

*As an already historic four-season drought drives widespread need, a fifth poor season is now forecast*

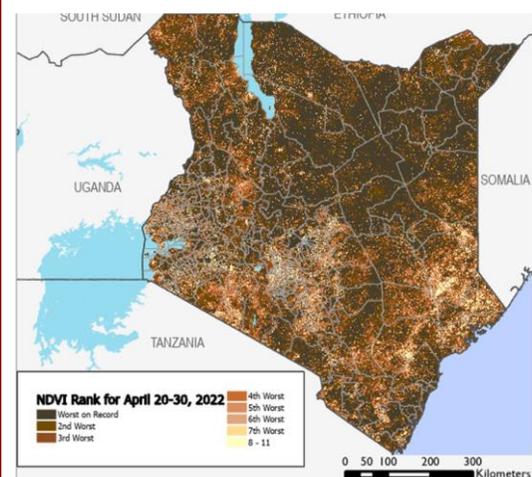
Pastoral and marginal agricultural areas of eastern and northern Kenya have received only minimal rainfall during the March to May 2022 long rains season, marking the fourth consecutive below-average season. Widespread livestock deaths, minimal livestock productivity, very low cropping levels, and sharp declines in purchasing power are creating large food consumption gaps and high levels of acute malnutrition among millions of households in eastern and northern Kenya. FEWS NET expects 4-5 million people are in need of humanitarian food assistance, and while ongoing assistance is currently mitigating the severity of acute food insecurity, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are increasingly likely as needs outpace assistance levels. The current drought is already historic in its length and severity, and forecast models are now signaling an elevated likelihood that the October to December 2022 short rains season will also be below average<sup>1</sup>, setting the stage for an unprecedented five-season drought. This will only increase the severity and scale of food assistance needs into 2023, and a significant and sustained scale up of humanitarian assistance is needed to save lives and livelihoods.

Rainfall totals through April for the main season long rains were less than 60 percent of the 40-year average across most of Kenya, with many areas of northern and eastern Kenya receiving less than 45 percent of the 40-year average. Rainfall in many areas did not begin until late April, when seasonal rainfall is typically at its peak. Near-term forecasts suggest large deficits are likely to average to above-average rainfall in late April and early May, and most areas will conclude the season with rainfall amounts that are 25 to 75 percent below average.

In pastoral areas, vegetation greenness is significantly below the 2012-2021 mean (Figure 1) and monitored water points range from empty to well below median depths. Sentinel site data from Kenya's National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) suggest significantly longer trekking distances, and reports suggest up to 1.5 million livestock, particularly cattle and sheep, have died between October 2021 and March 2022. County-level livestock mortality rates are upwards of 12 percent, diminishing livestock herds. In addition to low herd sizes, the amount of maize that can be purchased from the sale of a goat is around 10-50 percent below what is typical, and at near record lows given high maize prices and low livestock value. Moreover, livestock milk production, a key source of food and cash income for pastoralists, is 10-80 percent below average. The overall decline in household access to food is driving up levels of acute malnutrition, which exceed Extremely Critical levels (GAM WHZ  $\geq$  30 percent) in Mandera County per a March 2022 SMART survey by UNICEF, while NDMA sentinel site surveillance in Wajir County reported deaths of children under five due to severe acute malnutrition complications.

In marginal agricultural areas, household food stocks are already depleted due to poor past seasons, and household income from agricultural labor is lower than usual due to a drop in demand. Normally, poor households in these areas rely on long rains crop production to cover about 10 percent of their annual food needs, while the sale of crops, agricultural wage labor, and the sale of livestock and livestock products provide income to purchase food. In addition to low labor demand, the amount of maize that a household can purchase with the daily wage has fallen; maize and bean prices are 10-25 percent above average, contributing to goat-to-maize terms of trade that are 5-50 percent below average. Available data from NDMA sentinel sites suggests households are increasingly applying consumption and livelihood-based coping strategies such as reducing the number and size of meals, purchasing food on credit, sending household members to eat elsewhere, reducing expenses on health, and eating seed stocks. Furthermore, despite projections of average February to August rains in the

**Figure 1.** Ranking of vegetation conditions April 20-30, 2022, compared to the same period of 2012-2021, according to the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index\*



Source: USGS

\*Late April is typically when vegetation values are at a bi-annual peak.

western unimodal areas, high fuel and fertilizer prices are raising production costs, which is likely to result in below-average national long-rains production, putting further upward pressure on food prices.

Ongoing humanitarian and livelihoods support through the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) and Emergency HSNP scale-up payments are mitigating more severe acute food insecurity, and the government of Kenya has released over 33 million USD for drought mitigation. However, needs far outstrip assistance levels. The [Kenya Drought Flash Appeal of 2021/2022](#) remains just 20 percent funded with only 28.5 million USD received out of the required 139.5 million USD.

Further deterioration is likely into at least early 2023 based on the forecast of a below-average October to December 2022 short rains season. Household purchasing power will likely further deteriorate as agricultural labor opportunities remain low, the value of livestock declines, and staple food prices increase, the latter of which will be driven by poor local production, depreciation of the local currency, and rising global food prices. In the absence of a scale-up of humanitarian food and livelihoods assistance in pastoral areas, households will likely lose or sell off a significant proportion of their livestock – their key source of food and cash income – which will lead to higher levels of acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition and undermine households' capacity to recover in future seasons. An increasing number of pastoral households will likely face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes despite ongoing assistance, with area-level Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes likely to emerge by September. In marginal agricultural areas, households are cushioned somewhat by higher purchasing power, additional off-farm labor opportunities, and relatively better livestock conditions, allowing for higher milk production, but the consecutive very poor harvest will still drive widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Across northern and eastern Kenya, immediate action is required to end the already widespread and severe acute food insecurity present in the country.

*FEWS NET: Kenya Food Security Alert, May 9, 2022: As an already historic four-season drought drives widespread need, a fifth poor season is now forecast, May 2022.*

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<sup>1</sup> Forecast models predict an increased likelihood of strong sea surface temperature gradients in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, and a La Niña event and/or a negative Indian Ocean Dipole appear likely during the October to December 2022 rainfall season. Based on research conducted by FEWS NET science partners, these three climate drivers are all correlated with below-average rainfall in the eastern Horn, signaling an elevated chance that the October to December 2022 short rains season will be below average.