

## Kenya Food Security Alert

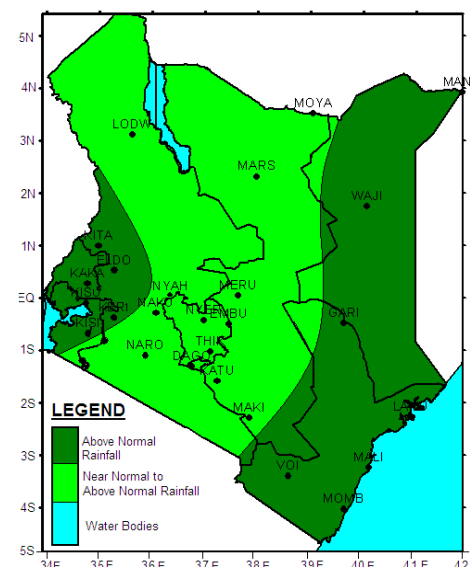
September 29, 2009

### National maize harvest deficit likely to increase food insecurity in 2010

The long-rains maize harvest in Kenya's Rift Valley highlands, the "grain basket," is expected to take place from October through January. This harvest is significant because it represents more than 50 percent of annual national production, and it typically signals the end of the main hunger season, which has been particularly severe this year. However, due to insufficient rainfall, a total of 1.9 million MT of maize is expected to be harvested throughout the 2009 long-rains season (including approximately one million MT already harvested mostly outside of the grain basket), nearly 25 percent lower than the four-year average of 2.52 million MT. While the grain basket harvest will generate moderate improvements in food security into early 2010, these improvements are expected to be short-lived, and food security will likely begin to decline around April 2010.

Approximately 900,000 MT of long-rains maize is yet to be harvested from parts of the western and Rift Valley highlands. However, production estimates may be even lower than projected given the potential impacts of El Niño on the harvest. While a mild to moderate El Niño is expected to bring above-average rains in November and December, and with them the potential for recovery in drought-affected marginal agricultural and pastoral areas, there are concerns that heavy rains in the Rift Valley highlands could continue into the tail end of the harvesting period in January, thereby impeding long rains harvesting. At the same time, the above-normal rains are expected to have beneficial impacts on the short rains (February-March) harvest.

**Figure 1. Rainfall forecast, October-December, 2009**



Source: Kenya Meteorological Department

With the expected long rains harvest of 1.9 million and the short rains harvest estimated at 540,000 MT, projected domestic production through the end of the marketing year in June 2010 is about 2.4 million MT. However, with national annual demand estimated at 3.2 million MT, a substantial deficit is likely to manifest from the second quarter of 2010 or even earlier, although the grain basket harvest will provide sufficient food stocks to last through March. In addition, most producers are likely to hold on to their harvest in anticipation of a widely-publicized deficit that would increase the upward pressure on maize prices.

The Government of Kenya has waived duties levied on maize imports to encourage private sector imports. However, few importers are interested because the key harvest is about to begin and will continue through January. The country has a structural deficit in maize production even in good years, and imports always meet the routine production shortfall. However, maize prices may continue to be prohibitive to highly and extremely food insecure households coping with the impacts of a succession of failed seasons, particularly the drought and conflict-affected households in the pastoral and marginal agricultural areas, the urban poor, and persons displaced during the post-election crisis. Furthermore, poor livestock/cereal terms of trade will also continue to hinder access to food for pastoralists and agropastoralists.

Thus, while the grain basket harvest will generate moderate improvements in food security into early 2010, these improvements are expected to be short-lived, given the severity of present food insecurity conditions and the lingering impacts of last year's poor harvest; the disruption to livelihoods and markets caused by the post-election violence in 2008; and the likelihood of continued high staple food prices. The development of El Niño rains and their impact on the progress of the grain basket harvest need close monitoring to determine the extent of the national maize deficit in the 2009/2010 marketing year and its impacts on food security. FEWS NET will continue to monitor unseasonal rains and their impact on the harvest, impacts on prices, and food assistance needs among vulnerable populations.

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