

## SOMALIA Food Security Alert

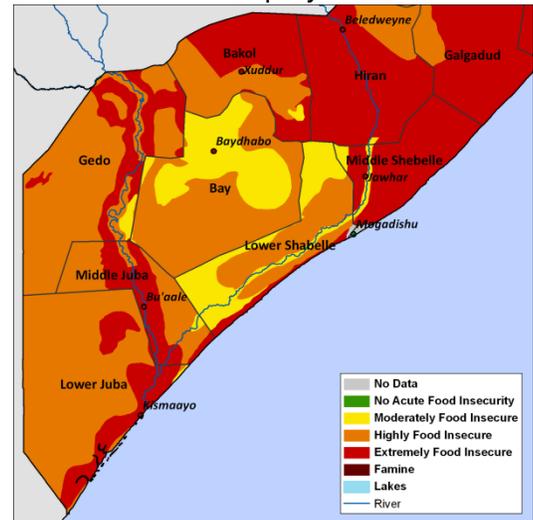
March 21, 2011

### *Extreme food insecurity likely due to drought and lack of humanitarian response*

The combined effects of several consecutive poor seasons, the failed 2010 *Deyr* season, and severely restricted humanitarian access have led to high and extreme food insecurity throughout southern Somalia. Vulnerability to a poor *Gu* season is high, and forecasts indicate that the April-June rains are likely to be below-average and erratically distributed. This will affect main season crop production, water availability, and pasture regeneration and result in further deterioration in food security for both pastoral and cropping households through at least September 2011. The development of new response strategies to address current and expected food deficits and malnutrition is critical.

January/February crop harvests in southern Somalia were only 20 percent of average and water and pasture availability are extremely poor. In February 2011, retail cereal prices in Baidoa, Beletweyne, Merka, and Mogadishu were significantly higher than last year's prices (120-130 percent higher for sorghum and 25-75 percent higher for maize) and have increased since December 2010 by 22-33 percent for sorghum and 21-25 percent for maize. Meanwhile, wages have dropped and local goat prices have declined 25-50 percent compared to this period in 2010. Purchasing power is now 35-60 percent lower than last year, and is the lowest since 2008. Demand and prices for cattle, a key asset for both pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Jubas, Gedo, and Hiran, have dropped more than 50 percent in the last year following the collapse of the Garissa cattle market and extremely poor animal body conditions. Poor and middle-income households in southern Somalia are currently relying on credit, local social support where available, remittances, and extreme asset stripping (especially unsustainable goat sales) to fund food purchases. However, these strategies are unable to fully mitigate the impact of recent shocks, and the delivery of emergency assistance is very limited due to insecurity. Food deficits, as high as 30-50 percent of survival needs in some areas, are widespread and the median prevalence of acute malnutrition in southern Somalia was 25 percent as of December 2010. Conditions in the socially and economically marginalized Lower Juba riverine area are most severe: credit is no longer available, access to remittances is limited, there are no livestock to sell, and active conflict has reemerged in recent weeks.

**Figure 1. Most-likely food security outcomes for southern Somalia, April-June 2011.**



Source: FEWS NET

**In the most-likely scenario, restrictions to humanitarian access and civil insecurity are expected to continue, and April-June *Gu* rainfall totals are expected to be 75-100 percent of average. However, the erratic distribution of this rainfall over space and time is likely to significantly reduce its utility for crop and pasture growth.** Rainfed cereal production is expected to be 50-75 percent of average, similar to levels observed in 2005 and 2008, and food prices are likely to continue their upward trend through at least June. Food insecurity in marginal cropping areas is expected to remain extreme through June, and subsequent post-harvest improvements are likely to be short-lived. In pastoral areas, pasture and water availability will improve, but will be insufficient to last through the July-September dry season. In addition, availability of milk (a key food and income source) is expected to be very low, and given current animal body conditions, above-average livestock mortality is expected with the onset of *Gu* rains. Food insecurity in pastoral areas may improve slightly during the rainy season, but is expected to begin deteriorating again with the start of the *Hagaa* dry season in July/August.

In the worst-case scenario, *Gu* rainfall will be significantly below average, resulting in very poor crop production (<50 percent of average), sustained high prices, and very limited pasture/water replenishment in key grazing areas. Large-scale crisis migration and localized famine conditions, including significant increases in human mortality, are possible in the Lower Juba Riverine and Hiran Agropastoral zones. Even if rains are average, asset depletion and high price levels mean that food security outcomes in southern Somalia would remain high/extreme. Emergency contingency planning and the development of new response strategies to address current and expected food deficits and malnutrition are critical to save lives. FEWS NET and partners will intensify monitoring and reporting, and an update to the seasonal forecast is expected in mid-April.

*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.*