



National Drought Management Authority MERU COUNTY March 2015

MARCH 2015 EW PHASE



Early Warning Phase Classification

LIVELIHOOD ZONE	EW PHASE	TRENDS
AGRO-PASTORAL	ALARM	WORSENING
MIXED FARMING (FOOD)	ALERT	DETERIORATING
RAIN-FED CROPPING	ALARM	WORSENING
COUNTY	ALARM	WORSENING

Drought Situation & EW Phase Classification

Biophysical indicators declined sharply this month. Rainfall onset was late by more than a week. River volumes declined significantly in the Agro-pastoral livelihood forcing most households to rely on water vendors. Few strategic boreholes were functioning in this zone forcing livestock to concentrate around Elat and Kina-nduba springs. Vegetation conditions deteriorated sharply across all livelihood zones. Pastures in the grazing areas in the Agro-pastoral livelihood were poor both in quality and quantity

Production indicators also registered notable declines. Livestock body conditions declined significantly with those in the Agro-pastoral livelihood ranging from fair to poor. Watering frequency also declined to two days from a normal of daily. Distances to grazing areas remained high. Foot and Mouth disease was still reported in this zone. Livestock from Isiolo and Laikipia Counties were still in the County and concentrated around Elat together with those from Igembe and parts of Tigania East. Others are concentrated around Kina-nduba springs. Conflicts have erupted at Elat towards the end of the month over grazing area and water and six local herders killed. Tension remains high with a possibility of retaliatory attacks. Livestock from parts of Tigania East, Tigania West and Buuri are still grazing around the Mt Kenya forest. Land preparation and planting were major activities. Lack of funds to procure seeds was the main challenge. Majority of farmers in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone planted late citing lack of seed and the unreliability of MAM rains. Total acreage under food crops is much lower than other seasons.

Access indicators also declined with milk consumption declining further than last month. Distances to watering points for households still remained high. Nutrition status of children under five years worsened with those at risk increasing to 23 per cent from 20 per cent last month.

The County is currently at 'ALARM phase' with a worsening trend. There is an urgent need to activate the drought contingency planned activities especially those that are focusing on security, water, livestock health and human health (especially for the under-fives).

Drought Risk	Low	Medium	High
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Biophysical Indicators	Value	Normal ranges
% of average rainfall (FEWSNET RFE)	50	80-120
SPI-3month (TAMSAT)	-0.36	-1 to 1
VCI-3month (Entire County)	16.8	35-50
VCI-3month (Tigania East)	9.13	35-50
VCI-3month (Igembe Central)	7.9	35-50
VCI-3month (Igembe North)	9.9	35-50
VCI-3month (Igembe South)	7.69	35-50
State of Water Sources	3	5

Production indicators	Value	Normal ranges
Livestock Migration Pattern	Internal migrations and in-migrations	Not normal
Livestock Body Conditions (Score)	3	6 – 5
Milk Production (Lt)	10	23
Livestock deaths (for drought)	0	No death
Crops area planted (%)	-	100% of LTA

Access Indicators	Value	Normal ranges
Terms of Trade (ToT)	NA	NA
Milk Consumption	8	13
Water for Households	2	3

Utilization indicators	Value	Normal ranges
MUAC	23	17
Coping Strategy Index (CSI)		

1.0 Environmental indicators (stability)

1.1 Rainfall

1.1.1 Current Performance

- The first two dekads (three weeks) of the month remained dry across all livelihood zones.
- Rainfall onset was noted towards the end of the third dekad which was not normal as rains are usually expected during the second dekad.
- In addition to late onset, spatial and temporal distribution was poor. Cumulative amounts received were below normal across all livelihood zones.
- Current rainfall trends are not normal for this time of the year.

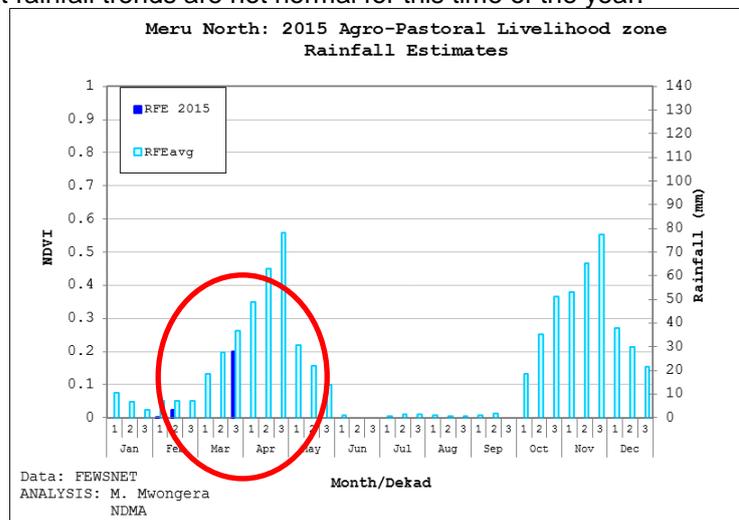


Figure: Rainfall totals (RFE) for the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone for March 2015

1.2 Agricultural Drought (Vegetation Condition Index)

- Notable declines in vegetation conditions were witnessed during the month. The long dry spell from January and a lack of off-season rains contributed to the decline.
- All Sub-Counties registered significant declines in vegetation condition index with Igembe Central and Igembe North registering lowest values.

MERU	County	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015			
		Color	VCI values	Drought Category			
	Buuri	50.59	38.29	28.24		3-monthly average	
	Central Imenti	46.26	31.03	19.6			
	Igembe Central	42.49	29.33	7.9		≥50	Wet
	Igembe North	40.47	29.4	9.9		35 to 50	No Drought
	Igembe South	51.42	34.57	7.69		21 to 34	Moderate Drought
	North Imenti	50.49	33.93	11.18		10 to 20	Severe Drought
	South Imenti	46.75	33.96	30.15		<10	Extreme Drought
	Tigania East	37.19	24.92	9.13			
	Tigania West	40.55	30.2	11.09			

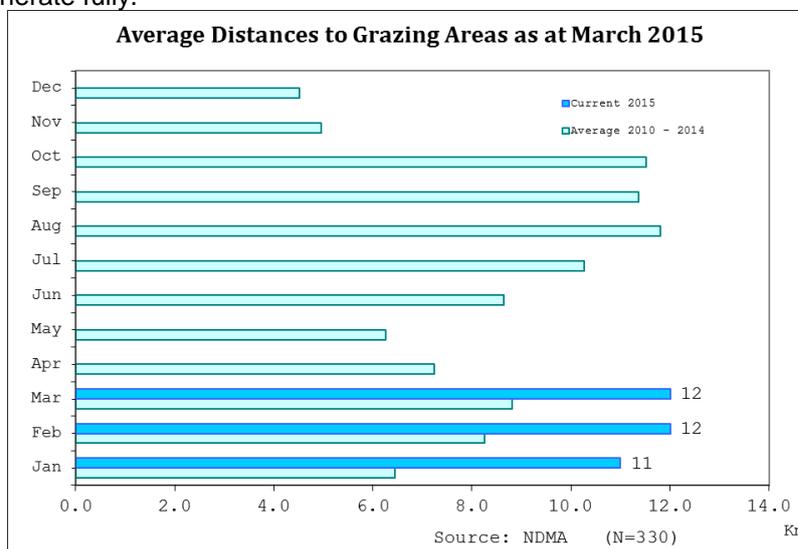
Fig: VCI 3-month values for Meru County

1.3 Condition of Natural Vegetation and Pastures (field observations)

- **Quality**
 - Further declines in pasture quality were observed this month compared to last month. The decline was more pronounced in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone with pastures in this zone being of poor conditions. Those in other livelihood zones were mainly of fair conditions.
 - Significant declines in browse quality were also noted in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone.
 - Current quality is likely to improve towards the end of next month following the onset of rains for the season.
- **Quantity**
 - Notable declines in pasture quantity were noted compared to the previous month. The decline was more pronounced in the relatively safe grazing areas in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone. Most parts of the grazing areas in Tigania West, Tigania East and parts of Igembe Central are almost bare.
 - The noted decline in this zone was as a result of poor OND rains that resulted in poor pasture regeneration, and increased livestock numbers in this zone especially from in-migrations from Isiolo and Laikipia.

- **Distance to Grazing Areas**

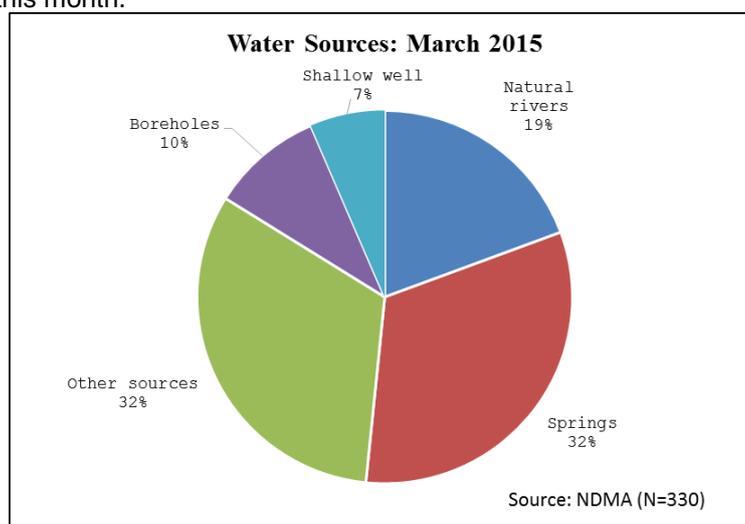
- Similar to the previous month, grazing distances remained significantly high especially in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone as pastures diminished and watering points decreased in addition to heightened insecurity.
- Distances during the month averaged at 12 km similar to last month which is not normal for the month.
- Majority of livestock are currently concentrated around Bolu, Elat, and Kina-nduba springs.
- Despite rainfall onset, distances are still expected to remain high next month until pastures regenerate fully.



1.3 Water Sources and Availability

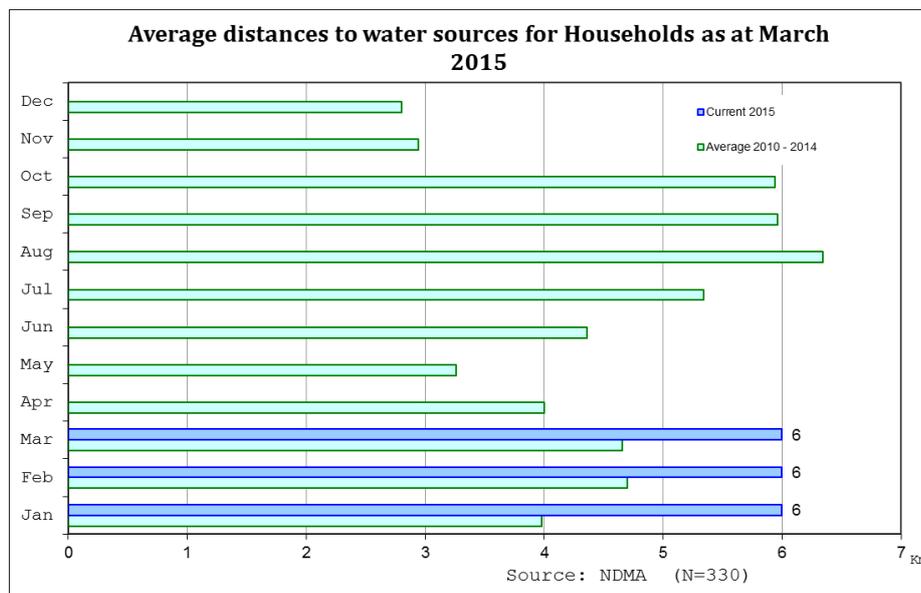
- **Water Sources**

- Water sources declined both in numbers and volume of water available for both domestic use and livestock. Water vendors were the most significant sources for households in most parts of the Agro-pastoral and Rain-fed Cropping livelihoods. Springs were also important sources for households in some parts of the Rain-fed cropping zone in Igembe South and Igembe Central and lower parts of Tigania East (Gambella) in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone.
- Natural rivers were important sources in the Mixed Farming zone and parts of the Rain-fed cropping zone around Marega and Kunati areas.
- Strategic boreholes were also important sources to livestock. These included Kandebene (Tigania West), Inono, Mariara, and Ndumuru (Igembe North). Springs around Elat and Kina-nduba areas were also important sources to livestock.
- Current water situation is not normal. Improvements are expected next month with the onset of rains late this month.



- **Household Access to water**

- Similar to the previous month, distances to watering points for households remained high at 6 km. Agro-pastoral livelihood recorded longest distances with Mutuati reporting an average of 23 km.
- Current distances are not normal but are expected to decline next month given the onset of rains late this month.



1.4 Emerging Issues

- **Insecurity**
- Incidences of cattle rustling increased notably this month with over 200 herds stolen and one herder killed.
- Conflicts over pastures and water were reported in Elat. Four persons have been confirmed dead as a result of the conflicts. Tension remains high despite interventions by the elders and representatives from the National Government. There is a high possibility of retaliatory attacks.
- **Livestock Migration**
- Majority of livestock including those from Isiolo and Laikipia Counties are currently concentrated at Elat and around Ngaya forest and Kina-nduba springs.
- Majority of livestock from Tigania East and Tigania West are still grazing around Mt Kenya forest

1.5 Implications on food security

- Reductions in pastures in the grazing areas, increased watering and grazing distances, in addition to noted livestock in-migrations have worsened food insecurity this month compared to last.
- Conflicts over pastures and water are a serious threat to stability and food security if not contained as soon as possible.

2.0 Rural Indicators (Food availability)

2.1 Livestock production

2.1.1 Livestock body condition

- Livestock body conditions have declined progressively due to poor pastures, increased grazing and watering distances since January. Outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease also contributed significantly to the declines in body conditions
- Livestock in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone are of poor conditions while those on the other livelihood zones range from fair to poor.
- Current livestock body conditions are not normal and are expected to worsen further next month as pasture quality and quantities decline.
- Overall, current livestock body conditions are not normal and are likely to worsen further next month.

2.1.2 Livestock diseases

- Foot and Mouth disease was still reported in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone of Tigania East, Tigania West, Buuri, Igembe South, Igembe Central, and Igembe North sub-counties affecting close to 80 per cent of livestock affected. A quarantine has been imposed in all the affected Sub-counties.

2.2 Crop production

2.2.1 Timeliness and condition of various crop production activities

- Land preparation and planting were the major farm activities this month. In the Agro-pastoral livelihood however, majority of farmers did not prepare land and plant in time citing lack of funds to procure seeds due to three consecutive crop failures. Further, the unpredictability of the March-April-May rains in this zone and the three consecutive crop failures made farmers in this zone reluctant to prepare or plant in time until actual onset of rains.
- Most farmers in all livelihood zones have concentrated on pulses and other fast maturing crops
- Germination was reported in the Rain-fed and mixed farming towards the end of the month especially among the early planters.
- Overall, acreage under food crops is likely to be low this season and given that poor harvests have been realised over the last three seasons, food basket this season is expected to be lower than normal

2.2.2 Crop pests and Diseases

- No crop pests and diseases were reported during the month

2.3 Implications on food security

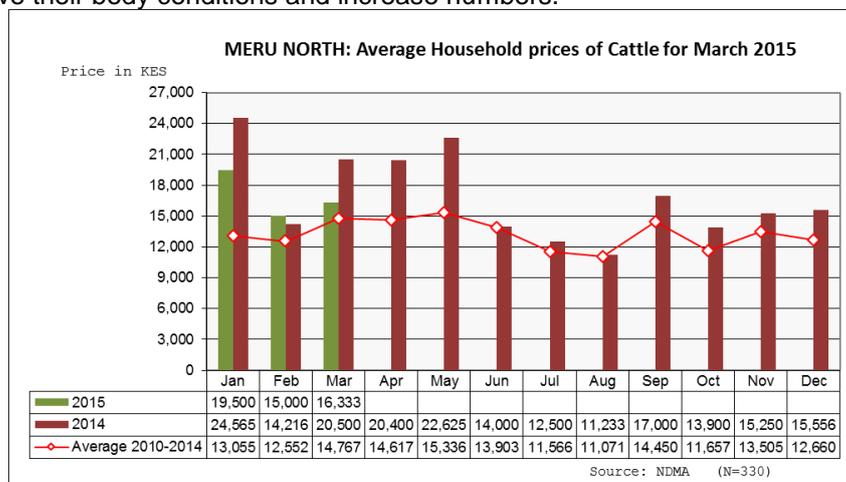
- Demand for cash to fund land preparation and planting further eroded household food reserves especially for purely subsistence households this month. This combined with poor livestock body conditions further worsened food security situation further this month compared to last.

3.0 Access to food

3.1 Livestock marketing

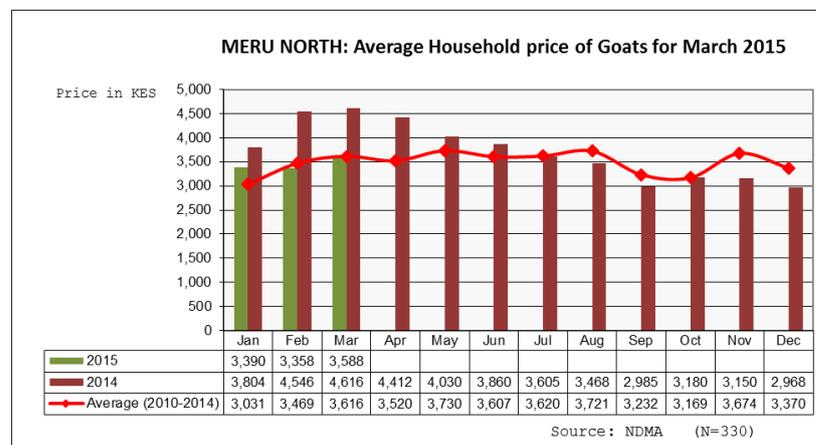
3.1.1 Cattle prices

- A marginal increase in average cattle prices was noted this month probably as livestock keepers increased prices in order to fund land preparation and procurement of seed, fertilizers, and other inputs.
- Prices this month averaged at Kshs 16,333 compared to Kshs 15,000 last month. Although current prices were higher than the long term average, they were lower than those recorded for the same month last year. Sale rates were also low with sales only reported in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone. Highest prices recorded were in Mutuati at Kshs 19,500
- Prices are expected to maintain an upward trend as herders and livestock keepers hold on to their stocks to improve their body conditions and increase numbers.



3.1.2 Goat prices

- Average goat prices have remained relatively stable over the last three months. Current prices averaged at Kshs 3,588 compared to Kshs 3,358 the previous month and are within the normal ranges though lower than those of the same month last year.
- Increased supply of goats to the markets as households seek quick cash to fund farm activities could have contributed to the relatively stable prices.
- Agro-pastoral livelihood recorded highest prices with Mutuati recording Kshs 5,000.
- Prices are expected to remain within normal ranges next month.



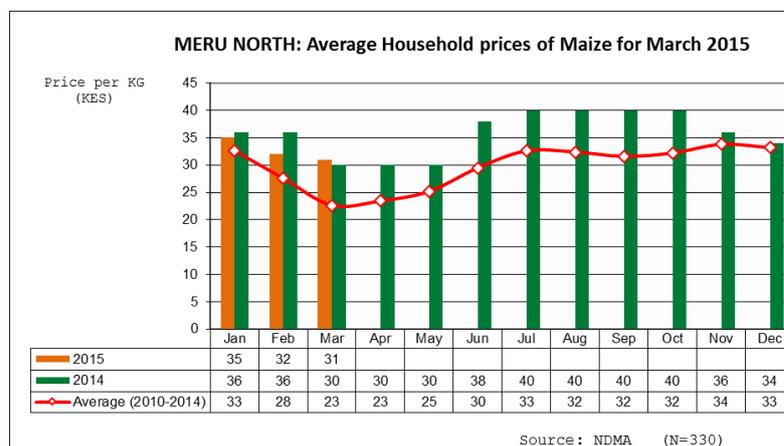
3.2 Milk consumption

- A notable decline in milk production and consumption was noted this month mainly due to poor livestock body conditions and the long distances between grazing areas and households. An average of 8 bottles were consumed in a day in an average of 30 households compared to 11 bottles the previous month.
- Consumption was higher in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone with Mutuati recording an average of 18 bottles.
- Consumption is likely to remain low next month as livestock will not have recovered fully.

3.3 Crop prices

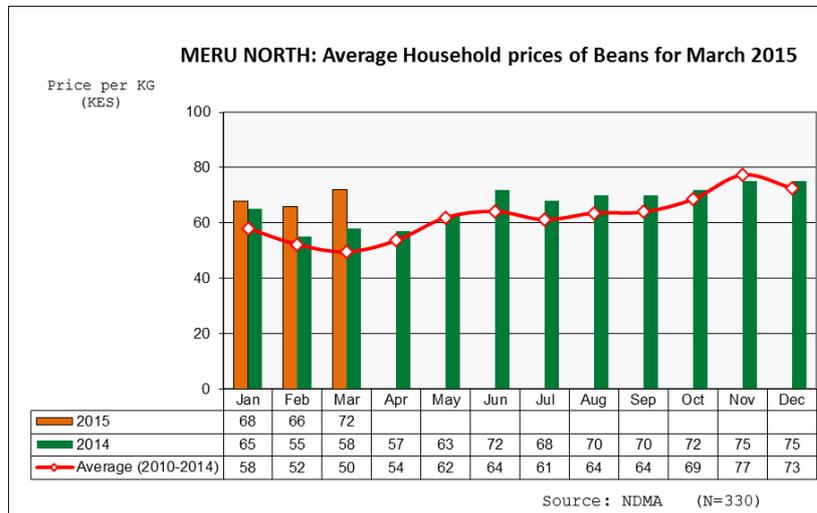
3.3.1 Maize prices

- Maize prices dropped marginally this month possibly due to the small harvests recorded in parts of the Rain-fed and Mixed Farming livelihood zones. Prices averaged at Kshs 31 this month compared to Kshs 32 the previous month. Despite the decline, current prices remained higher than those of the long term average and those reported for the same month last year.
- Highest prices were reported in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone with Kangeta recording highest prices at Kshs 53 per kilo.
- Prices are expected to increase beginning next month as household stocks decline until the next harvest in August. However, there is a likelihood that maize imports from western Kenya may influence prices downwards.



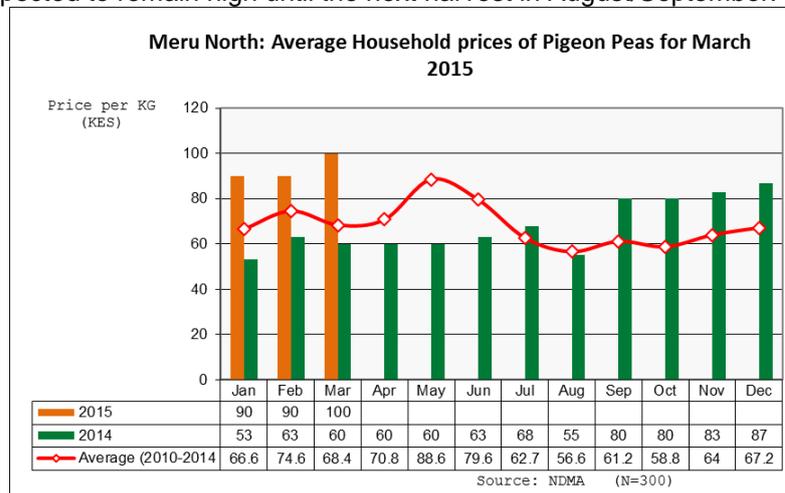
3.3.2 Beans prices

- Bean prices increased significantly this month to average at Kshs 72 compared to Kshs 66 noted the previous month. Current prices are not normal and are above both the long term average and those noted for the same month last year.
- This increase could have resulted from a poor harvest last season and declining household stocks. Further the demand for beans to plant and a limited supply could have led to the noted increase.
- Highest prices were noted in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone at Kshs 80 per kilo
- Prices are expected to remain high over the coming months until the next harvest in June/July/August.



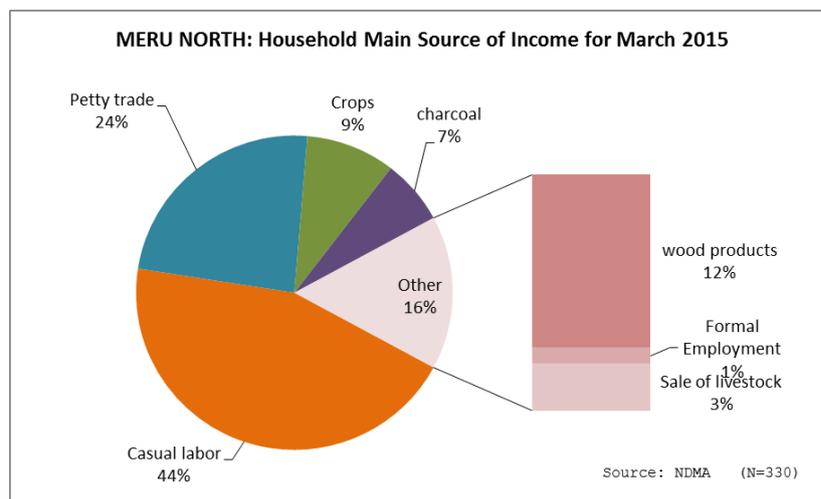
3.3.3 Pigeon peas

- A sharp increase in pigeon pea prices was noted this month as household stocks diminished and demand remained high. Prices averaged at Kshs 100 per kilo up from Kshs 90 last month.
- Sales were only reported at Kimirii sample site in the Rain-fed cropping zone indicating that majority of households did not have any left for consumption and sale.
- Prices are expected to remain high until the next harvest in August/September.



3.4 Income

- **Crop incomes**
 - Crop sales declined this month indicating constricting household food stocks following a poor harvest and a demand for seeds. From 330 households sampled, only 9 per cent of them reported crop sales compared to 15 per cent the previous month.
 - Majority of the sales were noted in the Rain-fed and Mixed farming zones where slight harvests were noted last month.
 - Sales are expected to remain low until the next harvests starting June.
- **Livestock Incomes**
 - A slight decline in livestock sales was noted this month as herders preferred to hold on to their stocks until body conditions improved and numbers increased. Of 330 households sampled, only 3 per cent received incomes from livestock sales compared to 4 per cent last month. Majority of the sales were reported in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone.
 - Sales are expected to remain low over the coming months until body conditions improve.
- **Other incomes**
 - Casual labour remained the major source of income to most households possibly due to the ongoing farm activities. Petty trade including sale of khat was also an important source of income.
 - Coping strategies such as sale of charcoal and firewood were important sources especially to households in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone.



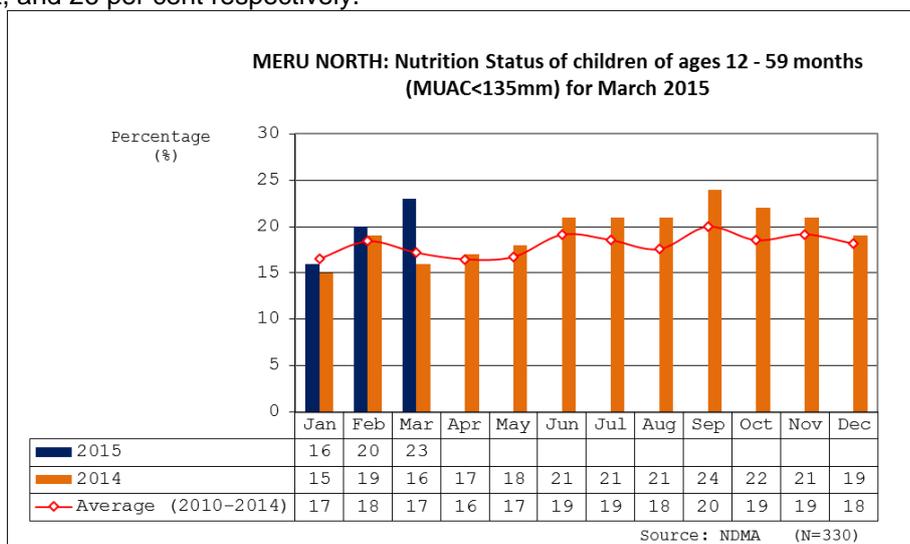
3.5 Implications on food security

- Low livestock prices and high food prices worsened terms of trade negatively affecting food security further than last month

4.0 Welfare indicators (Utilisation of food)

4.1 Nutrition status

- Nutrition status of children under the age of five years deteriorated further this month with those at risk of malnutrition increasing to 23 per cent compared to 20 per cent last month.
- This indicates declining household food stocks and associated poor dietary diversification and feeding habits. This is not normal for this time of the year.
- Kamweline (Igembe North), Kalimbene (Igembe Central), Maburwa (Tigania East), Kibiru (Tigania West), all in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone recorded highest figures of 59 per cent, 62 per cent, 20 per cent, and 26 per cent respectively.



4.2 Human Health

- No human disease outbreak was reported during the month

4.3 Flagged areas

- Igembe North Tigania East, Tigania West and Igembe Central Sub-Countries require urgent interventions to contain malnutrition among children below the age of five years.

5.0 Current interventions

5.1 Non-food interventions

- There were no non-food interventions noted this month

5.2 Food aid interventions

- No food aid interventions were noted this month

6.0 CCU recommendations to CSG and KFSM

- There is need to address malnutrition in the Agro-pastoral livelihood by all stakeholders
- Livestock and human disease surveillance.
- Peace and conflict resolution initiatives in the Northern Grazing Area and those bordering Isiolo district due to the noted livestock in-migration
- Repair of broken down boreholes and water pans in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone.
- Provision of drought recovery seeds
- Relief assistance and school feeding in the Agro-pastoral livelihood zone