

SPECIAL ALERT

No. 324

REGION: HORN OF AFRICA

DATE: 14 FEBRUARY 2008

PRECARIOUS FOOD OUTLOOK IN PARTS OF THE HORN OF AFRICA
The performance of the March to May rains is crucial to mitigate large scale crisis

Conflict and civil unrest in several parts of the Horn of Africa, with flare ups in the last several months, have rendered millions of people dependent on food assistance and devastated the livelihood systems of many. There is a high probability that hitherto generally food secure households will become chronically food insecure with continued large scale displacements. Recent poor seasonal rains in parts have exacerbated the food difficulties faced by millions.

The March to May rains are about to commence in eastern Africa. These rains are very crucial over the equatorial parts of the region and constitute the establishment of the main agricultural season for countries like Somalia, Kenya and Uganda. The Climate Outlook Forum for the Greater Horn of Africa has yet to announce its rainfall forecast for the season. However, the National Meteorology Agency (NMA) of Ethiopia has already forecast below-normal March to May rains in southeastern parts of the country. These rains are critical in these pastoral areas of the Somali Region and neighbouring lowlands of Borena, Guji and Bale zones of Oromiya Region, where households are already highly food insecure due to the poor performance of the 2007 "gu" and the recent "deyr" (October to December) rains. Failure of these seasonal rains in these countries would have far-reaching impacts if no proper contingency and intervention strategies are put in place.

In **Somalia**, considered as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia (FSAU) has indicated that the overall food security situation has deteriorated over the last six months. Between 1.8 and 2 million people, including roughly 1 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance and livelihood support for at least the next six months. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated over the last six months in the Shabelle, Hiran and Central regions due to a significant increase in the number of IDPs fleeing Mogadishu and a deepening drought in Hiran and Central regions. The crisis is aggravated by a poor 2007 main "gu" season cereal output and an about average secondary "deyr" season, which has just been harvested. In addition, hyperinflation in basic food and non-food items throughout the country is creating problems of food access for urban populations, especially the urban poor.

In **Kenya**, the political unrest that followed disputed election results has displaced about 600 000, killed nearly a thousand people and increased the likelihood of severe food difficulties among normally food secure farmers and the urban poor. The crisis has also disrupted markets, destroyed businesses and has been a blow to the tourism sector. Poor October to December rains also led to the failure of the secondary season cereal harvest in January in the southeast, and to increased food insecurity in northern and southern pastoral areas. The cost of farm inputs is reported to have increased and will negatively impact on areas cultivated during the 2008 main cropping season. Any reduction in food production from Kenya's grain-basket region of North Rift during 2008 would worsen the country's food security situation later in the year and in early 2009.

In **Ethiopia**, despite a record crop production in the recent 2007/08 main "meher" season, 8 million chronically food insecure people require food and cash transfers from the productive safety net programmes. In addition, more than 2 million people will require emergency relief mainly due to unrest and civil insecurity in Somali Region, but also more generally due to high food inflation and localized poor rains. Poor October to November rains in Somali Region, and parts of Borena, Guji and Bale zones of Oromiya Region, have also led to earlier-than-normal depletion of pasture and water resources.



Conflict and insecurity since mid-June in the southeastern parts of Somali Region continue to restrict movement and cross-border trade, severely constricting the livelihoods of pastoral and agro-pastoral populations, particularly in Gode, Korahe, Degehabur, Warder and Kebridehar zones. Recent reports indicate that these populations are relying heavily on an unsustainable diet of milk and meat from their own livestock and on wild foods. While slight improvements have been reported in the movement of commercial cereals to these zones, livestock exports, the main source of income for most of populations in these areas, continue to be sharply limited.

This report is prepared on the responsibility of the FAO Secretariat with information from official and unofficial sources. Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact Office of the Chief, ESTG, FAO, (Fax: 0039-06-5705-4495, E-Mail: giews1@fao.org) for further information if required.

Please note that this Special Alert is available on the Internet as part of the FAO World Wide Web at the following URL address: <http://www.fao.org/giews/> .

The Special Alerts/Reports can also be received automatically by e-mail as soon as they are published, by subscribing to the GIEWS/Alerts report ListServ. To do so, please send an E-mail to the FAO-Mail-Server at the following address: mailserv@mailserv.fao.org, leaving the subject blank, with the following message:

subscribe GIEWSAlertsWorld-L

To be deleted from the list, send the message:

unsubscribe GIEWSAlertsWorld-L

Please note that it is now possible to subscribe to regional lists to only receive Special Reports/Alerts by region: Africa, Asia, Europe or Latin America (GIEWSAlertsAfrica-L, GIEWSAlertsAsia-L, GIEWSAlertsEurope-L and GIEWSAlertsLA-L). These lists can be subscribed to in the same way as the worldwide list.