A shortened rainy season impacts cropping activities and pastoral resource availability

KEY MESSAGES

- The short rains (October – December) were characterized by a late onset, significant rainfall deficits in the east, and early cessation. This has shortened the growing season for the majority of southeastern marginal cropping areas and led to below-average forage regeneration in affected pastoral zones. While the rains have led to some improvements, moving more pastoral areas to Stressed (IPC Phase 2), Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes still persist in Isiolo and parts of Tana River.

- In the **southeastern and coastal marginal agricultural areas**, wage labor, while below average, is facilitating needed market purchases. However, it is likely the maize and bean harvests will be below average. The majority of poor households are expected to remain in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) until the February harvest. In many of the **pastoral areas**, livestock productivity has increased, improving income and food availability. These improvements are projected to continue, except in Isiolo and additional parts of Tana River, where poor households are likely to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes through May 2018.

- Despite higher food availability from the long rains harvests from the high and medium-producing areas in western Kenya and the Rift Valley, wholesale staple food prices in the urban markets of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Eldoret remain 8 – 32 percent above average. There continues to be high market demand due to depleted household stocks, outstripping the local supply. The above-average prices continue to constrain poor household food access.

CURRENT SITUATION

National: Food availability continues to increase as harvesting, mainly from the North Rift, has concluded. Production in Uasin Gishu, Trans Nzoia, and Nandi was about 10 – 25 percent below average due to a combination of a dry spell during the development stages, Fall Armyworm (FAW) infestations, and extended rains through October that delayed harvesting and drying, which caused some losses. Overall, long rains production from the high and medium rainfall areas is estimated to be 15 percent below average.

Seasonal Progress: The October – December short rains began late in October and stopped early in mid-November. Rainfall amounts were less than 80 percent of average in the east, with many areas lower, ranging between 50 – 60 percent of average. There were significant deficits in northern parts of Isiolo and Tana River, which received only 30 – 50 percent of average rainfall. Rainfall was much more favorable in the west, with those areas mostly receiving above 90 percent of average rainfall (see **Figures 1 and 2**).

Markets and Trade: Staple food commodities are available in the urban reference markets across the country. Between October and November, wholesale maize prices, though on a decreasing trend, remained within averages in Kisumu but were 8 – 20 percent above average in Eldoret, Mombasa, and Nairobi due to increased demand and higher marketing costs. Dry bean prices were generally stable but remained 18 – 32 percent above average due to low local production and high-priced imports from

Projected food security outcomes, December 2017 to January 2018
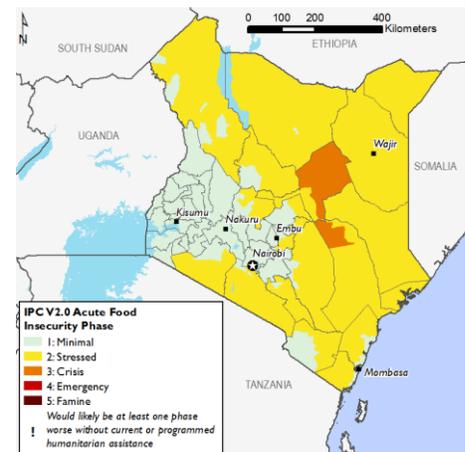
Source: *FEWS NET*

Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2018
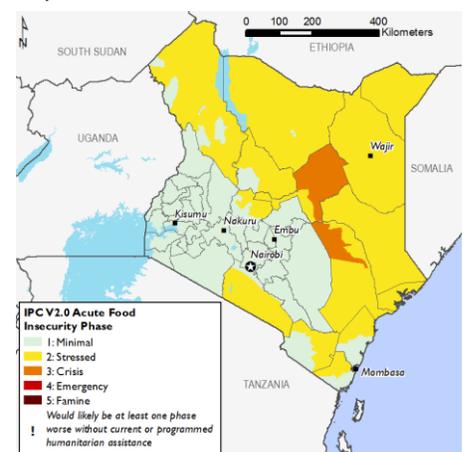
Source: *FEWS NET*

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Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia. After a two-month extension, the Government of Kenya's maize subsidy program is still slated to stop at the end of December.

Marginal farming zones: The varying onset of the rains has resulted in notable variations in cropping activities, with some households still planting in early December, but most areas have crops at the weeding stages. These differences are also reflected in the availability of agricultural labor opportunities, which varies depending on total area planted and crop performance. (It is important to note that there has been a shift towards more drought-tolerant crops that is helping farmers offset the effects of another poor rainy season.) In parts of Kilifi and Kitui, planting was below average, with some households opting not to plant due to concern about the below-average rainfall forecast, while in Nyeri it was due to a lack of inputs. In southern Makueni, the maize crop is showing moisture stress, which will likely fail if no more rains are received. A Fall Armyworm infestation was observed in parts of Nyeri and Tharaka and all sub-counties of Makueni, Taita Taveta, Kitui, Kilifi, and Kwale. There are ongoing efforts to control the pest, but the biggest obstacle to date is that the appropriate pesticides are too expensive for poor households to purchase.

The reduced agricultural production activities and below-average labor opportunities have lowered household income and constrained purchasing power ahead of the harvest. The majority of poor households are entirely dependent on market purchases to meet their minimum food needs, following consecutive seasons of below-average production. Retail staple food prices between October and November remained above average across the zone. The majority of poor households are classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2), with some vulnerable households in parts of eastern and northern Kitui, southern Makueni, northern Tharaka and Meru North, and southern Mbeere, Kilifi, and Taita Taveta likely facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

Pastoral areas: Pasture and browse levels largely reflect seasonal rainfall totals, with the best conditions in Turkana and Marsabit. The poorest conditions are in Isiolo, and portions of Mandera, Tana River, and to a smaller extent in southern Wajir. In the east, water sources are only partially recharged by the rains. Livestock return trekking distances from grazing fields vary, but are highest in Mandera and Isiolo at 20 and 40 kilometers, respectively, due to poor forage regeneration and low water availability. Atypical migration movements

Figure 1. October 1 - December 10, 2017 CHIRPS rainfall (percent of the 1981-2010 average)

Source: *FEWS NET/USGS CHIRPS*

Figure 2. Difference in rainfall in Oct-Dec 2016 versus Oct-Dec 2017. Data in mm through Dec 10, 2017.

Source: *FEWS NET/USGS CHIRPS*

have occurred in isolated areas, but most livestock are currently in wet-season grazing areas, with varying body conditions. They are good for all species in Turkana, but poor for cattle and sheep in Isiolo, as well as cattle in Tana River. In Marsabit's Moyale and Saku, all species have poor body conditions.

According to the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) November 2017 Drought Bulletins, retail maize prices were within averages in Mandera and Marsabit but were 6 – 24 percent above average across the rest of the pastoral markets due to low household and market stocks and high transaction costs. In Wajir, the prices were six percent below average due to increased relief food distribution, reducing demand for the commodity. Goat prices are mixed, with above-average levels in Turkana and Marsabit, average levels in Garissa and Tana River, but below-average in Isiolo, Wajir, and Mandera. Milk production also reflected the varying conditions, with above the five-year average production in Turkana and Marsabit, but below-average levels in Garissa, Isiolo, Mandera, and Tana River. Tana River's average milk production was the lowest at eight percent of the five-year average. NDMA nutrition sentinel site data for November showed that the proportion of children under five years of age with a Middle Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) <135mm was generally declining. In Turkana and Marsabit, the proportion of MUAC <135mm was below average, attributed to increased access to milk, but it was above average and ranged from 15 – 31 percent in Garissa, Tana River, Mandera, and Isiolo. Livestock deaths were reported in Isiolo, Kajiado, Mandera, and Laikipia due to prolonged lack of pasture and water, while in Marsabit they were due to diseases, low temperatures, and flash floods. Overall, even in areas where the rains were below average, there have been improvements in livestock productivity, raising income and food availability. As a result, a significant number of poor households have improved
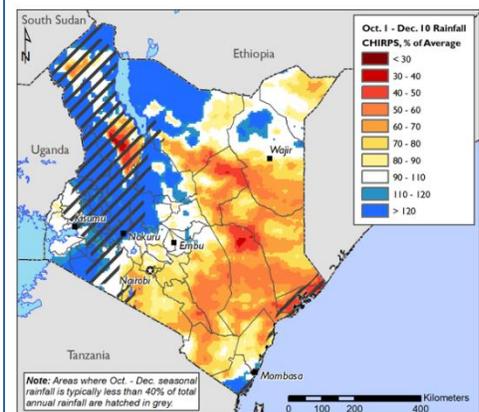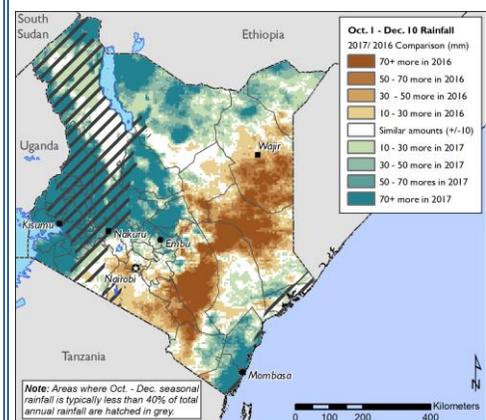
to Stressed (IPC Phase 2). However, some poor households, especially in Isiolo, Tana River and Mandera, are unable to meet their minimum dietary requirements and are experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET's most likely scenario for the *Kenya Food Security Outlook for October 2017 to May 2018* remain unchanged except the following assumptions:

- Since the short rains (October – December) season in eastern Kenya was significantly more below average than forecasted, **pasture and water availability** are expected to be below average through the dry season, most likely until the end of March.
- Main season (February – August 2018) **rainfall in unimodal Kenya** is now forecasted to be above average.
- The **long rains (March – May 2018)** are still expected to below average in the southeast and parts of the northeast, but are now forecasted to be average tending to slightly above average across the western and central areas of the country.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2018

In the marginal areas, the green harvest will become available in late December, followed by the short cycle crops in early January, gradually improving household food availability and access. Cropping activities will continue to provide below-average agricultural wage labor activities through February, prompting an increased reliance on charcoal and firewood sales, petty trade, remittances, and safety nets. It is likely that due to a combination of poor rainfall and the Fall Armyworm infestation, the maize and bean harvest will be below average, notably in Kilifi, Kitui, and Makueni. Regardless, the harvest is expected to restore household stocks, lessen market dependence, and improve incomes. Depending on production levels, malnutrition of children under five years of age is likely to reduce slightly. Since the short rains is the main season in the southeastern marginal agricultural areas, the harvest is still expected to provide substantial amounts of drought-tolerant crops, which will support generally average food consumption and dietary diversity through May 2018. With the forecasted below-average long rains, agricultural wage labor is likely to continue to be below normal for the next season. In April, the rains will likely bring improvements in pasture, browse, and water availability, leading to better livestock body conditions and productivity. However, for the small number of poor households that already sold their milking herd in Tharaka and northern Meru before the October rains began, and in the areas that experienced poor short rains, below-average milk production is expected through May. From February with the harvest, the majority of poor households in the marginal agricultural areas will move to None (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity. However, the small proportion of poor households that are likely to experience significant crop failure, as well as those that experienced Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes through January 2018, will take some time to recover and are likely to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through May.

In the **pastoral areas,** from December to January, food security is expected to gradually improve in a majority of the areas with improved forage and water resources. This is likely to lead to higher income from livestock sales, particularly of goats. Even with partial pasture regeneration, livestock body conditions will steadily improve and pastoralists will start to bring their livestock back to homesteads. These improvements will be less significant and short-lived in parts of Garissa, Tana River, Wajir, Mandera, and Isiolo where rainfall and rangeland resource regeneration were below average. As a result, household purchasing power is likely to be constrained by low incomes in these areas. Improvements in wage-earning opportunities like herding, are expected to improve but remain below average, and this also applies to conception rates and calving, lambing, and kidding levels in eastern areas of the country. Through mid-April 2018, milk production is expected to largely remain below average, and with households mostly depending on markets for food access, additional income sources, such as charcoal sales and remittances, will be relied upon to meet minimum food needs. The March – May long rains, though forecasted to be below average in parts of the northeast, are likely to begin in mid-March, bringing slight improvements in forage and water resources. While the resultant impacts are likely to remain below average, livestock body conditions and milk production will still increase. In the northwest pastoral areas, livestock body conditions and production are expected to increase from mid-March through April, improving milk production and livestock-related wage-earning opportunities to average to above-average levels. A large number of households will experience improvements, even if the levels for livestock productivity and sales remain below average. The majority of poor households in pastoral areas are expected to be able to meet their minimum food needs and be in Stressed (IPC Phase 2). However, in areas in the east that will likely experience another poor rainy season, like parts of Isiolo, additional parts of Tana River, and vulnerable households in Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to persist through May.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE

This monthly report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates FEWS NET's Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work here.