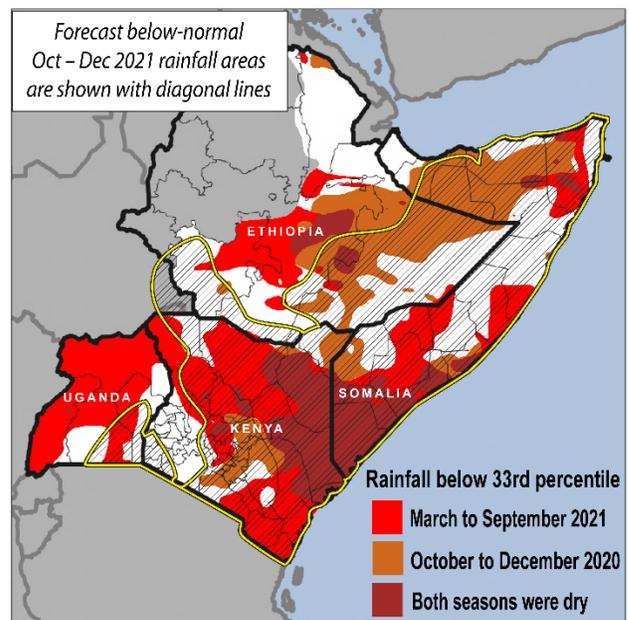


Worsening drought threatens Horn of Africa as conflict-driven emergency persists in northern Ethiopia

The Horn of Africa region faces its third consecutive below-average rainfall season since late 2020, which will likely intensify ongoing drought and significantly worsen food insecurity through at least mid-2022. Multiple regional and global forecast models concur that October to December (OND) 2021 rainfall will be below average, primarily due to [negative Indian Ocean Dipole](#) and [La Niña](#) conditions. Furthermore, research on historical climate patterns suggests elevated chances of a fourth consecutive below-average rainfall season from March to May 2022. The region last witnessed a four-season drought in 2016/2017, which led to severe acute food insecurity in the eastern Horn. With multi-year drought again likely in 2021/2022, food and income losses – with the potential for crop failure and excess livestock mortality – will likely be substantial. Currently, FEWS NET estimates up to 20 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda will need food assistance through mid-2022 due not only to the impacts of drought, but also conflict, insecurity, and economic challenges, including the [complex humanitarian emergency in northern Ethiopia](#). National governments and donors must urgently scale up and sustain food, water, nutrition, and health assistance as well as livelihood protection programs to prevent severe acute food insecurity, rising acute malnutrition levels, and the erosion of resilience and coping capacity through at least mid-2022.

Figure 1. Areas in the Horn of Africa where recent seasonal rainfall totals were below the 33rd percentile of 1981-2020 amounts ([CHIRPS](#))



Source: FEWS NET and the Climate Hazards Center, University of California Santa Barbara

The onset of the OND 2021 rainfall season is already delayed in the eastern Horn, and weather forecasts indicate very dry conditions will likely persist through at least the end of October. Although a timely rainfall onset is alleviating drought in much of Uganda, the next rainfall season in Uganda’s Karamoja Region will not occur until April 2022. Due to preceding seasons of poor rainfall (Figure 1), the impacts of drought on food security are already evident across central, southern, and southeastern Ethiopia and most of Somalia, Kenya, and Karamoja. Available assessments of the July/August 2021 harvests indicate that cereal and pulse production ranged from 30 to 50 percent below average in southern Somalia and southeastern Kenya. The annual harvest in Karamoja, Uganda, and the national *belg* harvest in Ethiopia were also below normal. In many pastoral and agropastoral areas, pasture availability is 20-40 percent below normal and water sources are drying up, leading to atypical livestock migration, high water prices, and declines in livestock health, value, and milk production. There are already reports of hunger-related livestock deaths in parts of southern Somalia and parts of Ethiopia’s Oromia Region.

Consequently, poor households are experiencing significant reductions in food and income from on-farm sources, as well as increased competition for income from off-farm sources. In many pastoral and agropastoral livelihood zones, households are entering the OND 2021 season with persistently low herd sizes, as they have not fully recovered from the large-scale losses that occurred during the 2016/2017 drought. In addition, diverse economic shocks – such as rising fuel prices, currency depreciation, and inflation – are further constraining household purchasing power. In Kenya, for example, the price of livestock has fallen by 15-30 percent compared to last year. In Baidoa, Somalia, the price of red sorghum has reached 10,000 SOS/kilogram, the highest price recorded since the 2016/2017 drought. In Hosanna in SNNPR Region, Ethiopia, the poor harvest and inflation drove maize prices to 170 percent above the five-year average in August.

Amid these alarming trends in food availability and access, the delayed and below-average OND 2021 season is expected to

further erode household food and income from crop and livestock production, especially in the eastern Horn. Based on rainfall performance in past OND seasons with similar climate conditions, rainfall totals are projected to be over 40 percent below average in crop-producing areas of southern Somalia and coastal Kenya and in most pastoral areas of Somalia, northeastern Kenya, and southeastern Ethiopia. Elsewhere, rainfall deficits are projected in the range of 25-40 percent below average. Given these deficits, historical crop production data suggest cereal crop losses will most likely exceed 20 percent of average in southern Somalia and southeastern Kenya. Crop losses will reduce local food availability and demand for agricultural labor, thereby contributing to spiking food prices and lower purchasing power before and after the January/February 2022 harvests. Past trends also show household livestock holdings will most likely stagnate or decline and milk availability will be low, resulting from poor livestock reproduction, hunger-related disease incidence, and household coping strategies that include culling or selling off their livestock. FEWS NET's livestock herd model suggests goat and sheep herd sizes could drop to 20-50 percent below normal during the OND season in several pastoral livelihood zones. In a worst-case scenario where OND rainfall fails, excess livestock mortality would further accelerate in the subsequent January/February 2022 dry season.

Based on the drought outlook, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to become increasingly widespread in the region through at least mid-2022. Moreover, the worst-affected areas will likely witness an increase in the number of households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), particularly during the agricultural and pastoral 2022 lean seasons in the eastern Horn and Karamoja. Areas of highest concern, including Somalia's [Juba Pastoral, Bay Bakool Low Potential Agropastoral, and Coastal Deeh Pastoral livelihood zones](#) and some southern pastoral areas in Ethiopia, will likely see Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes emerge between late 2021 and early 2022. If the March to May 2022 rains are also exceptionally poor, then Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes would be possible across wider areas of southern and southeastern pastoral Ethiopia and south-central Somalia. In Kenya, however, the ongoing scale-up of assistance under the [national emergency drought response](#) is expected to mitigate Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes. As Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are associated with moderate to large food consumption gaps and atypically high acute malnutrition and mortality levels, national governments and humanitarian partners are urged to immediately scale up food, water, nutrition, and health assistance to save lives and livelihoods.

FEWS NET: East Africa Food Security Alert: Worsening drought threatens Horn of Africa as conflict-driven emergency persists in northern Ethiopia, October 27, 2021.