Food insecurity sharply deteriorating due to prolonged drought conditions

Poor 2018 October-December “Deyr” rains, followed by a harsh January-March 2019 “Jilaal” dry season and by drought conditions during April and early May, resulted in significant crop and livestock production shortfalls. The insufficient domestic availabilities were compounded by a reduction in humanitarian assistance since early 2019, while food access has been severely affected in recent months by declining employment opportunities and low wage rates and by the escalation of conflict. In addition, the drought has induced widespread displacements, with nearly 45,000 individuals fleeing in 2019 from rural areas to urban centres. As a result, the food security situation is sharply deteriorating and, according to the results of the latest multi-agency assessment, about 2.2 million people are estimated to be severely food insecure (IPC Phase 3: “Crisis” and IPC Phase 4: “Emergency”) between July and September 2019. This figure represents almost 18 percent of the total population and is more than 40 percent higher than the estimate of food insecure people at the beginning of 2019. The areas with the highest levels of food insecurity are central Galgadud and Mudug regions and northern Nugal, Bari, Sool, Sanag, Awdal and Woqooyi Galbeed regions, where IPC Phase 4: “Emergency” levels are expected to prevail.

The international community is scaling up its response to prevent that the already alarming humanitarian situation could further deteriorate. In the framework of the 2019 Drought Response Plan, launched on 20 May, the Food Security Cluster aims to assist 4.5 million beneficiaries, between June and
December 2019, with a total requirement of USD 350 million, by providing:

- Immediate life-saving food assistance through unconditional in-kind and cash-based transfers in drought-affected areas.
- Emergency livestock asset protection through supplementary feeding, basic veterinary care and water trucking for animals.
- Emergency agricultural support to farmers through quality drought-tolerant seed varieties, tools, irrigation and cultivation services.
- Activities aimed to enhance household resilience to new shocks including infrastructure rehabilitation and training to increase household income.

Unfavourable prospects for upcoming 2019 “Gu” season harvest

In southern key cropping areas, the establishment and development of “Gu” (April-June) season crops, to be harvested in July 2019 and accounting for about 60 percent of the country’s total annual cereal output, have been severely impacted by drought conditions prevailing in April and early May. The key maize producing Lower Shabelle Region has received only some scattered, well below-average rains in late April and early May. Heavy downpours in mid-May marginally improved vegetation conditions that remain very poor and, according to FAO’s Agricultural Stress Index (ASI), severe drought is currently affecting between 55 and 85 percent of the cropland. In the “sorghum belt” of Bay Region and eastern areas of neighbouring Gede and Middle Juba regions, rains started in the third dekad of April with a delay of more than two weeks and cumulative seasonal precipitations have been so far 40-60 percent below average. Here, drought is now affecting 25-85 percent of the cropland in most areas. Severe dryness prevailed also in other cropping areas, including the “cowpea belt” in Middle Shabelle, Galgadud and Mudug regions. Very low water levels in the Shabelle and Juba rivers affected the irrigation of the maize crops in riverine areas. As of late April, proper germination was reported to have occurred only in less than one-third of the area planted to cereals. Precipitations in April and early May are crucial for the performance of the “Gu” crops as, in southern Somalia, they account for more than 50 percent of the cumulative seasonal rains. The heavy rains received in mid-May and rainfall forecasts, point to near-average to average precipitations for the remainder of the season are, therefore, not expected to significantly improve crop prospects. According to the FAO Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) - Somalia and FEWS NET, the aggregate “Gu” output is forecast to be 40-50 percent below average. It would be the second consecutive poor harvest as the 2018/19 “Deyr” harvest, gathered last January, was more than 20 percent below average due to inadequate precipitations.

Severe pasture and water shortages in pastoral areas affecting livestock conditions

The impact of the poor 2018 October-December “Deyr” rains, followed by a harsh January-March 2019 “Jilaal” dry season and by severe dryness during April and early May, affected southern agro-pastoral areas and central-northern pastoral areas. Most of these regions remained almost completely dry until mid-May. As a result, rangeland conditions were very poor, with widespread pasture and water shortages, leading to a sharp decline in livestock body conditions. In central and northern regions, severe...
animal emaciation prevails and drought-induced livestock diseases, abortions and deaths were reported in central Galgadud and in northern Bari and Sanaag regions. In these areas, herders that were unable to provide feed and water for their animals opted to cull offspring in order to save milk-producing females. The recent livestock deaths are of particular concern as herd sizes are already at well below-average levels due to the massive losses induced by the 2016/17 drought. Heavy late season precipitations received in the second dekad of May had some positive impacts on rangeland conditions, but these limited improvements will be short-lived as seasonal rains usually subside in late May.

**Significant food access constraints despite generally low cereal prices**

Prices of locally produced sorghum and maize increased in southern key markets, including the capital, Mogadishu, by 15-25 percent between January and April. The increase was driven mainly by the early depletion of stocks from the reduced “Deyr” output and by concerns over the performance of the upcoming “Gu” harvest. Despite the recent increases, cereal prices remained around their year-earlier levels in several markets, as stable supplies from neighbouring Ethiopia limited the upward pressure. However, poor households are facing significant food access constraints as declining employment opportunities and low wage rates in crop-producing areas are affecting purchasing power. In addition, extremely high prices of water are limiting other expenses, including purchases of food.

In the first months of 2019, prices of livestock increased in most markets, mainly due to reduced market supplies, as the numbers of saleable animals with good body conditions are very low. In Galkayo, one of the main livestock markets in the Horn of Africa, prices of goats increased by about 15 percent between January and April. Terms of trade for pastoralists remained mostly stable in recent months as the rates of increase of livestock prices were similar to those of cereal prices. However, this livelihood activity is not viable, as pastoralists have to repopulate their herds.

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