

*Food access in Sitti Zone and southern Afar far below normal*

In Sitti (formerly Shinile) Zone in northern Somali Region and southern Afar, both of this year's rainy seasons have had far below average rainfall. The resulting lack of forage and water has led to deteriorating livestock body conditions and caused a large number of unusual livestock deaths. The related decline in livestock prices has sharply reduced food access. Food insecurity is expected to worsen over the coming six months, peaking in February and March 2016. Approximately 954,000 people are currently in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or higher, including poor households who received transfers from the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) through June. This population requires urgent assistance between now and the start of the next rainy season in March 2016 to access food and water and to protect the remaining livestock.

The northern pastoral areas of Ethiopia typically have a long dry season from October to February, followed by the March to May *Diraac/Sugum* rains and then the July to September *Karan/Karma* rains. This year, March to May rainfall was only [50 to 80 percent of the 1981-to-2010 average](#). The *Karan/Karma* rains then started late, and have been interrupted by long dry spells. In some lowland areas, there was not any rain until late August. With no moisture, vegetation has dried up at a time of year when it would normally be regenerating. Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), a satellite-derived measure of vegetation health, has values similar to 2009 and 2011, years of severe drought (Figure 1). Unusual livestock migration is occurring, with households moving their herds great distances towards Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Dire Dawa, and Djibouti in search of forage and water. With low access to forage and long trekking distances, livestock body conditions have deteriorated. Unusual livestock deaths were first reported in April and have continued since.

Starting in October of last year, livestock prices in these areas began to fall more sharply than usual, due to the deterioration in livestock body conditions. For example, in July, the price of a local-quality goat in Shinile town was 41 percent below last year. As livestock prices rose, household purchasing power declined. In southern Afar, the quantity of wheat that could be purchased with the income from selling a goat declined from 67 kg in July 2014 to only 28 kg in July 2015. With reduced income from livestock sales and limited earnings from firewood and charcoal sales, households are unable to afford adequate quantities of food. In addition, though this is typically a period of high milk availability at the end of the rainy season, almost no livestock are currently lactating, reducing access to milk as a source of food or income. While water trucking is ongoing, many households and many herds are still great distances from a water source. Nearly one million people are currently in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and would be even worse-off, if not for the presence of some humanitarian assistance. Rising admissions rates to treatment centers and preliminary information from surveys conducted in July suggest that the prevalence of acute malnutrition has risen significantly from levels that are already very high in a typical year.

While some rainfall was received in August, forage and water availability are likely to remain below average. Thus, livestock body conditions will remain poor. As there will be no expected significant increase in income or access to new sources of food

**Figure 1.** Below-average vegetation conditions, August 16-25, 2015, 2015 NDVI compared to the 2001-2010 mean



Source: [U.S. Geological Survey \(USGS\)/FEWS NET](#)

likely before the start of the *Diraac/Sugum* rains in March 2016, households require sustained assistance to prevent widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4), further increases in the prevalence of acute malnutrition, and additional livestock losses.

In the most recent round of emergency food assistance deliveries, over 46,000 people in Sitti Zone and over 186,000 people in Afar received assistance. Additionally, traders from Shinile and Dire Dawa have provided some charitable assistance. However, this is not enough to fully address expected food deficits and preserve remaining livestock assets. Additional food assistance and assistance in preserving remaining herds are urgently needed.

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