ETHIOPIA Food Security Outlook Update March through June 2012

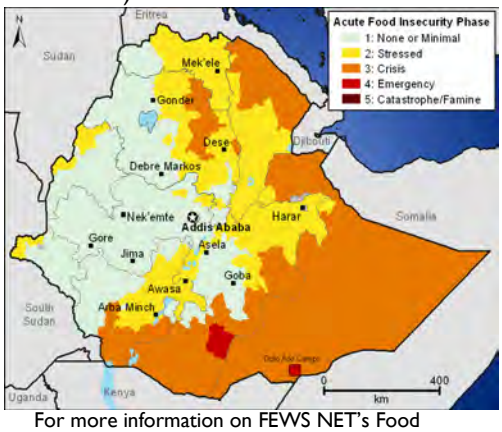
Below normal February to May rains likely to lead to reduced livestock production and a below average *Belg* harvest

- According to the humanitarian requirements document (HRD) of the Government of Ethiopia, around 3.2 million people will continue to require food assistance across the country until June 2012. Additional needs are likely due to poor sweet potato harvest in SNNPR and potential food gaps during the March to May lean season which will also be extended because of the delayed or failed *Belg* harvest.

- Needs for water and livestock interventions are increasing as shortages of water and pasture continue to persist in parts of southern and southeastern pastoral and agro-pastoral zones of Oromia and Somali regions, and SNNPR along with northeastern Afar and the northern zones of Somali region.

- Staple food prices have started rising again in many parts of the country, possibly due to the late start of the *Belg*. Prices typically do not start to seasonally rise until May. Nationwide annual consumer inflation stood at 36 percent in February 2012.

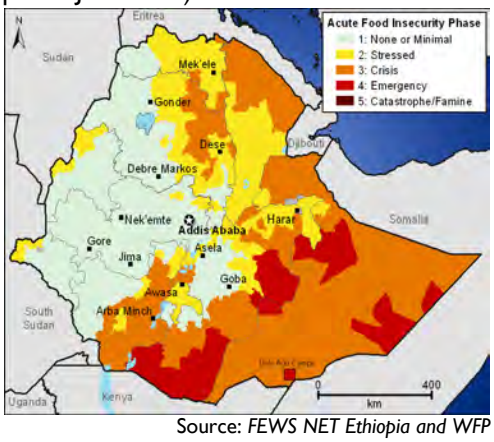
Figure 1. Current food security outcomes (March 2012)



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

Source: *FEWS NET Ethiopia and WFP*

Figure 2. Most-likely food security outcomes (April to June 2012)



Source: *FEWS NET Ethiopia and WFP*

Current food security conditions and outcomes

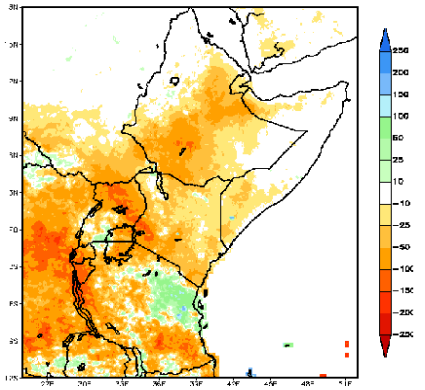
Based on the National Meteorological Agency (NMA) forecast, the February to May *Belg/Gu/Genna* rains are expected to be erratic and below normal. Thus far, the late onset and poor distribution of the rains has already impacted planting, pasture, and water availability in *Belg* cropping areas in Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), eastern Oromia, and the northeastern highlands in Amhara and Tigray regions. Further delay and poor distribution is likely to intensify existing water and pasture shortages. The rains normally begin around the end of March and beginning of April in the southern and southeastern pastoral and agropastoral areas. Late onset and erratic rains will likely lead to abnormal livestock migration, deterioration of livestock body conditions, and declining prices for livestock due to their poor condition. This could adversely affect the terms of trade (ToT) for pastoralists and agropastoralists who need to purchase cereals with proceeds from their livestock. Although the rains are anticipated to improve from the second half of April, agricultural livelihoods that depend on planting for the *Belg* would be impacted by the short growing period as a result of late planting. The delay in the rains has led to the possibility of some bimodal areas not being able to plant crops both for the *Belg* and the *Meher* season (Figure 3).

The western parts of the country continue to experience stable food security situation and remained to be characterized by No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1). On the other hand, Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity persist among thousands of poorer rural households in the eastern half of the country in spite of the recent *Meher* harvest and the ongoing Productive Safety Nets Program (PSNP) and other relief resource transfers. Poor seasonal rains which affected agricultural and livestock production and productivity in the past couple of years have exhausted assets and coping capacity leading to poorer outcomes than climactic conditions suggest (Figure 1).

FEWS NET Ethiopia
Tel: 251 11 662 0216
ethiopia@fews.net

FEWS NET Washington
1717 H St NW
Washington DC 20006
info@fews.net

Figure 3. Precipitation Anomaly (mm) Based on NOAA/CPC RFE Climatology Method
February 1, 2012 to March 26,201



Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Staple prices have shown an increasing trend as early as the beginning of February and March in many parts of the country. Higher prices potentially constrain access by poor households to food as their purchasing capacity is already limited. Major gaps in household food availability will continue to challenge such households since further price increases are likely over the coming months as stocks from the 2011 *Meher* harvest are drawn down. The effects of the anticipated below-normal 2012 February to May *Belg/Gu/Genna* rains on cereal and livestock production both in the cropping, pastoral and agropastoral areas are likely to include an increase in prices across much of the country. These increases in prices often occur in years with poor *Belg* seasons, and increases are despite the fact that the *Belg* only contribute 5 to 10 percent to national cereal production.

In the formerly drought affected zones of **southern Somali and in the lowlands of the Borena, Guji, and Bale zones of Oromia and South Omo zone of SNNPR**, the good 2011 *Deyr*/*Hageya* (October to December) rains improved livestock to cereals terms of trade and the purchasing power of pastoralists and agropastoralists. Nevertheless, severe water shortages continue in some parts of all seven zones in Somali region. In these areas with ongoing water shortages, the performance of the *Deyr* rains was relatively poorer than in the rest of the region. March is the peak of the long dry season that typically extends from the end of December to the beginning of April, so pastoral resources are relatively meager during this time as pasture and water resources diminish. Livestock sales often peak as early as December in some livelihood zones, so income also declines over the course of the dry season. Water shortages remain a critical problem in the lowland woredas of Bale zone associated with below normal *Hageya* rains. Water rationing is under way in most of the woredas in Bale zone and in Kelafo of Gode and Gurodamole of Afder zones, but water resources are still inadequate. Many areas require water interventions. Similar problems are reported in Dire, Dhas, Miyo, and Arero woredas of Borena zone. Among the 13 Livestock Early Warning System (LEWS) remotely sensed and modeled water points in Borena, 33 percent are near dry, 25 percent are between alert and watch signals while the remaining 42 percent are holding good amount of water, primarily in areas closer to the Kenyan border. However, as livestock and populations congregate near a smaller number of water points, other risks emerge. The levels of the big rivers are decreasing, and water points are drying-up in some lowland areas of South Omo zone of SNNPR. In areas where water availability is poor, normal migration or movements of livestock are ongoing to areas where water availability is relatively better within the zones. Apart from this, physical condition of livestock in most of these areas of concern including lowlands of South Omo is relatively normal for this time of the year. Normally, cattle conceive during the end of *Gu/Genna/Belg* (March/April to May/June) season and are milked for six months from February to July in the following year. However, over the past year, the conception of cattle was very poor due to declining herd size and the slow recovery of body condition from recent droughts. Due to the drought in 2011, cattle conceived late in December 2011 and births will be pushed towards August 2012. This will limit the availability of milk during the wet season, and milk is a key source of both food and income in these areas.

Staple food prices in southern and southeastern pastoral areas have shown increasing trend since February 2012 despite more or less stable market supplies brought in from the surplus-producing regions of the country. For example, the price of maize in Liben woreda of Guji zone in February 2012 has increased by 44 percent from a year ago. While there has been an accompanying increase in livestock prices upto 23 percent in price of ox in the same woreda. However since the rate of increase in staple prices are much higher, the livestock to cereal terms of trade (ToT) have decreased. For each ox sold, households can purchase 29 percent less grain than last year at the same time in Liben market. Acute rates of malnutrition decreased in most woredas of Guji and Borena zones between October 2011 and December 2011 due to relief interventions including the distribution of general rations and supplementary foods. However, admissions to outpatient therapeutic programs (OTPs) started rising again in January 2012 in some woredas. In Miyo woreda, the number of newly admitted children in February 2012 was 112 which was 14 percent more than December 2011. Currently, poor and very poor households in these areas of concern are still facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity despite the ongoing

PSNP and relief resources transfers due to declining ToT during a peak sales season, increasing water shortages, and increasing rates of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

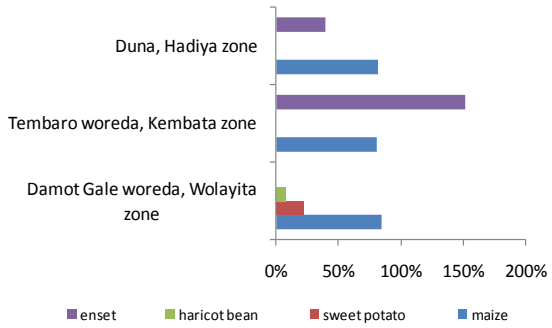
Milk availability will also remain scarce which leads to inadequate food consumption. In Borena-Guji Cattle Pastoral Livelihood Zone, the poor and very poor households are highly dependent on purchases which cover 70 to 75 percent of their annual food needs. While 10 to 20 percent of their foods come from relief, livestock products such as milk along with gifts from better-off households cover remaining needs. Sale of livestock and livestock products during May through August and between December and March are the primary sources of income for these households. The poor and very poor households generate 80 to 90 percent and 50 to 60 percent of income from this source respectively. Much of this income gets spent on staple food purchases throughout the year. The anticipated below average rains will further affect the ToT due to deteriorated livestock conditions and subsequent decreases in prices given the likely increases in staple prices which will in turn continue to constrain access to food and household consumption. Even though interventions are underway, thousands of poor and very poor households in most parts of these areas are likely to continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity through June 2012. However, food insecurity situation in woredas that began facing critical water shortages are likely to deteriorate to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) level during the April to June period given the anticipated inadequate and poorly distributed rains with options to slaughter old and weak animals, increase sales of livestock, and depend on external interventions to alleviate their needs in the water and nutrition sector.

The March to May *Sugum/Gu* rains which normally start around the middle of March have not yet started, so the dry season has extended in the dominantly pastoral region of **Afar and the northern zones of Somali region.** Many woredas currently face critical water shortages both for human and livestock consumption. Water points including *Birkads* have dried up and potential water-related disease outbreaks are likely even when the rains start. Pasture is becoming scare as the dry season extends, and livestock body conditions deteriorate. These areas include Kori, Elidaar, Bidu, and Erebti woredas of Afar region, Harshin, Kabribayah, parts of JIjiga, Awbare, and Babile woredas of Jijiga zone, and Ayisha, parts of Afdem, Erer, Shinile, and Dambel woredas of Shinile zone in northern Somali region. In zone five of Afar, livestock migration started about four months earlier in January to the highlands of Amhara. This year goats migrated while usually only cattle and camel migrate. According to field reports, the livestock are returning as pasture and water in their dry season grazing destinations have been exhausted. Animals normally return when the rains start in their wet season grazing locations. In Shinile Pastoral Livelihood Zone, for instance, livestock normally stay around homes or stationary villages for grazing and water beginning in April and through October while animals in the agropastoral livelihood zones of Jijiga and Shinile zones do migrate in June until the next rains begin in July. Spread of livestock diseases are already reported in woredas such as Megale and Afdera in Afar as a result of stress to the livestock caused by shortages of water and pasture. Deteriorating livestock body condition are affecting prices, and the pastoral terms of trade are declining against the rising staple food prices. Even through the ongoing relief wheat distribution has stabilized market supply, pastoralists have to sell more livestock than normal to purchase staple foods due to declining commercial supply from outside the region. Emergency food aid is being distributed in these areas, but in Afar the PSNP distributions which normally start in January and runs through June have not yet started. The delay of PNSP is due to delays in constructing the public works required by the program. Pastoral households are at Stressed (IPC Phase 2) level of food insecurity in most parts while the dry-belt areas of northeastern Afar where water is a chronic problem and parts of Shinile and Jijiga zones in northern Somali are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). The respective level of food insecurity is likely to persist through June given the anticipated poor *Gu/Genna* rains and further declines in terms of trade as the May to June primary lean season peaks.

Belg rains **in the eastern *Meher* marginal areas** normally begin around mid-February. This year, however, they started around March 23rd, but the rains so far have been both irregular and low volume. The onset was delayed by almost five weeks. The absence of rainfall or their conspicuous deficits so far have resulted in limited land preparation and planting of *Belg* crops. By now, in a normal year, the planting of *Belg* crops will have been completed in the northeastern and central *Belg* dependent areas. Actual planting performance to date is insignificant compared to the planned area. The normal planting window in these areas which normally takes place between February to March is almost over, implying that any further planting of *Belg* crops in the coming weeks, assuming soil moistures permit, faces serious risks that the crop could be damaged by heavy rains during the start of the *Kiremt* (June to September) rains during the flowering, maturity, or harvesting stages. Other risks of planting so late are that the harvest of the crop would be pushed forward due to the late planting, or that the chance to plant a second crop for the *Kiremt* in June or July would be unlikely. These planting problems are likely in parts of North Shewa and East and West Hararghe.

With the unusual delays in the start of the current *Belg* rains, pasture and water resources are rapidly depleting in some of these areas, especially in areas where the last *Kiremt* (June to September) rains were either poor or ceased earlier than normal. This could lead to significant declines in body condition and productivity of livestock unless expected precipitations over the coming weeks improve the situation. Shortages of pasture are being reported in parts of Raya Azebo and Alamata woredas of Tigray region, Wag Himra, North and South Wello, and Oromia Zones of Amhara region, the lowlands of East and West Hararghe zones in Oromia region. In some of these areas, especially in Wag Himra and lowlands of East and West Hararghe, livestock are trekking long distances in search of water and pasture. Shortages of water for human consumption have also been reported. The problem is worsening with the unusual delay in the onset of the current rainy season. Areas with critical water shortages include, pockets in Alamata, Raya Azebo, Werei Leke woredas Tigray region, Minjar Shenkora woreda and most woredas of Wag Himra zone in Amhara region, Burka Dhimtu, Hawi Gudina, Boke, and Darolebu woredas in West Harerghe zone, Kumbi, Golo Oda, Midhega Tolla, Gursum, Chinaksen, and Meyumuluke woredas in East Hararghe zone, Arsi Negele, Shala, Shashemene, and Siraro in West Arsi zone. To alleviate the problem, emergency water trucking is underway in many woredas. The scarcity of water is having a notable impact on school attendance in eastern Oromia. Some schools are temporarily closed due to water shortages in Darolebu, Kumbi, Burka Dhimtu, Hawi Gudina, and Boke woredas. There is hope that the April rains will improve the situation. According to the NMA forecast, the rains are expected to improve starting in the middle of April.

Figure 4. Selected annual percentage increase in nominal ETB staple food prices in SNNPR between February 2010 and February 2011



Note: Sweet potato is no longer available in the markets in Tembaro.
Source: *Woreda Disaster Prevention and Food Security Offices*

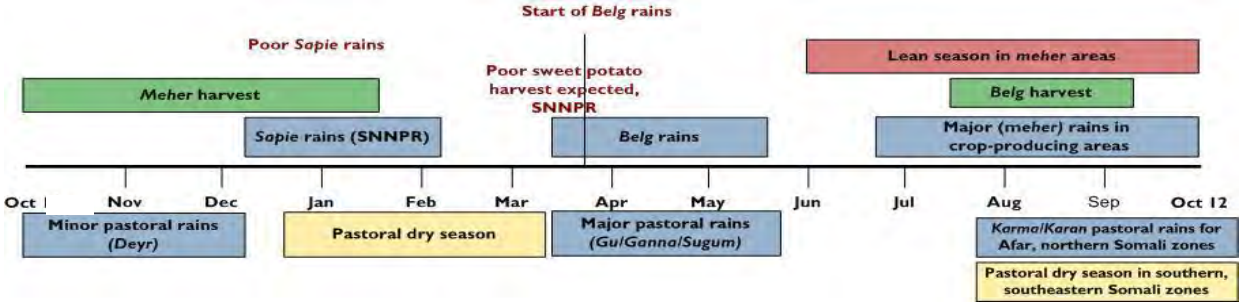
In the eastern *Meher* marginal areas, the positive impact of the previous *Meher* harvest in Octoter through January ongoing emergency humanitarian assistance, and PSNP transfers are keeping food security outcomes relatively stable. The Stressed (IPC phase 2) levels of food insecurity is likely to continue until June 2012 among poor and very poor households. On the other hand, in the dominantly *Belg*-growing highlands, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of food insecurity remain as the April to June lean season progresses since staple prices continue to rise and stocks from the previous harvest have already been run down. The 2011 harvest was below normal in these areas.

In the **SNNPR, the major root crop-dependent areas of** Kembata, Hadiya, and Wolayita zones are likely to have a very poor sweet potato harvest this year. Sweet potato is the primary transitional crop, and it is the staple consumed during the March to May lean season until the *Belg* harvest begins in June with the consumption of green maize and the harvest of haricot beans. At the start of the sweet potato season, soil moisture from unseasonable rains received in November allowed the planting of sweet potatoes for households that had access to cuttings. However, availability of sweet potato cuttings has been increasingly reduced since 2008 due to poor seasonal rains, so not all households have been able to adequately plant sweet potatoes or retain cuttings for future plantings. In the absence of cuttings, in Tembaro woreda of Kembata zone, for example, most of the farmers instead planted ginger in January and February and taro in May 2011. Taro is typically harvested starting in November until sweet potatoes become available in March. However, this year, consumption of taro started early in July, so no more of the crop remains in the ground for most of households. This year, the short *Sapie* rains failed in December and January**.** These rains typically provide necessary moisture for sweet potato growth after they are planted in October and November with residual moisture from the *Kiremt* season. Right now, the sweet potato crop is severely stressed. In addition to the direct damage to the crop from dry conditions, due to the lack of the start of *Belg* rains in mid-February, the dryness has allowed pest infestations such as sweet potato butterfly (*acrea acereta*). With the late start of the *Belg,* and the already damaged crop, the remainder of the sweet potato harvest is expected to be a near failure. The harvest in 2011 was also a failure during same season. For households that planted taro in November as a substitute for sweet potato, those standing crops are performing poorly similar to the sweet potatoes. This has caused the over-consumption of *enset* which is also significantly moisture-stressed. This will have a longer-term livelihood impact as its productivity will be affected in the future since a newly planted *enset* requires upto five years to mature and be ready for consumption in subsequent years.

The late *Belg* rains affected and prevented land preparation and planting of *Belg* crops in most areas in the central and eastern parts of SNNPR including the dominantly *Belg*-cropping Segen zone and the major coffee growing zones of Sidama and Gedeo. The late rains also affected the flowering of coffee since which typically occurs between January and March. The impact will be felt during the harvesting period from September to December, mainly by the poor households who heavily depend on coffee labor as a major source of income. Wilting of coffee has been observed in some woredas. Pasture and water shortages continue in most of these areas. Water is scare for human consumption, and the number of woredas in need of water rationing is increasing. These woredas include Borecha, Awassa Zuria, parts of Shebedino, and Loke Abaya of Sidama zone. People have to travel up 6 to 10 hours to fetch water. Typically, during the dry season, water is available within two kilometers. Prices for water have increased across the zonal capitals of Hadiya, Wolaita and Kembata. The nutritional situation among vulnerable groups including children under five-years-old and pregnant and lactating women is normally stable following the *Meher* harvest. However, increasing admissions to outpatient therapeutic programs (OTPs) are reported in these zones. Zonal and woredas health office records suggested that, in East Badewacho and Shashago woredas of Hadiya zone, the number of new admission have increased from 86 and 99 in January 2012 to 219 and 140 in February 2012. Staple prices began to rise unusually for this time of the year. Maize prices in Duna woreda in Hadiya zone, Tembaro woreda in Kembata zone, and Damot Gale woreda in Wolayita zone in February 2012 increased by 80 to 85 percent over the past year (Figure 4). According to experts at field level, the decline in staple food market supplies which in escalates prices is caused by several factors including that local maize production in 2011 was poor due to the late *Belg* rains, that stocks holders refrain from selling onto markets in fear of an upcoming poor *Belg* season, and that supplies from outside of the zones had high transportation costs. Currently, the food insecurity is at Stressed (IPC Phase 2) level in most parts of the eastern and central parts of the region.

More than 55 percent of the woredas in SNNPR are chronically food insecure and are beneficiaries of the PSNP resource transfers during the January to June period. During the October to November government-led multi agency *Meher* seasonal needs assessment, about 98,000 thousand people were identified for emergency humanitarian assistance for the period between January to June 2012. Seven woredas are labeled as hotspot priority number one by the region based on the severity of their food security problems. The lack of sweet potatoes, the major transitional crop during the ongoing lean season, is exacerbated by high staple food prices for market purchases. In Tembaro woreda, sweet potatoes cover 80 percent of food consumption during the *Belg* season and there has no supply on the markets since September 2011. Continued pasture and water shortages are likely to lead to additional household expenses. These high prices, poor availability of own-produced sweet potatoes, and additional water expenses and labor demands to gather water will exacerbate existing shortage of household food availability. Thus, food insecurity among the poor and very poor households are expected to deteriorate into Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the major sweet potato-growing zones during the April to June scenario period. The *Belg*-dominant cropping woredas of Segen zone will continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) level of food insecurity through June due to the much below-normal harvest last year.

Seasonal Calendar



Source: *FEWS NET Ethiopia*