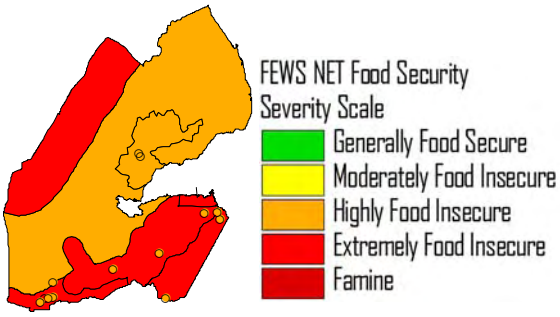
DJIBOUTI Food Security Update — August 2008

- The food security situation is alarming in all of Djibouti's livelihood zones due to four consecutive poor rainy seasons and high staple food prices. These factors are leading to significant reductions in poor household food consumption in both rural and urban areas and contributing to child malnutrition rates which are above emergency thresholds. About 341,280 people, 54 percent of the population, are currently in need of emergency food assistance.

- In addition to serious food access issues, both urban and rural populations are facing severe water shortages. In urban areas, these shortages have resulted in water rationing.

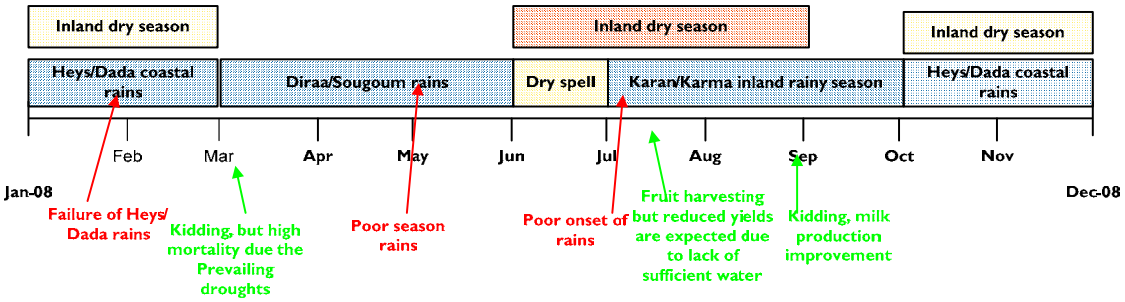
- Although Djibouti plays an important role as a regional trade hub, a role that is vulnerable to civil unrest, a lack of coordination and transparency is hindering the provision of assistance by the donor community.

Figure 1. Estimated food security conditions, Third quarter 2008 (July to September)



Source: FEWS NET Djibouti

Seasonal calendar and critical events



Source: FEWS NET

Food security summary

The food security situation is alarming in all of Djibouti's livelihood zones due to four consecutive poor rainy seasons and high staple food prices. The current drought is known as *Xaaba*, (terminator) in the local language. These factors are leading to significant reductions in poor household food consumption in both rural and urban areas and contributing to child malnutrition rates which are above emergency thresholds. Overall, 341,280 people in Djibouti are food insecure and require emergency food and water assistance in order to meet basic needs.

Pastoral households are facing a livelihood crisis due to the loss of a large portion of their livestock (50-70 percent) and the severity of this crisis is evidenced by an increasing rural exodus to urban areas (e.g., Djibouti city, Sankal, Assamo, and Beyadde). The Northwest and Southeast livelihood zones are the most affected as they depend most heavily on their livestock as a source of food and income. The Central and Market gardening livelihood zones are also affected.

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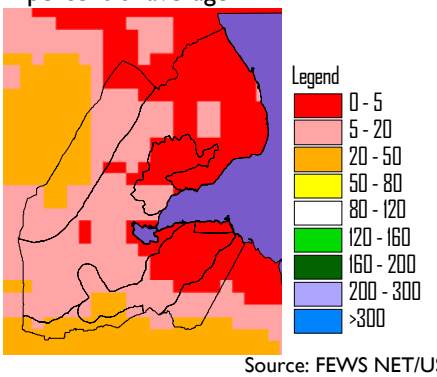
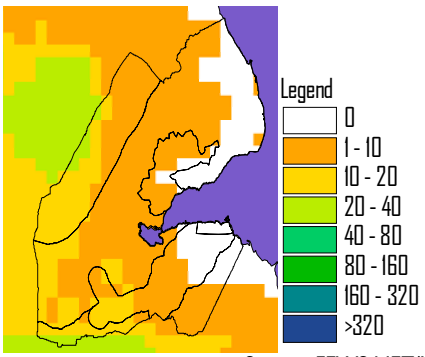
Rains during July were below the threshold for pasture regeneration and although prospects are promising for the remainder of the *Karan/Karma* season (July to September), only marginal improvements in the food security situation are expected in pastoral areas. Full recovery in pastoralist areas will require successive rainfall seasons with average or above-average precipitation in combination with restocking and asset building programs. WFP is currently distributing food aid (full rations) to around 55,000 rural residents (31 percent less than the estimated need) and UNICEF has reactivated therapeutic and supplementary centers. Resources to assist the most vulnerable population remain very limited.

Figure 2. Estimated rainfall for July, as percent of average



Source: FEWS NET/USGS

Figure 3. Cumulative rainfall for July 2008 in mm



Source: FEWS NET/USGS

In addition to the effects of high food prices and drought, rural households have also been seriously impacted by a decline in remittances from urban households, who are also experiencing high and extreme levels of food insecurity. Urban food security has been driven largely by high food prices, (the basic monthly expenditure basket now costs almost twice the minimum monthly salary) and unemployment. No actions have been taken so far to assist the poor urban households although WFP is considering options to assist urban population including vouchers or cash for food.

Finally, both urban and rural households who rely on the railroad for transportation and trading are facing a serious livelihood crisis as the rail service between Ethiopia and Djibouti has been reduced to once per week instead of once per day.

Recent clashes between Eritrea and Djibouti have displaced around 1,000 people in Khorangar and Andoli in Obock district. There is a high risk of disease epidemics due to lack of sanitation facilities in these areas.

As an important trade hub for East Africa, and the transit point for more than 90 percent of Ethiopia's food imports, Djibouti's plays an important role in the region. Therefore, its current food insecurity, and this situations possible contribution to political unrest, should be considered a regional priority. It should also be noted that a lack of coordination and transparency is hindering the provision of assistance by the donor community.

Seasonal progress

The *Karam/Karma* rains began on time, but their performance and spatial distribution have been very poor. The coastal belt of Djibouti city, Obock and Tadjourah received little rain during July, while rainfall in most inland areas was 80 to 95 percent below-normal. Showers were reported during the second dekad of August around Siyallou and Hillou in Balho area and in Gourabous up to Kalafi in Dikhil. No rains were reported in Obock and Alisabieh. In Arta some rains were reported at the edge of Grand Bara. In general, pasture and browse have not received enough rainfall to regenerate and reports indicate that while some water catchments received rainfall, the water in most catchments is not fit for human consumption based on UNICEF and OMS standards.

Water shortages are not only affecting rural populations but also the very poor, poor and middle-class households in urban areas. The limited availability of water has coincided with the climax of hot season (temperatures in the shade exceeding 47 degrees centigrade), the period of peak annual water water demand. The government is rationing water in all urban areas, particularly in Djibouti city, and most households who depend on water trucking are receiving it every three days. This water is often of poor quality and is highly saline. As the construction sector is booming, urban households are competing with builders for water destined to poor and middle class communities. Another competitor for poor household's water is the restaurants in Balbala quarter. The quarters mostly affected by lack of water include Vietnam, Sauvage, Gaan maan PK 12, Wadajir (Arhibba II) Hayabley, Layabley, Bache à eau, behind the livestock market, Barwaqo, Moustigaire. Even wealthier areas in the centre of the city, like quarter seven, have been affected. Emergency actions are needed to resolve water shortages.

Markets, trade and food access in urban areas

The cost of the expenditure basket for poor urban households increased again between June and July (7 percent). The increase was driven primarily by a 9 percent rise in staple food prices. Other food prices rose by 4 percent and total non-food items by 5 percent. Specific staple commodities whose prices rose since June include rice (by 3 percent), sorghum (by 13 percent), cooking oil (by 47 percent) and beans (by 26 percent). Non-staple food items also increased in price as compared to last month (e.g., milk powder by 6 percent, meat by 5 percent, onions by 18 percent). Kerosene prices have increased 10 percent since last month. The situation is very critical for both very poor and poor urban households and has been aggravated by typical seasonal declines in income. Ramadan, which begins in September, and is typically characterized by increased food prices, is likely to constrain food access further. School begins in September and poor enrollment is expected this year as households will be unable to afford education-related expenses.

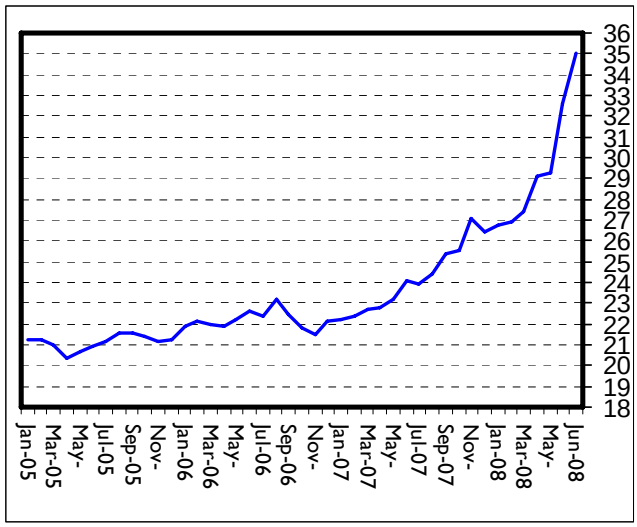



Figure 4. Cost of expenditure basket for poor households in Djibouti City (in '000 DJF per month)