

## Poor spring (Gu) rains likely to prolong food security emergency in southeastern Ethiopia

Ethiopia is expected to continue facing a major food security emergency in 2018, as the impacts of poor rainfall in 2016/17, expected below-average rainfall in the first half of 2018, and large-scale conflict-related displacement drive continued humanitarian assistance needs. Sustained, large-scale emergency assistance – including food, nutrition, and WASH aid – is needed, particularly in Somali Region, to prevent extreme levels of food insecurity, acute malnutrition, and excess mortality.

Drought in 2016 and 2017 drove large-scale livestock deaths in many pastoral areas of southeastern Ethiopia. Starting with the onset of *Deyr* rainfall in October 2017, seasonal performance improved and cumulative rainfall totals were average or above average, except in western Jarar Zone of Somali Region, where rainfall was well below average. However, even following mostly favorable performance of the *Deyr* 2017 season, livestock holdings, surface water availability, pasture/browse availability, and milk production remain below average in many areas. Good performance of several consecutive seasons would be needed in order to support the rebuilding of livestock herds.

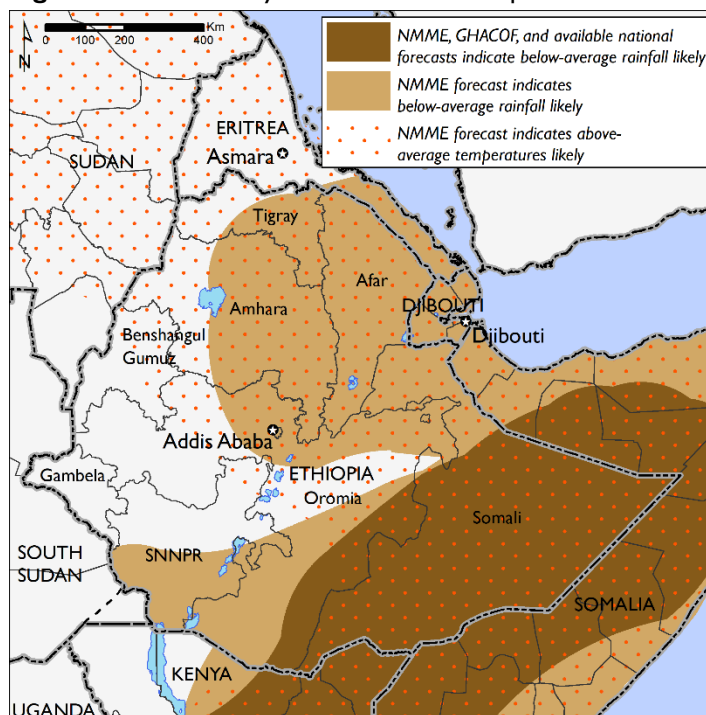
However, the forecast for rainfall during the upcoming *Gu*

(March to May) season is poor. Major global climate forecasting centers indicate the ongoing La Niña is forecast to continue through the early spring in 2018. When present between March and May, La Niña is typically associated with below-average seasonal rainfall in the Horn of Africa. This, in combination with sea surface temperature anomalies in the western Pacific Ocean, is likely to drive poor performance of the *Gu* rains over much of the Horn of Africa, including in mostly pastoral areas of Somali Region and southern Oromia. International, regional, and national forecasts indicate below-average rainfall is likely between March and May 2018 in southeastern Ethiopia (Figure 1), including in some areas that have already faced three below-average rainy seasons during the past two years.

Recent information from household surveys, rapid field assessments, and the post-*Meher* seasonal assessment suggest that food security outcomes in parts of Somali Region remain severe and that levels of acute malnutrition remain critically high. Outcomes are worst among IDPs, who have lost most of their livestock and will therefore have the most difficulty recovering even if future rains improve. Many IDP and resident households are facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes and large-scale humanitarian assistance has played a key role in preventing food insecurity and malnutrition from deteriorating to more extreme levels. Without sustained emergency food assistance, large increases in acute malnutrition and excess human mortality, particularly among children, would occur.

Elsewhere in Ethiopia, a poor *Belg* (March to May) 2017 season in eastern and northern SNNPR has resulted in emergency assistance needs that will persist through May 2018. Should *Belg* 2018 rainfall in southwestern Ethiopia perform well as forecast, harvests starting in June should improve household food access through much of 2018. However, North American Multi-Model Ensemble (NMME) forecasts suggest *Belg* 2018 rains will be below average in northern Ethiopia (Figure 1), which could affect crop production and lead to assistance needs later in the 2018/19 consumption year. In addition, conflict since mid-2017 has driven large-scale displacement along the Somali-Oromia regional border. More than 800,000 people are reportedly displaced, many of whom are facing disrupted livelihoods and difficulty meeting their basic food needs.

**Figure 1. March to May 2018 rainfall and temperature forecasts**



Source: NMME, GHACOF, Ethiopia NMA, Kenya Met. Dept. forecasts

Given the significant impacts on household food access and nutrition described above, a major food security emergency is likely to continue in Ethiopia during 2018. Continued close monitoring of *Belg* and *Gu* seasonal progress, drought and conflict related displacement, and disease incidence are required alongside sustained, well-targeted, and large-scale multi-sectoral assistance, particularly in Somali Region, to prevent extreme food insecurity, high levels of acute malnutrition, and excess mortality.