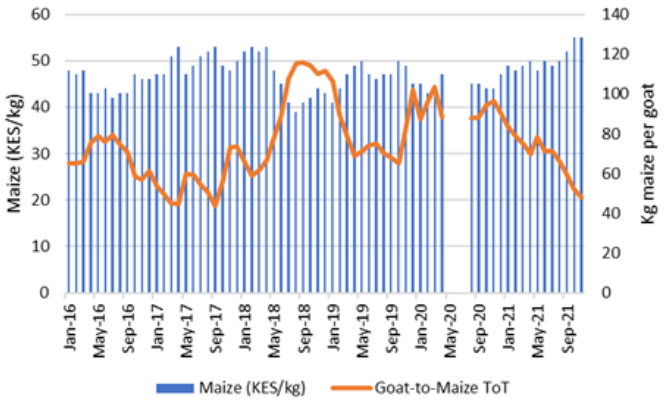
Historic 2021/2022 drought in Kenya to drive high assistance needs through 2022

The October to December 2021 short rains have largely failed, marking the third consecutive below-average season across pastoral and marginal agricultural areas of eastern and northern Kenya. In pastoral areas, very low pasture and water resources have driven atypical livestock migration, rapid declines in livestock health and productivity, and excess livestock deaths. The drought also follows the temporary closure of livestock markets in early 2020 due to COVID-19, which already suppressed formal livestock trade in the short-term. In marginal agricultural areas, rainfall totals have been inadequate for crop development. While the distribution of food assistance, expansion of the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP), and the delivery of water and livestock feed are helping to prevent more severe food insecurity, widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes persist, with worst-affected households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). With the elevated likelihood of a fourth consecutive below-average season during the March to May 2022 long rains, there is high concern that food insecurity will increase in severity and scale in 2022, and FEWS NET expects 3-4 million people will be in need of humanitarian food assistance in Kenya. Large-scale humanitarian assistance and livelihoods support are urgently required to cover current needs in northern and eastern Kenya, and assistance should be sustained throughout 2022.

Figure 1. Goat-to-maize terms-of-trade (ToT), Marsabit market, January 2016-November 2021.



Source: *FEWS NET; data from National Drought Management Authority (NDMA)*

Rainfall in October and November was less than 60 percent of the 40-year average across much of northern and eastern Kenya, with some areas registering a significant delay to the start of season or no onset of rainfall at all. Increased rainfall in December has improved conditions, but deficits remain severe at 30 to 75 percent of average.

In pastoral areas, rangeland resources are significantly below median levels and monitored water points range from empty to well below median depths. Pastoralists must trek livestock greater distances, and NDMA sentinel site data suggest return trekking distances from grazing areas to water points are around 100-400 percent above average. The increased trekking distances and low vegetation are resulting in poor livestock body conditions and declining livestock productivity. Sentinel site data suggest livestock milk production – a key source of food and income for pastoralists – is around 0.25-1.30 liters per household per day, roughly 40-80 percent below average. In addition, pastoral households are facing lower access to food given their outright loss of livestock and/or lower livestock value amid poor body conditions. In August 2021, the NDMA long rains assessment suggested poor households in pastoral areas owned around 2-8 tropical livestock units (TLUs)[1], already roughly 35 percent below the long-term average due to losses in past seasons, and key informants and media reports suggest atypical livestock deaths are already occurring. The cash income earned from the sale of one goat in November could purchase 30-48 kg maize, sufficient to fulfill roughly 9-15 days of basic kilocalorie needs for a family of six, which is about 25-40 percent below average. Seasonal price trends suggest that terms of trade will only further deteriorate during the January to March dry season, as food prices increase and livestock values decline (Figure 1).

In marginal agricultural areas, the short rains season supports up to 65 percent of annual crop production, which is a key source of food and income for poor households. Given the extremely poor performance of the season, many households did not plant, and among those who did, most crops have wilted or failed to germinate. Late November and early December rainfall is likely occurring too late to adequately support late-season planting as the rains are forecast to cease before effective crop establishment. Production in these areas is expected to be significantly below average, marking the third consecutive

[1] Tropical Livestock Units are livestock numbers converted to a common unit. Camels = 1.1; cattle=0.5; sheep and goats=0.1; pigs=0.2; chickens=0.01.

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poor season of production in marginal agricultural areas. Poor households in these areas also rely on livestock as a food and income source and official data suggest livestock conditions and productivity are also significantly below average, with atypical livestock deaths occurring in Tana River, Lamu, Kilifi, and Taita Taveta counties. According to key informants, daily agricultural wage rates are near average levels and this, coupled with average maize prices, is keeping the terms of trade stable at 5-16 kilograms of maize per day worked, or roughly equivalent to 2-5 days of minimum kilocalorie needs for a family of six. However, as maize and other staple food prices increase in the coming months, and as poor households rely more heavily on markets to make up for crop losses, household purchasing power is expected to decline in early 2022.

Ongoing humanitarian and livelihoods support is likely mitigating the severity of acute food insecurity. In October, OCHA reported 28,000 people received food and livelihood assistance, and in the same month the government reported distributing around 12.46 MT of food and purchasing over 8,000 heads of cattle from farmers as part of an offtake program. Additionally, around 100,000 households enrolled in HSNP in Turkana, Marsabit, Wajir, and Mandera continue to receive 5,400 KES (47.81 USD) every two months. There are also plans underway for more significant assistance in the coming months, including an emergency relief cash transfer program through the Kenyan government, through which 360,696 households will receive 3,000 KES (26.57 USD) monthly, equivalent to 10-16 days of minimum kilocalorie needs for a family of six at current prices. The government also signed an agreement with the Kenya Red Cross Society to purchase and slaughter more than 75,000 weak livestock and to distribute the meat as relief food to over 766,000 households.

Despite ongoing assistance, needs far outpace ongoing and planned distributions. Furthermore, with a forecast of below-average March to May 2022 rainfall, needs in 2022 are expected to increase. Household purchasing power will likely further deteriorate as agricultural labor opportunities remain low, the value of livestock declines, and staple food prices increase amid a fourth season of poor local production. Widespread area-level Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are already present in pastoral areas of northern and eastern Kenya, and while the ongoing assistance is likely preventing some households from facing more extreme outcomes, there remain worst-affected households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). In the absence of a scale-up of humanitarian food and livelihoods assistance in pastoral areas, households will likely lose or sell off significant proportions of their livestock – a vital source of food and income – which will lead to higher levels of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition. From January, an increasing number of pastoral households will likely face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes without assistance. In the marginal agricultural areas, the expected poor harvest will likely lead to area-level Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes from December as food availability and access to income remain low. Across northern and eastern Kenya, immediate action is required to prevent widespread acute food insecurity.

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