DJIBOUTI Food Security Outlook Update March 2010

Slight improvement expected in pastoral areas due to early onset of seasonal rains

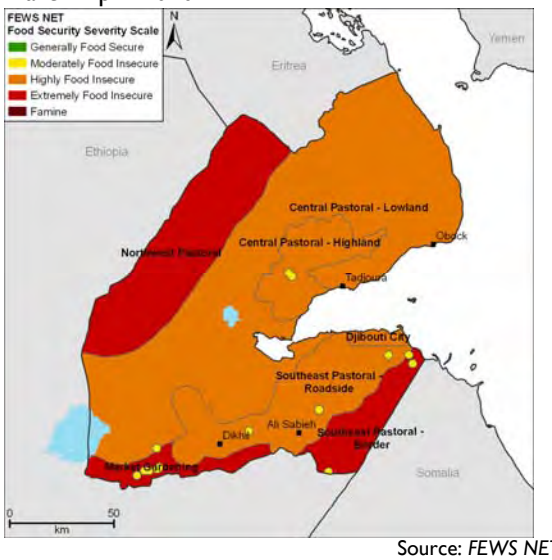
Key Messages

- The unseasonable rains in late February and early onset of the *Diraac/Sougoum* (March-May) rains in most parts of the country will lead to short-term food security improvements for livestock-dependent households. Most pastoralists are likely to have sufficient grazing resources (pasture, browse, and water) through the season if the rains continue and are near normal, which would consolidate the initial recovery process. However, the effects of several poor seasons, along with high food prices, will nevertheless inhibit the recovery of households, unless livestock asset-building programs are immediately implemented. Initial estimates indicate that approximately 120,000 people (50 percent of the rural population) are in need of humanitarian assistance.

- In addition to the WFP general food aid distributions since January of 851 MT to 26,285 people, government emergency food aid distributions through Diwan Al-Zakat for approximately 2,436 MT for 10,000 families in all districts have provided some relief. Humanitarian assistance needs over the coming months in most livestock-dependent pastoral areas, market gardening zones, and poor urban areas will be above average. More resources will likely be needed for food aid, food for work, cash for work, veterinary services, water, nutrition and health interventions, and restocking programs.

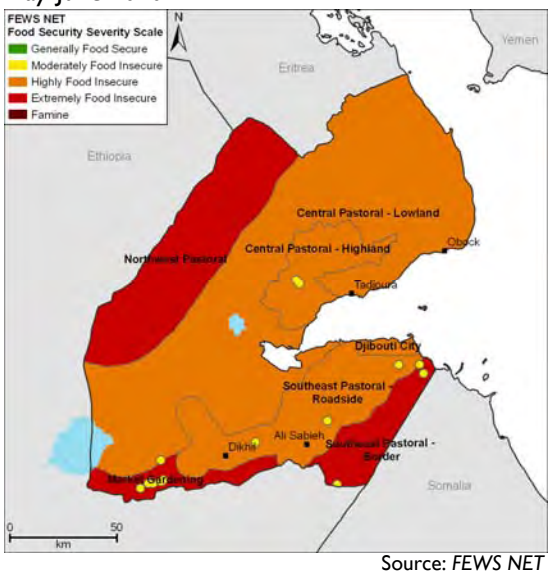
- Food access of the urban poor will continue to be constrained during the coming months by persistent inflation, high food prices, low income opportunities, and the presence of a large number of IDPs and economic immigrants from neighboring countries. The latter group increases the competition for the limited income-generating opportunities available. Approximately 210 refugees originating from South/Central Somalia were registered in February alone at Ali-Adde camp, and more are expected in the coming months.

Figure 1. Estimated food security conditions, March-April 2010



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 2. Estimated food security conditions, May-June 2010



Source: *FEWS NET*

For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Updated food security outlook through June 2010

The food security situation is expected to be critical through June due to the following factors: the decline in herd size since 2008 in most pastoral areas, limited income and food sources from animals, high staple food prices, and reduced remittances from urban to pastoral households. Consequently, high and extreme food insecurity will persist in most pastoral areas through June.

This report provides an update to the January 2010 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook report which estimated food security conditions in Djibouti through June 2010. The next Outlook report will be released in April and will cover the April to September 2010 period.

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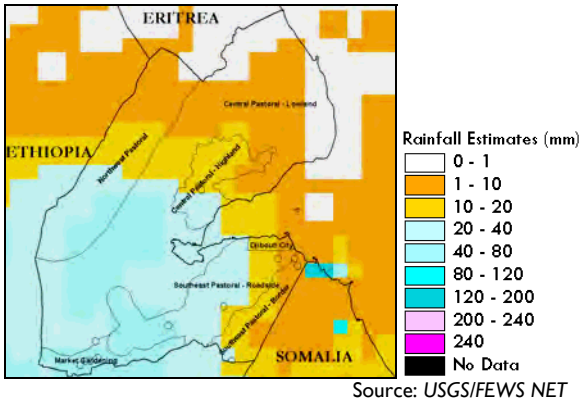
However, slight improvements may happen earlier than expected due to the above-normal rainfall received in late February and the early onset of the *Diraa/Sougoum* season (Figure 3), which has provided some relief to water shortages and pasture regeneration, particularly in the coastal areas. The enhanced rainfall during the last two weeks has resulted in localized flooding (in Obock, Ali-Sabieh, Dikhil, Arta and Djibouti city), though no damage has been reported. In the inland areas, improvements will depend on the performance of the current season. The forecast for the *Diraa/Sougoum* season is mixed, according to IGAD/ICPAC, while ECMWF predicts a 40-50 percent chance of below-normal rains. Due to the lingering effects of the current El Niño conditions, there may be reduced rainfall amounts towards the end of the season.

Figure 3. Cumulative rainfall for the first dekad of March 2010



Source: *USGS/FEWS NET*

In **pastoral areas,** after significant dryness in November, December, and January, the return of above-normal rainfall since late February is expected to provide relief for areas facing major moisture shortages. However these rains may be too late in the season for a full recovery of livestock-dependent households. Both income and food sources from animals are expected to improve but will be below average due to decreased herd sizes. Water availability is likely to improve in the southern area due to the recent rains, though water retention capacity of water catchments, due to lack of rehabilitation, is a concern. The refilling course of most water catchments has diverted their course and need to be re-directed. Pastoralists who depend on water harvesting will face water shortages in the future if the water catchments are not rehabilitated.

Preliminary results from the joint assessment mission indicate that most pastoralists in all livelihood zones lost some of their herds during this season and the food security situation is critical due to diminished sources of food and income from animals and exhausted coping strategies. Some areas reported that they reduced the number of meals per day to two. Family assistance has reduced significantly due to the high cost of living in urban areas, while the quantity of food purchased with the same amount of remittances is reduced due to high staple food prices. Most poor households in zones accessible to markets are intensifying charcoal production, which has decreased charcoal prices. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance is estimated at approximately 120,000 people (located in the pastoral and market gardening zones). The emergency interventions recommended by the assessment mission include general food aid distributions, food for work, rehabilitation of existing water catchments to increase water holding capacity, water trucking for the most needed groups, veterinary services, restocking for those IDPs who lost all of their livestock, new water catchments in the grazing areas, and nutrition, water and health interventions.

In the **coastal grazing areas**, households are anticipated to experience an extended period of major improvements in household food security through June if the *Diraac/Sougoum* rains are near normal and adequate food aid is distributed. However, the effects of several poor seasons, high food prices, limited herd sizes, reduced remittances, and reduced humanitarian assistance have compounded the current food and livelihood crisis. The ***Heys/Dada*-dependent grazing areas** have benefited from the current unseasonable rains and the early onset of *Diraac/Sougoum* rains, and pasture and browse conditions have already improved. This will in turn improve animal productivity in terms of good sales and milk production. However, these improvements will not be realized before April.

In the **northwest pastoral livelihood zone**, *Diraac/Sougoum* rains have begun and most water catchments contain some water, though insignificant amounts. Browse and pasture are expected to improve if the performance of the rains is adequate at least up to April. Income and food sources from livestock are not expected to improve until June. Exchange of salt and palm leaves (Onga) for cereals from Ethiopia, the usual alternative source of food in this zone, will be insignificant during the coming months due to very weak camel conditions not able to transport the salt and sorghum at long distances. WFP food aid distributions are filling the food deficit gaps in this zone. IDPs have been reported in Andoli since the hostilities of Djibouti-Eritrea and recently Garabtissan due to droughts and other security concerns.

In the **southeast pastoral livelihood zone**, pastoralists in the **roadside subzone** rely on milk sales as the main source of income; however, milk sales are not expected to improve significantly due to low birth rates, particularly among goats, due to high rate of abortions because of drought. Camels gave birth last month and their milk production will be improved by

April-May. Family assistance has also declined due to the high cost of living in urban areas. Charcoal production in this area has been intensified, but will not cover basic needs. No significant improvement is expected up until June. Pastoralists in the **border subzone** received good rains from late February to early March particularly in the southern parts. Both pasture and browse have improved and water availability has slightly improved. However major grazing areas between Ali-Adde and Geustir and from Kabah Kabah to Biidlay lack water catchments, and water is trekked at long distances. This zone reported camel losses during the last season and it will be very difficult for them to transport charcoal, the main source of income in this zone. Certain pockets are receiving WFP food aid, which is partially covering the food deficits. Households in this subzone will be extremely food insecure up to June at least. IDPs have been reported in Sankal and Assamo due to droughts and in Bahour due to security reasons at Loyada border.

Food security in the **central pastoral livelihood zones** will be critical in the coming months as the main income source and food for households is from family assistance, and urban middle income households are expected to reduce remittances (frequency and amount) due to the high cost of living (high staple food prices, electricity prices etc). Income and food sources from animals are expected to improve by April, but this does not contribute much to their daily caloric intake. Households in this livelihood zone will remain highly food insecure and will require livelihood protection interventions.

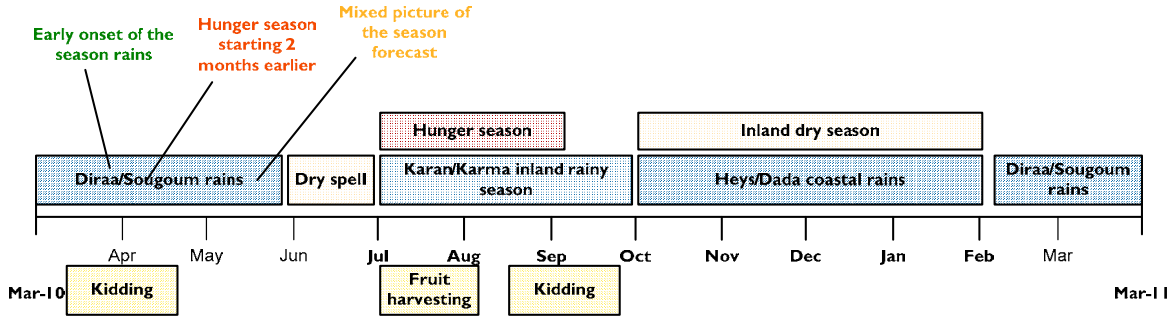
In addition to the WFP general food aid distribution, the WFP rural food for work program is likely to start soon to cover around 5,000 people under the current humanitarian program. There is a high likelihood that the emergency case load will be significantly increased after the validation of the results of the joint assessment mission.

In the **market gardening zone,** the peak vegetable production season is ending and only those who planted large surfaces are still harvesting, and the products sold late in the harvest season get higher prices. Poor households in this zone are highly food insecure and will remain in this situation up to the summer harvest. High fuel prices, diseases and pests, and lack of fertilizers reduced the yield this season. Poor farmers who mainly rely on the production of their farms require assistance in terms of food for work and certified seeds, pesticides, implements, and subsidized fuel for irrigation.

A significant number of **poor urban** households continue to struggle to meet their basic food needs. Both survival deficits and livelihood protection deficits persist for poor urban households in Djibouti and other district capitals. The cost of the monitored expenditure basket for poor urban households increased by three percent compared to last month, but it is 44 percent above the five-year average. Staple food prices increased five percent this month compared to last month and are 70 percent higher than the five-year average. No decrease in prices is expected at least up to June. Cereal-producing areas in Asia are experiencing a poor rainy season and production is expected to be low this year. This is likely to affect prices in Djibouti, as cereal imports are mostly from Asia. Though sufficient stocks are available globally, there may be significant price increases towards the end of the year. WFP is currently looking into the possibility of resuming food for work activities targeting the poorest areas of the city (Balbala, Boulaos and others) for approximately 10,000 people up to the end of the present humanitarian operation (PRRO 10544.1) in September 2011. However, there is a need to increase the number of beneficiaries in the near future due to the number of food insecure people in urban areas.

Djibouti is planning to establish a food stock reserve and will be revitalized by the production of farms given to Djibouti by the governments of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Malawi. First productions from Sudan (Sorghum) have already arrived in Djibouti and are directly distributed to the drought-affected pastoralist. Once it is fully established, the reserve is expected to play an important role in stabilizing cereal prices.

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: *FEWS* NET