

KENYA Food Security Alert

January 3, 2014

Due to late, inadequate rains, a below average harvest is expected in the Southeast in February

Food security among an estimated 45 percent of the population of the southeastern and coastal marginal agricultural livelihood zones will remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) during the post-harvest period due to a far below average short rains harvest and its effects on agricultural labor and staple food markets. Even if the March to May long rains are normal, lingering effects of the below average harvest could lead to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in some areas during the August to October 2014 lean season. Continued and expanded humanitarian assistance could prevent the worst outcomes.

The short rains crops account for up to 65 percent of total annual crop production in the affected livelihood zones. The delayed onset of the rains resulted in considerably delayed planting. Distribution of drought-resistant seed varieties was delayed, leading to less planting of drought-resistant varieties. A dry spell after the rains started in November led to poor crop development. **Maize output**

is likely to be considerably below average, becoming the third consecutive below average harvest. The harvest will likely be lowest in the marginal, agricultural areas of Taita Taveta County, being as little as one tenth of average in the worst-affected areas, according to informal estimates by local, agricultural officials. However, the more drought-resistant legumes are likely to mature, and their yields are expected to be near average during the harvest in February/March.

Figure 1. Underdeveloped crops in Taita Taveta County, December 19, 2013



Source: FEWS NET

Casual labor contributes between 45 and 60 percent of household income in the affected livelihood zones. Casual labor wages range between KES 150 per day in the marginal mixed farming areas in Mwingi Sub-county and KES 200 in the higher-productivity areas in Kitui, Makueni, and Taita Taveta Counties. With a wage of KES 150 per day, a household can currently afford three kilograms of maize, a very low amount compared to other areas of East Africa. Although many of the households can access their most basic energy requirements through this income, dietary diversity is low as households can afford little more than maize and have no stocks from previous seasons. **Purchasing power is expected to deteriorate further as poor local maize production and a below-average national, long rains harvest are likely to drive continued slight increases in maize prices from January to March, a period when prices would normally be stable.** Food security in the affected livelihoods zones is currently Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Poor households are likely to remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) from January to March during the harvest and post-harvest periods as limited labor income, early reliance on maize purchases, and increased food prices prevent poor households from meeting essential, non-food expenses.

The March to May long rains are currently expected to be near normal in total amounts, allowing seasonally normal casual labor opportunities in March and April. However, this is the secondary growing season in these areas, so even a very productive long rains harvest will fail to provide as much income or food as the short rains harvest. **With less casual labor income at during the primary season, elevated food prices, and longer dependence than usual on market purchases, poor households will likely have difficulty accessing adequate food by July or August 2014.** The worst-affected areas are likely to fall into Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Some poor households and pocket areas would likely reach Crisis (IPC Phase 3) earlier. If the long rains were to be significantly below average in terms of amounts or very late, worse food security outcomes would be more widespread and likely start earlier in the year.

Humanitarian assistance is ongoing in localized, marginal areas, primarily in Taita Taveta County where the lowest amounts of rainfall were received. Continued and expanded humanitarian assistance will be necessary as households exhaust their income and stocks of legumes going into the lean season in July/August 2014.