

## Somalia Food Security Alert

May 14, 2008

*Issued in collaboration with FAO/Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU)*

### Rising food prices, deepening drought push 2.6 million into crisis

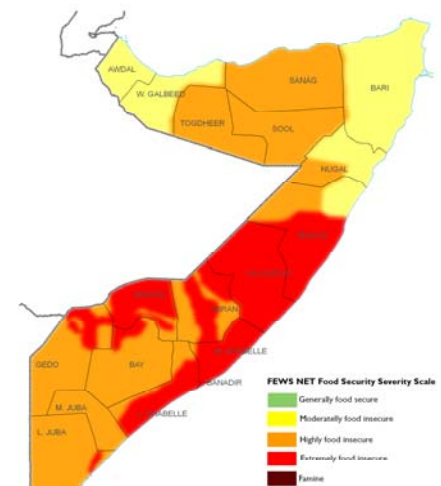
Rapidly increasing food prices and a delayed and poor start of seasonal *gu* rains (mid-April to June) that is resulting in a deepening drought have increased the estimated number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Somalia by June 2008 to over 2.6 million. This figure could rise to as high as 3.5 million by late 2008 if high inflation, drought, and civil insecurity continue. The increased number of people in need of assistance includes an additional 600,000 urban poor who now face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis, as well as pastoralists and internally displaced people from Mogadishu. Continued humanitarian interventions targeting these populations are necessary, as is contingency planning for potential further increases in needs.

An April 2008 assessment conducted by FSAU Somalia and FEWS NET found that 600,000 urban poor (20 percent of the total urban population) living in Somalia's main towns and rural settlements are now highly food insecure (Figure 1) as they struggle to cope with rapidly increasing prices for food and other basic commodities. Prices for commercially imported and locally produced cereals have increased by 110 to 375 percent in the last year, and are now at record levels that are two to three times higher than the five-year average price for this time of year. The urban poor are struggling to cover their basic needs, as the cost of a minimum food basket is now more than double what it was last year at this time. Coping strategies adopted by food insecure urban populations include switching to lower quality cereals and skipping meals.

Sixty percent of Somalia's cereal needs are imported in a normal year. However, record high international food prices, combined with the sharp devaluation (more than 100 percent in the last 15 months) of the Somali Shilling, has pushed prices for imported cereals in Somalia to record highs and beyond the reach of most poor urban households. These households depend on locally produced cereals as an affordable alternative to imports, but, as fewer households can now afford imported cereals, demand for and prices of local cereals have also risen. In many regions, the price of sorghum – a locally produced food that is a staple for poor households and which normally costs only a fraction of the price of imported rice – is already as high as imported rice prices in normal times. In addition, the delayed start of and poor prospects for the *gu* rains indicate that the country may likely experience another season of below-normal cereal production. As the *gu* season is the main growing season for Somalia, normally contributing about 75 percent of the country's annual cereal production, a poor *gu* season will likely lead to shortages of and further price increases for locally produced cereals.

The onset of the *gu* rains was delayed by more than two weeks in many regions of Somalia – including in the key cropping areas in the Shabelle Valley, Hiran, and the central regions – and so far those rains that have fallen have been below normal. Households in these regions face a deepening water crisis, and serious shortages of pasture for livestock. Water trucking continues in these regions, and unusual movements of people and livestock toward the few functioning boreholes have been observed. Rains have also been erratic in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, leading to below-normal river levels, which will limit the potential for downstream irrigation activities in the Shabelle Valley in the coming weeks.

**Figure 1.** Current estimated food security conditions (April-June 2008)



Source: FEWS NET and FSAU