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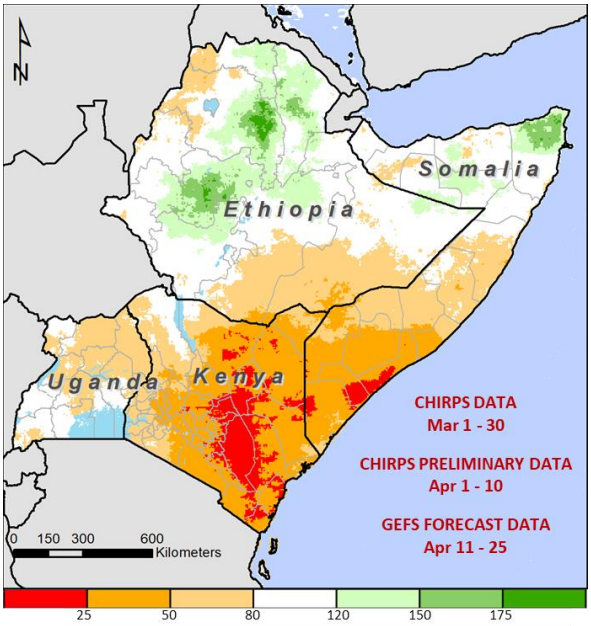
EAST AFRICA Food Security Alert April 19, 2019

Poor rainfall since late 2018 to increase assistance needs and slow 2016/17 drought recovery

Rainfall during the 2019 *Gu*/long rains season has been well below average across much of the greater Horn of Africa, resulting in a second consecutive below-average season in a region still recovering from the prolonged 2016/17 drought. This is expected to result in significant crop loss, increased food prices, and poor livestock body conditions and milk availability, which will reduce poor households' access to food. May to June rainfall and regional food trade is likely to partially mitigate deterioration in food security outcomes, but the population in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse is still expected to increase through late 2019. Peak needs are expected from July to October in northern and south-central Somalia, pastoral Kenya, and southeastern Ethiopia. In a worst-case scenario in which little to no rainfall occurs through May, the season will have failed and the impact on food security outcomes would be more severe than currently anticipated. Humanitarian agencies are urged to scale up emergency assistance planning to avert a food security crisis in worst-affected areas and to prepare for a greater increase in needs should the season fail.

Figure 1. Rainfall anomaly for March 1–April 25, 2019 (observed plus forecast), as a percentage of 1981–2010 mean



Source: *FEWS NET/USGS/UCSB*

Rainfall during the first six weeks of the March to June *Gu*/long rains season has been less than 50 percent of average across the Horn of Africa, and less than 80 percent of average across much of Uganda. The season to date is among the top three driest on record in southern and eastern Kenya, southern Somalia, and central-northern Uganda. Although April normally brings peak annual rainfall activity to the region, Tropical Cyclone Idai disrupted the rainfall system by redirecting precipitation away from East Africa. Increased rainfall through late April in Ethiopia and northern Somalia is expected to alleviate deficits in these areas, but even considering forecast rainfall through April 25, deficits will persist (Figure 1). Forecast rainfall in May and June is expected to further alleviate rainfall deficits, but cumulative rainfall is still likely to be well below average.

In agricultural areas, below-average production, rising food prices, and low agricultural labor demand will reduce food availability and access. Maize harvests are expected to be significantly below average in Kenya's marginal agricultural areas, though the longer rainfall season in high potential areas is still likely to support near-average production in those areas. Below-average rainfed production is also expected in southern Somalia and Ethiopia's eastern SNNPR, Oromia, and Amhara regions. However, rainfall in the Ethiopian highlands is expected to increase Somalia's river water levels and support irrigated riverine production. Deficits are also expected in Uganda, particularly in eastern and central regions that typically contribute 40 to 60 percent of annual production. Food prices are rising in eastern Uganda and the country's food exports are likely to decline to below-average levels. Food prices are expected to rise to above-average levels in Somalia, while current high food prices in most of Ethiopia are likely to be sustained. In Kenya, current low food prices in main reference markets are expected to rise to near average, moderated by harvests in high potential areas and Tanzanian imports. Remote, rural markets may see higher increases.

In pastoral areas, pasture deterioration and water scarcity has accelerated declines in livestock productivity, reduced poor households' income and access to milk, and led to atypical migration patterns and resource-based competition. Although livestock prices remain near or above average in many key reference markets given low supply and sustained demand, poor households have limited saleable livestock. Improvements in May-to-June rainfall are expected to provide temporary relief in some areas, but current drier-than-normal conditions are still anticipated to worsen the severity of the subsequent dry season until the onset of October rains. Given below-normal livestock holdings and below-average income from livestock production, household food access will decline through late 2019.

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Drought conditions during the below-average October to December 2018 season have already caused many poor households to deplete their food stocks earlier than normal and have stalled the recovery of livestock assets from the significant losses experienced during the 2016/17 drought. Rainfall through May will be critical to determining food security outcomes through late 2019. The most likely scenario is that cumulative rainfall will begin to improve through the remainder of the season; however, due to the loss of rainfall at the start of the season, an increase in the population in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse is expected in areas of concern. These include central, northern, and parts of southern Somalia; southern Ethiopia; northwestern and southeastern pastoral Kenya; and Karamoja in Uganda.

In a worst-case scenario in which little to no rainfall is received across wide areas of the region through May, the result would be a failed season and deeper crop production deficits and excess livestock deaths would be expected. Acute food insecurity would rapidly worsen and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes would become more widespread. Additionally, the prevalence of populations facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes would increase in areas of greatest concern in Somalia and Ethiopia. Humanitarian agencies should scale up food assistance planning now to prevent food gaps in worst-affected areas and prepare for a more substantial increase in assistance needs through late 2019 in the event the season fails.