

Prolonged drought drives a food security Emergency in Somalia and southeastern Ethiopia

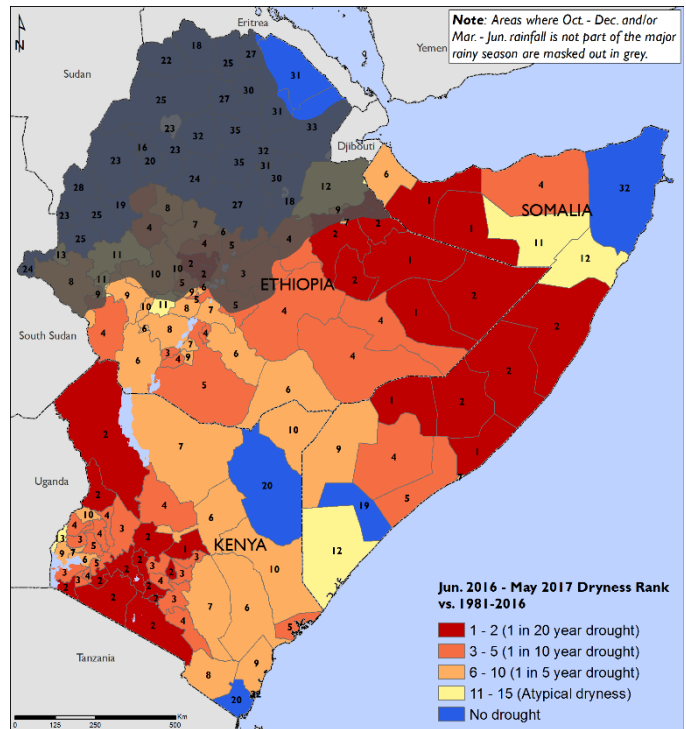
A major food security Emergency is expected to continue in the Horn of Africa into early 2018, following very poor performance of the March to June 2017 *Gu*/long rains, the second consecutive below-average season in many areas. The regeneration of pasture and water resources for pastoralists has been well below normal in southeastern Ethiopia, central Somalia, and northern Kenya, and July harvest prospects are very poor in most areas of southern Somalia. These factors are likely to sustain high humanitarian assistance needs across the Horn of Africa, and drive a continuation of Emergency (IPC Phase 4) acute food insecurity in southeastern Ethiopia and Somalia. In addition, Somalia continues to face a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5). Improved humanitarian access in Somalia, and urgent, sustained assistance in Somalia and southeastern Ethiopia, is needed to mitigate very high levels of acute malnutrition and the threat of loss of life.

The start of the March to June 2017 rains was delayed by 10 to 40 days across the Horn of Africa, and cumulative totals between March 1 and May 31 were less than 70 percent of average in much of central Somalia, southeastern and southern Ethiopia, and northern Kenya. In the worst-affected areas of Mudug and Galguduud regions of Somalia, and Korahe Zone in Ethiopia, cumulative rainfall was less than 50 percent of average. Many areas of Somalia, southeastern Ethiopia, and northern Kenya are facing drought conditions that have persisted for nearly a year or more. To put the severity of this drought into perspective, rainfall totals between June 2016 and May 2017 were the first or second lowest in the past 36 years in many areas, including in Warder and Korahe zones of Somali Region in Ethiopia and much of central Somalia (Figure 1).

The drought is having a significant impact on typical agricultural and pastoral livelihood activities. Harvest prospects, regeneration of pasture and water resources, and improvements in livestock body conditions are being severely limited by this year's very poor seasonal performance. As a result, excessive livestock sales and deaths in pastoral areas have been reported in pastoral areas such as Warder Zone of southeastern Ethiopia and Nugaal and Bari regions in northern Somalia. In these areas, field reports suggest pastoral households have lost up to 60 percent of their livestock since mid-2016 due to drought-related deaths and excess sales. In the rainfed agropastoral areas of Bay and Bakool in Somalia, *Gu* harvests in July are expected to be less than 50 percent of average. This follows *Deyr* harvests in January 2017 that were less than 25 percent of average. Worst-affected areas also include Galguduud and Nugaal regions in central Somalia, Togdheer and Sool regions in northern Somalia, and Korahe, Gode, Afder, and Liben zones in Somali Region of Ethiopia.

During the coming months, the significant limitations on agriculture and livestock production will continue to have an impact on household food access. For example, harvests in July will improve food access in the near term for agropastoral households. However, these improvements will be short-lived due to well below-average production, and households will not harvest again until January 2018. Meanwhile, among pastoral households, significant time is required for livestock herd sizes and productivity

Figure 1. June 2016 to May 2017 Dryness Rank vs. 1981-2016, by administrative zone



Source: FEWS NET

to improve and food access to return to normal. During this time, the potential for further displacement of households within Somalia and between neighboring areas of Ethiopia and Kenya also remains a concern. Moreover, a severe cholera outbreak is ongoing throughout the region, including more than 50,000 cases in Somalia alone since January 2017. This, along with outbreaks of measles and other diseases, has resulted in excess mortality.

To date, ongoing assistance has likely helped to mitigate severe acute food insecurity among some populations in areas worst affected by drought, including northern and southern Somalia, Turkana County in Kenya, and parts of Somali Region in Ethiopia. In addition, humanitarian assistance has likely prevented or moderated cereal price increases that would otherwise exacerbate the scale and severity of needs, especially in Somalia. Safety nets in Ethiopia and Kenya are also likely playing a major role in protecting food consumption. However, humanitarian access remains limited outside cities and towns in southern Somalia, while in Somali Region of Ethiopia, [field reports](#) suggest food assistance has been interrupted for some populations most in need. Sustained, well targeted, and timely assistance throughout the Horn, along with increased humanitarian access in southern Somalia, is required to mitigate extreme levels of acute food insecurity expected into early 2018. Additional appropriate response is also needed to address ongoing major disease outbreaks and health and sanitation needs.

The impacts of very poor *Gu/long* rains seasonal performance will drive large humanitarian assistance needs, despite the likelihood of some limited improvements with the rainy season in late 2017. Where available, data suggests acute malnutrition already remains at critical levels or worse across affected areas in the region. Food access will remain very poor as agropastoral and pastoral households exhaust any remaining food stocks and face poor food access due to high staple food prices, low livestock herd sizes, and low livestock milk production. Large areas of southeastern Ethiopia and Somalia will continue to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes through early 2018, while much of the rest of the Horn of Africa remains in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) into early 2018. In a worst-case scenario in Somalia in which there is a significant interruption in current food assistance in worst-affected areas, Famine (IPC Phase 5) is possible. Improved humanitarian access in Somalia, and urgent, sustained assistance in Somalia and southeastern Ethiopia, is needed to mitigate very high levels of acute malnutrition and the threat of loss of life.