

For Immediate Release

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Early impact of poor rains seen in Somalia

NAIROBI, November 26 - Somalia has started experiencing the impact of *La Niña*, a meteorological phenomenon that results into drier than normal conditions in the Horn of Africa nation, reports indicate.

The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis unit (FSNAU), managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Somalia, reports that the current short rainy season is characterized by unusually low rainfall and is already negatively affecting the food security situation. Currently, 2 million Somalis depend on humanitarian aid.

“We are very concerned that the initial early warning for below normal short rains we gave in August, has now transpired, which will have a negative impact on the gains earlier this year, following the above normal long rains” said Grainne Moloney, FSNAU’s Chief Technical Advisor.

Below average rainfall in Bay, Shabelle, Gedo, Bakool and Hiran regions in southern Somalia has already led to early crop failure with planted seeds not germinating in some areas. Farmers are already predicting low cereal production. For pastoralists, grazing conditions are also poor throughout central Somalia and in Bari, Sool and Sanaag regions in northern areas, with many water sources already drying up. This has led to abnormal out migration of livestock to areas which received better rainfall, such as the border areas of Ethiopia.

Though *La Niña* has been predicted in the wider east and horn of Africa region, semi-arid Somalia, mired in conflict since 1991, is likely to be hardest hit. FSNAU closely monitors rainfall performance and distribution in Somalia and its impact on crop, pasture, water and livestock conditions and ultimately on the nutritional status of children.

FSNAU has a unique network of 30 specialists all over Somalia whose job is to gather and analyse essential food security, livelihood and nutrition data that informs both emergency and development interventions.

Threatening gains

These events come at the backdrop of the last long rainy season of *Gu* – from April to June 2010– which was characterized by above normal rainfall, boosting production of crops, and improving livestock conditions.

Most agricultural and agro-pastoral areas in southern Somalia are rain-fed and traditionally used for subsistence farming, while northern and central pastoral and agro-pastoral communities heavily depend on rainfall for livestock and crop production. According to the initial reports, production of sorghum, a staple crop for Somalis in the southern regions, is likely to be below normal, which will lead to a shortage of supply and consequent increase in local prices. Starting mid December, FSNAU will carry out a comprehensive country-wide assessment to examine the impact of the rain shortfall, with the results expected in January 2011.

“Although it is too early to know the full impact of the below normal rains, now is the time to build on the gains of the last season and support farmers and pastoralists to maintain their stocks with livelihood support interventions, which can mitigate the situation to some extent,” said Moloney.

Moloney said contingency planning for water shortages, both for humans and livestock, and the subsequent impact of this shortage, is essential to prevent a further deterioration of Somalia’s ongoing humanitarian crisis.

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Funding Agencies