

Somalia's food insecurity eases but acute malnutrition remains high

1 February 2013, Nairobi/Washington – While the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Somalia has halved to 1.05 million since August 2012, malnutrition rates remain among the highest in the world, according to the latest data released today. Humanitarian assistance to protect livelihoods, reduce acute malnutrition, and help the most food insecure populations is needed over the next six months. The underlying vulnerability of poor households also requires actions to address the causes and reduce the risks of food and nutrition insecurity by increasing the resilience of existing livelihoods.

A new report by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) warned that although average rains in Somalia boosted food production and livestock farming, these gains could easily be reversed. Following two consecutive seasons of extreme drought, the UN declared famine in parts of southern Somalia in August 2011. During the 2011 *Gu* season, the harvest only reached an estimated 26 percent of average, and 4 million people required humanitarian assistance.

Food security conditions improve

The recent improvements in food security are attributed to continued humanitarian interventions, improving food stocks at the household and market levels from the ongoing 2013 *Deyr* harvest, sustained high livestock prices, and improved milk availability during the October to December *Deyr* rainy season across many pastoral areas of Somalia. Following the famine declaration in 2011, sustained humanitarian response and multiple seasons of below average to good rainfall in most parts of the country increased agricultural and livestock production and household purchasing power.

The average October to December *Deyr* rains boosted maize and sorghum production, yielding what may be the largest cereal harvest in nearly ten years. Substantial cash crop production also occurred as some farmers shifted from cereals to more profitable sesame. The recent multi-agency assessment found high production in Bay Region, which contributes more than half of Somalia's sorghum production, as well as in Lower and Middle Shabelle Regions. However, a few areas in the South are likely to have a poor harvest in January and February due to late and erratic *Deyr* rainfall.

Areas still in crisis

Most areas of Somalia are currently classified as **Stressed** (IPC Phase 2), where the poor have minimally adequate food consumption, cannot afford essential non-food expenditures, and are unable to maintain their livelihoods. In several areas, food insecurity is more severe:

- With poor rains in the northwestern coastal area of the Gulf of Aden since 2010, pastoralists are struggling with poor pasture conditions, low water availability, and diminished self-employment opportunities. The ongoing December to February *Hays* rainy season has not significantly improved these conditions so far. Many households, unable to meet their food needs, are classified in **Crisis** (IPC Phase 3).
- Sheep pastoralists in the coastal areas of Central Somalia have very small herds. The recent season did little to improve grazing areas. These areas remain classified at **Crisis** (IPC Phase 3).
- Following maize crop losses due to multiple dry spells during the October to December *Deyr* rains, households in agropastoral areas of Jamame District in Lower Juba Region also are in **Crisis** (IPC Phase 3). Contributing factors include: the lack of a current harvest, poor stocks from previous harvests, and low and declining holdings of livestock to sell for food.
- Destitute pastoralist throughout the country continue to struggle living in deplorable conditions with limited access to food and other basic needs. However, in the coastal areas of Central, some of the destitute pastoralists have started to shift back into pastoralism. These groups are classified in **Emergency** (IPC Phase 4).
- The United Nations estimates that 1.1 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Somalia. An estimated 615,000 of the IDPs are in food security crisis. Most of the major IDP settlements are in **Emergency** (IPC Phase 4).

In total, 1.05 million in acute food insecurity represents about 14 percent of the total population. At the height of the famine, 4 million people, or nearly half of the Somali population, were in food security crisis.

Malnutrition

An estimated 215,000 children under-five years of age are acutely malnourished out of which at least 45,000 are severely malnourished. Two-thirds of these children are in the conflict-stricken Southern Regions. Although nutritional situation has slightly improved in the country, with one in seven children acutely malnourished, and one in thirty-three severely malnourished, the situation remains one of the worst in the world. With reduced access to basic services, such as health care and clean water, the ability for these children to reach their potential is severely restricted.

Outlook

Over the coming months, most of Somalia will be in the *Jilaal* dry season. The productivity of livestock will seasonally decrease. While no major changes in food security classification are expected between now and June, livelihoods in Somalia remain at risk to a wide variety of hazards. Early forecasts are that the April to June *Gu* rains will be normal to below normal. A normal or near normal *Gu* would allow households to continue meeting their food needs, recover from previous crises, and build assets. However, in case of a poor season an increase in numbers of households in food security crisis would be expected.

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Somali Acute Food Insecurity Situation Overview Rural and Urban and IDP Populations: February 1, 2013

