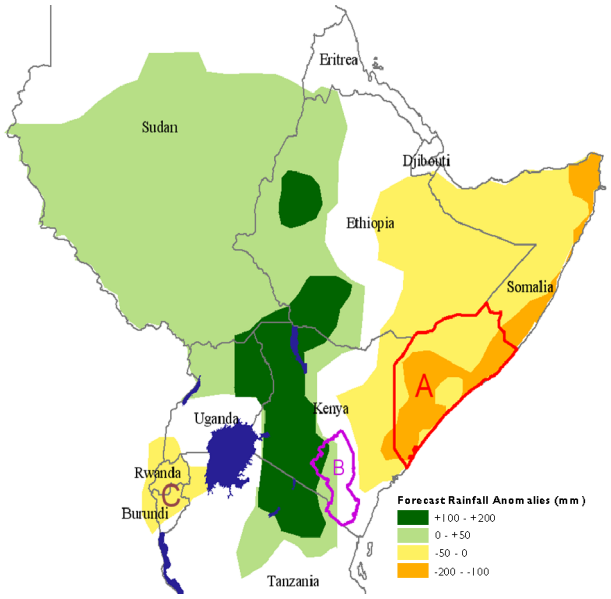
EAST AFRICA Food Security Alert

November 2, 2010

Pre-emptive livelihood support could mitigate likely La Niña impacts in the eastern Horn

The recent IGAD Climate Prediction and Application Centre (ICPAC) forecast confirms that a La Niña event continues and will likely persist into 2011. As a result, rainfall during the October-December period is likely to be below-average in the eastern sector of East Africa (Figure 1). An analysis of rainfall during past La Niña years suggests that while early season rainfall may be favorable, precipitation later in the season is likely to be erratic and end early. This poor performance is expected to result in a worse than usual January-March lean season, offsetting the modest recovery in household food security which occurred during 2009/10, following three years of drought. March-May 2011 rains, the major rains for this region, may also be below-average. Four areas are of particular concern: agropastoral areas of southern and central Somalia (Area A), southeast marginal cropping areas of Kenya (Area B), cropping areas of Rwanda/Burundi (Area C), and pastoral areas of Somalia, northeastern Kenya, and southeastern Ethiopia. In these at-risk areas, household receipt of livelihood support over the coming months could help to prevent deterioration in food security.

Figure 1: Forecast rainfall anomalies (ECMWF) – November 2010 to January 2011



Source: *ECMWF* Graphics: *FEWS NET/USGS*

In agropastoral areas of southern/central Somalia, ECMWF forecasts suggest rainfall deficits of 100-200mm below the average in many key cropping areas (Figure 1). Higher than usual temperatures are also anticipated, and this will exacerbate the impacts of below-average rainfall on crop production during the *deyr* season, which typically accounts for 40 percent of cereal production in Somalia. The marginal cropping areas of southeast Kenya (Area B) lay between the region's eastern sector, where below-average rainfall is forecast, and the central/western part of the region, where above-average rainfall is expected. However, the margin between a successful cropping season and total crop failure is incredibly small in southeast Kenya, and given crop performance during past La Niña years, a poor February harvest is expected. This harvest accounts for 70 percent of production in this area. In Burundi and Rwanda (Area C), poor rainfall is also forecast, and is likely to affect first season production. In all three areas, poor harvests would result in reduced labor opportunities and food stocks, increased food prices, and a reduction in income from crop sales, all of which are expected to drive increased food insecurity. The most severe food security outcomes, assuming additional assistance is not provided, would be expected in SE Kenya and Somalia, particularly after January/February, when harvests normally occur.

In pastoral areas of northeastern Kenya, central/northern Somalia, and southern Ethiopia, rainfall deficits of up to 50mm are likely between November 2010 and January 2011 (Figure 1), compared to average total rainfall of 50-150mm. Though rangelands are less sensitive to rainfall performance than crops, earlier than usual depletion of pasture, browse, and surface water are expected, in part because temperatures between July and September have been higher than average. This decline in pastoral conditions is likely to cause early clustering of livestock in dry-season grazing areas (which increases disease risk), deterioration in livestock body conditions and productivity, and poor survival rates among newly born kids and lambs during November/December. Subsequently, food security outcomes are likely to worsen, particularly among the poorest households whose coping capacity is the most limited.

In areas at-risk of worsening food security, households may require livelihood support to prevent asset loss, household food deficits, and negative coping. Potential interventions in pastoral areas include rehabilitation of water points (boreholes), increased veterinary services targeting the dry season grazing areas, commercial off-take programs, and nutrition support programs targeting poorer households. In the cropping southwest marginal areas of Kenya, and in Rwanda and Burundi, the scale-up of resource transfer programs may be required to minimize the food security impacts of the La Niña event.