GIEWS Country Brief
Kenya

Reference Date: 12-May-2020

FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Abundant rains in March and April benefited establishment and development of 2020 “long-rains” crops
- Severe desert locust outbreak affecting country, with crop losses expected mainly in southeastern marginal agriculture areas
- Reduced cereal output obtained in 2019 due to unfavourable weather conditions
- Above-average rangeland conditions benefiting livestock, despite localized pasture losses due to locusts
- Prices of maize declined in March, but remained at high levels due to tight supplies
- Number of severely food insecure people currently estimated at 980,000, markedly lower than in 2019, following two consecutive favourable rainy seasons benefiting livestock productivity

Abundant rains benefited establishment and development of 2020 “long-rains” crops

In the major uni-modal rainfall growing areas of Central, Rift Valley and Western provinces, planting of the 2020 “long-rains” crops, for harvest from October, is almost complete. Seasonal rains had a timely onset in mid-February and have been characterized so far by well above-average amounts. In high potential cropping areas of the southwestern “maize basket” (Bungoma, Lugari, Kericho, Nakuru, Nandi North, Nandi South, Trans Nzoia and Uasin Gishu counties), cumulative rainfall between February and late April were between 70 percent and more than 100 percent above the long-term average. In bi-modal rainfall southeastern and coastal areas, where crops will be harvested from July, after a timely onset in early March, rains in March and April were also well above the average. The abundant precipitation received across all growing areas benefited crop planting and germination, and overall vegetation conditions are currently good (see ASI map for cropland).

The heavy rains triggered floods and landslides in April, which resulted in the loss of lives, population displacements and localized damage to crops. The worst affected areas include southwestern West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet, Kisumu, Homa Bay, Kakamega, Siaya and Bomet counties, central Kirinyaga and Nairobi counties, and eastern Tana River, Garissa and Kilifi counties.
According to the latest Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) weather forecast, the remainder of the March-May rainy season is likely to be characterized by above-average precipitations in western areas and average to above-average rains over eastern areas, with a favourable impact on yields.

Since December 2019, the country is affected by a severe desert locust outbreak, the worst in 70 years. Locust swarms are currently present in 28 counties, mainly in central and northern agro-pastoral and pastoral areas, while infestation levels in southwestern key cropping areas are low. Large-scale control operations carried out by the Government with the support of FAO are mitigating the impact of locusts on crops. As a result, only localized production shortfalls are expected, mainly in southeastern marginal cropping areas of Embu (Mbeere), Tharaka Nithi, Meru North and Kitui counties.

Reduced 2019 cereal output due to unfavourable weather conditions

In bi-modal southeastern and coastal marginal agricultural areas, harvesting of the secondary 2018/19 “short-rains” season crops, accounting for about 20 percent of the annual cereal production, was concluded in mid-March. The October-December rainy season was characterized by exceptionally abundant rainfall amounts, among the highest of the past four decades, which boosted cereal yields, and the maize output is estimated at about 25 percent above the average of the previous five years. However, the torrential rains resulted in floods, which caused waterlogging and damage to standing crops, especially in Embu, Kilifi and Kwale counties, where the maize output was estimated at 10, 17 and 18 percent below average, respectively. Losses due to locusts have been minimal, as most crops had already been harvested when the insects reached these areas.

Earlier in the year, the main “long-rains” crops were affected by erratic rains, especially in southeastern areas, where severe early season dryness resulted in widespread germination failures and maize production is estimated at about 50-60 percent below average.

As a result, aggregate cereal production in 2019 is estimated at about 4 million tonnes, about 17 percent less than the previous year and 5 percent below the average of the previous five years.

Above-average rangeland conditions benefiting livestock despite localized pasture losses due to locusts

In northern and northeastern pastoral areas, abundant rains both during the October-December 2019 “short-rains” season and so far during the March-May 2020 “long-rains” season resulted in a significant improvement of vegetation conditions, which are currently well above average (see ASI map for grassland). According to the Government’s National Drought Management Authority, open water sources (pans, dams, rock catchments) were estimated to be at 50 to 80 percent of their capacity by the end of March and the well above-average rainfall amounts received in April are likely to have recharged them to a near-full capacity. Due to the lasting impact of the abundant October-December 2019 “short-rains”, trekking distances to watering points from grazing fields did not increase significantly during the January-February dry season and, in March 2020,
they were between 35 and 75 percent below average in most pastoral areas. Livestock body conditions and milk production were reported to be above average as of end-March and have likely further improved as abundant rains continued in April.

So far, the losses of pasture due to the current desert locust outbreak have been localized, as the ongoing control measures and the regeneration of rangeland resources driven by abundant seasonal rains prevented widespread damages. However, significant losses are reported in some areas. For example, in Mandera South and West sub-counties of Mandera County and in North Horr and Laisamis sub-counties of Marsabit County, they are estimated at about 25-30 percent.

Maize prices at high levels despite declines in March

Prices of maize decreased by 10-15 percent in March in the markets located in key producing areas and in large urban centres including the capital, Nairobi, as newly harvested “short-rains” crops increased supplies. However, prices in March remained up to 70 percent higher than one year earlier due to tight domestic availabilities following the reduced 2019 cereal output.

In northern and eastern pastoral areas, prices of livestock increased in late 2019 with the abundant October-December “short-rains” and remained mostly stable during the January-February 2020 dry season. In Turkana, Marsabit and Garissa counties, for example, prices of goats increased by 15-35 percent between October 2019 and March 2020, when they were 30-60 percent higher than one year earlier. In these areas, prices of maize slightly declined in March with the “short-rains” harvest, when they were only slightly above their year-earlier levels.

As a result of increasing livestock prices and declining cereal prices, the terms of trade for pastoralists markedly improved in northern and eastern areas over the last six months, increasing by 30-60 percent between October 2019 and March 2020, when they were well above their year-earlier levels. For example, in Marsabit County, the equivalent in maize of a medium-sized goat increased from 64 kg in October 2019 to 106 kg in March 2020, when it was more than 30 percent higher than one year earlier.

Improving food security situation in agro-pastoral and pastoral areas

According to the results of the latest IPC analysis, about 980 000 people are estimated to be severely food insecure (IPC Phase 3: “Crisis” and Phase 4: “Emergency”) in the period April-July 2020. This figure, which includes 872 000 people in IPC Phase 3 and 112 500 million people in IPC Phase 4, is about 25 percent lower than the estimate of 1.3 million in the period February-March 2020 and more than 60 percent lower than the estimate of 2.6 million in mid-2019. The substantial improvement of the food security situation is mainly the result of improved livestock productivity in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas due favourable rains during the last two consecutive seasons. The restrictive measures introduced in March to curb the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak have affected households’ income, especially in the informal sector in urban areas, but the implementation of social protection measures is expected to mitigate their negative impact.
COVID-19 and measures adopted by the Government

The Government introduced, in March and April 2020, several precautionary measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- A nationwide curfew, from 19:00 to 05:00, except for essential service workers.
- The obligation for all citizens to stay indoors unless travel is essential.
- The prohibition of public gatherings.
- The suspension of all international flights, except for cargo planes.
- The closure of the land border with Uganda, except for cargo trucks.
- The prohibition of all movement in and out of the Nairobi metropolitan area and Mombasa, Kilifi, Kwale, and Mandera counties, except for providers of essential services.
- The restriction of vehicle movement in and out of Garissa County.
- The closure of all schools and universities.
- Work-at-home orders for public and private sector workers.

To mitigate the economic impact of these measures, especially on the vulnerable households, the Government is scaling up social protection and assistance programmes as well as implementing various fiscal measures, including:

- A suspension of income tax for low-wage workers earning a monthly income of up to KES 24,000 (USD 224).
- A reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT) on all goods and services from 16 to 14 percent.
- The allocation of KES 10 billion to the elderly, orphans and other vulnerable groups through cash transfers to compensate income losses.

To bolster cereal availabilities during the pandemic, the Government allowed private traders to import about 4 million 90 kg bags of maize from outside the East African Community with an import duty reduced from 50 percent to 14 percent for white maize and 10 percent for yellow maize.