

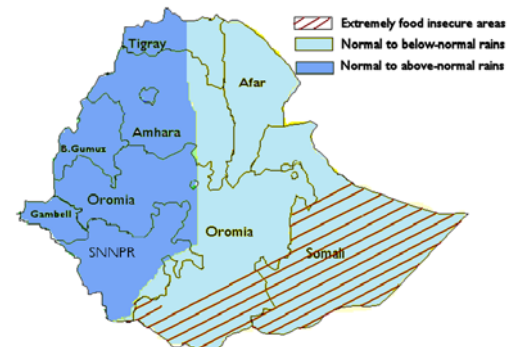
ETHIOPIA Food Security Alert

October 23, 2008

Despite strong start, forecast poor rains could deepen food insecurity

Food security in parts of southeastern and northern Ethiopia will deteriorate from already high or extreme levels if forecasts indicating trends toward below-normal October-December/January rains hold. While the National Meteorology Agency's (NMA) October 2 outlook predicts normal to above-normal rains for western parts of the country, including much of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR), and while rains to date have been near normal for much of the country, forecasts indicate the possibility of below-normal rains among already highly and extremely food insecure pastoral and agropastoral populations in Somali Region, the neighboring lowlands of Oromia Region, southeastern parts of SNNPR, and northern parts of Afar Region (Figure 1). Many of these areas are already coping with successive seasons of poor rains, extremely high cereals prices, poor pastoral terms of trade, restrictions on trade and movement, and inadequate humanitarian assistance. To prevent further deterioration of food security, additional assistance is needed until at least June 2009, when the next rainy season for these areas is complete.

Figure 1. Climate outlook for October to January in Ethiopia



Source: National Meteorological Agency October 2, 2008
Climate Outlook forum; Graphic: FEWS NET Ethiopia

While October-December rains are the secondary season for pastoral and agropastoral populations in southeastern Somali, Oromia, and SNNP regions, they are crucial to the replenishment of water and pasture, which, despite some improvement following recent rains, remain in critically short supply. Persistent dryness has led to unusually high numbers of livestock deaths, poor body conditions among surviving animals, and important losses of food, income, and long-term food security. To cope, households have reduced meal frequency and are selling productive assets to meet their immediate needs. In Afar Region, short coastal showers during December and January are also important for the replenishment of water points and regeneration of pasture. Given that the main July-September rains in this region were significantly below normal, forecasts for below-normal December/January rains are particularly worrying.

The latest humanitarian requirements document for Ethiopia indicates 6.4 million people are acutely food insecure, 1.9 million of whom are from Somali Region. This is in addition to the 5.7 million chronically food insecure people being assisted through the Productive Safety Net Program. To date, humanitarian assistance to Somali Region, mainly in the form of food aid, has reached far fewer than the targeted number of beneficiaries. In addition, beneficiaries receiving relief rations have only received two-thirds of requirements since July due to resource shortfalls. Net emergency food requirements for Ethiopia from September to December are estimated at 270,245 MT (USD 218 million), with an additional USD 7.8 million required for targeted supplementary feeding, and USD 39.8 million for non-food needs. With forecasts trending toward the possibility of poor rains, continued deterioration of livestock body conditions and pastoral terms of trade and persistence of extremely high prices for staples, the number of food insecure people in affected parts of Somali, Oromia, SNNP, and northern Afar regions, and their associated needs, will likely increase between now and June 2009. Even if current forecasts prove inaccurate, recovery of highly and extremely food insecure populations in these areas will require several consecutive normal rainy seasons and continued assistance in rebuilding their asset bases.

It is recommended that the Government of Ethiopia and its humanitarian partners prepare a contingency plan to counter potential increases in needs until at least June 2009 if the October-December/January rains perform poorly in these areas. Regardless, food aid and nutrition interventions remain a priority. Water provisioning activities (catchments and increased water trucking) during the coming dry season (December-March) may also be necessary. Livestock interventions, including timely commercial destocking, veterinary care, and vaccinations, are also required in advance of and during the dry season.

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.