

FSNWG¹ Statement on the Potential Deterioration of Food and Nutrition Security Condition in the Great Horn of Africa (GHA)

The regional food and nutrition security alert covers Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda²; these are the countries expected to receive normal to below normal rains during March to May season according to the Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF 39) held in Nairobi between 23rd and 25th February 2015. This rainfall season constitutes a critical period for agricultural and livestock production in the region. It is the main cropping season for most agricultural areas in Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan (the Equatorial region), and the *Belg* areas of Ethiopia. The season also marks the long rains season for pastoral areas in Kenya and southern Ethiopia, the *Gu* season in Somalia, and *Dirac/Sugum* rains in Djibouti when vegetable gardening is undertaken. Hence, the performance of March-May season is a crucial determinant of food and nutrition security in the Greater Horn of Africa region.

The forecasted normal to below-normal rains for most of Kenya, south central Somalia and most areas of Ethiopia, Djibouti and central Tanzania could lead to further deterioration of pasture and water resources, thereby affecting the food and nutrition security. The expected deterioration in food and nutrition security will be exacerbated by a multiplicity of factors:

- *The 'short rains' ('Deyr') season of late 2014 performed poorly across East Africa*, with north-east, eastern and far southern Kenya and southern Somalia having been affected by persistently drier than average conditions since the early stages of the season. The anticipated normal to below normal and poorly distributed rainfall in March to May 2015, will compound the effect of significant rainfall deficits of the previous seasons, resulting in extended dryness, depleted soil moisture levels and below average vegetation cover mostly affecting water availability, pastoralist resources and crop production. This will deepen food and nutrition insecurity both in the pastoral and marginal agricultural areas, with possibilities of more households especially those in *Stressed* (IPC Phase 2) falling into *Crisis* (IPC Phase 3) and *Emergency* (Phase 4) through August 2015. The areas likely to be most affected will include Mudug, Hiran, central region, Gedo and Juba regions in Somalia; Wajir, Marsabit, Mandera, Garissa, Isiolo, Samburu and Laikipia in Kenya; Karamoja in Uganda; and northeastern and southern pastoral areas in Afar and lowlands of Borena in Ethiopia.
- *Reduced food availability from own production* is expected in parts of the *Belg*-producing areas of Ethiopia, marginal agricultural areas of Kenya, and the main agricultural producing areas in southern Somalia, as the forecasted normal to below-average rains will negatively impact the main growing season. In Eastern Amhara, Eastern Tigray, lowlands of East and West Hararge, and lowlands of West Arsi Zone of Ethiopia where food and nutrition security is already poor following poor 2014 seasonal performance, the situation may further deteriorate over the March-June 2015 period, as *Belg* production and pastures are likely to be below normal.
- *Adverse changes in market prices and deterioration in terms of trade* are expected in agro-pastoral/marginal agricultural areas in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. In these areas, poor rainfall performance could delay or reduce agricultural activities and hence deprive poor households the opportunity to earn incomes through agricultural wage labour. Likewise, in pastoral areas, declining livestock productivity and body conditions will lower livestock prices in comparison with increasing staple prices, thereby worsening the terms of trade between wage labour and livestock versus staples. This will make it difficult for waged labourers, poor agro-pastoralists and pastoralist households to access adequate amounts and diverse foods from the local markets.

¹ The East and Central Africa Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) is a multi-stakeholder regional forum, chaired by IGAD and FAO, and mandated to conduct regional food and nutrition security situational and response analysis in the region.

² In addition to these countries, the FSNWG also covers Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan. This Alert excludes these countries as they are not affected by the below normal rains.

- *Worsening malnutrition levels above the already critical thresholds* are expected after May 2015 in parts of northern Kenya, eastern and southern Ethiopia, rural Djibouti, and South Central Somalia. Poor March-May seasonal performance and the resulting decline in livestock products availability and incomes could worsen food access leading to increased malnutrition levels especially among children. Moreover, the critical malnutrition levels in southern and central Somalia following a below average *Deyr* season could be sustained especially among rural pastoral populations.
- *Increased conflict over grazing resources is expected as earlier than normal declining rangeland conditions and depletion of grazing resources trigger unusual livestock migration* in search of pastures and water. Intensified competition may lead to conflicts over resources resulting in human displacements and loss of assets (livestock) thereby further subjecting poor households to food and nutrition insecurity. This is more likely to occur in pastoral areas of Kenya (Samburu, West Pokot, Tana River and Turkana counties) and along border regions of Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan.
- *Increased charcoal production and sales of wood to meet the household income and food needs, will particularly be exacerbated in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of the region. This will result in increased environmental degradation.*
- The overall nutrition situation in the region remains a serious concern, with pockets of acute emergency/crisis malnutrition levels. In particular, nutrition surveys recently conducted in the same countries (Djibouti, Kenya, South Sudan and Somalia) depict Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) levels higher than 20 percent, exceeding the World Health Organization's Emergency threshold of 15 percent. The situation could deteriorate further, as a result of the below normal forecasted rainfall. An estimated 8 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda require emergency humanitarian assistance. The figure excludes refugees and other countries. The total number of affected persons could increase depending on the performance of the March to May rainfall season.

The drivers outlined above will be exacerbated by the likely continued conflict in South Sudan, parts of Sudan and Somalia that will deepen and accelerate food and nutrition insecurity in the region. The conflicts have already led to: population displacements, resulting in about 2.5 million refugees, excluding the more than 7 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); impeded food production and trade, resulting in severe food shortages; increased commodity price distortions in conflict-affected areas, such as in South Sudan; restricted humanitarian access, notably in parts of southern Somalia, Greater Upper Nile region of South Sudan and in western Sudan; constrained access to rangeland resources, especially in South Sudan, western Sudan, southern Somalia and parts of northern Kenya, lowering overall productive capacities.

However, the consensus seasonal climatic outlook for the March to May 2015, forecasted normal to above-normal rains in Uganda (except for Karamoja region), parts of western Ethiopia, western Kenya, northeastern Somalia and greater part of South Sudan, northwest cropping areas of Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, it is likely that the food security situation will improve in these areas.

After analysing key food security and nutrition indicators and outcomes, the FSNWG urges strongly that **close monitoring of the March-May seasonal performance be enhanced** in order to better understand the implications on the livelihoods, food and nutrition security situation of the at-risk population as highlighted above. The key areas of concern are the pastoral and agro-pastoral areas of Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Djibouti, in particular where poor seasonal performance was experienced in 2014. Similarly, impacts of successive seasons of below average rains in eastern and northern Kenya, southern Somalia, north-eastern Uganda (Karamoja) and north-eastern Ethiopia leading to reduced coping mechanisms will deepen food and nutrition insecurity in those areas. Conflicts, violence and escalating food prices resulting from below average yields as well as early depletion of food reserves will undoubtedly contribute to worsening food and nutrition insecurity in the affected areas. The severity of this situation calls **for the necessary emergency preparedness measures** to be put in place and implementation of timely and effective appropriate responses and scale up where necessary.