

Following a below average Meher harvest, food access is poor in East and West Hararghe

East and West Hararghe Zones have deteriorated into Crisis (IPC Phase 3) following two consecutive, poorly-distributed rainy seasons and a well below average *Meher* harvest in October/November 2012. Food security outcomes are unlikely to significantly improve until June 2013 when consumption of green *Belg* crops begins. To prevent any further deterioration of food security, the scaling up of humanitarian assistance is necessary.

Normally, households in East and West Hararghe plant short-cycle *Belg* crops in March which are harvested in July. Long-cycle maize and sorghum are planted in March/April and additional short-cycle crops are planted in May/June; both types of crops are harvested in October/November. In 2012, a four to five week delay in the onset of the February to May *Belg* rains was followed by a significant June dry spell. As a result, short-cycle crops wilted and long-cycle maize and sorghum were not sown until June/July. The June to September *Kiremt* rains then withdrew in late August and early September, up to a month earlier than usual. The impact of late planting and early cessation of the rains reduced yields. The total *Meher* harvest of cereals and pulses was estimated to be 30 to 40 percent below the five-year average in these zones, but for some households, the harvest has been reported to be as low as 20 percent of average. Poor household food stocks and income from crop sales are therefore less than usual.

Reduced rainfall increased distances to water points both for human and livestock consumption. In some lowland areas, households sent their livestock to nearby river valleys as early as November and December, one to two months earlier than is typical. This unusual livestock migration from within the zones and from nearby pastoral areas has led to resource-based conflicts between Somali pastoralists and Oromo agropastoralists. Conflict has intensified over the last month primarily in Kumbi, Meyumuluke, Gursum, and Chinakssen Woredas in East Hararghe Zone.

As a result of poor production, most households are more market-dependent than usual. Households are increasingly relying on livestock sales to fund food purchases, but the number of small ruminants in the market exceeds the quantity demanded by buyers. Chat, a major cash crop, is being sold at prices higher than in recent years due to continued demand, but rainfed chat yields are low due to the poorly distributed rains, and the low volume of chat has reduced the income from sales. Casual labor income has also declined as less labor was necessary for harvesting and other local, agricultural tasks.

In January, over 400,000 residents in 26 woredas received an eighth round of emergency food distribution. Nutrition response and safety net programs are ongoing. Households have some food from assistance and other sources right now, but these will quickly be exhausted. With the forecast for the February to May *Belg* season still unclear and limited income from other sources, households will remain unable to purchase adequate quantities of food. Increased humanitarian assistance is necessary to prevent further loss of assets, facilitate the planting of crops in March/April, and prevent additional deterioration of food security in East and West Hararghe Zones.

Figure 1. Gathering water in Fedis Woreda, East Hararghe, February 2013



Source: FEWS NET Ethiopia

Figure 2. Location of East and West Hararghe Zones, Oromia Region



Source: FEWS NET