

PRESS RELEASE

Humanitarian Emergency will Continue in Southern Somalia

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Although the *Gu* rainy season is not yet complete, the Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia (FAO/FSAU), together with FEWS NET Somalia, predicts that conditions of Humanitarian Emergency in Southern Somalia will continue from July through December 2006. Several Central and Northern Regions continue to face stressed conditions and will be in an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis. Comprehensive field assessments will be conducted later this month and to determine levels of severity for specific areas, and generate new estimates of populations in crisis. However, it is evident at this stage that urgent humanitarian needs will continue.

Fortunately the direst prediction that famine conditions were possible from last January to June has not come true. This is due to the deep social support systems of Somali people, the absence of an outbreak of widespread conflict, and humanitarian relief operations providing food, cash, water, health care, veterinary, and other basic services. Malnutrition rates throughout southern Somalia, already very high, have increased further to over 20% Global Acute Malnutrition in many areas (see May FSAU Nutrition Update for more details). As well, very high levels of asset loss (cattle deaths of 50% are reported in Gedo Region) and financial indebtedness ensure that the affects of the crisis will continue into the next season, and full recovery could take several years.

The current *Gu* long rainy season is almost complete, with patchy results. While initially abnormally heavy, there are large areas in Gedo, Bakol, and Hiran that will have a below normal season; as well as parts of Bay, Lower Shabelle, the Jubas, Galgadud, Toghdeer, Sool, Sanaag, and Bari.

The overall cereal crop harvest is projected to be below normal this season due to poor rains in some key cropping areas, outbreaks of army worm, localized flooding, and insufficient agricultural inputs. This could lead to the third consecutive year of below normal cereal production, which means that families do not have previous cereal stocks to rely on.

While rangeland and livestock body conditions are improving in many areas of the South, there will be minimal cattle calving until the next *Deyr* rainy season (October-December) due to emaciated body conditions and abortions during the past several months, leading to less milk availability for consumption and sale. Camels, however, are generally in good condition and have had normal calving rates. A recent report by ICRC indicates that it could take several years for pastoralists to recover their herds following losses during the past six months.

Food access and supply will continue to be very stressed through December. Market prices of cereals are at their highest levels in over six years in many areas. The supply of imported food continues to be disrupted by conflict in Mogadishu and piracy. Recent deliveries of food assistance were also constrained by poor road access due to heavy rainfalls and floods.

The presence and intensity of conflict will be a key factor that will determine the severity of the humanitarian situation. If the current outbreak of conflict in Mogadishu (which has already led to several hundred deaths and thousands of displaced persons) is not resolved quickly, in addition to wreaking havoc within Mogadishu, it will continue to disrupt market supplies throughout Southern Somalia. Already commodity prices are up by 20-30% due to this disruption, and many fear that the conflict could spread to other areas of the South. Existing internally displaced persons (IDPs) in particular have suffered from the Mogadishu conflict, and as such contingency for large numbers of new displaced people and protection programmes is necessary.

Due to the sustained high levels of malnutrition, high levels of asset loss, and predicted below normal cereal harvest, there is a need for continued humanitarian relief in many areas of the South until the next *Deyr* rainy season. Concurrently, there needs to be increased attention to providing livelihood support for recovery in the form of livestock programmes, cash assistance, and agricultural rehabilitation in the South, and parts of Central and Northern Regions. It is equally critical for all stakeholders to use this crisis as an opportunity to address underlying causes such as environmental degradation, the economic drain of *Khat* consumption, and on-going civil insecurity.

"The resilience of the Somali people is truly admirable, but consecutive shocks combined with prolonged lack of investment in basic development continue to knock their well-being lower and lower", says Nicholas Haan, UN FAO Chief Technical Advisor to the FSAU. "At what point will the Somali people decide and be able to turn this tragic downward spiral around?"

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