GIEWS Country Brief
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FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Severe and prolonged desert locust outbreak affecting rural livelihoods
- Overall favourable prospects for main 2020 “Meher” crops due to abundant seasonal rains
- Crop losses due to floods and locusts, and reduced access to inputs in some areas likely to result in localized “Meher” production shortfalls
- Production of 2020 secondary “Belg” crops estimated at below-average levels due to erratic rains and locust-induced losses
- About 8.5 million people estimated severely food insecure between July and September 2020
- Large segments of population require urgent humanitarian assistance in Somali, Afar and eastern Oromiya regions

Severe and prolonged desert locust outbreak affecting rural livelihoods

Since mid-2019, the country has been affected by a severe desert locust outbreak, the worst in 25 years. Until early 2020, it mainly affected northeastern and eastern pastoral and agro-pastoral areas in Afar, Somali and eastern Oromiya regions. In March, the outbreak spread to central and southern Oromiya and SNNP regions, affecting “Belg” crops. Abundant March to May “Gu-Genna” rains created a conducive reproduction environment, with the formation of two generations despite sustained control operations, while additional insects reached the country from northern Kenya. In June, the spring-bred locusts migrated to summer breeding areas in the northern highlands of Tigray and northern Amhara regions. Large-scale control operations carried out by the Government with the support of FAO are mitigating the impact of the locusts on crops and pasture. Widespread damages have been averted so far and losses, although localized, have been significant. The “Meher” growing areas located in the northern highlands are likely to become the epicentre of the infestations in East Africa and control operations need to be substantially scaled up to avoid major crop losses.

In late July, FAO launched a programme to safeguard and restore the livelihoods of pastoral, agro-pastoral and farming communities affected by desert locusts. The programme is assisting over 70 000 households in Afar, Amhara, Somali, SNNP, Tigray and Oromiya regions whose livelihoods have been affected by locusts. Farming communities will receive seeds.
fertilizers, hand tools and irrigation equipment, while pastoralists and agro-pastoralists will be provided with Multi-Nutrient Blocks to improve livestock body conditions. In addition, FAO will promote forage production and provide the targeted households with unconditional cash transfers to meet their immediate needs and invest in productive activities.

Overall favourable prospects for main 2020 “Meher” crops

Planting of the 2020 main “Meher” season crops, for harvest from October, was completed in June in key producing areas of western Oromiya, Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz regions. An early onset of seasonal “Kiremt” rains, with abundant precipitation amounts received in May in several areas, benefited planting activities and germination as well as the establishment of long cycle crops, including maize, sorghum and millet. Subsequently, rainfall amounts continued at above-average levels for the remainder of the cropping period with cumulative May to September rains estimated in several areas at more than 50 percent above the long-term average. The abundant rains boosted yields but also triggered floods, that affected about 175 000 individuals and resulted in damages to standing crops in some areas. As of late August, according to remote sensing data, vegetation conditions were good across all the “Meher” cropping areas (see ASI map) and cereal production prospects are generally favourable. However, crop losses due to floods and locusts as well as constraints in access to agricultural inputs due to COVID-19-related restrictions in some areas, are expected to result in localized shortfalls in cereal production.

Production of 2020 secondary “Belg” crops below average

The 2020 secondary season “Belg” harvest concluded in August, with about one month of delay. The February to May “Belg” rainy season was characterized by above-average cumulative precipitation amounts, but had an erratic temporal distribution over most “Belg” receiving areas, including eastern Amhara and eastern Oromiya regions. A late onset of seasonal rains in the first dekad of March was followed by adequate precipitation between mid-March and mid-April and by particularly abundant rains for the remainder of the rainy season. The torrential late season rains had a positive impact on vegetation conditions and benefited crop development, but also triggered floods that resulted in localized crop losses. The planted area was below average due to the delayed onset of seasonal rains and access constraints to seed and other agricultural inputs due to COVID-19-related restrictions, while yields were constrained by desert locust induced losses, mainly in SNNP Region. As a result, the cereal “Belg” production is forecast at 10 to 20 percent below average.

Above-average rangeland conditions benefiting livestock despite localized pasture losses due to locusts

In pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of southern SNNP, southern and eastern Oromiya and southern Somali regions, abundant rains during March to May 2020 “Gu/Genna” season resulted in a significant improvement of vegetation conditions, which entered the current “Hagga” dry season at well above-average levels (see ASI map for grassland). However, the heavy “Gu/Genna” rains triggered floods which resulted in the death of about 2 000 heads of livestock.
Animal body conditions are currently at above-average levels due to adequate availability of pasture and water. Herd sizes are gradually increasing, but they are still below average following the massive livestock losses incurred during the 2017 drought. For example, in Afder zone of southern Somali State, herd sizes in June were estimated to be still 30 to 40 percent below average. Milk availability has also increased, but remains below average due to the low number of animals.

In northern pastoral areas of Afar State and Sitti zone of northern Somali State, current pasture conditions are above average following above-average rains during both the March to May “Diraac/Sugum” and the mid-July to mid-September 2020 “Karan/Karma” rainy seasons.

Losses of pasture due the current desert locust outbreak have been localized as control measures and the regeneration of rangeland resources driven by abundant seasonal rains prevented widespread damages. Substantial damage to pasture mainly occurred in the areas where insecurity hindered control operations.

According to the latest weather forecast by the Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF), the October to December “Deyr-Hageya” rains in southeastern areas are likely to be below average, with a negative impact on pastoral livelihoods. In the areas affected by the locust outbreak, the expected dry weather conditions are likely to hinder insect reproduction. However, pasture losses due to adult swarms could still be substantial as the forecast below-average rains will not allow an adequate regeneration of vegetation and, as a result, this could cause increased competition between locusts and grazing animals for the limited resources. Therefore, sustained control efforts are needed.

**Food security situation in 2020 affected by multiple shocks**

According to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, about 8.5 million people are estimated to face severe food insecurity (IPC Phase 3: “Crisis” and IPC Phase 4: “Emergency”) between July and September 2020. Of these, about 7.1 million people are classified in IPC Phase 3: “Crisis” and about 1.4 million in IPC Phase 4: “Emergency”. The areas most affected by food insecurity are most of southern Somali region, zones 1 and 2 of Afar Region and Bale, Borena, East Hararge, West Hararge, Guji and West Guji woredas in eastern Oromiya Region, where 25 to 45 percent of the population faces food insecurity.

The main drivers of food insecurity include the COVID-19 pandemic, high food prices, the desert locust outbreak, a reduced “Belg” harvest and displacements due to inter-communal violence and weather extremes, with the number of IDPs estimated in August at 1.8 million people. The negative impact of these shocks has been amplified by a reduced household resilience, especially in the drought-prone eastern pastoral and agro-pastoral areas, due to the lingering impact of previous droughts and floods. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the food security situation mainly through:

- Movement restrictions within the country resulting in reduced market availability and exerting upward pressure on food prices, already at high levels prior to the pandemic, mainly
due to the depreciation of the local currency. According to a Food Security Monitoring Survey conducted in July, about 30 percent of the assessed households reported food price increases since the introduction of the restrictive measures.

- Global and domestic economic slowdown causing a sharp decline in incomes and remittances. According to a survey conducted by the World Bank in May, half of the respondents reported a reduction of income and 39 percent a total loss of remittances from abroad.
- Returns of migrants due to reduced economic activity and containment measures in countries with large Ethiopian diaspora in Africa and the Middle East. This returnee inflow resulted in increased humanitarian needs and competition for resources and labour opportunities.
- Reduced exports of livestock and horticulture products.

To mitigate these impacts, FAO has launched the Revised humanitarian response Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) May-December 2020, aiming to assist about 4.3 million beneficiaries with a wide range of actions, including a rapid delivery system for agricultural inputs, distributions of home gardening kits for the production of short cycle crops to the vulnerable households with no access to land, livestock treatment and vaccinations.

COVID-19 and measures adopted by the Government

The Government of Ethiopia introduced, since late February 2020, several precautionary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and declared, in April 2020, a State of Emergency. The precautionary measures include:

- The obligation for all citizens to wear masks in public and the adoption of social distancing measures.
- The prohibition of gatherings of more than four people unless there is an absolute necessity, in which case permits need to be acquired from relevant authorities.
- The closure of all schools with the exception of higher level learning institutions.
- Work-at-home orders for all Federal and Addis Ababa Government employees.
- The prohibition of sporting activities at all levels.
- The closure of bars and clubs and the prohibition of restaurants to have more than three customers at a table.
- The obligation for all travellers arriving at Addis Ababa International Airport to be tested and undergo a 14-day self-isolation.
- The closure of all land borders, enforced by the army, except for cargo trucks and essential goods.
- The introduction of a road movement limitation scheme banning the circulation of private vehicles with odd or even plate numbers on alternate days.
- The prohibition for taxis and cross-country buses to carry more than 50 percent of their capacity.

While most measures are still currently in place, air and land transportation services with Djibouti have recently resumed.

To mitigate the economic impact of the restrictive measures, especially on the vulnerable households, the Government has scaled up social protection and assistance programmes, and implemented several fiscal and monetary measures, including:
The provision by the Central Bank, the National Bank of Ethiopia, of ETB 15 billion of additional liquidity to private banks and ETB 33 billion to the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia to facilitate debt restructuring and prevent bankruptcies.

A COVID-19 Multi-Sectoral Preparedness and Response Plan. Interventions include emergency food distributions to 15 million individuals vulnerable to food insecurity and not currently covered by the rural and urban Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP).

Cancellation of all tax debt prior to 2014/15, a tax amnesty on interest and penalties for tax debt pertaining to 2015/16-2018/19, and exemption from income tax for four months for firms who continue to pay employee salaries despite not being able to operate due to COVID-19.

The prohibition for employers to lay off workers due to business slow-downs.

The prohibition for property owners to evict tenants and to increase rent rates.

The introduction of price control measures for staple foods.

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