Food security emergency deepens in the Horn as famine expands in southern Somalia

Key Messages

- The prices of locally produced staples have been rising sharply in the eastern Horn, reaching record highs in June in most markets. The increase is attributed to low supplies following two consecutive seasonal failures, high marketing costs due to soaring fuel prices, and in some areas, restricted trade and limited access to food assistance. About 11 million people in the eastern Horn cannot access food and are unable to meet basic survival needs, and emergency levels of acute malnutrition are widespread.

- In southern Somalia, the high food prices together with increased livestock mortality, poor productivity and value of surviving livestock due to the on-going drought, and increased civil insecurity have led to severe reduction of food access by poor and very poor households, acute malnutrition, and increased crude mortality. This has led to famine (IPC Phase 5) in the highly populated Shabelle and agropastoral areas of Bakol. While other areas of southern Somalia remain in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), they are expected to deteriorate to famine in the coming 1-2 months due to limited humanitarian response.

- The prevailing food security emergency is expected to persist at least through the coming 3-4 months given the expectation for late and below-average long rains harvests, early depletion of pasture and water from the late April rains, and continued high prices for food and water.

The agropastoral and pastoral areas of the Greater Mandera Triangle

The March to May (MAM) rains comprise the main season for the pastoral and agropastoral livelihoods in the greater Mandera triangle that includes the southern areas of Ethiopia, northeastern Kenya, and southern Somalia (Figure 3). In most of the pastoral areas in this region, the rains were less than 20 percent of normal.

In the cropping areas of Somalia, including Bakol, Bay, Gedo and Lower and Middle Juba and Shabelle, the delayed onset and very poor distribution of rains will most likely lead to reduced long rains (Gu) maize and sorghum output to about 50,000 MT, equivalent to just 50 percent of the post-war average. In all of the pastoral areas of the Mandera Triangle, the failed rains have contributed to severe pasture and water shortages, leading to significant livestock mortality. For example in Wajir district of Kenya, mortality rates are estimated to be about 15 percent for cattle, 6 percent for sheep and goat, and 8 percent for camel. In southern Somalia, mortalities of about 30 percent have been recorded in cattle and sheep. The increased livestock mortality has increased the

Figure 1. Estimated current food security outcomes, July 2011

Figure 2. Most-likely food security outcomes (August - September 2011)

For more information on the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Reference Table, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale.
number of pastoralists’ drop-outs who are relying on humanitarian assistance and extreme coping measures (like begging) to meet basic survival needs. In areas of southern Somalia without sufficient humanitarian response measures to cover the basic survival needs, famine conditions are expected.

Overall, in both pastoral and agropastoral areas, the physical condition of the surviving livestock has continued to worsen after a brief recovery following limited improvement in pasture and water after the late April-early May rainfall. As a result, milk production has also declined. Consequently, the price of livestock has declined in most markets, while milk prices have significantly increased. Milk is three times higher than average (i.e. up to Kshs 80 per liter in May/June) in Garissa, Kenya, while cattle prices are about 70 percent below the long-term average in Dinsor, Somalia. Staple food prices have simultaneously increased, leading to a sharp decline in cereal to livestock terms of trade. In Mandera, the maize-goat terms of trade have declined by about 70 percent between June 2010 and June 2011 (Figure 4).

In Somalia, the increase in cereal prices has been even more severe, due to ongoing civil insecurity, movement restrictions and the anticipated below normal Gu harvests. In Qorioley (the key maize belt market), the price of white maize increased by 22 percent between April and May 2011, and was 154 percent above the price last year. The combined effect of severe food shortages due to drought and the limited humanitarian response due to conflict has led to very high human migration, with record numbers of refugees reporting to camps in both Kenya and Ethiopia. UNHCR recorded about 20,000 refugees reporting to Dadaab camp (Kenya) during two weeks, compared to a monthly average of about 5,000 recorded in 2010.

These high prices across the eastern Horn have contributed to a substantial reduction in purchasing power among both rural and urban households in the eastern Horn, leading to increasing household food deficits. Levels of malnutrition are increasing, with reports of increased admission to therapeutic feeding centers on the Ethiopia side increasing by 90 percent between February and April and Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates of up to 28 percent on the Kenya side of the Mandera Triangle. On the Somali side, extremely high GAM rates have been recorded. The rates are highest in agro-pastoral livelihoods of Bay (55 percent), followed by Bakol pastoral systems (52 percent), and lowest in the pastoral (camel) livelihoods of Gedo (24 percent). These have been accompanied by high mortalities of above 2 deaths/10,000/day in Shabelle and Bakol and under five mortalities of above 4 deaths/10,000/day across the whole southern Somali region.

Overall, most areas of the Mandera Triangle are at Emergency levels (IPC Phase 4) as most of the poor and very poor rely on emergency food support and extreme coping strategies to meet basic survival needs. These levels of food insecurity are not expected to improve as the July to September dry season progresses and staple prices increase further. However, in the highly populated Shabelle and Bakol regions of southern Somalia where there is limited emergency food support and coping strategies have been exhausted, the poor face complete lack of food and other basic needs and face famine conditions (IPC Phase 5). These conditions will not only persist through September, but will spread to all regions of southern Somalia starting in August as poor households exhaust coping strategies and the on-going humanitarian response seems inadequate to meet emergency needs. An immediate, large-scale and comprehensive response is needed to save lives. Mortality rates are likely to increase with the onset of deyr rains starting October.
Greater Hawd and central Somali Region
The Greater Hawd and central Somalia region comprises Lowland Hawd pastoral livelihood zone of Somali Region of Ethiopia, Hawd Pastoral, Addun pastoral and Coastal Deeh of Somalia (Figure 3). The gu (April to June) rainy season is the main rainy season in these dominantly pastoral and agro pastoral parts of the region.

The two rainy seasons this year have been very poor in most of these areas. Some rain was received in the last week of April in most of these areas, slightly improving water availability and regenerating browse. There are, however, areas that still require water trucking, such as Kelafo and Hargele woredas in Gode zone of Ethiopia. The consecutive poor seasons have also led to unusually high livestock mortality, especially in the coastal Deeh. There were some camel births in Hawd and parts of Addun of Somalia which could lead to slight improvements in milk availability but are expected to be short term. Milk availability overall is extremely low and prices of livestock have declined substantially due to poor physical condition. Livestock prices are expected to improve as demand for livestock from the Arab countries typically increases during the Hajj and Ramadaan period in August. However, poor pastoralists are not expected to benefit because they do not have sufficient livestock to be able to sell. The number of livestock exported to the Arab countries is also expected to be much below average this year as traders, who typically buy in July and feed the livestock until the Hajj begins in August, have not bought livestock this year because they are not able to feed the livestock until they sell them in August.

Staple prices have sharply increased because of declines in local production following the poor rains and increase in fuel prices that contribute to high prices for imported food items. There is very limited opportunity for labor work and the wage rates are declining, limiting the ability of poor and very poor households to cope with the rising food prices. There is heavy reliance on remittances and food aid; however, the level of assistance has not been adequate and has also been interrupted for about two months on the Ethiopia side of the Hawd due to insecurity. The poor and the very poor households in these areas continue to be extremely food insecure (IPC Phase 4). Improvement in food security is not expected during the dry season between July and September.

The Belg crop producing parts of Ethiopia
Belg crops, typically harvested in June/July, are the secondary crops in Ethiopia, contributing to about five to ten percent of total annual production of the country. They are however, very important in the dominantly belg crop-producing parts of the country and contribute up to 85 percent of total annual production.

Poor performance of the March to May rains this year led to near total failure of sweet potato and other transitional crops in SNNPR typically consumed during the lean season between February and May. Land preparation and planting of belg crops was delayed by about a month and a half due to delayed start of the belg rains. Areas covered by belg crops this year also declined substantially following the late start and erratic distribution of the rains. In Wolayita zone, where about 50 percent of annual production is typically obtained from the belg harvest, area planted declined by 44 percent this year compared to average. The belg harvest is therefore expected to be late and much below normal this year. In the southern special woredas, Konso, Derashe, Burji and Amaro, that have the highest dependence on the belg crops, performance of belg crops this year is extremely poor.

Staple prices have also been unusually high and increasing this year. In Wolayita zone for example, the price of maize, the staple food for the area, increased by 60 percent in June compared to that of February this year.

The delayed belg harvest, failure of the transitional crops and the unusually high staple prices have led the poor and very poor households in these parts of the country to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) phase. Increased admissions to Therapeutic Feeding Programs (TFP) have been reported. According to the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector’s Early Warning Bulletin of 1-15 June, TFP admissions increased by 42 percent between February and March and by 90 percent between March and April. Improvement in food security is not expected until the meher begins in October. In the southern special woredas, where the contribution of meher crops is very low, improvement in food security is not expected even when the meher harvest begins in October. These woredas are expected to continue to be at Crisis levels throughout the outlook period.

Southeastern marginal agricultural areas and coastal lowlands of Kenya
The long rains harvest in the southeastern marginal areas (Mwingi, Makueni, Kitui, Mbeere, and Tharaka) and the coastal lowlands (Taita Taveta, Kwale, Kilifi and Malindi) has nearly failed following poor performance of the MAM rains, which followed the failed October to December 2010 rains. Although the MAM rains comprise a minor season, particularly in the southeastern marginal areas, harvests from this season enable households to rebuild their food stocks, thereby easing
pressure on markets and lessening the use of extreme coping strategies. The two consecutive seasonal failures have led to depletion of household food stocks, intensified application of extreme coping mechanisms, and contributed to record increases in food prices. For example, in Kitui market, the price of maize has increased by 110 percent, from Kshs 22/kg in March to Kshs 46/kg in June.

The situation has worsened because of increased human-wildlife conflict as wild animals have invaded croplands in Taita, Kwale and Tharaka, and increased conflict between pastoralists from northern Kenya and sedentary farmers in Kitui and Mwingi as pastoralists migrate to cropping areas in search of pastures. In addition, the failed rains have led to severe water scarcity, especially in the inland marginal areas, leading to significant price increases of up to 600 percent above the seasonal average of Kshs 2 per 20 litres. The scarcity of water and dwindling pasture and browse have also led to reduced livestock productivity. Livestock prices are low due to poor physical condition, while prices of staple cereals are extremely high, making it difficult for the poor and very poor households to access food. These households have already started skipping meals and pulling their children out of school, and the numbers of those at risk of malnutrition have begun to rise (though still lower than the long term seasonal average). Intensified food and non-food assistance will be required to prevent further deterioration of the food security of the poor and very poor households in the inland marginal areas from the current Crisis level (IPC Phase 3) and those in the coastal lowlands from Stressed conditions (IPC Phase 2) beginning in August, when food stocks from the near-failed harvest may begin to deplete.

Additional areas of concern
Other areas of concern include the border states between Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, and parts of the greater Turkana district in Kenya. In the border states, continued militia insecurity and conflict, particularly in Abyei and South Kordofan; a persistent north-south trade blockade; and, additional pressure from ongoing returns of southern Sudanese will most likely lead to deterioration of food security from Crisis (IPC Phase 3) to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in August and September. The most affected states are Abyei, Northern Bahr El Gazal, South Kordofan and parts of Upper Nile. In Turkana, food security is rapidly deteriorating, especially in the northeastern parts due to upsurge of conflict over resources, exceptionally high food prices and poor rains. In most parts of the district, malnutrition rates are at very critical levels with GAM rates ranging from 24 to 37 percent.

Regional Markets and Trade
Prices of local staple foods (maize, sorghum, millet and beans) are increasing across the region due to the ongoing lean season in Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Sudan. Similarly prices are on the rise in Tanzania despite the good msimu rains harvests in May/June, ostensibly driven by reduced regional stocks and traders’ anticipation to cash in on much higher prices in neighboring countries.

In Kenya, the current food (maize) stocks are quite low, and it is estimated that farmers and traders hold a paltry 75,000 MT of maize while the stocks in the strategic grain reserve (SGR) stand at about 300,000 MT, just sufficient to cover one month’s consumption. Long rains maize production projection is estimated at 2.3 million MT with harvests starting in July and staggered until Jan/Feb 2012. Between July 2011 and June 2012, with a monthly consumption of about 300,000 MT/month, SGR of 300,000, carryover stocks of about 75,000 MT and assuming an average short rains harvest (i.e. 450,000 Mt), then a deficit of 395,000 MT remains to be covered by cross-border and commercial imports. Supplies from countries within the region will be key to ensuring markets are adequately supplied in the next twelve months.

The situation is the same in Somalia, where 2011 Gu cereal production is projected at about 69,500 MT, which is about 50 percent of the post war average. There have been increased imports of rice, wheat flour and wheat products to cover for the low 2010 deyr harvest and anticipated low gu harvest. The supplies of sorghum, maize and beans will be significantly low due to limited cross-border inflows following the export ban in Ethiopia and low stocks in Kenya. Most households will have to rely on rice and wheat and traders will thus need to step up imports in the coming months.

Uganda expects a good harvest and approximately about 650,000 MT of maize are anticipated starting in June until September. About 15 percent of this harvest (100,000 MT) is surplus, available for regional trade. These stocks will be key in supplying deficit neighbors like Kenya and South Sudan, more importantly following reduced supplies from Sudan into South Sudan. Despite the good stocks in Tanzania and the anticipated average harvest from msimu crop between July and August, the availability of these stocks to neighboring countries will be constrained by the export ban imposed by the Tanzanian government. The same applies to the January belg harvest from Ethiopia. This implies that Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia will have to turn to external markets to meet cereal deficits.