

## DJIBOUTI Food Security Update

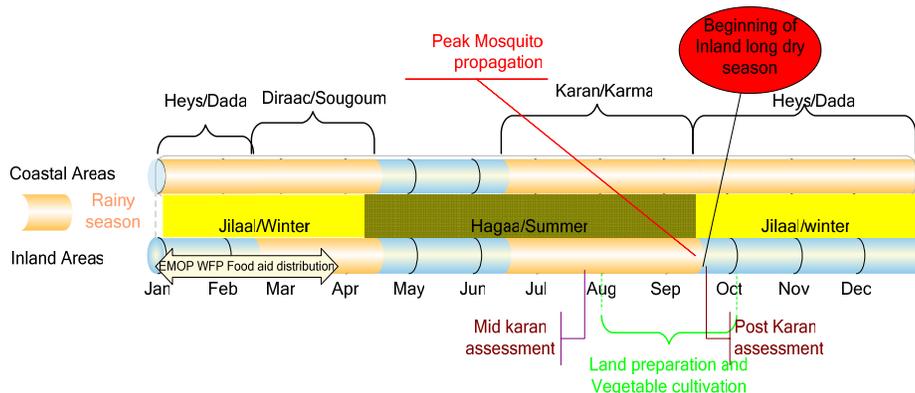
April 2007

Following the poor *Heys/Dada* season (October to February) rains and the delayed onset of the current *Diraa/Sougoum* season, the government of Djibouti declared a drought situation in the inland pastoral zones. In a meeting organized at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government appealed officially to the international community to help overcome the impact of drought on the livelihood and food security of the pastoralists, particularly those who do not receive remittances from urban areas and are dependent solely on livestock. In its appeal, the government emphasized malnutrition rates which are above international thresholds for emergency in both rural and urban areas. It is hoped that the drought declaration will bring additional attention to the significant shortfall for the regular WFP programs as well as additional support to UNICEF therapeutic and supplementary feeding programs in Djibouti. An additional US\$ 6 million is needed for WFP operations in Djibouti through December 2007. About US\$ 1 million is required immediately to avoid an interruption of food aid distributions in May. A total of 53,000 people (including 47,000 drought affected pastoralists and 6,000 refugees) dependent on food aid distributions will be affected.

The pastoralists most affected by the drought reside in the Northwest pastoral zone and the Southeast border sub zone. These areas have been in a prolonged dry season since October 2006, although some rains were reported during the second dekad April. The Djiboutian pastoralist lives at the edge even under normal circumstances, and any slight climate hazard such as delay in the onset of the rainy season will have an immediate and direct negative impact on their livelihood and food security. The situation is currently aggravated by the staple foods prices that are beyond the reach of poor pastoralists as well as urban households. The current infestation of desert locusts in Arta, Ali-sabieh and Dikhil districts is an additional concern for pastoralists as they threaten the limited supply of pasture and browse. A detailed joint assessment on the impact of the current delay of the seasonal rains is highly recommended and must be organized soon.

Urban households are in their fourth month of unprecedented above normal staple food prices, and the expenditure basket of the urban poor is beyond their reach. The government is trying to take extra policy measures to adjust the price fluctuations for the benefit of poor population without affecting the market liberalization. A national debate has been opened on how to overcome on trader speculations. Price control measures are likely to be put in place.

### Seasonal timeline



### Current hazard summary

- The current delay in the onset of the main inland rainy season – *Diraa/Sougoum* is pushing the pastoralist in inland areas to extreme food insecurity.
- The continuous increase in staple food prices is seriously affecting the food security of urban poor households.

## Food security summary

Though the rains in the second dekad of April in the inland are expected to have brought a temporary respite to the livelihood and food security of the inland livestock dependant pastoralists, the lack of rainfall is still a concern in the more remote areas of the Northwest pastoral livelihood zone in the districts of Obock, Tadjourah and Dikhil. Livestock are showing an extreme signs of distress, and their body conditions are not satisfactory. Reports indicate that the rains of the second dekad of April were well distributed in the inland areas, however the season performance is so far below the short term average according satellite images.

Milk production is practically not existent in the Northwest, as livestock were in a prolonged dry period from October 2006 through March 2007. During this dry period, the food sources for livestock significantly diminished. Livestock in the areas around Dohda, Dorra, Makarasou, Balho and Boli in Tadjourah district down to the plateau of Daguirio in Dikhil district are in a desperate situation because there is no pasture and browse, although the water availability and quality is improving due to recent rains.

The resilience capacity of Djiboutian pastoral households is undermined by the increased frequency of droughts and lack of proper mitigation and recovery programs. Livestock dependant pastoralists have been in a critical livelihood crisis for the last decade. Livestock herd sizes declined significantly, and the main underlying causes of chronic food insecurity is the inability to recover completely from shocks. Hunger safety nets need to be developed to lift up the poor pastoralists from their deepening dependence on food aid assistance.

The government's renewed appeal on international assistance reflects the persistent but deepening pastoral crisis that requires more comprehensive programs of mitigation and sustainable recovery in response, so that pastoralists can at least develop the capacity to cope with minor shocks and to minimize the rural exodus to urban areas.

Pastoralists in more remote areas in the Northwest cannot satisfy all their daily caloric needs on their own even under normal circumstances, and animal productivity is progressively declining due to the lack of sufficient pasture and browse. The government, NGOs and the donor community need to address the root causes of this chronic food insecurity, which has been reflected recently by high malnutrition rates. Similarly, the scale of destitution among pastoral communities needs to be explored in detail and possible potential solutions for supporting them must be examined. Asset creation projects through restocking, cash transfers or developing alternative livelihoods like farming activities will support the pastoral community in a sustainable manner.

In urban areas, the cost of the monitored expenditure basket for poor households is currently exceptionally high and beyond their reach. Reports indicate that poor households are currently consuming only two daily meals instead of the usual three. This will exacerbate the impact of the chronic food insecurity that already exists in the poor quarters of the city. Malnutrition rates among children and pregnant women are expected to increase. There is a likelihood that the rate of school dropout may increase as poorer households are no longer able to afford school fees and associated costs. Appropriate measures for assisting the most vulnerable groups in urban areas are needed like cash for work, coupons for food, extension of school feeding programs to urban poor areas, or take home rations at school. The creation of income generating activities and the expansion of micro-credit schemes to vulnerable communities will help to build assets in the long term.

WFP normally covers the food deficit gap for drought affected pastoral communities and the chronically food insecure households in rural areas through general food distribution, school feeding programs, food for work and health related programs for AIDS and TB victims. Current food aid availability is not sufficient to cover all regular programs, and food aid distributions for around 53,000 beneficiaries could be cut in May if pledges are not secured soon.

**Natural resource availability: water, pasture and browse**

March is known to be the start of the *Sougum/Diraa* season. A strengthening of the weather system that gives rise to the *Heys/Dada* rains leads to the development of *Sougum/Diraa*, corresponding to the *Belg* rains in neighboring Ethiopia. The *Sougum/Diraa* rains are of paramount importance for the recovery of the inland pastoralists who normally experience a prolonged dry spell of six months (October to February). The onset of the current season rains has been delayed by more than 6 weeks, effectively extending the dry spell. Current field reports and satellite imagery (see figure 1) confirm that there were virtually no rains for the whole Djibouti territory in the month of March. Some insignificant showers were reported around lac Abe and in a very limited area in the coastal plain of Obock.

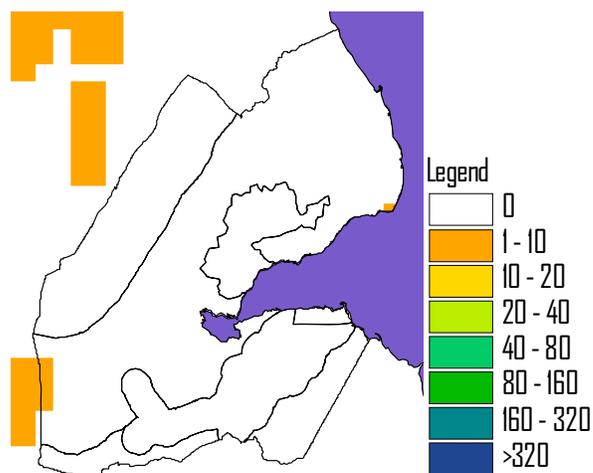
This lack of rain is abnormal and there is a clear indication that the short season rains will be poor. The rainfall performance of March was extremely poor. The satellite imagery in figure 2 below clearly evidences the unexpected prolonged dry period in the inland pastoral livelihoods. As a consequence, the water aquifer levels were diminished and the zones that depend on water harvesting from water catchments and basins were facing serious water shortages in terms of water quality and quantity.

However, the rains reported in the second dekad of April brought a temporary respite and are expected to improve the availability of pasture and browse. Figure 3 illustrates the spatial distribution of rains in the 2<sup>nd</sup> dekad of April and confirms that the whole country received some rains, except Djibouti ville and most parts of Obock district. Around 10-20 mm of rainfall fell in most of inland pastoral areas. The rains were heavy in some parts of Dikhil district, particularly Goobad zone.

The availability of pasture and browse is currently extremely limited. Pastoralists have been observed shaking acacia trees to feel animals on the falling leaves, a clear sign of distress. Recent locusts infestations reported in areas around Ali-adde and in Goobad and Hanle plains will further aggravate the availability of vegetation already affected by the unusual prolonged dry period in the inland areas.

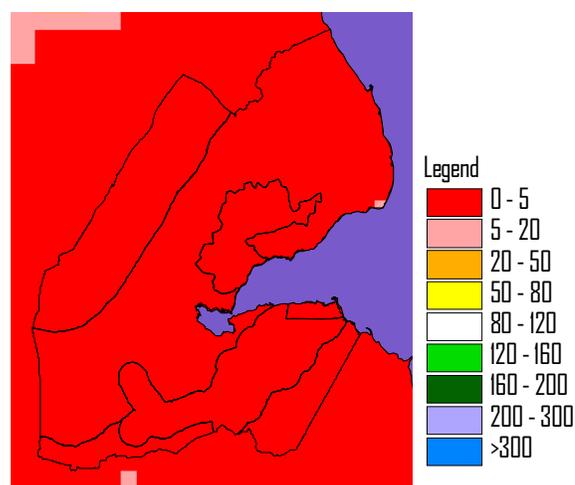
The rains in the 2<sup>nd</sup> dekad of April were brief, lasting less than one hour, and runoff was very high, eroding but not always penetrating the soil. Steady and significant rainfall is required for vegetation to recover.

**Figure 1.** Cumulative rainfall (mm) for March 2007



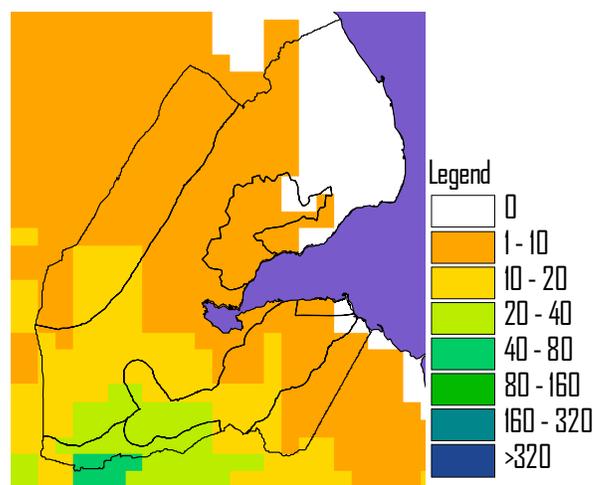
Source: USGS

**Figure 2.** March 2007 rainfall performance as percentage of average (March 1996-2003)



Source: USGS

**Figure 3.** Cumulative rainfall for April 2<sup>nd</sup> dekad 2007



Source: USGS

### Urban food and livelihood security

For the fourth consecutive month, the cost of the total monitored expenditure basket for the urban poor has risen beyond their reach. Since November, the cost has increased by 5 percent, with an increase of 2 percent from February to March. This increase is mainly accounted to the rise in the staple foods (1 percent), particularly sorghum and cooking oil, other essential food items (2 percent) and non food items (3 percent). Prices for cooking oil have increased by around 74 percent since September 2006, mainly attributed to high speculation of wholesale traders who re-export the commodity to neighboring Ethiopian markets, where there is high demand. Another worrying concern is the high price of milk powder, the only food source for weaning children. Prices of milk powder increased 6 percent in March, and by 17 percent since September 2006. The main factors behind the increase in milk powder prices are the gradual removal of the subsidies by the European Union and the increase in the value of the Euro currency to the dollar, to which the Djibouti currency is linked. Despite the decrease in the tax on staple foods, from 20 percent to 8 percent, prices are still increasing. The government is fully aware of the price increases and is currently trying to put in place an instrument of controlling the un-acceptable speculations.

Kerosene prices increased again in April and are 7 percent higher than in March. Kerosene absorbs more than 14 percent of the total cost. Many poor families have opted along time ago to use charcoal and firewood as an alternative source of energy for cooking. (The composition and cost of the basket of consumer goods for the urban poor could be modified as a result.)

There is clear evidence that a high proportion of the Djiboutian poor living in urban areas are facing significant food deficits. However, the continuous increase in the price of the expenditure basket is also affecting the livelihood and food security of the middle class. Some measures are required to ease the burden on consumers.

Children and pregnant women have been the most affected by changes in dietary intakes. Malnutrition rates are likely to increase with the continuous increase in prices. Close monitoring of the admission rates of malnourished children to the feeding centers is required, and a program of information and sensitization is highly recommended to encourage poor households to bring their malnourished children to the centers

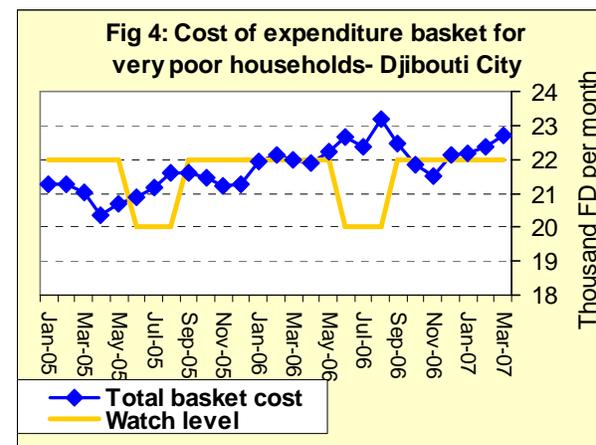
The provision of an environmentally friendly alternative source for cooking (solar cookers) initiated in PK 12 by a local association (ADED) and financed by the French can directly improve the food access of poor households. Solar power could potentially reduce the demand for kerosene by 80 percent, increasing the amount of income available for food purchases. The use of solar cookers can also play an important role in reducing the impact of intensive charcoal and firewood production on the environment. The project is in line with poverty reduction and environmental protection and reflects the President’s initiative on social development (INDS). There are currently 30 households who are benefiting from the experimental phase of this project, which will be expanded soon to rural areas.

#### Key indicators at a glance

Expenditure indicators	Current situation
Cost of staple foods	Increasing
Cost of other foods	Increasing
Cost of non-food items	Increasing
Income indicators	Current situation
Payment of government salaries/pensions	Regular
Cargo loaded/unloaded at Djibouti Port	Not known

#### Key Indicators Explained

In the city, most necessities are purchased, and thus the key indicators to monitor are those linked to expenditure and to income. The main sources of income for poor households are casual labor, petty trade, low-wage formal employment and pensions.



Source: DISED/FEWS NET

Notes: Figure 3 shows trends in the cost of staple foods, other foods and non-food items per FD per household per month

**Nutrition**

Since the drought of 2005/06, with the support of UNICEF/DJIBOUTI and WFP, the Ministry of Health opened therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers for the care of both moderately and severe malnourished children in the capital city of Djibouti and the five district capitals (Alisabieh, Arta, Dikhil, Tadjourah and Obock). In Djibouti city alone there are now 9 supplementary feeding centers in operation (Ambouli, Arhiba/Arnaud, Balbala I, Balbala II, Einguela, Farah-Had, Hayableh, Ibrahim Balala, Pk12.). Figure 4 clearly indicates that admission rates dramatically increased beginning in June when the hunger period began and a month after the treatment protocol was put in practice.

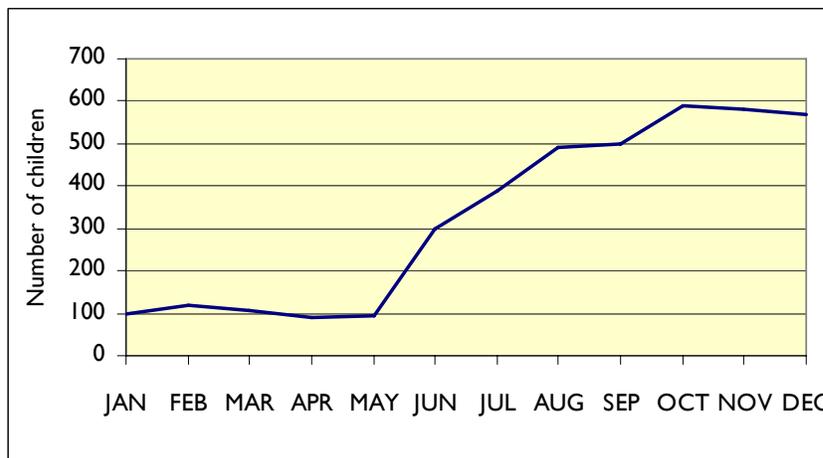
The national protocol for the management of acute malnutrition in the Republic of Djibouti has been developed by the Ministry of Health with the technical support of UNICEF/DJIBOUTI and WHO during the first quarter 2006. The protocol provides guidelines for screening and managing moderate and severe acute malnutrition in the selected feeding centers. The implementation of the protocol started in May 2006.

The admission rates of the two therapeutic centers in Djibouti city (Balbala and Peltier) are indicated in figure 5. The significant increase in June 2006 is also observed here. The total number of admissions (around

4,000 to supplementary feeding centers and around 1,200 to therapeutic feeding centers) is still far below the number of moderately and severely malnourished children expected to be admitted during the reported year. One reason for the low turnout could be the lack of awareness of the poor and vulnerable population of the free treatment available for malnourished children. In district feeding centers, the rate of admission was very low, and a total of around 180 children were reportedly admitted from August through December. This low admission rate doesn't correspond the need.

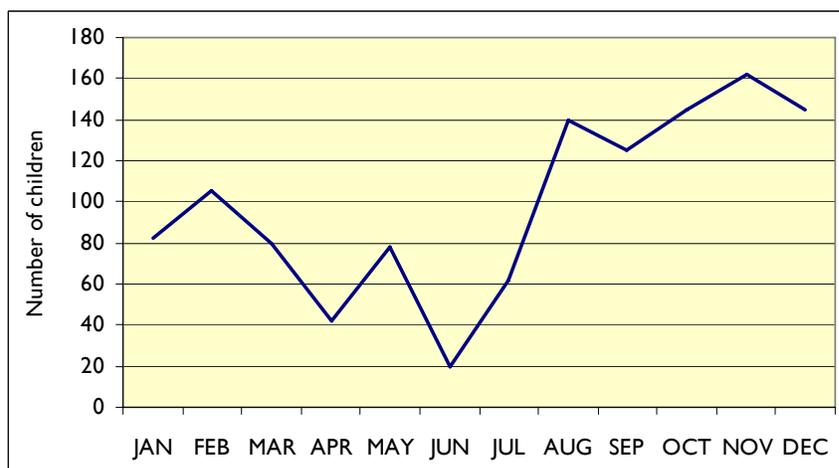
At the height of the hunger period in 2006, malnutrition rates were alarmingly high, according to the latest Multi Indicator Cluster Results (MICS 2006). The current government appeal to the international community emphasizes the need to intervene strongly in this sector to reduce further child mortality rates. A vast campaign of public awareness and extension of both supplementary and therapeutic feeding programs are necessary.

**Figure 5.** Admission rates to supplementary feeding centers in Djibouti in 2006



Source: UNICEF/DJIBOUTI

**Figure 6.** Admission rates to two therapeutic feeding centers in Djibouti city



Source: UNICEF/DJIBOUTI

### Food aid pipeline

The food aid pipeline in Djibouti is currently in a critical situation, with current pledges totaling only 36 percent of the 13,517 MT of food aid required through the end of 2007. A breakdown in the food aid pipeline, particularly for cereals and pulses, is expected in May. Regular supplies of sugar and CSB are also at risk but to a lesser extent. The shortfall in May is estimated to be around 214 MT. WFP has already appealed to international partners and requested 9,000 MT of food aid worth US \$ 6 million, of which about US \$ 1 million (or 1,500 MT) is required immediately to avoid interrupting distribution in May. WFP warned that around 53,000 beneficiaries could go without food rations unless funds are secured soon. In order to overcome these shortfalls, WFP is currently opting for a 50 percent reduction in the cereal distributions for April and May for the drought affected victims. WFP is intending as well to continue providing half ration for the refugees (6,800 persons) until new rations cards are effective. The government appealed the international community to fill the shortfalls as per WFP's request. WFP programs normally assists the food insecure population through general food distribution by EMOP programs (47,500 persons), school feeding programs (9,860 children), health programs (5,739 persons), food for work (425 persons) and assistance to refugees (6,793 persons).

**Figure 7.** Djibouti food aid gap analysis

