

DJIBOUTI Food Security Outlook Update

February 2010

Projected conditions deteriorate following poor rainfall distribution

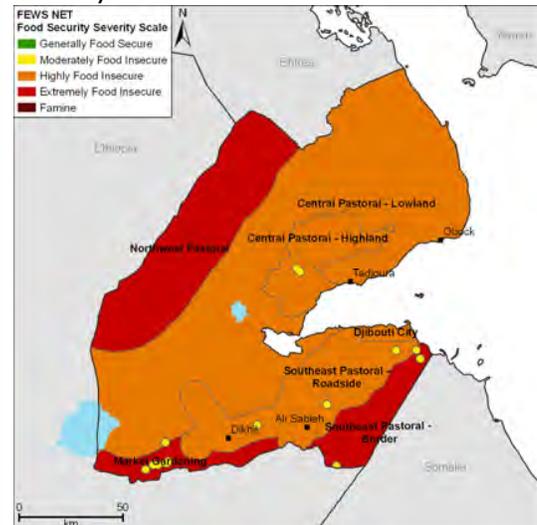
Key Messages

- The food security situation will be critical in the coming months and no significant improvement is expected until at least June, in spite of unseasonal showers that were observed in the first and second dekad of February, and the possible early onset of the next season (*Diraac/Sougoum*- March to May). Pastoralists have not yet recovered fully from the impact of the 2008 droughts, while the current crisis has increased vulnerability to shocks. Preliminary results from the Ministry of Agriculture indicate that the food security situation is of significant concern in most pastoral areas primarily due to the lack of water in water catchments, diminishing water tables, and very weak animal body conditions, as well as signs of acute malnutrition and poor dietary diversity. Livestock mortality has been reported in all districts and initial estimates are around 50-70 percent. Several hundred internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been reported in all districts.
- High levels of food insecurity will persist in the coming months for urban poor households due to high staple food prices (above the five-year average), the high employment rate, and the limited availability of casual labor opportunities. Malnutrition in poor urban areas is of high concern.
- Approximately 5,000 more refugees from Somalia are expected during the coming months according to WFP, in addition to the 12,000 existing refugees in Ali-Adde camp. The increased number of refugees is due to the halt of food aid distributions by WFP in southern Somalia, given ongoing insecurity and increasing restrictions by local militants.

Updated food security outlook through June 2010

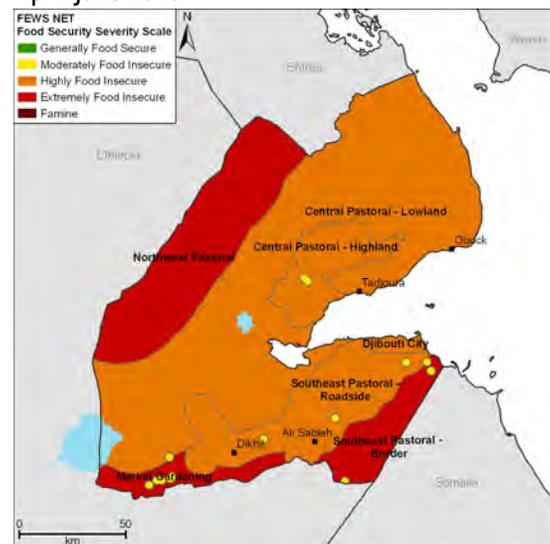
As indicated in the January 2010 Food Security Outlook, food insecurity is expected to remain at high and extreme levels through June 2010 based on the following assumptions: a forecast of below-normal to near-normal rainfall in the coming *diraa/sougoum* (March-May season), which is expected to provide some relief to water shortages and pasture regeneration (although these improvements will not be realized until June and beyond in terms of food security); the continuation of government food aid distributions through Diwan Alzakat and WFP general food aid distributions, which will slightly improve food security among the general population; continued high staple food and fuel prices; and reduced

Figure 1. Estimated food security conditions, February-March



Source: FEWS NET

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



Source: FEWS NET

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

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.

remittances from urban households to pastoral households due to the high cost of living. The pastoralist crisis and the degradation of natural resources, along with consecutive droughts, high staple food prices, reduced remittances, limited dietary diversity, water shortages, and security issues, are the factors influencing the continued rural exodus (increased IDPs) in districts all over the country. Several hundred destitute IDPs have been observed in Sankal (Dikhil district), Assamo (Ali-sabieh district), Garabtissan (Tadjourah district), Andoli (Obock district), Bahour (Arta district), and Djibouti city.

Most of the country received some cumulative showers from October to January ranging from 50-70 percent of the short-term mean, with the exception of the coastal areas of Obock and Tadjourah, which received near-normal rainfall. *Heys/Dada* rains normally contribute 5-10 percent and 10-25 percent of the annual total rainfall contribution in the inland and coastal grazing areas, respectively. Spatial distribution of the rains this season was extremely poor, with the bulk of the rains in October, followed by nearly three consecutive dry months. Some showers continued unseasonably in the first half of February in some pockets of coastal grazing areas and in parts of Ali-Sabieh and Dikhil districts.

In **pastoral areas**, these rains will have limited impacts on food security, because they are still recovering from poor consecutive seasons and above-average staple prices. Water availability is still critical in these areas, particularly for those pastoralists who depend on water harvesting (e.g., water catchments, Barkads). Water availability will slightly improve due to the early onset of March to May season but no significant improvements are expected until the end of April.

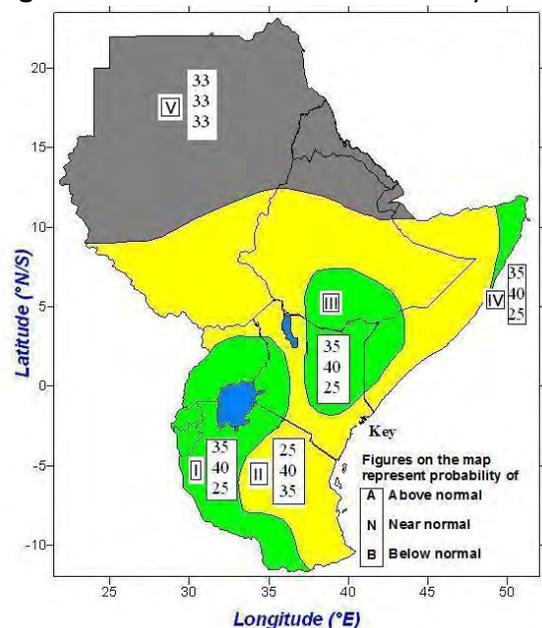
Preliminary results from the Ministry of Agriculture indicate that the food security situation is alarming in most pastoral areas primarily due to the lack of water in dried water catchments, diminishing water tables, very weak animal body conditions with some mortality reported in certain localities as well as signs of acute malnutrition and poor dietary diversity and limited food access. Sources of income and food from animals will be very limited in the inland areas during the coming months. Though goats will start kidding in late February to early March, milk availability will be low due to low animal birth rates. The hunger season is expected to start in April, two months earlier than normal. A joint assessment mission from February 24 -March 1 is evaluating the magnitude of the situation and interventions needed.

In the **coastal grazing areas**, the unseasonable February rains have resulted in slight improvements in pasture and browse availability in some areas in the coastal grazing areas of Obock, Tadjourah, Arta and high plateaus of Ali-sabieh. The **Heys/Dada-dependent grazing areas** will also benefit from the current unseasonable rains, and pasture and browse conditions will start improving slightly if the rains are adequate for pasture and browse regeneration. This will in turn improve animal productivity in terms of good sales and milk production. However, these improvements will not be realized before April.

The March–May (*Diraac/Sougoum*) rainfall season accounts for 10-30 percent of Djibouti’s annual total rainfall. According to the ICPAC forecast (Figure 2), there is an equal likelihood for above normal, near-normal, or below-normal rainfall performance for the season. ECMWF predicts a 40-50 percent likelihood for below-normal rainfall. Due to the lingering effects of the current El-Nino conditions, there may be reduced rainfall amounts towards the end of the season.

High and extreme levels of food insecurity will persist through June and beyond in the **northwest and southeast pastoral livelihood zone**. Current government food aid distributions through Diwan Al-Zakat and WFP general food aid distributions will slightly improve food accessibility. Water availability is expected to improve significantly by the end of April and pasture regeneration will be adequate by the end of the season; however, these improvements will not be realized until June in terms of food security.

Figure 2. Rainfall Outlook for March to May 2010



Source: ICPAC/IGAD

Food security in the **central pastoral livelihood zones** will be critical in the coming months as their main source of income

and food 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.

The market gardening zone is in the middle of the vegetable harvesting period and transporting produce to urban centers. Initial reports indicate that production is low compared to last year due to high fuel costs for pumping water for irrigation and diminishing levels of water in aquifers. Competition from duty-free vegetable imports from Ethiopia has also affected income derived from vegetables. Although food insecurity will remain moderate in this zone, this population will require external assistance such as food for work activities to compensate for high fuel prices, and the provision of solar pumps to reduce the cost of pumping.

High levels of food insecurity will persist in the coming months for **urban poor households** due to high staple food prices (above the five-year average), the high employment rate, and the limited availability of casual labor opportunities. Malnutrition in poor urban areas is of high concern. Although MSF and UNICEF support therapeutic and supplementary feeding centers in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the rate of admission is very low, mainly due to lack of awareness of these centers.

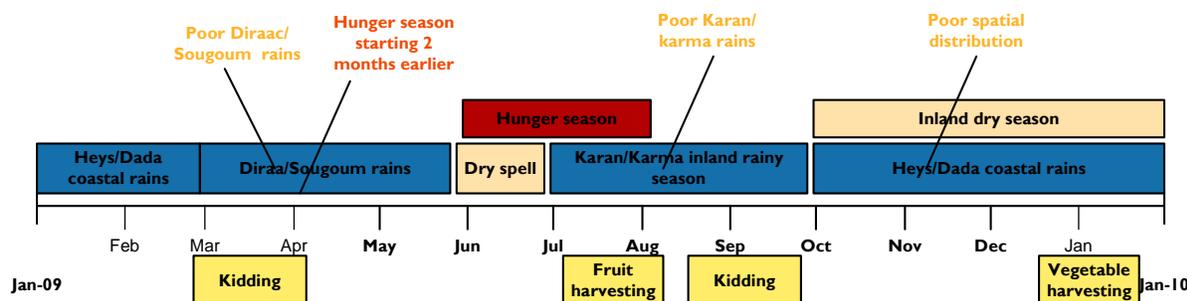
The cost of the monitored expenditure basket for poor urban households increased by two percent compared to last month, but it is 40 percent above the five-year average. The staple food prices are expected to remain high during the coming months and no decrease is expected at least up to June. Cereal imports from Ethiopia will remain low due to the export ban. This will influence high cereal prices, particularly sorghum, which is the main staple food of poor households.

Increased income opportunities are unlikely due to limited casual labor opportunities in the construction sector and at the port. Food security of these groups of people will continue to be affected, and their dependence on external food assistance will increase to satisfy the daily food requirements.

Table I. Review of January 2010 Outlook scenario assumptions

Key Assumptions	Recent evolution and impacts on the food security outlook
Normal performance in the remainder of the season is expected	<i>Heys/Dada</i> rains started in late October but ceased earlier than normal in most of the coastal grazing belt of the country followed by a long dry spell of three months (November to January). Rains picked up in the first dekad of February encouraging below normal temperatures which will increase cases of pneumonia in the weakened animals and will increase the mortality rate. The late <i>Heys/Dada</i> rains will slightly improve the pasture conditions after three to four weeks if the intensity is sufficient for pasture and browse regeneration.
Slight improvement in general food aid distribution	Since last month the Government started general food aid distributions in certain areas through Diwan Al-Zakat. These distributions, along with WFP general food aid, have slightly covered the food deficits in certain localities.
Staple prices higher	Generally cereal prices are showing an increasing trend following by strict control measures imposed by the Ethiopian custom authorities to apply the existing export ban. Available stocks are below normal which will influence the price increases.

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: FEWS NET