

## EAST AFRICA Regional Rain Watch

April 9, 2008

FEWS NET will publish a rain watch for East Africa after every dekad through the end of the ongoing March to May rainy season. Its purpose is to assess the progress of these rains and their impacts on food security, especially in areas where there is an ongoing food security crisis.

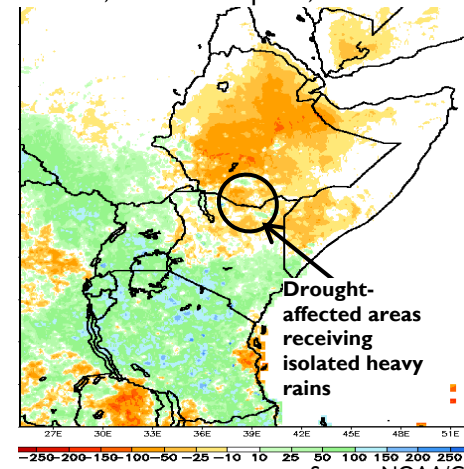
### Late, insufficient rains cause food security concerns in northeast; floods in south

The March to May rains have been slow to start and below normal in **Ethiopia, Djibouti, and northern Somalia** (Figure 1). In Ethiopia, late and poor rains are leading to concerns of crop failure in the *belg* production areas of the country. Continued poor rains will also affect crop establishment for the main long-cycle *meher* crop (April/May-September/October), further compromising food availability in Ethiopia for the remainder of 2008. The *belg* harvest in June/July is critical in mitigating the lean season in parts of SNNP, Oromiya, and Amhara regions, and in Jijiga Zone of Somali Region. Late rains are also prolonging drought conditions in **Djibouti**, and are beginning to affect pastoralists in northwestern **Somalia**, where rangeland conditions have started to deteriorate significantly. In most other parts of **Somalia**, southeastern **Ethiopia**, and northeastern **Kenya**, rains usually begin in early April, and a normal start of season will be critical for planting, crop production, and mitigation of poor and deteriorating water and pasture conditions. In Somali Region of **Ethiopia**, livestock mortality due to water and pasture shortages has already been reported, and in some of the worst-affected areas pre-famine conditions will emerge due to water scarcity, food shortages, and poor market access if delays in rains continue. Isolated heavy showers have brought some relief to parts of northern **Kenya** and Borena Zone of **Ethiopia** (Figure 1), though these rains have also triggered renewed livestock movement into these areas, increasing the risk of the spread of livestock diseases due to crowding around water points and widespread movements.

The March to May rains started on time and at normal to above-normal levels in southern areas of East Africa (including southern **Kenya**, most of **Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi**, and parts of southern **Sudan**), bringing relief to drought-affected pastoral and agro-pastoral areas along the Kenya/Tanzania border. Above-normal rains also caused localized flooding in these areas. If above-normal rains continue, **northern Tanzania**, the **Lake Victoria basin**, parts of **southeastern Kenya**, and **southern Somalia and Sudan** are also at risk of flooding (Figure 2). Rains have eased in many southern flood-affected areas since the end of March, however, allowing flood waters to recede and facilitating crop planting.

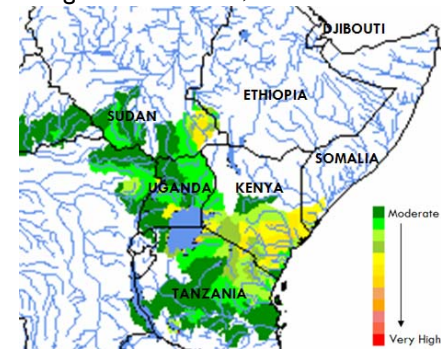
As there have been no significant changes in the forecast since it was released at the end of February, it is anticipated that most of **Djibouti and Somalia**, northeastern **Kenya**, and most *belg* areas of **Ethiopia** will receive erratic rains with a potential for declining rainfall as the season progresses. Given the other factors aggravating food insecurity in these areas, including civil insecurity, poor market access, population displacement, and high malnutrition rates in **Somalia**, southeastern **Ethiopia**, and northwestern **Kenya**, as well as high cereal prices in nearly all countries in East Africa, interventions to prevent already high to extreme food insecurity from deteriorating further are recommended.

**Figure 1.** Rainfall received (mm) compared to normal, March 1 – April 2, 2008



Source: NOAA/CPC

**Figure 2.** Flooded areas and areas at risk of flooding as of March 31, 2008



Source: USGS/FEWS NET