• Current restrictions on trade and movement in Somali Region could lead to a humanitarian crisis among pastoral and agropastoral populations in Warder Zone, Korahe Zone and parts of Fik, Degehabur and Gode Zones, if restrictions are not lifted or if food aid is not provided.

• Food insecurity in the lowlands of Oromiya region could deteriorate into a humanitarian emergency in the second half of 2007 if sufficient food aid is not provided, especially during the current hunger period (June to September).

Food security summary

A three-week, multi-agency, mid-season Belg/Gu assessment, conducted in Ethiopia’s Belg cropping and pastoral areas found that:

• The performance of Belg rains was very poor in the lowlands of southern Tigray region, the only Belg crop-producing zone in the region. Belg rains were relatively better in Tigray’s highlands. Production deficits in southern Tigray are covered by the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). Additional assistance is, therefore, not needed.

• In Amhara region, the Belg rains performed well in the eastern parts of North and South Wello zones. However, Belg rains were reported to be below normal in the western parts of these zones. The overall performance of the Belg rains in Oromiya and North Shewa zones of Amhara Region was also reported to be below normal, leading to stunted crop growth, poor seed formation and reduced yield. Because Belg crops represent up to 80 percent of total production in

Seasonal calendar and critical events

Source: FEWS NET

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parts of North Wello, South Wello and North Shewa zones, poor Belg crop performance in these areas could lead to up to nine months of food deficit. In addition to the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) beneficiaries in these areas, people requiring emergency food assistance beginning in August due to the poor performance of the Belg season have also been identified.

- In Oromiya region, the late start, poor distribution and early cessation of rains led to a very poor Belg performance in the lowlands of Borena, Guji, Arsi, East Shewa, East Hararghe and West Hararghe zones. Production of maize, haricot beans, wheat, barley and teff crops in these areas was very poor or failed. Food security in the lowlands of these zones is particularly worrying, as the poor 2007 Belg season is compounded by the poor 2006 Kiremt (June to September) rains these areas received. Most of these areas are also chronically food insecure and are being supported through the PSNP. However, the number of PSNP beneficiaries is reported to be below the actual number of those in need of assistance, and additional emergency needs were identified during Meher (November) 2006 assessment. Emergency food assistance was not provided, however. Poor performance of these two seasons, coupled with insufficient assistance, has led to the implementation of extreme coping strategies, including sale of draft oxen, renting out of farmland and increased wild food consumption in some of these areas.

- Belg rains were normal to above normal in Southern Nations Nationalities and People’s (SNNP) region, with some heavy rainfall in parts of the region in April and May causing water logging of crops, landslides and flooding. The 2007 Belg season is considered as one of the best in SNNP Region in terms of crop performance, except in those areas affected by flooding and landslide. These areas require immediate emergency food assistance.

- In some areas of the predominantly pastoral Afar region, the onset of the March to May Sugum rains was very late, insufficient in amount and erratic in distribution. Livestock in these areas were reported to have emaciated body conditions and low productivity, significantly decreasing their marketability and jeopardizing pastoral livelihoods. Employment of extreme coping strategies, including slaughtering of calves to protect mothers, and the death of between 5 and 10 percent of livestock was reported in Chifra, Mile, Ewa and Awra woredas. Serious water shortages were also reported in Elidar woreda of Zone 1, Dallol and Berhale woredas of Zone 2 and Yalo and Teru woredas of Zone 4.

- Asaita, Dupty, Afambo and Kuneba woredas and most parts of zone 3 in Afar region received better Sugum rains during the season. With the start of the Karma (July to September) rains, availability of water and pasture has improved, allowing for improvements in the physical condition and productivity of livestock and contributing to an overall improvement of food security in these areas.

Based on the findings of the Belg assessment, an estimated 830,000 people in Afar, Amhara, Oromiya and SNNP regions require emergency food assistance through the end of the year. Of this total, 650,000 people are in Oromiya region alone. Official beneficiary estimate is expected to be released with the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency’s (DPPA) Belg appeal.

Similar to the Meher assessment figures, Belg figures will be used for resource mobilization and contingency planning purposes. Actual needs will be determined on a case-by-case basis, through verification assessments. Areas in Oromiya region are of particularly serious concern because most of the people identified as requiring assistance during the Meher season did not receive it. As June to September is the typical hunger period for most people in these areas, provision of immediate assistance is critical to prevent further deterioration of food security. Taking more time to conduct another verification assessment will exacerbate the already very poor food security situation.

**Seasonal progress**

Meher season production, which contributes between 90 and 95 percent of the nation’s total crop production, relies upon the major June to September Kiremt rains. These Kiremt rains are also important for the regeneration of pasture and water in the northeastern pastoral region. The onset of the Kiremt rains was timely, and rains were well-distributed in most western and south western parts of the country. These areas have also received adequate 2007 Belg rains, with some parts
of South Omo zone of SNNP Region and parts of Amhara and Afar Regions flooding due to the heavy rainfall in the highlands. However, onset of the Kiremt rains was delayed by about a month in the eastern parts of Oromiya, southern Afar, northern Somali, Harari and Dire Dawa Regions.

Planting of long-cycle crops was carried out on time throughout Meher-producing parts of the country, except in eastern Oromiya, southern Afar, northern Somali, Harari and Dire Dawa regions, where the rains started late. In these areas, planting of long-cycle Meher crops may not be possible, and replanting with short-cycle varieties may be carried out instead.

The overall performance of the Kiremt rains in Tigray, Amhara, Benshangul Gumuz, Gambella, western Oromiya and parts of SNNP regions has been normal to above-normal, with high intensity of rainfall and good distribution (Figure 2). According to the National Metrological Agency (NMA), more heavy rains are expected in these areas in August, which could lead to landslides, water logging of crops and flooding, especially because many of these areas already have soils with a high moisture content, as they did not experience the normal four-to-six week gap between the Belg and the Kiremt rains. Heavy rains have also been reported in southern parts of SNNP Region, where Kiremt rains do not normally fall. This could contribute to further flooding.

Figure 2. Estimated rainfall compared to the long-term average

Markets, trade and food access

Cereal prices in Addis Ababa market continued to rise in June, following their normal seasonal trend (Figures 3 and 4). The June to September period is the hunger period for most of the crop-dependent populations of Ethiopia, except for the few areas in the country that rely on Belg production. During the hunger period, most poor farmers rely on the market to purchase staple food.
Compared to the 2002/2006 average (Figure 3), prices for white maize, mixed teff, white wheat, and white barley - the most widely consumed cereals in the country, are significantly higher. These high cereal prices will have a significant negative impact on the food security of poor farmers, as well as on vulnerable urban populations who spend most of their income to purchase food, especially during the hunger season. Food prices are expected to increase further during the coming months, following their seasonal pattern and making it more difficult for poor farmers and the urban poor to purchase food to meet their needs. Provision of recommended emergency food assistance is therefore very important in those areas where Belg performance was poor, particularly in those areas that have already started using negative coping strategies to meet food requirements.

**Somali Region Update**

Following the mid-June restrictions on trade and movement in Warder, Korahe and parts of Degehabur, Gode and Fik zones of Somali region, the Gu season assessment was conducted in Jijiga, Shinile, Afder, Liban and parts of Gode, Fik and Degehabur where movement is not restricted. After a two-to-three week delay, assessments were also conducted in Warder and Gode zones, where there are restrictions of movement and trade. Korahe and most of Fik zone have not yet been assessed. Results of the assessment in the restricted areas are still not available due to the late start.

Preliminary results from non-restricted areas show that the overall performance of the current Gu rains is below average, and food and cash income is lower than the reference year. However, in most livelihood zones the decline in income is not to the level where emergency intervention is required.

In areas where movement is restricted, it is predicted that, with the current trend in prices of cereals and an absence of or very limited market for livestock, the level of deficit could be as high as 70 to 75 percent. According to the Pastoralist Livelihood Initiative’s monthly food security update, the price of 50 kg of sorghum in Degehabur town was 65 Birr in May, before the restriction. It was 120 Birr in July, almost double. Similarly, the price of 50 kg of rice in Gode town was 240 Birr in May, and has risen to 430 Birr in July, an increase of 80 percent. Although assessment teams have not returned to Addis Ababa and complete information is not yet available, some sources report that there is very little or no food (local cereals or imported food such as rice and pasta) in the markets.

In the absence of food from commercial sources, the DPPA started delivering emergency food aid to parts of the population in two woredas of Warder zone. The DPPA plans to distribute more food in areas within and outside of the restricted zones. This is expected to improve the food security situation in the short term, until commercial activities resume. Since almost all the population in the restricted areas is expected to rely on food aid, the amount of food aid provided should be increased to cover these needs. The type of food commodities provided should be a complete basket to meet the nutritional requirements of the affected population. Targeting of food aid in pastoral areas has always been difficult. In a situation like this, where other sources of food are not available, extra efforts are needed to ensure that the food aid reaches all the people that require the assistance.