

ETHIOPIA Food Security Alert

December 4, 2015

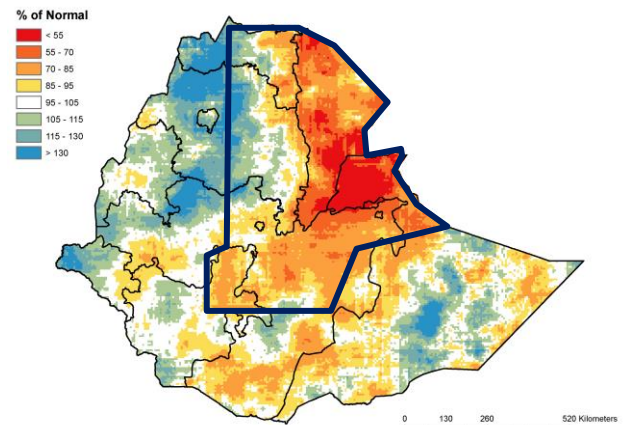
Food security emergency in central/eastern Ethiopia follows worst drought in more than 50 years

Following the worst drought in more than 50 years, a major food security emergency is ongoing in central and eastern Ethiopia. Early estimates indicate that at least 15 million people will face severe acute food insecurity and require assistance in 2016, making Ethiopia the country with the largest acutely food insecure population in the world.ⁱ Already, significant populations in northern Somali region and southern Afar are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), meaning that they are unable to access adequate food for survival and face an increased risk of malnutrition and mortality. **Sustained, large-scale, multi-sectoral emergency assistance is required immediately to save lives and livelihoods.**

Rainfall in central and eastern Ethiopia was very poor during 2015, largely due to the ongoing El Niño. February to May *Belg/Diraac/Sugum* rains were erratic and well below average (Figure 1). The subsequent June to September *Kiremt/Karan/Karma* rains started late and were also significantly below average. (Figure 2). An analysis of two rainfall datasets, CenTrends (1960-2014) and CHIRPS (1981-2015), indicates that central/eastern Ethiopia received an average of 480mm of rain between March and September, the lowest level in more than 50 years (Figure 3). This low rainfall, in combination with the highest average March to September temperatures since 1960 has resulted in extremely dry soil conditions and limited water availability. The areas worst-affected by the drought include northern pastoral areas of Afar Region and Sitti Zone, eastern and central Oromia, *Belg*-producing highlands, and northern Amhara/central Tigray (Figure 4). Other affected areas include Eastern Amhara and eastern Tigray, the Amhara-Abay lowlands, and the lowlands of SNNPR.

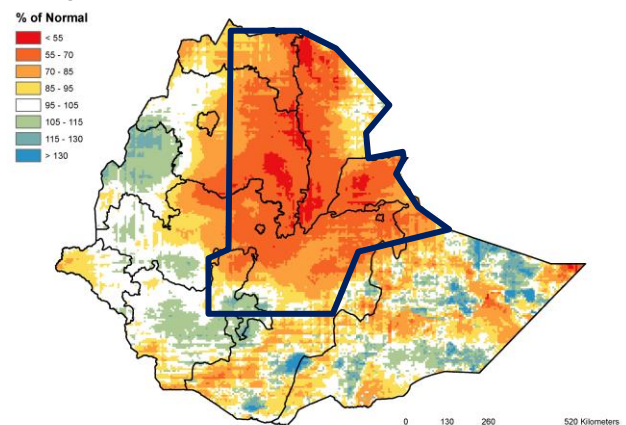
The drought has resulted in severe water shortages and significant crop losses. In some areas, high levels of livestock mortality have occurred and livestock prices have dropped substantially. In northern pastoral areas milk is largely unavailable due to atypical livestock migration and reduced herd sizes. Given the impact of the drought on food security, lean seasons across central and eastern Ethiopia will start early and be much more severe than usual. A significant further increase in the prevalence of acute malnutrition is expected. In the absence of timely and adequate humanitarian assistance, especially food assistance and nutrition/health support, excess mortality is also likely, especially among children. However, it is unlikely to reach levels seen during the mid-1980's due to improved early warning and preparedness, the absence of conflict, and the size of existing food security and nutrition programming.

Figure 1. Feb-May 2015 rainfall as a % of the 1981-2014 average



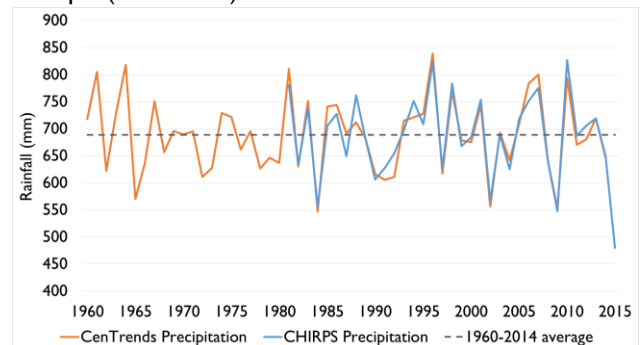
Source: USGS/CHIRPS

Figure 2. Jun-Sep 2015 rainfall as a % of the 1981-2014 average



Source: USGS/CHIRPS

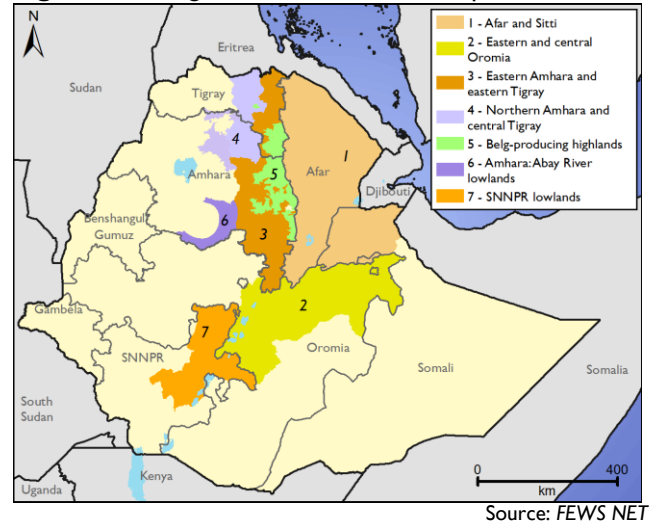
Figure 3. March to September rainfall in central/eastern* Ethiopia (1960-2015)



*Defined as the area within the blue outline in Figures 1 and 2
Source: FEWS NET/USGS, Florida State University

Nonetheless, assistance needs during 2016 are expected to reach their highest levels in at least 12 years. Early estimates by the Ethiopia Humanitarian Country Team suggest that at least 15 million people will require food assistance next year. This includes 8 million people who will receive transfers through the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) and an additional 7 million drought-affected people who will require emergency food assistance. Needs could increase further as the full impact of the drought becomes clearer and if rains are below-average during the first half of 2016. Needs will be highest between May and September 2016, the peak lean season in the country's most densely populated areas. However, significant needs exist now, and elevated needs are likely to persist beyond next September given the impacts of the drought on livelihoods and asset holding. In addition to food needs, large-scale assistance will be required across a range of other sectors including nutrition, health, water and sanitation, and livelihoods. These needs are above and beyond what the government and donors have already committed.

Figure 4. Drought-affected areas of Ethiopia



Northern Pastoral Areas

In northern pastoral areas, little pasture, forage, or water is available. More than 200,000 livestock have died in southern Afar and Somali region's Sitti zone. More than 13,000 households have lost all livestock and migrated to informal camps in Sitti zone. The condition of surviving livestock is poor, and almost no milk is available for consumption or sale. Livestock prices have dropped sharply and in the hardest hit areas, livestock trade has been significantly disrupted. The loss of livestock assets and declining livestock to cereal terms of trade have significantly limited households' ability to access food; severe water shortages are also ongoing. Despite ongoing humanitarian assistance, 2015 admissions of severely acutely malnourished children to feeding programs in Afar Region have been 40 percent above the 2011-14 average. As a result, these areas are already in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). Food security is expected to deteriorate further over the coming months as the October to March dry season progresses. A normal start of rainfall in March/April would alleviate water shortages but not the high levels of food insecurity, which are likely to persist through much of 2016.

Eastern agricultural and agropastoral areas

In the *Belg*-producing highlands, June/July *Belg* harvests failed. October to December *Meher* harvests in these areas, as well as in northern Amhara, central Tigray, and eastern and central Oromia, are late due to repeated replanting. Recent assessments in Wag Himra, West Haraghe, and North Wollo indicated that, on average, zonal level harvests would be 25 percent below a typical year. In 10 of the 33 *woredas* visited during these assessments, harvests were estimated to be more than 70 percent below typical levels. The worst-affected households will harvest no crops. Livestock conditions are also poor and income from livestock sales, crop sales, and agricultural labor are already well below average. Currently, households in these areas are moderately better off than those in northern pastoral areas due to ongoing though meager, harvests, somewhat better livestock body conditions, and less severe water shortages. Nonetheless, poor households, unable to afford key expenditures, are selling important assets like livestock, at low prices, and are beginning to face food consumption deficits. Admissions of severely acutely malnourished children to feeding programs in 2015 are up 10 percent in Amhara and up 50 percent in Oromia compared to the recent four-year average. In many of these areas, food security is likely to deteriorate to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) over the coming months, as already limited food stocks and asset holdings are exhausted and households face substantial difficulty meeting their basic survival needs.

Other areas of concern

Drought-affected households in a number of other areas are also likely to face atypically severe food insecurity over the coming year, with large populations in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and an increased risk of falling into Emergency (IPC Phase 4). These include: the Abay lowlands of Amhara, eastern Amhara, eastern Tigray, and the lowlands of SNNPR (Figure 4).

¹ The Government of Ethiopia's Humanitarian Requirements Document (HRD), which will provide updated information on 2016 assistance needs, is expected to be released by mid-December.