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## EAST AFRICA Food Security Alert

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### Ongoing drought and uncertain forecast raise food security concerns

In the Horn of Africa, households in pastoral and marginal cropping areas (Figure 1) currently face high levels of food insecurity due to an ongoing drought, deteriorating purchasing power, and, in some areas, limits on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Poor performance of March-May rainfall would result in further deterioration in food security. Large-scale emergency assistance to address current food insecurity is needed; contingency planning, given the possibility of a major crisis, should also be implemented.

Following two seasons of average to above-average rainfall, the 2010 *Deyr*/Short rains (Oct-Dec) were extremely poor across the region's eastern sector, with rainfall totals less than 30 percent of average in many areas of southern Ethiopia, central/southern Somalia, and eastern/northern Kenya. January/February harvests completely failed in most cropping areas. In pastoral areas, poor rainfall limited both sheep/goat conceptions and pasture growth in key grazing areas. Serious water shortages are ongoing.

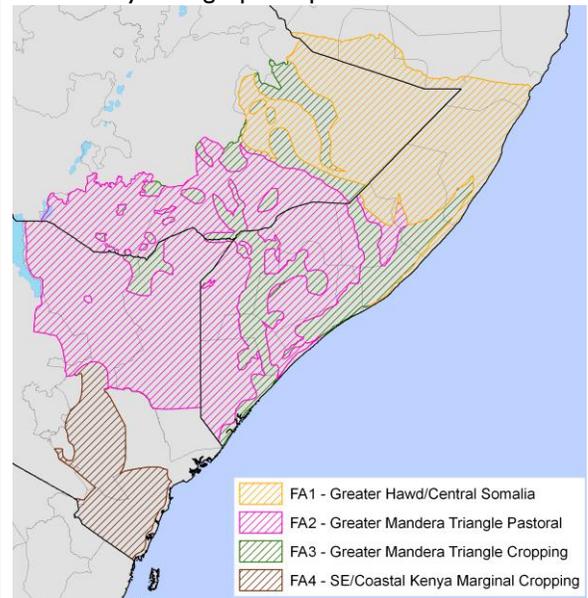
Household purchasing power has declined across these same drought-affected areas. Poor harvests in January/February, government price policy in Kenya, and increasing international food prices have driven up local staple food prices. January retail prices for sorghum in Baidoa, Somalia and maize in Mandera, Kenya are 34 percent and 39 percent above January 2010 prices, respectively, and higher than 2008 food-price crisis levels. This trend in prices is expected to continue through at least July/August 2011. Reductions in cattle prices and wages have exacerbated the impact of increased food prices. Lean seasons during the first half of 2011 are expected to be longer and more extreme than usual. Recent assessments indicate that nearly five million people in these areas will have difficulty meeting basic food and water requirements for survival over the coming months.

While uncertainty persists regarding the current La Niña and its impacts on March-May rainfall, other climate factors suggest an increased likelihood for below-average rainfall during the March-May season. In the current most-likely scenario, it is assumed that the onset of rainfall will be erratic and rainfall totals will be 60-80 percent of average across much of the region's eastern sector. In combination with reduced purchasing power, below-normal livestock holdings, and very limited milk availability, this poor seasonal performance would drive further deterioration in food security in pastoral and cropping areas and an increase in the population in need of lifesaving emergency assistance between April and September 2011. In the worst case scenario, rains would be substantially below-average. Total crop failure and massive livestock mortality would occur and food insecurity would become extreme across much of the region. Pre-famine indicators, including large-scale migration, further increases in levels of acute malnutrition, and elevated child mortality would be expected, especially in southern Somalia, where humanitarian access is constrained and the median GAM prevalence already exceeded 25 percent as of December 2010. Even if March-May rains are average, food security in the region is not expected to improve until at least May/June 2011.

Substantial assistance programs should be implemented to address current and expected food insecurity. In addition, large-scale contingency planning should begin immediately given that a failure of the March-May rains would result in a major crisis. FEWS NET and its partners will continue to monitor current conditions and will update food security projections in early March, following the Regional Climate Outlook Forum.

*The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.*

**Figure 1.** Areas at highest risk of extreme food insecurity during April-September 2011



Source: FEWS NET