

EAST AFRICA: Past year one of the driest on record in the eastern Horn June 14, 2011

Over the past year, the eastern Horn of Africa has experienced two consecutive severely below-average rainy seasons. In some areas of Kenya, drought conditions have persisted even longer. In order to provide some historical context for the current drought, FEWS NET/USGS has merged two historical rainfall data sets: interpolated rain gauge data from 1950-2009 and satellite derived rainfall estimates from 1995-2011. Using this merged data set, FEWS NET/USGS then compared rainfall totals from the past year (June 1, 2010 – May 31, 2011) with comparable data for the last 60 years for specific drought-affected pastoral areas of Kenya and Ethiopia (Figure 1). Somalia has also been severely affected by the current drought, but historical data is too limited for this type of analysis.

This analysis indicates that rainfall was below-average in all analysis areas (Figure 2) with 2010/11 being the driest or second driest year since 1950/51 in 11 of the 15 analyzed pastoral zones. Though May 2011 rains have resulted in some improvement to pasture and water availability, these gains are likely to be short-lived. In a similar but separate analysis, 2010/11 rainfall in the southeast marginal cropping areas of Kenya was also found to be one of the lowest since 1950. Temporal distribution of rainfall has also been poor across the region, meaning that “effective” rainfall — the quantity beneficial for pasture and crop production — is likely to be even lower than rainfall totals suggest. Other droughts have been longer (e.g., 2008/09), and 2009/10 was an exceptionally good year for rainfall. Nonetheless, the current drought is severe, and its impacts have been exacerbated by extremely high food prices, reduced coping capacity, and a limited humanitarian response. More information on the food security impacts of this drought can be found at www.fews.net/east.

Figure 1. Selected drought-affected pastoral areas of northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia.

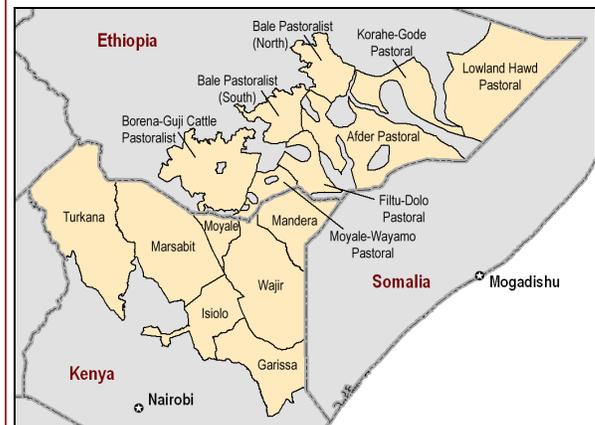
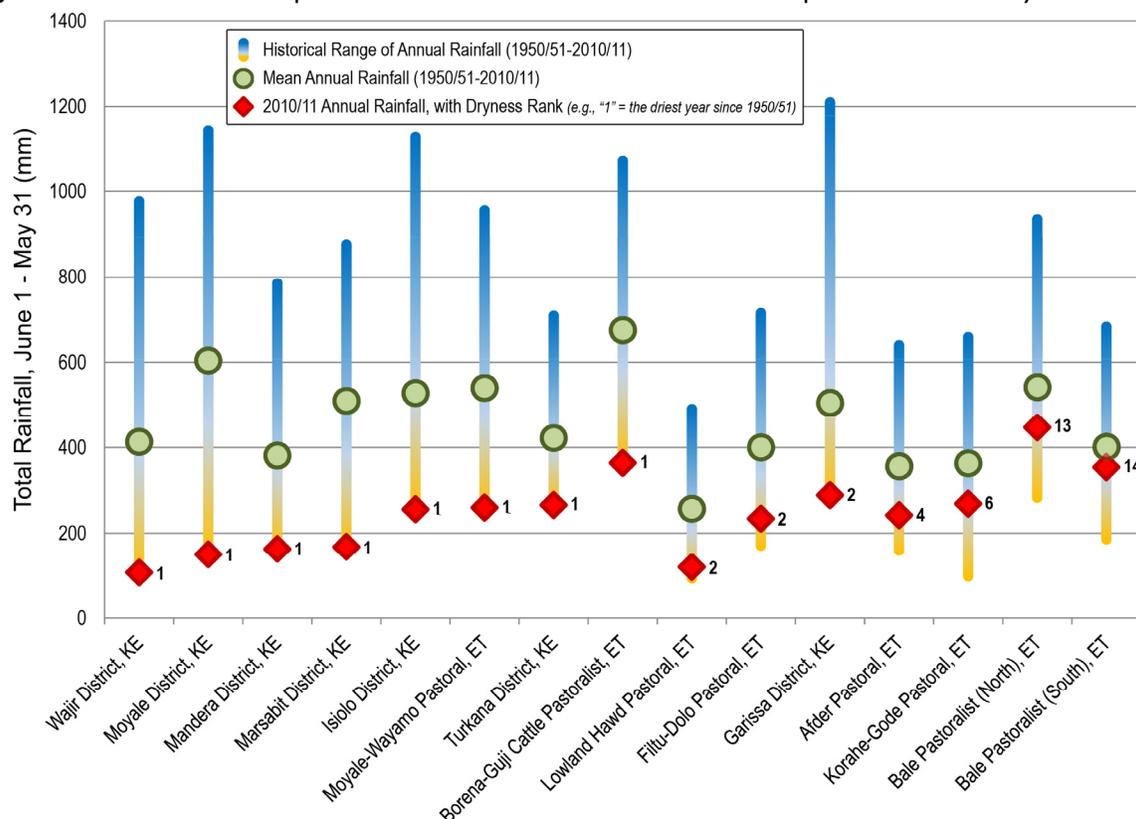


Figure 2. 2010/11 rainfall compared to historical totals since 1950/51 in select pastoral areas of Kenya and Ethiopia



Source: FEWS NET/USGS and FEWS NET/NOAA Graphics: FEWS NET

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