Tanzania Food Security Report: March 14, 2003

Summary

- **The overall national food security situation was satisfactory in February. However, pockets of food insecurity are likely to have existed in some districts, particularly where the *vuli* season rains were poor, and among some households in the districts targeted to receive 7,200 MT of subsidized food aid, which has yet to be distributed.**

- **The normal January/February dry spell, which typically lasts for two to three weeks, has been longer than usual this year, affecting crop and livestock production to varying degrees throughout the country.**

- **Despite its effect on the planted crops and pasture, the dry conditions in February have facilitated land preparation for the 2002/03 *masika* season, which is expected to start in the second half of March.**

- **Wholesale prices for maize remained stable in February compared to January. In most cases the February prices were below the last year and five-year average (1997/98 to 2001/02), suggesting that most market-dependents could still afford to purchase food.**

- **The climatic outlook for March to May predicts normal to below normal long rains (*masika*).**

1. Current Food Security Overview

The overall national food security situation was satisfactory in February. However, pockets of food insecurity are likely to have existed in some districts.

These pockets are likely to have occurred for two reasons. First, in areas where the *vuli* rains performed poorly, some households may be facing household stock shortages and will be increasingly food insecure in the coming months. The short rains (*vuli*) were inadequate and ended early in some districts, such as Magu, Misungwi and Kwimba (Mwanza region) and several districts in Mara, Arusha, Manyara and Tanga regions. The below average and erratic rainfall did not allow crops to germinate, caused wilting and, in some cases, a total failure. As harvesting of the *vuli* crops normally takes place between December and February, poor performance of this crop has reduced food availability. Also, in the unimodal areas of Singida, Dodoma, Tabora (particularly Nzega and Igunga districts), Lindi and Mtwara, where crops are planted in December and January, the long dry spell has negatively affected crop development.

Second, food insecure areas identified in last year's assessment have not received the needed assistance, and households in these areas are likely to be suffering as a result. Monduli (Arusha), Simanjiro (Manyara), Mwanga and Same (Kilimanjaro), Korogwe, Lushoto and Muheza (Tanga), Liwale (Lindi) and Masasi (Mtwara) districts were all targeted to receive part of the 7,200 MT of subsidized food aid, which should have been distributed starting in January. So far, this food has not been distributed, due to the districts' slow response in verifying their requirements and the fact that the Treasury has not released the necessary money to the Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR). The situation in some of these districts has been compounded by failures of the *vuli* rains as discussed above. Contrary to a normal year, when harvests from the *vuli* crop increase food supplies and

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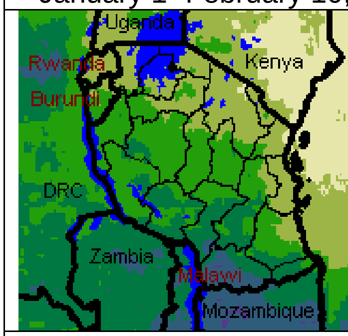
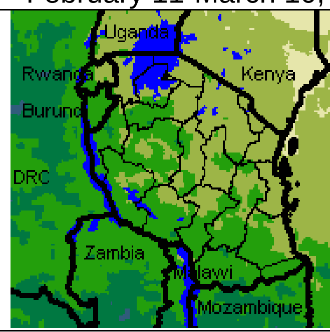
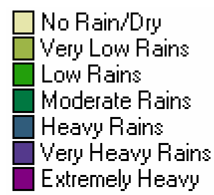
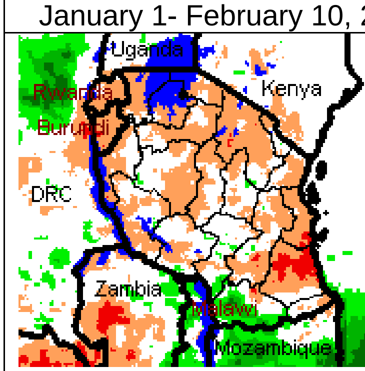
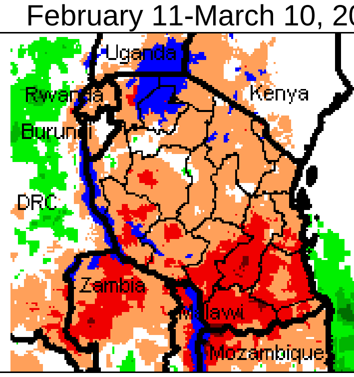
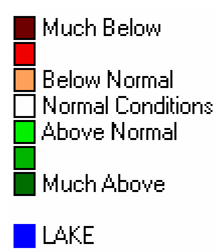
reduce prices, this year food prices have been rising in some of the rural markets, making it increasingly difficult for poor households, who purchase a greater proportion of their food than better-off households, to secure the household supplies they need. For example, in Simanjiro the price for a 100 kg of maize has increased from TShs 9,000 to TShs 15,000 between December and early March, at a time when prices would normally be dropping.

2. Recent rainfall and crop performance

A longer than usual dry spell has affected most parts of the country. Normally, the dry spell lasts for two to three weeks during January and February, but this year, it has extended to March, with some locations receiving very low or no rains from January (Figure 1).

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Figure 1: METEOSAT Rainfall Estimates for January to early March, 2003</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">Current METEOSAT Rainfall Estimates (RFE)</th></tr>
<tr><td>January 1- February 10, 2003</td><td>February 11-March 10, 2003</td><td>Legend</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">Observed RFE difference (Current vs. long term average)</th></tr>
<tr><td>January 1- February 10, 2003</td><td>February 11-March 10, 2003</td><td>Legend</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">FEWS NET/Tanzania</td><td>Source: NASA, USGS</td></tr>
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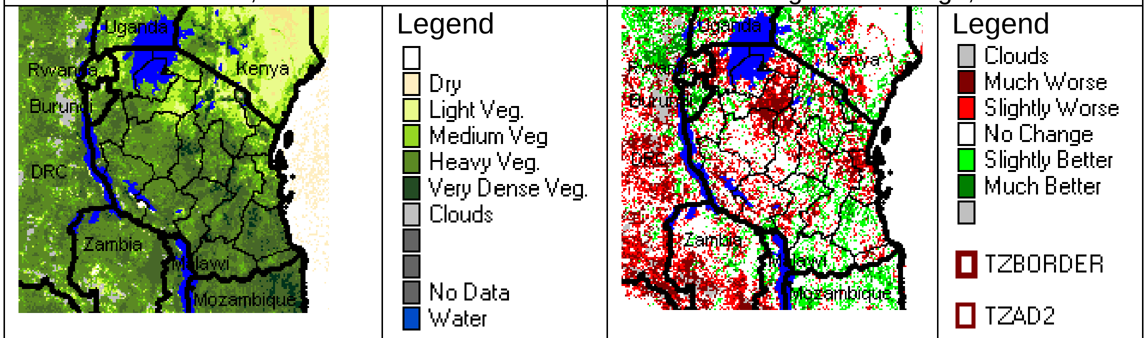
This long dry spell has resulted in a significant loss of vegetation over time, as indicated in the satellite images of vegetation for the first ten days of March (Figure 2). Compared to the long term average, the NDVI for a number of northern and eastern locations was slightly worse or much worse during the dekad of March 1-10.

Figure 2: Normalized Difference Vegetation Index

Current March 1-10, 2003 | Current vs long term average, March 1-10



FEWS NET/Tanzania | **Source: NASA, USGS**

3. Wholesale Prices for Maize

Despite the poor *vuli* crop performance in some areas, supplies of maize and other food crops to most urban markets were stable during February. Wholesale prices for maize were also stable between January and February, with the exception of Mbeya and Tanga, where prices increased by 11 and 15 percent, respectively. In general, though, compared to last year and the five-year average (July 1997 - June 2002), maize prices for February 2003 were lower.

Stable maize prices in key urban markets tend to suggest that current food supplies and availability are satisfactory and that farmers and traders still have good stocks of maize supplies from the good 2001/02 harvests. In addition, the long dry spell, while unfortunate for future supplies, has actually facilitated transportation of food crops from surplus to deficit areas. However, the future climate outlook is not as favorable, and prices may soon start to climb.

4. Food Security Outlook

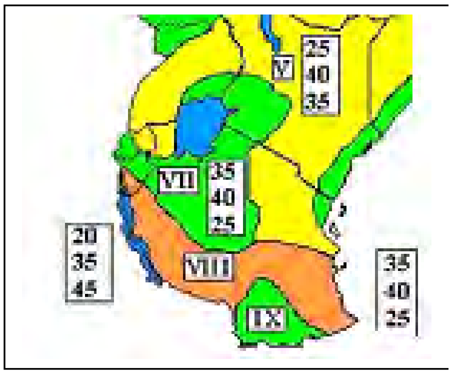
Overall prospects for food security in the coming three months to May are good. However, there is a possibility that some of the 177,000 persons classified in November as food insecure might be pushed into the highly food insecure category, since the period assessed earlier as critical for distributing this food was January to April, and these distributions have not taken place. Moreover, any further delays in distributing this food might prove difficult, likely to be hampered by poor access to some of the rural areas during the long rains (*masika*), which are expected in the second half of March.

Also, as stated above, poor performance of the *vuli* rains in certain locations ruined some of the *vuli* harvest. This harvest normally helps supplement the main harvest, providing a buffer between seasons, and some households are likely to suffer as a result.

For the period beyond May/June, domestic supplies will depend very much on balances from this year and the performance of the long rains (*masika*). The Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA), according to its recent press release on the March-May Climatic Outlook, predicts that the *masika* rains will begin in the second half of March. The agency is optimistic that the long rains will support to maturity the crops that were planted early in the central regions (Dodoma and Singida) and western parts of Iringa, Mbeya, Rukwa and southern Kigoma regions.

However, the climatic outlook also predicts that the *masika* rains will be mixed. Normal to above normal rainfall is expected only in the Lake Victoria Basin regions (Kagera, Mara, Mwanza and Shinyanga), northern parts of Kigoma region and Ruvuma region. In these places the rains are likely to support normal agriculture. In the unimodal rainfall areas of Mtwara, Lindi, Arusha, Tabora, Singida and Dodoma regions, southern Kigoma region, and southwestern areas of Rukwa, Mbeya and Iringa regions, rains are expected to be below normal to normal.

Figure 3: Climate Outlook for March to May, 2003



The numbers for each zone indicate the probabilities (chances of occurrence) of rainfall in each of the three categories of above-, near-, and below normal rainfall. The top number indicates the probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; the middle number is for the near normal and the bottom number for the below-normal category. For example, in the case of southern Tanzania, (zone IX), there is a 35% probability of rainfall occurring in the above-normal category; 40% probability of rainfall occurring in the near-normal category; and 25% probability of rainfall occurring in the below-normal category. Boundaries between zones should be considered as transition areas.

Source: Eleventh Climate Outlook Forum for the Greater Horn of Africa

The Eleventh Climate Outlook Forum for the Greater Horn of Africa, which also released a statement on Climatic Outlook, classified into four major climatology zones the likely situation in Tanzania during the March-May period (Figure 3). These include:

- Zone V, covering northeastern and extreme northwestern Tanzania, and dominating much of Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya. The likelihood for this area is to receive near-normal to below-normal rainfall.

- Zone VII, which stretches from southern Uganda and southwestern Kenya to central and northwestern Tanzania. This zone is likely to experience near-normal to above-normal rainfall.

- Zone VIII, covering southwestern and southeastern Tanzania, is likely to receive below-normal to normal rainfall.

- Zone IX, in southern Tanzania, is likely to receive near-normal to above-normal rainfall.

While this climate outlook is probabilistic, rather than predictive, it is worth considering the heightened possibility that crop yields and production might be lower this year, potentially causing food shortages later in the 2003/04 consumption year.

At present, staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS), in collaboration with regional and district authorities, are in the field assessing crop performance and the food security situation. It is expected that, as a result of this exercise, the MAFS will release a report providing a clearer picture of the present and near-future situation.

In view of the climate outlook, government authorities and the TMA have cautioned people to use the available food wisely, suggesting that farmers reserve enough grains (and other crops) to meet their food needs until the next harvest. Farmers in areas that depend largely on *masika* rains have been advised to complete land preparation and have inputs ready to enable them plant as soon as the rains start, and to plant early maturing varieties and drought tolerant crops. This advice, however, may be difficult for some farmers to follow because of the following two constraints:

- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has not responded to the government's appeal to provide seed aid (sorghum, peas, maize and beans) to farmers in the districts of Monduli (Manyara Region), Simanjiro (Arusha region), Mwanga and Same (Kilimanjaro region), Korogwe, Muheza and Lushoto (Tanga region) and Magu (Mwanza region). These are among the districts affected by drought in 2001/02, and the assistance was intended to enable farmers to plant their fields at the start of the long rains season. As the climate outlook indicates, the onset of rains is expected soon implying that even if FAO supplied the seeds now, they would not reach farmers in time for planting.

- The prolonged January-March dry spell caused permanent wilting of crops in some areas, and replanting may be necessary. However, some farmers may not have enough seed to both replant early crops and plant anew for the *masika* season.

Both the poor rainfall outlook and a shortage of planting materials suggest reduced domestic food crop production this year and consequent food shortages in the 2003/04 marketing year.

On the side of livestock and livestock keepers, pasture and browse are currently available in satisfactory amounts. However, water and pasture shortages are likely in the near future, especially in areas likely to receive below normal rainfall. For this reason, the TMA has advised livestock keepers to harvest rainwater for use at later dates. Also, government leaders are advising livestock keepers to sell off some of their herds and put aside the money to buy food and other necessary items later. Prospects for farmers to earn good prices from their livestock are high at the moment, as Tanzania recently resumed exports of live cattle and goats to the Middle East, Comoro and Seychelles.