

Food security crisis emerging in pastoral areas

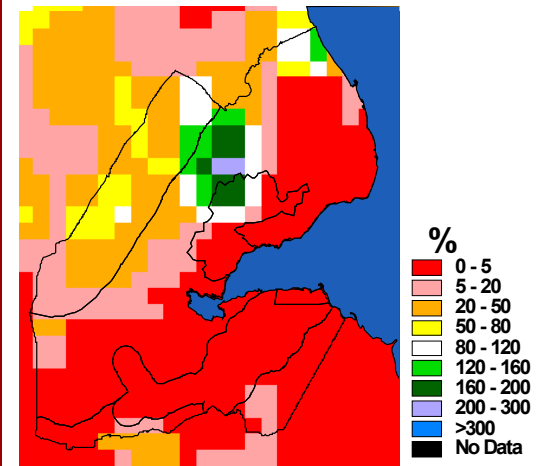
Significant areas of Djibouti experienced a failure of the *heys/dada* rains from October 2010 to February 2011 (Figure 1). These areas may experience a below-normal *diraac/sougoum* rainy season from March through May. This lack of rainfall, along with high and rising staple food prices, will push households towards higher levels of food insecurity, particularly in the northwest and southeast pastoral livelihood zones (Figure 2). There is a high likelihood that the World Food Programme (WFP) food aid pipeline will breakdown by June due to a lack of incoming supplies. The situation is expected to worsen as food and income from animal sources decline in pastoral areas over the coming months due to the prolonged dryness and the resulting failed rejuvenation of pasture and browse and lack of sufficient water for livestock.

The failure of the *heys/dada* rains (October to February) and the forecasted below-normal rains during the current *diraac/sougoum* season from March through May will result in insufficient pasture and browse and limited water availability leading to poor animal body conditions and higher livestock mortality rates. *Diraac/sougoum* rains contribute between 25 and 50 percent of the total annual rainfall in most pastoral livelihood zones. The current *diraac/sougoum* rains have been poorly distributed and the food security situation in the *diraac*-dependant areas is likely to deteriorate through June. As a result, the lean season may start in April, two months earlier than normal, in most pastoral livelihoods zones.

The main inland areas of the northwest and southeast border pastoral livelihood zones are currently facing insufficient pasture and browse and a lack of water, particularly those areas which depend on water catchments. As a result, these zones are currently in crisis (IPC Phase 3), while the central lowlands, highlands, and southeast roadside livelihood zones, which depend on water trucking for both human and livestock water requirements, are stressed (IPC Phase 2) and are expected to remain so through June.

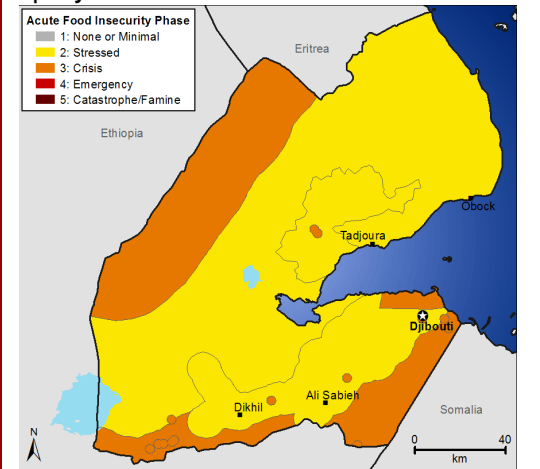
Already poor animal body conditions are expected to deteriorate further as the extremely poor rainfall observed during the *heys/dada* season has affected the availability of both water and pasture. In addition, livestock are vulnerable to pneumonia at this time of year. Livestock deaths have already been observed in many districts (including Dikhil, Alisabieh, Tadjourah, and Obock) and animal mortality rates are expected to increase over the coming months. Since recovery from last season's drought has been slow, the ability of households to absorb further livestock losses is limited. Additionally, milk production is below normal given the poor rate of conception and births this season. Livestock prices are below normal due to weak animal body conditions, while staple food prices are at high levels in most markets that serve pastoral areas. Livestock prices have decreased in Dikhil and Alisabieh districts since November resulting in poor livestock-to-cereal terms of trade for pastoralists. Given the above-mentioned conditions, the pastoral population in need of emergency assistance is expected to increase in the coming months, and current emergency food aid distributions should be expanded to meet the anticipated need.

Figure 1. Rainfall performance for October 2010 to February 2011 compared to the short-term mean



Source: NOAA/FEWS NET

Figure 2. Most likely food security scenario, April-June 2011



Source: FEWS NET

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.