

GREATER HORN OF AFRICA (GHA) Regional Rain Watch

November 28, 2007

FEWS NET will publish a dekadal Rain Watch for the GHA region through the end of the October-December rainy season, with a special focus on the ongoing crises in Somalia and southern Ethiopia. Its purpose is to assess the progress of the current season and its potential impact on food insecurity, which is currently at high or extreme levels in several areas of the region.

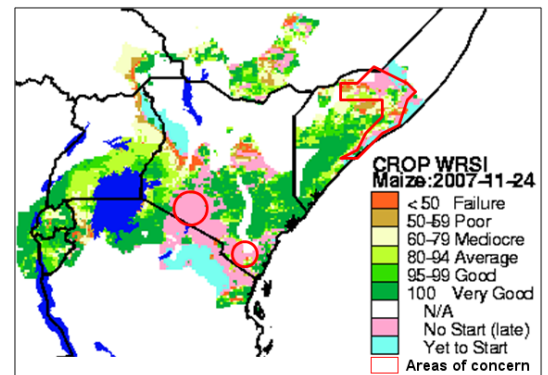
Poor rains may intensify dry season food insecurity in southeastern Ethiopia and central Somalia

The October-December *deyr* rains have so far been erratic and below normal in several areas of the GHA. The forecast for the remainder of the season is not favorable, with strong indications that the rainy season may already have concluded. Across central Somalia and southeastern Ethiopia, areas where households are already moderately to extremely food insecure, cumulative rainfall to date is between zero and fifty percent of the average. This level of rainfall has not permitted full replenishment of water sources, rainfed crop development or sufficient pasture regeneration to carry populations in these areas through the upcoming dry season. Households in this area are already coping with a number of food security threats, including poor March-May rains earlier in the year, resource-based conflicts and, in central Somalia, pressure from IDPs. Additionally, ongoing government security operations in Ethiopia's Somalia Region of have severely restricted movement and trade, while locusts threaten crops and pasture. While rainfed cropping typically contributes only 20-30 percent of annual agro-pastoral cereal production in these areas, a poor *deyr* season will intensify existing food insecurity during the upcoming dry season, reducing household incomes while increasing their dependence on market purchases and food assistance.

In much of southern Somalia (where *deyr* season crop production is more important than it is further north) and eastern Kenya, the rains have allowed good crop and/or pasture growth (see Figures 1 and 2). However, in Kenya, the season began late in the drought-affected southeastern and coastal lowlands, while the early onset of the rains in eastern pastoral areas has not been sustained. Should the rains fail to improve significantly in these areas of Kenya over the remainder of the season, pastoral and lowland farm households could face high to extreme levels of food insecurity.

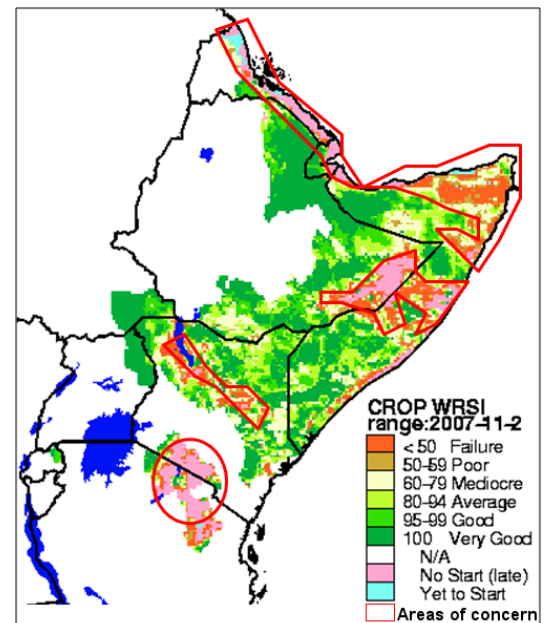
Analysis of sea surface temperatures indicates that this season's La Niña event has intensified, bringing drier than normal conditions to the region. At the same time, the rain is moving to the south ahead of schedule. It is possible that in some areas of the region, the rainy season will have effectively consisted of a few dekads of rainfall in November, with the dry season beginning up to one month early. Even in areas where pasture availability is currently adequate (see Figure 2), if rainfall conditions do not improve before the end of the rainy season, pastures will not have adequately regenerated to sustain animals through the upcoming dry season, and livestock interventions may be necessary in early 2008.

Figure 1. Maize crop conditions in the GHA at the end of the 2nd dekad of November



Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Figure 2. Pasture conditions in the GHA at the end of the 2nd dekad of November



Source: USGS/FEWS NET