



GIEWS Update

Ethiopia

Severe food insecurity in southern Somali Region due to prolonged drought

Highlights:

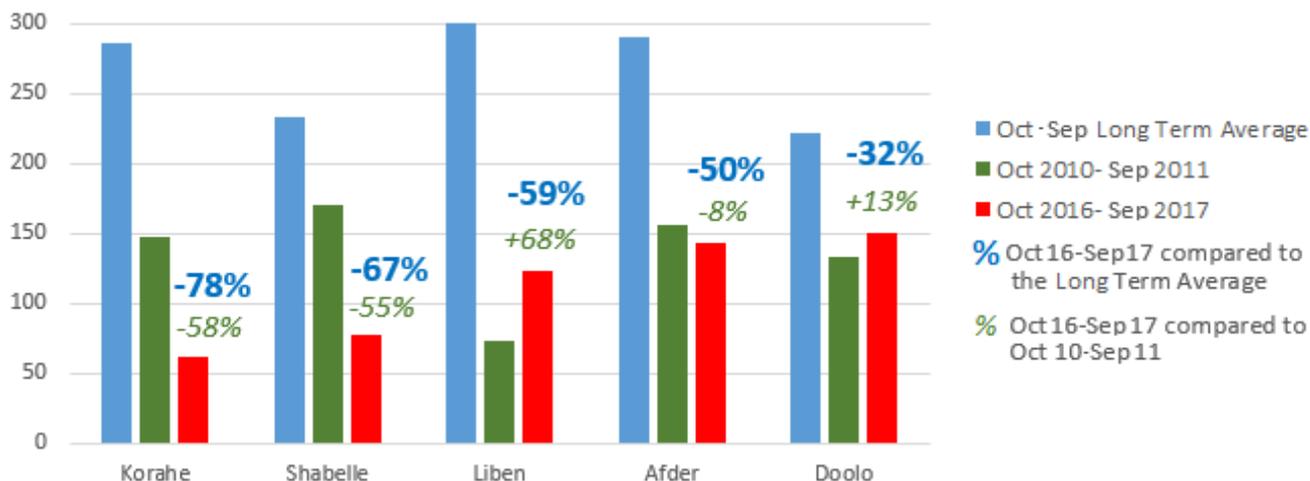
- Prevailing severe dry weather conditions since October 2016 affected rangelands and crops in southeastern Ethiopia, resulting in serious deterioration of food security conditions.
- A major area of concern is the Somali Region, where an estimated 2.3 million people require emergency livelihood and food assistance.
- The critical food security situation reflects a sharply-reduced availability of food, pasture and water, particularly in southern and southeastern pastoral districts.
- The incoming October-December rains are forecast at below-average levels, potentially resulting in a third consecutive poor rainy season.
- Recurrent climate-related shocks have undermined household resilience, and urgent support to agricultural livelihoods is needed.

Prolonged drought conditions have severely affected pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods in southeastern areas of Ethiopia. The food security situation in the country has sharply deteriorated in recent months, with the estimated number of food insecure people increasing from 5.6 million in December 2016 to 8.5 million in early August 2017. The area of major concern is the Somali Region, where the food insecure caseload is estimated at 2.3 million (42 percent of the region's population), the highest since 2011. The critical food security situation reflects a sharply reduced availability of food, pasture and water, particularly in southern districts. In the whole Somali Region, about 1.12 million people were estimated to be severely affected by the drought in June 2017, with more than 50 percent of the caseload residing in the southern Afder, Korahe and Doolo zones.

In late 2016, the October-to-December "deyr/hageya" rainy season largely failed, with Shabelle and Korahe zones receiving less than 5 percent of the long-term average cumulative seasonal precipitations and Afder, Liben, Dollo zones only receiving between 15 and 37 percent of the average. Subsequently, a harsh dry season characterized by higher-than-normal temperatures was followed by a poor "gu/genna" rainy season between March and May, which caused a further deterioration of rangeland conditions. Cumulative seasonal rainfall in these areas was up to 60 percent below average. The area most affected by the drought was Korahe Zone, which only received some rains in the last dekad of April and in the first dekad of May. Although late season rains had some positive effects on forage and water resources, improvements were short-lived as rainfall amounts diminished from

Figure 1: Ethiopia (Somali Region) - Estimated cumulative rainfall comparison in southern districts

Long-term average, October 2010-September 2011 and October 2016-September 2017



Source: FAO/GIEWS Earth Observation - www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation.

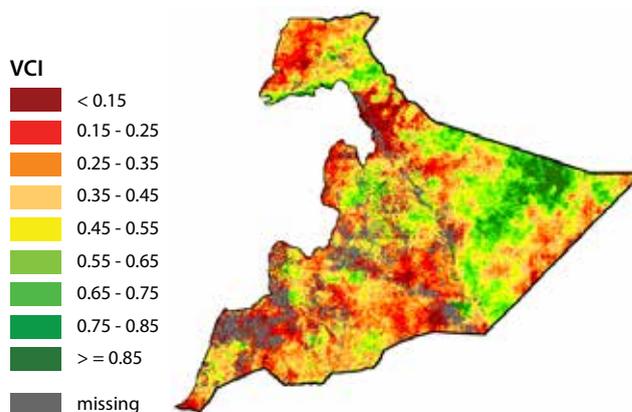
mid-May. Overall, cumulative rainfall between October 2016 and September 2017, which includes the 2016 October-to-December “deyr/hageya” and the 2017 March-May “gu/genna” rainy seasons, was between 30 and 80 percent below the long-term average. In most zones of the region, these poor rainfall amounts were even lower than the levels between October 2010 and September 2011, when a comparable sequence of failed October-December and poor March-May rains over the eastern Horn of Africa caused a regional food security emergency and resulted in famine in neighbouring Somalia. The cumulative impact of two consecutive below-average rainy seasons has resulted in widespread poor vegetation conditions, severely affecting crop growth and pasture availability.

In the cropping areas of the Shabelle Zone, plantings of maize and sorghum were very limited, while in neighbouring Afder and Liben zones almost no crops were planted. Similarly, in riverine areas of the Wabe Shabelle River in Shabelle and Afder zones, plantings were severely constrained by low river water levels. In addition, a large proportion of farmers opted to plant forage crops instead of food crops due to the severe feed shortages. As a result of the sharp reduction in plantings and low yields due to poor rains, production of “gu” season crops, harvested last July, was estimated at very low levels.

In pastoral areas, the prolonged drought has resulted in poor rangeland conditions and in severe pasture and water shortages. Some late season rains in May supported a limited regeneration of pasture, which lasted only 1-2 months. In June, about 55 percent of the wells in the whole region were reported to be dry with most of them located in the drought-affected southern zones. Due to the significant pasture and water stress, body conditions of cattle, sheep, goats and camels are

Figure 2: Ethiopia (Somali Region) - Vegetation Condition Index (VCI)

August 2017



Note: The Index calculation is based on METOP-AVHRR data.

Source: FAO/GIEWS Earth Observation - www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation.

very poor, with severe emaciation and large scale animal deaths reported. As some areas received relatively higher rainfall amounts, migration of animals towards areas of comparatively better pasture availability has been observed. These migration flows often resulted in additional stress on already weakened animals and the higher concentration of livestock in restricted areas has been conducive to the rapid spread of contagious diseases. Herd sizes were estimated in June at up to 70 percent below average because of high mortality rates and distress sales. Milk production was also at extremely low levels due to low conception and birth rates. As large numbers of breeding animals died due to the drought, the number of lactating animals will be reduced in

the next months, with a negative impact on milk production.

According to the latest Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) weather forecast, the 2017 October-December "deyr/hageya" rains are likely to be below normal over the southern zones of Somali Region, thus potentially resulting in a third consecutive poor rainy season. In this case, rangeland resources would recover only partially and harvests would be below average. A timely, effective and sustained support to the agricultural sector is urgently required as recurrent climate-related shocks have disrupted local agro-pastoral livelihoods and eroded the resilience capacity of a large number of households.

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Enquiries may be directed to:

Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS)

Trade and Markets Division (EST)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla

00153 Rome, Italy

E-mail: GIEWS1@fao.org

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