

Ethiopia: Food Security EMERGENCY

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues periodic **Emergency** alerts when a significant food security crisis is occurring, where portions of the population are now, or will soon become, extremely food insecure and face imminent famine. Highest priority should be given to responding to the crisis highlighted by this **Emergency** alert.

Issued: 22 November 2005

Poor *deyr* rains are a serious concern in southern Somali region

From October to December there is normally a short rainy season (*deyr*) in the livestock-dependent southern and southeastern lowlands of the country. These rains are critically important to the livelihoods of pastoralists, as they recharge water sources and replenish pasture, and thus sustain livestock through the dry-season from December to April. When the *deyr* season fails, the population in these areas usually experiences extremely stressful water and pasture shortages until the *gu* (March – May) rainy seasons. In recent years, a combination of successive droughts, high cereal prices, conflict, and the ban on livestock imports to markets in the Gulf States has rendered the livestock-dependent population highly food insecure and increasingly vulnerable to poor seasonal rainfall performance.

This year, the performances of *deyr* rains in Somali Region has been very poor, raising concerns for many parts of the *deyr* dependent southern Somali Region. According to the region's November 21 *Food Security Flash* report, there are districts where no rainfall has been reported. Districts that to date have received insufficient *deyr* rains include: Kelafo, Mustahil, Ferfer, Denan and East Imi (Gode zone); Barey, and parts of Gorobaqaqa, Hargelle, Elkare, Chareti, Dolobay and West Imi (Afdar zone); Moyale and Dolo-ado (Liban zone), Hamaro, Segeg, Duhun, Garbo, Lagahido, Salahad and Mayomuluko (Fik zone); Sheygoch (Korahe zone); and Galadi and parts of Warder and Danot in Warder Zone.

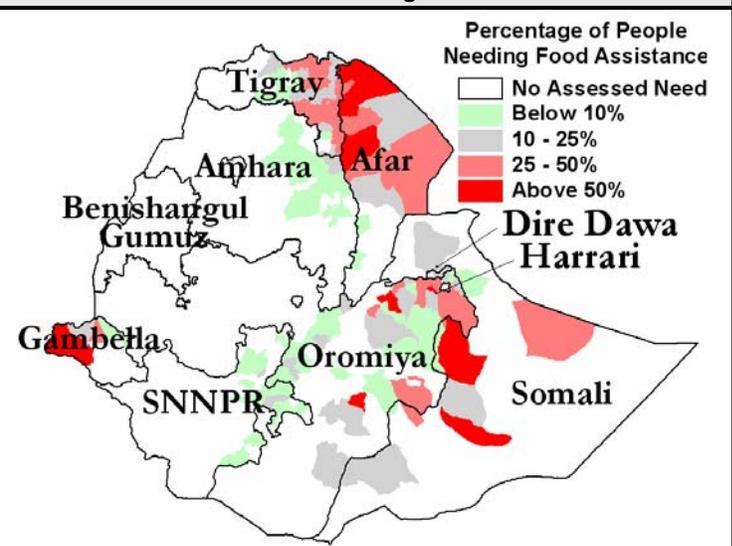
The *Food Security Flash* further indicates that, as a result of the poor rains, access to pasture and water is currently insufficient to sustain livestock herds and human needs until the long-rains begin in March-April 2006. The situation is worse in the districts that had poor rains during the last *gu* season, including Fik, Gode, Afdar, Liban and parts of Korahe zones. The emergence of stress signs (including abnormally early livestock migrations, deterioration of livestock body condition, and crop wilting in agro-pastoral areas) at such an early stage is serious concern, given that conditions will continue to deteriorate during the upcoming dry season (January – March/April) in these seven southern zones of the Region.

Any expectation that rains will improve towards the end of the season must be reconciled with the seasonal rain forecasts from the National Meteorological Services Agency (NMSA), which predicted that rainfall would actually be weaker later in the season.

Given the delicate nature of the region's food security, contingency plans for the area should be reviewed. In late November, a multi-agency food needs assessment to the region will determine if the availability of pasture and water is sufficient. If the rains fail, mitigation efforts to avert the potential food crisis in the pastoral areas must be initiated in the short term. According to the regional food security flash report, interventions aimed at improving livestock protection and marketing and those aimed at supporting coping mechanisms (mainly income support) will be essential.

Unless the necessary measures are taken, the already high level of food insecurity in the region is expected to deteriorate further. Actions taken now by donor agencies and the Ethiopian Government will determine whether deteriorating food security conditions can be mitigated over the already elongated "dry season" period in January – March/April. Food and non-food interventions must also continue to the half million highly food insecure people already receiving food aid in Somali Region as a result of poor rainfall performances during the previous seasons.

Figure 1: Percentage of Rural Population Needing Emergency Food Assistance between August & December 2005



Data source: DPPC. Graphics by FEWS NET.