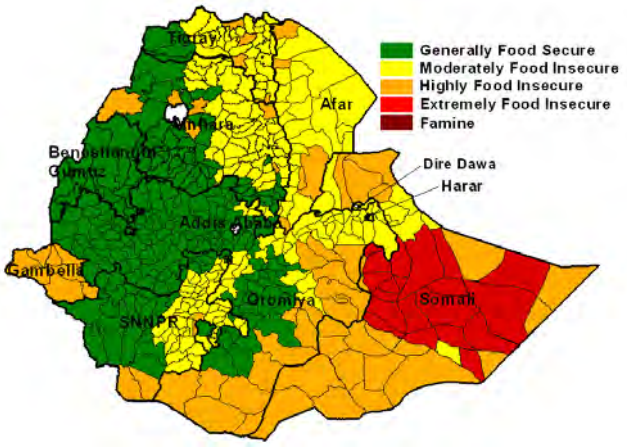
ETHIOPIA Food Security Outlook — October 2007 to March 2008

- National food security is relatively good this year. Although prices are high, food is available in markets, and favorable rains have improved pasture conditions in many areas. However, about eight million chronically food insecure people are receiving cash and food assistance, and 263,700 people require emergency food assistance. In addition, flooding since June has affected about 240,000 people, of which about 84,000 require assistance through the end of the year. In parts of Somali Region, restrictions on trade and movement are limiting pastoral access to markets, and immediate relief assistance is needed for 953,481 extremely food insecure people in that region.

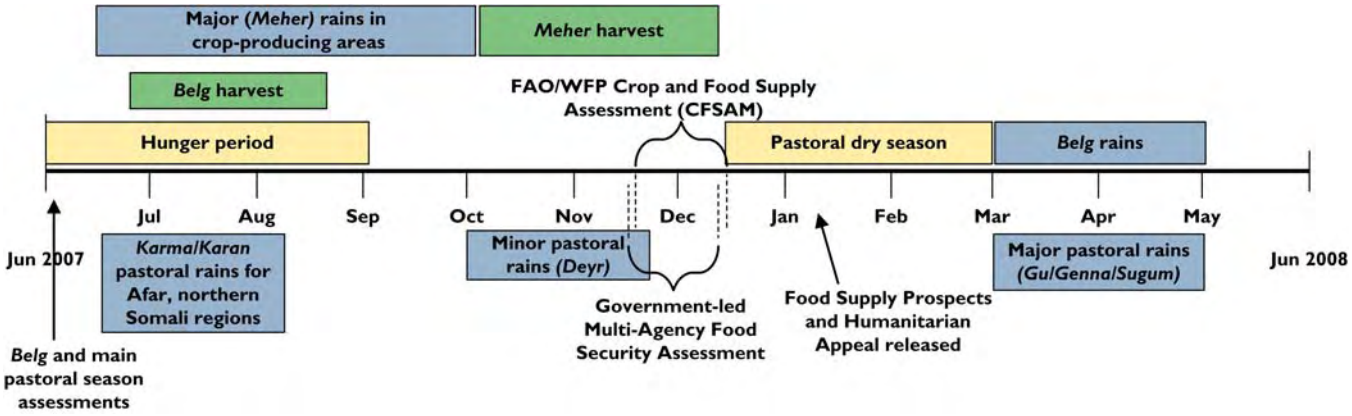
Figure 1. Current estimated food security conditions, third quarter 2007 (Jul to Sep)



- Through March 2008, food security conditions are expected to improve throughout the country. A good *meher* harvest is expected from October to December, which will increase food availability. Pasture conditions will remain good in northern pastoral areas, maintaining favorable terms of trade. The restrictions on trade and movement in Somali Region are expected to be partially lifted, improving access to markets, although most pastoral households will remain highly food insecure due to the impacts of previous poor seasons and expected normal to below-normal October to December rains.

- In the worst-case scenario, untimely rains or frosts in November or December could damage the *meher* crops, further increasing the already above-normal food prices and restricting household food access. The October to December rains in southern areas could fail, causing pasture conditions to deteriorate, and the restrictions in Somali Region could extend into 2008. In this scenario, significant amounts of emergency assistance would be needed beyond current levels, and many households in the southeast would face extreme levels of food insecurity.

Seasonal timeline and critical events



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Current food security situation

The current June to September *kiremt* season is the fourth consecutive good main rainy season in Ethiopia. *Meher* crops harvested from October to December using the *kiremt* rains contribute 90 to 95 percent of total crop production in the country. Although there were localized production problems due to heavy rains, water logging, flooding, hailstorms and shortages of rain between mid-June and the end of September and unseasonable rain in October, *meher* production this year is expected to be above the recent five-year average. Performance of the rains in the northeastern pastoral area has also been good in July and August, which regenerated pasture and replenished water sources. Livestock body conditions and productivity have also significantly improved.

Despite the overall improvement in food security, about 8 million chronically food insecure people in Afar, Oromiya, Amhara, Tigray and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' regions continue to require assistance through the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). The food security of these people is relatively stable as a result of the PSNP food and cash transfers. In addition, about 1.3 million people require emergency food assistance, comprised of 953,481 people from Somali Region (of whom 642,016 live in restricted areas), 84,000 people displaced by floods and 263,700 people based on the *belg/gu* assessment conducted in June/July. Most of the people requiring relief food assistance based on the *belg* assessment findings live in the lowlands of Oromiya Region.

Food security in the lowlands of Oromiya region, where households are primarily crop dependent, continues to be fragile due to the poor performance of 2006 *meher* crops and 2007 *belg* crops (see areas of high food insecurity in figure 1). Prospects for the 2007 *meher* crops are also poor due to the poor performance of the current *kiremt* rains in these areas. It is reported that PSNP beneficiary figures are not sufficient to cover the actual needs of the chronically food insecure in these areas, and additional people that require food assistance have been identified.

Households are extremely food insecure in parts of Somali Region where there is an ongoing restriction on trade and movement. Most of the people in Korahe, Degehabur and parts of Warder, Fik, and Gode zones are pastoralists and agro-pastoralists that depend on the sale of livestock and livestock products to buy cereals and imported food items such as pasta, rice and sugar. The restriction on trade and movement that started in mid-June has made access to markets to sell livestock and purchase food extremely difficult. There are reports that people, especially in the rural areas, are slaughtering their livestock for consumption and also eating wild food. There have been some dispatches of food aid and also limited commercial food deliveries to these areas, although the amount is insufficient to cover the needs of all the people in these areas. Even as commercial food is delivered, unless people are able to sell their livestock and livestock products, they will not have sufficient income to be able to purchase food.

A recent mission by the UN to the restricted areas in Somalia Region has recommended immediate relief food assistance between October and December for 642,016 people living in the restricted areas. The mission highlighted the importance

Table 1. Scenario assumptions and indicators

Most-likely food security scenario

- Above-average October to December *meher* production due to good rains.
- Improved food security of the pastoral and agro pastoral people of Afar and northern Somali regions due to good *karma/karma* (Jul and August) rains.
- Normal to below normal *deyr* (October and November) rains in southern and south eastern pastoral areas.
- Current restrictions on movement and trade in parts of Somali Region will be partially lifted by the end of October.
- Food and cash transfers will be carried out for the current 8 million chronically food insecure people smoothly.
- Continued escalation of food prices and overall inflation restricting access to food for the poorest households both in urban and rural areas.

Worst-case food security scenario

- Poor *meher* production due to heavy rains, frost, hailstorm, floods, untimely rains during harvest time, pest infestation and below-normal rains.
- Failure of the *deyr* (October and November) rains in southern and southeastern pastoral areas.
- Current restrictions on movement and trade in parts of Somali Region continue until March 2008 and beyond.
- Delayed and insufficient food and cash transfers will be carried out for the about 8 million chronically food insecure people due to a break in the PSNP pipeline.
- Continued escalation of food prices and overall inflation restricting access to food for the poorest households both in urban and rural areas.
- Continued displacement of people due to clan conflicts and influx of refugees from Somalia.

of appropriate targeting of food aid so that the intended beneficiaries receive it. In addition to the food, provision of drugs for health facilities and establishment of mobile health teams for health and nutrition support have also been recommended. If the restriction continues, a significant proportion of the people living in these areas will need emergency relief food assistance as well as support in health and nutrition.

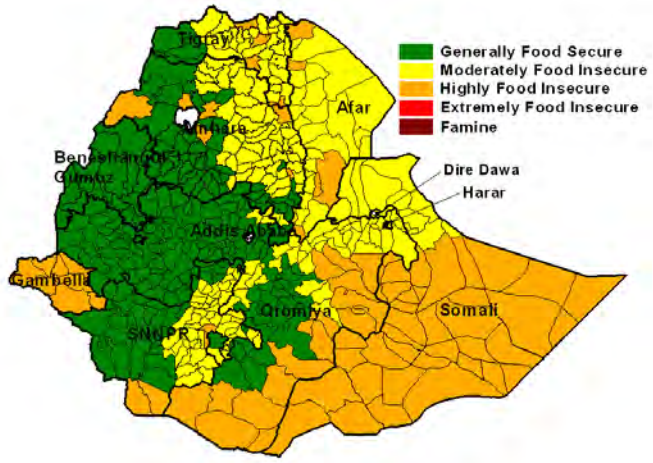
In Afder, Liben and Shinile zones of Somali region, where there is no restriction on trade and movement, households are highly food insecure. Limited trade related to the restrictions and insecurity in neighboring Somalia is affecting their market access, especially for livestock exports. Additionally, households are recovering slowly from the effects of the 2005/06 drought that led to large number of livestock deaths and destitution of some households.

Flooding has affected an estimated 240,000 people in Tigray, Amhara, Afar, Somali, Gambella and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples' regions, of which about 84,000 require and are receiving assistance. The impact of the flooding this season is less compared to last year, when about 524,000 people were affected and close to 200,000 people displaced during the same period, as most communities were prepared this year after the government issued a flood warning in early June. Some households will require continued assistance, as an estimated 43,300 ha of crops were damaged, although most are expected to resume their normal activities once the flood waters recede, and some households are reported to have started going back to their villages.

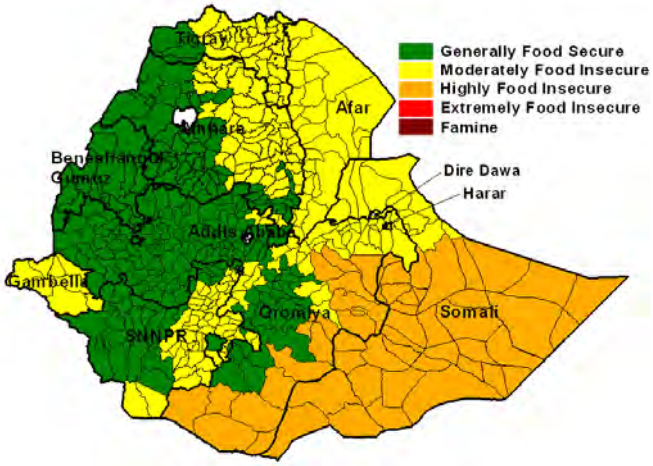
Prices of cereals and other commodities have been abnormally high since the end of 2004, despite consecutive seasons of good production. The government has taken various measures to stabilize prices since March 2006, including selling wheat and oil at subsidized prices to the poor in selected urban areas, banning grain exports, increasing the reserve requirements of commercial banks and increasing bank interest rates. Despite these measures, prices have continued to increase. The rate of increase, especially during the recent June to September 2007 hunger period, has been unusually high, limiting access to food for the poor in both urban and rural areas.

Figure 2. Most-likely scenario: estimated food security conditions, fourth quarter 2007 and first quarter 2008

October to December 2007



January to March 2008



Most-likely food security scenario, October 2007 to March 2008

Food security is expected to improve in most of Ethiopia through March 2008. The favorable *kiremt* rains in most *meher* crop producing parts of the country are likely to enable a good harvest. The July to August rains in northeastern pastoral areas have improved conditions for pastoralists, and the restrictions on trade and movement in Somali Region are expected to be partially lifted by the end of October.

As a result of the expected above-average *meher* production, household own-production and consumption will improve starting in October, leading to increased overall food security through the next harvest. However, production in some areas will likely be poor as a result of localized insufficient *kiremt* rains, flooding, hailstorms and water logging. Most highland areas received heavy rains that could lead to reduced yields. The lowlands of Oromiya and lowlands along the Rift Valley received insufficient rains, which could also lead to reduced yields. The food security in most of these areas is already poor

due to high land degradation, high levels of poverty, high population growth, high population density and poor infrastructure, which have been aggravated by the poor performance of previous consecutive seasons. These areas are expected to continue to be highly food insecure, especially in early 2008 once the harvested stocks are depleted.

The very good performance of the July to August *karma* rains this year in the dominantly pastoral Afar Region has improved livestock body conditions, which in turn will improve livestock prices and the availability of milk. As a result, food security in the region is expected to remain stable until the next rainy season that begins in March.

In Somali Region, partial lifting of the restriction on trade and movement will result in an immediate improvement in the availability of food in markets, thereby resulting in slight improvements in food security in the formerly restricted areas. According to the forecast made by the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) and also the National Metrological Agency, performance of the October/November (*deyr*) rains is expected to be normal to below normal, which could lead to below-normal livestock productivity in late 2007 and early 2008. The combination of the below-average performance of the past *gu* rains, the lasting impacts of the restrictions and the anticipated normal to below-normal rains will most likely have a continued impact on the availability of pasture, livestock productivity, crop production and access to normal markets. Most pastoral and agro-pastoral households will remain highly food insecure, especially as the dry season progress in January 2008 until the next main rainy season begins in March.

The prices of cereals, which should have started to decline in September following the normal seasonal pattern, have increased despite the anticipated very good *meher* harvest. This unusual trend suggests that prices will continue to rise in the coming months, or at least that there will not be a significant reduction through March 2008.

In response to this scenario, the provision of emergency relief food assistance to the 642,016 people identified in the restricted areas of Somali Region by the UN mission should be continued until the restrictions are completely lifted. In other parts of the country, including the non-restricted zones of Somali Region, the lowlands of Oromiya and those that require assistance due to flooding, the provision of assistance should continue until the annual needs assessment is conducted in November/December. Additionally, studies should be conducted to understand the causes of the ongoing high prices of food and other commodities and the implications for food security, so that appropriate measures can be taken to stabilize prices.

Worst-case food security scenario, October 2007 to March 2008

In the worst-case scenario, food security conditions will deteriorate through the end of 2007 and in early 2008, especially in southeastern pastoral areas. Weather hazards could damage crops and cause pasture conditions to deteriorate, and a continuance of restrictions on trade and movement in Somali Region would further restrict access in that area. Extreme levels of food insecurity would set in across the pastoral areas of the southeast and high levels of food security would persist in parts of the north, especially from January to March 2008 (figure 3).

Although unlikely, there is a risk of poor *meher* production in parts of Amhara, Tigray, Oromiya, SNNP and Gambella regions as a result of potential hazards including unseasonable rain, frost and pest infestations during the harvest time from October to December. The poor harvest would affect households by reducing the availability of own-produced crops for household consumption and for sale. Low production would also cause cereal prices to increase further beyond their already above-normal levels, restricting access to food especially for poor households. These reductions in access to food and income would increase from January to March 2008 as the stocks that were harvested are depleted.

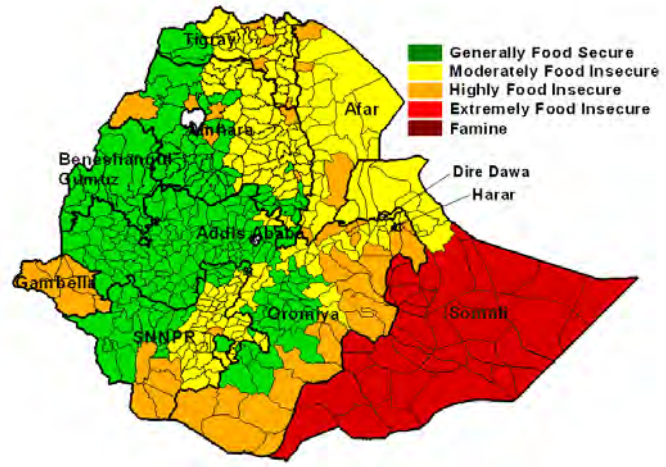
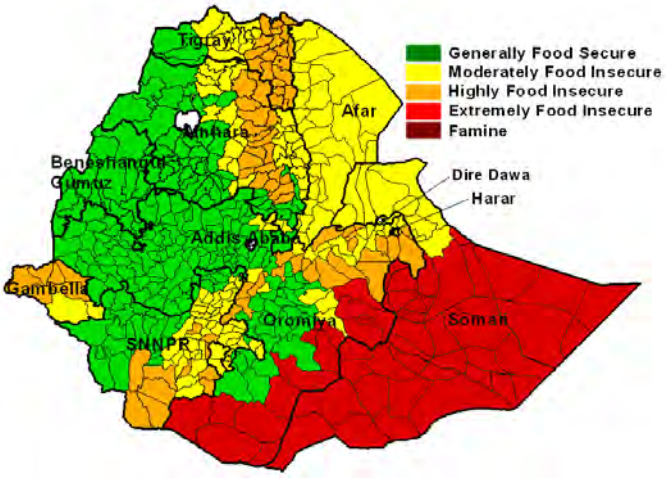
In this worst-case scenario, the October to December *deyr* rains perform worse than expected, to the point of complete failure. This would further decrease the availability of pasture and water in southern Somali Region, including in the parts that have already been affected by the below-average *gu* rains. Livestock will become emaciated and drinking water shortages will worsen, especially after January as the drought persists. The terms of trade for pastoralists will deteriorate as the prices of cereals and imported food items continue to rise and the price of livestock declines due to the poor physical conditions. Households that currently face high food insecurity will become extremely food insecure, including in the southern lowlands of Oromiya Region, by early 2008 and will continue to be so until the next rainy season starts in March.

The impacts of the failed *deyr* rains will be compounded in areas where movement and trade are currently restricted in Somali Region, as the government could continue the restrictions in this scenario. This would lead to total disruption of market access, and household access to food will be severely constrained. People living in these areas will continue to be forced to consume their own livestock and wild food, although deteriorating livestock body conditions and productivity as a result of the failed *deyr* season will limit access to food from own-livestock slaughtering and milk. High levels of acute malnutrition are likely in this scenario, as well as increased levels of morbidity and mortality due to food shortages and related diseases.

In response to this scenario, a significant proportion of the pastoral and agro-pastoral populations living in the restricted zones would require food assistance. The government and humanitarian partners should prepare to provide the required food aid and also undertake activities such as de-stocking of livestock, nutrition interventions, rehabilitation of water points and water tankering and provision of required health assistance. In the crop-dependent parts of the country where high food insecurity is anticipated, increased food and non-food humanitarian assistance will be needed in addition to the already existing assistance to the 8 million PSNP beneficiaries. There should also be appropriate market interventions based on assessment studies to address the escalated food prices, especially for the most vulnerable households.

Figure 3. Worst-case scenario: estimated food security conditions, fourth quarter 2007 and first quarter 2008

October to December 2007



January to March 2008