2019 Gu marks second consecutive poor season, driving widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes

KEY MESSAGES

• The nutritional status of children under five, and pregnant and lactating mothers in IDP camps, such as Gedeo, East and West Hararghe, are likely to deteriorate through September 2019 due to the continuing poor conditions that are exacerbated by the shortage and timeliness of required staple and specialized nutrition food assistance, though priority has been given to these areas and additional transfers have been made available for new arrivals.

• Due to the worse than expected Gu/Gana rainy season in southern and southeastern pastoral areas of SNNPR, Oromia and Somali Region, food security outcomes have deteriorated. This is particularly true in the southeastern part of Somali region where rains did not start until the end of first dekad of April. As a result, the entire region is expected to remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through September.

• Belg rainfall performance has been mixed but overall below-average throughout the country, with relatively more favorable conditions in eastern Amhara, southern Tigray, and western SNNPR beginning in the last week of March. Rainfall has been erratic and below-average in central and eastern Oromia, eastern SNNPR and throughout Somali region. As a result, long-cycle and root crops are likely to be negatively impacted, and households in eastern SNNPR, Oromia and Amhara have planted less, reducing their typical total area planted.

• Humanitarian food assistance needs exceed the number of total approved targeted beneficiaries and funding gaps are expected to persist. Taking into consideration the below-average Gu/Genna/Belg rainy season, the number of beneficiaries in need of humanitarian food assistance will likely increase. This will likely increase the number of poor households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and above through September 2019.

CURRENT SITUATION

Seasonal progress: In Belg-producing areas of northeastern Amhara, Southern Tigray, Oromia and SNNPR there were few days of rainfall in mid-February and the rains diminished in amount and spatial and temporal distribution in the first two dekads of March. However, rainfall amounts, and temporal distribution improved in the last week of March. Cumulative Belg seasonal rainfall is below average in the lowlands of southern Tigray bordering both Amhara and Afar Regions, Sidama, Gedio, Gamogofa and Segen Zones of SNNPR, western Arsi, eastern Shewa, east and west Hararghe zones of Oromia Region, and most all of Somali Region.
It is expected that the February to May Belg rainfall totals for many of these regions will be less than 65 percent of normal.

The onset of the March to May Sugum/Dirraac rainy season was delayed by almost a month over most northern pastoral and agropastoral areas. This situation coupled with the complete failure of the last short rainy season “Deda” has resulted in abnormal dryness and high surface temperature (LST) especially in northeastern Afar. Rainfall days were very limited in March and what did occur was sporadic. Overall, the performance of the current Sugum/Dirraac season rainfall is much below average.

March to May Gana 2019 seasonal rainfall started in mid-March over the lowlands of Bale, Borena, and Guji Zones of Oromia Region. The cumulative rainfall and distribution were limited in March but improved progressively to near average conditions in most of these zones in the first week of April 2019. The performance of Gu rains in Somali region has been inconsistent throughout the region. In the lowlands of Dollo, Korahe, Gode and Bare Woreda of Afader Zone the March to May 2019 Gu rainy season still had not started by the end of the first dekad of April, making their arrival delayed by more than 10-15 days.

Livestock: The combined effects of the delayed seasonal onset of Gu rains – the second consecutive poor season during the recovery period from the 2016/17 drought, limited water availability, long distances to travel between grazing areas and water sources, and high temperatures have already negatively impacted pastoral conditions over many areas. Due to the persistent dry conditions and below average performance of the Deyr/Hagaya rains in southern and southeastern pastoral areas, livestock did not improve their body conditions normally and pastoralists concentrated their livestock in areas with permanent water sources. Most pregnant camels and shoats have either aborted or their offspring died soon after birth in most of these areas. Camels conceived during the 2018 Gu season and shoats conceived during the 2018 Deyr season are expected to give birth in April and May 2019. If Gu/Gana rainfall performance improves in the coming days and month, it will help improve both pasture and livestock body condition, and this in turn will improve livestock production and products.

Prices: Though livestock body conditions remain below normal in southeastern pastoral areas, livestock prices are not significantly reduced. This is due to the low supply of livestock in markets as pastoralists are not selling as many as usual since they are still recovering from the 2016/17 drought. Supply and prices of livestock in other parts of the country remain stable.

Cereal supply in markets is well below average across all markets in the eastern and southern part of the country due to the exhaustion of local production. As a result, the prices of most staple cereals in most local markets have shown a significant increase compared to previous months and years. This is mostly due to low supply because of the exhaustion of local production, increased transportation costs – as current supply is from central and western surplus producing areas, inflation of the Ethiopian Birr, shortage of foreign currency to import food commodities from abroad, and sporadic civil unrest that disrupts proper market functioning. For instance, the price of wholesale maize in Hosanna market in Southern Ethiopia is about 750 Birr/100kg which is 3, 7 and 34 percent higher than February 2019, March 2018, and the five-year average, respectively. The price of sorghum in March 2019 in Woldia market in North Wello zone of Amhara Region, was 2,156 Birr/100kg which is 6, 118 and 102 percent higher than February 2019, March 2018, and the five-year average, respectively. Imported food prices in Somali region are also significantly higher than in February 2019 (increases of 9 percent for rice, 10 percent for sugar, and 20 percent for wheat flour).
Crop Conditions: Farmers in Belg-producing parts of the country took advantage of rainfall in mid-February for land preparation and planting of Belg season short maturing crops particularly barley in the highlands and Teff in the lowlands of Amhara, root crops in SNNPR, and long maturing Meher crops (maize and barley) in East and West Hararghe, western areas of SNNPR, and Oromia. More extensive planting took place in late March and early April 2019 following additional rainfall. According to reports from Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR Regions, the amount of land planted compared to the amount planned has not yet been achieved. Thus, planting is ongoing during the remaining planting window.

In SNNPR sweet potatoes and other root crops that were planted in November and December 2018 were severely affected dryness in January and below-average rainfall in February and March, particularly in Sidama, Gedio, Gamogofa, Wolayita and Segen zones.

Internal Displacement: Conflict related displacement continues throughout the country, the most recent of which took place in Amhara and SNNPR Regions in March and April - official figures are not yet released. More than 3.2 million IDPs across the country continue to be dependent on external assistance as they already missed both the 2018 Belg and Meher seasons’ agricultural activities and they will also miss the 2019 Belg crop cultivation for a third consecutive year.

Currently 675,737 IDPs are in need of humanitarian food assistance in Gedeo according to the most recent Emergency Task Force briefing. The majority of these IDPs are concentrated in Gedeo Woreda of Gedeo Zone.

Large populations of conflict–induced IDPs are residing in various woredas of East and West Hararghe zones of Oromia. The majority of these IDPs are exclusively dependent on humanitarian food assistance to meet their food needs.

Nutrition: According to the most recent report this month by ENCU for the Emergency Task Force, around 7000 children under five and 14,800 pregnant and lactating mothers were screened for MAM. Overall, 3.2 percent were found to be SAM cases, 25 percent of which required inpatient care.

Humanitarian Assistance: Transfers of PSNP safety net assistance for nearly 8 million chronically food insecure people across 10 regions, which is planned, funded and likely through June 2019, occurred for the months of January and February. March transfers are expected to be finalized by mid-April. Woredas are in the process of targeting for emergency humanitarian assistance beneficiaries for the first round of the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). What was distributed so far in February and March 2019 is a carryover allocation from the 2018 HRP. Because of resource limitations the government of Ethiopia has only been able to allocate food aid resources for 5.2 million people out of the 8.3 million people who were identified as in need of assistance for 2019 for the first round of food distribution.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS
The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the Ethiopia Food Security Outlook for February to September 2019 remain unchanged except for the following updated assumptions:

- In southern central and southeastern areas, the Belg season is likely to be delayed and have below average rainfall totals. The southwestern regions of the country will have near average Belg seasonal rainfall totals.
- Cumulative rainfall in southeastern Ethiopia, during the Gu/Genna/long rains (March to May 2019) is most likely to be below average and have a delayed onset.
- The 2019 Belg season had a late start and was erratically distributed, which delayed Belg crop planting, and will likely lead to delayed and below-average 2019 Belg crop production. This also likely to reduce root crop and vegetable production that is normally expected in April 2019 in SNNPR.
- Water and animal feed availability, including pastureland, browsing land, and fodder, is expected to be below average in southeastern pastoral and agropastoral lowland areas. As a result, livestock body conditions and productivity will be below average through September 2019.
- Agricultural labor opportunities will likely to be below average due to the expected below average Belg agricultural season activities, but opportunities will likely improve during the 2019 Meher agricultural seasons from July onwards.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2019
- The lack of pasture and water improvements over southeastern Somali Region, Bale lowlands, southern Omo and parts of Afar Regions has atypically reduced livestock body conditions and will lower livestock prices. This will significantly affect poor
households’ incomes and milk and milk product consumption, which will lead to expanded food consumption gaps for an increasing number of households. Through September acute food insecurity outcomes are not expected to improve across these areas. As a result, these areas are likely to move from Stressed (IPC Phase 2) to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and areas which were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) from May to September 2019.

- Poor households in eastern and southeastern Oromia bordering Somali region, northern Afar, Wag Himera and northeastern Amhara, the Tekeze river catchment of Tigray, south Omol of SNNPR, and Fafan zone of Somali Region are expected to continue facing limited incomes due to the following: below-average 2018 Meher crop production and high numbers of IDPs, poor performance of the current Belg/Gana rains, high staple food prices, a reduction in agricultural labor opportunities for the ongoing Belg season, and lower incomes from firewood, petty trading, and other self-employment due to increased competition. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected from June to September 2019.

- The national level of acute malnutrition is likely to deteriorate through September 2019 due to the seasonal reduction in food access during the lean season, intermittent humanitarian assistance and shortage of specialized nutritious foods for children under five and lactating and pregnant months in IDP camps and drought-affected areas. Acute malnutrition screenings are likely to continue in Oromia, SNNPR, Somali, and parts of Afar Regions where Critical wasting levels are currently indicated.

- Many poor households have already exhausted their own production as of March and will continue to be dependent on markets through July when the 2019 Belg harvest takes place. The anticipated below-average 2019 Belg season and the resulting decreased agricultural labor opportunities will affect incomes from labor. In addition, the expected staple food price increase from April to June 2019 will weaken the purchasing power of market dependent households. However, most of these households will also continue receiving PSNP resources that supplement food purchases through June 2019. Therefore, some central, eastern and southern Zones of SNNPR are likely to remain in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) between April and May 2019. With the anticipated below-average Belg production expected in July 2019 some improvement in food access are expected but these household will remain in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through September 2019 as most of these households will face income deficits to fulfill their non-food needs.

- Food insecurity concerns for conflict-induced IDPs in Gedio zone, who are reliant on humanitarian assistance, is increasing as the number of displaced persons continues to rise. The situation was most severe in January/February 2019 due to inadequate humanitarian assistance; however, the Government and humanitarian agencies have given priority to providing food and shelter to these displaced people as the population continues to increase. Most of these households will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3!) between April and September 2019.