

Expanding famine across southern Somalia

NAIROBI JULY 20, 2011 – Evidence of severely reduced food access, acute malnutrition, and crude mortality indicates that **a famine is currently ongoing in two areas of southern Somalia: the Bakool agropastoral livelihood zones and all areas of Lower Shabelle**. A humanitarian emergency currently exists across all other regions of the south, and current humanitarian response is inadequate to meet emergency needs. As a result, **famine is expected to spread across all regions of the south in the coming 1-2 months**. An immediate, large-scale, and comprehensive response is needed and tens of thousands of lives can be saved, but the window of opportunity to do so is extremely limited. Preliminary estimates are that 3.7 million people are in crisis nationwide; among these 3.2 million people need immediate, lifesaving assistance (2.8 million in the south). Assistance needs will remain extremely high through at least December 2011.

The current crisis in southern Somalia is driven by a combination of factors. The total failure of the October-December *Deyr* rains (secondary season) and the poor performance of the April-June *Gu* rains (primary season) have resulted in crop failure, reduced labor demand, poor livestock body conditions, and excess animal mortality. The resulting decline in cereal availability and ongoing trade restrictions have subsequently pushed local cereal prices to record levels and substantially reduced household purchasing power in all livelihood zones. Large-scale displacement and significant limitations on humanitarian access have further exacerbated the situation.

Based on the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) scale, famine exists when at least 20 percent of the population has extremely limited access to basic food requirements, global acute malnutrition exceeds 30 percent, and the death rate exceeds 2/10,000/day for the entire population. In regard to the current situation:

- Local cereal prices across the south are far above average, more than 2 to 3 times 2010 prices in some areas, and continue to rise. As a result, both livestock to cereal and wage to cereal terms of trade have deteriorated substantially. Across all livelihoods, poor households (~30 percent of the population) are unable to meet basic food needs and have limited ability to cope with these food deficits.
- During July, FSNAU conducted 17 representative nutrition and mortality surveys across southern Somalia; results are available for 11 surveys. The prevalence of acute malnutrition exceeds 20 percent in all areas and is higher than 38 percent (with severe acute malnutrition higher than 14 percent) in 9 of the 11 survey areas. The highest recorded levels of acute malnutrition are in Bay, Bakool, and Gedo (agropastoral) where the GAM prevalence exceeds 50 percent. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has verified these findings.
- Population-wide death rates are above the famine threshold (2/10,000/day) in two areas (Bakool agropastoral, and all areas of Lower Shabelle) and are elevated across the south. Under-5 death rates are higher than 4/10,000/day in all areas of the south where data is available, peaking at 13-20/10,000/day in riverine and agropastoral areas of Lower Shabelle. Tens of thousands of people have died in the past three months.

The crisis in southern Somalia is expected to worsen over the coming months, with all areas of the south slipping into famine. This deterioration is considered likely given the very high levels of both severe acute malnutrition and under-5 mortality in combination with an expectation of worsening pastoral conditions, a continued increase in local cereal prices, and a below-average *Gu* season harvest.

The current situation represents Africa's worst food security crisis since Somalia's 1991/92 famine. A massive multisectoral response is critical to prevent additional deaths and total livelihood/social collapse. Most immediately, interventions to improve food access and to address health/nutrition issues are needed. In the medium term, interventions to rebuild and support livelihoods are critical. Extraordinary measures to provide these responses should be implemented. These assistance needs will persist through at least December 2011.

FSNAU and FEWS NET will continue to monitor conditions and outcomes, update analysis, and report on current and projected levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. Joint reporting every ten days will begin July 22nd. The results of the 2011 Post-*Gu* seasonal assessment, which will cover the entire country, will be released on August 19th. All information will be made available through www.fews.net and www.fsnau.org.