

EAST AFRICA Food Security Alert

May 6, 2011

Poor performance of April rains brings major food security concerns in the Eastern Horn

The progress of the March to May rains to date in pastoral and cropping areas of Kenya and Somalia and *belg* cropping areas of Ethiopia has been extremely poor. In Kenya, rainfall deficits in most districts of the southeastern cropping lowlands and the northeastern pastoral areas have been between 50 to 200 mm (or 10 to 50 percent of normal) (Figure 1), indicating that conditions in the pastoral areas in particular are moving toward the ‘worst case scenario’ identified by FEWS NET in the [March 15 East Africa Food Security Alert](#). In the *belg* areas of Ethiopia, comprising SNNPR, the northeastern highlands, and parts of Oromia, the erratic start and distribution of the season have led to a near-total loss of the *belg* crop. In Somalia, food insecurity conditions remain at Crisis and Emergency levels, despite the rains during the last week in April. Activation of response plans is advised to deal with the current and anticipated very high levels of food and non-food assistance needs.

In pastoral areas of northeastern Kenya and southern Ethiopia, the poor rainfall has severely limited livestock conceptions, milk availability, and pasture/water availability, and above-average livestock mortality rates are reported across pastoral areas. Pastoralist terms of trade have seriously eroded. In Mandera, for example, maize prices were nearly 70 percent above five-year averages in April, while cattle prices were 30 percent below average. Although rains at the end of April provided some respite from drought conditions, further deterioration in food security conditions to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels is expected between July and September 2011 and beyond, as the dry season sets in.

Following the poor performance of the rains to date, and the forecast for continued poor rainfall in May, there are very low harvest prospects in *belg* areas of Ethiopia and southeastern marginal cropping areas of Kenya. Even if rains perform normally during May, it is already too late to plant *belg/gu* crops for harvesting in June/July. For parts of southern Ethiopia, April-June rainfall appears likely to be poor, and critical growing areas in the southern Lakes area and SNNPR are likely to be affected. In most of these marginal cropping areas, food insecurity is expected to reach Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels in June, and deteriorate at least until the next harvest in October–January in Ethiopia and in December in Kenya.

Heavy rains received during the last week in April in most of Somalia have eased severe water shortages, but caused excess animal mortality due to hypothermia in most key pastoral areas, particularly among small ruminants. Rains are expected to continue through mid-May, leading to the start of the cropping season and regeneration of range resources, though rainfall totals and cropping and pasture conditions are still expected to be below average, in keeping with the most-likely scenario. Close monitoring of seasonal progress is required through the end of May.

Given the poor rainfall progress to date, the significantly below-normal short- and medium-term rainfall forecasts in north-central and eastern Kenya, and the limited potential for any additional rains to improve conditions in *belg* areas of Ethiopia, expanded programming should be implemented immediately to address current and expected food insecurity, and contingency/response plans should be activated. FEWS NET and its partners will continue to monitor the progress of the rains and the evolving impacts on crop development and pasture and livestock conditions in these at-risk areas.

Figure 1. Rainfall Anomalies (mm), Mar 1-May 1, 2011

