

Food security deteriorating in pastoral areas

Consecutive seasons of poor rainfall, a possible failure of the current *Heys/Dada* rains, high staple food prices and a significant reduction in emergency food aid distribution is pushing households towards extreme food insecurity, particularly in the Northwest and Southeast pastoral livelihood zones (Figure 1). The situation is expected to worsen as food and income from animal sources declines over the coming months. A continuation of current emergency food assistance, along with destocking and asset protection interventions is needed.

Heys/Dada rains (Oct-Feb) are particularly important in Djibouti's coastal grazing belt, where they serve as the main rainy season, and are beneficial to goats giving birth in January and February. This year, the performance of the *Heys/Dada* rains has been below normal. The rains started in October but totals were low and rainfall was poorly distributed. In most areas, no significant rains were observed in November (Figure 2), normally the period of peak rainfall, suggesting that the season may be a complete failure. Earlier rains in 2009 were also below normal.

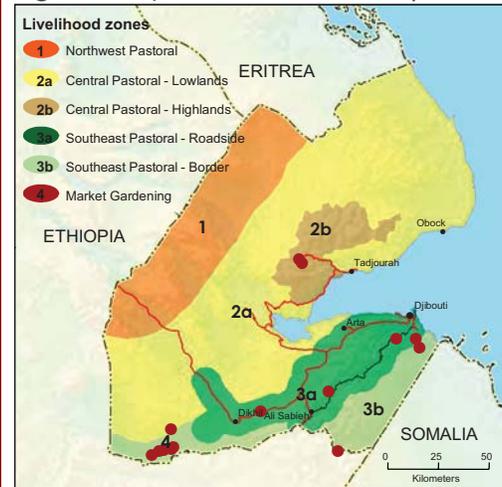
Already poor body animal conditions are expected to decline further as the extremely poor rainfall observed during the last month has affected the availability of both water and pasture. In addition, livestock are vulnerable to pneumonia at this time of year. Livestock deaths have already been observed in some areas (e.g. Makarassoul and Oubalay) and animal mortality rates are expected to increase over the coming months. As pastoralists lost 50-70 percent of their livestock in late 2008 due to drought, and because recovery has been so slow, household's ability to absorb further livestock losses is very limited. Milk production is below-normal given poor conception and births. Livestock prices are below normal, due to weak animal body conditions, and staple food prices remain above-average, meaning that livestock-to-cereal terms of trade do not favor pastoralists, limiting their food access.

As a result, most pastoral households are facing survival deficits, particularly in the Northwest and Southeast pastoral livelihood zones. This means that they are unable to meet basic food and water needs without external assistance. Households in the Central pastoral zones are facing livelihood protection deficits; they are meeting basic food needs, but only at the expense of future wellbeing. For example, they are selling off remaining livestock, taking children out of school, reducing their dietary intake, and migrating to cities in search of casual labor opportunities. However, despite ongoing needs, WFP is scaling down general emergency food aid distributions in most pastoral areas by nearly 74 percent as compared to last year, following a May 2009 rapid assessment. However, this survey does not reflect the impacts of poor rains since May, and therefore underestimates the size of the population in need.

The rural population in need of emergency assistance, both food and non-food, is expected to increase in the coming months to 80,000 to 100,000 persons. Current emergency food aid distribution is inadequate and should expand to meet the expected caseload. In addition, any program intended to help the affected households should consider destocking and asset protection interventions in rural areas.

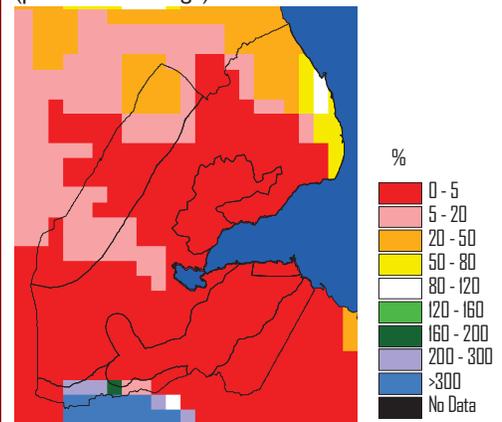
The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Figure 1. Djibouti livelihoods zone map



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Estimated rainfall for November 2009, (percent of average)



Source: NOAA/FEWS NET