

FSNWG¹ Food Security and Nutrition Situation Update

Key messages

- 33.1 million people in the eastern and central Africa region are currently severely food insecure (IPC phase 3 or worse) and require food assistance. Of these, 16.95 million are from four of the eight IGAD member countries (i.e. Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan).
- Significant food security gains have been realised in most countries following above-average rains across the region towards the end of 2019. However, macro-economic shocks, protracted conflict, the ongoing desert locust infestation and the COVID-19 pandemic threaten to erode these gains.
- Acute malnutrition levels across the region remain high and could further deteriorate. Diseases such as cholera, malaria and measles remain a threat across the region.
- The COVID-19 pandemic could exacerbate an already fragile situation, especially if it spreads to vulnerable communities such as those with high levels of acute malnutrition, refugee settlements and IDP camps, slums, hard to access and with poor infrastructure ASALs and other informal settlements.
- The halt of school feeding programmes occasioned by school closures as a temporary measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19, could result in significant deteriorations of nutritional outcomes among the school going youth.
- Rising food and nutrition insecurity and school closures may force families to adopt negative coping mechanisms and lead to increase protection concerns, including violence.
- According to UNHCR, the East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region continues to witness an increasing number of displaced people. Presently, the region hosts an estimated 13 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 4.6 million refugees and asylum seekers.
- The desert locust situation remains critical and a threat to food security and livelihoods, particularly in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia where hopper bands are already beginning to form immature swarms.
- The start of the March to May 2020 rains was timely across most of the equatorial parts of the region. The onset was characterised by heavy to moderate, frequent showers, prompting commencement of planting and other seasonal activities since mid-March.

Figure 1: Food Insecure Population Estimates (million)²

Country	Stressed (IPC Phase 2)	Crisis (IPC Phase 3)	Emergency (IPC Phase 4)	Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)	Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+)
Ethiopia	10,296,000	6,497,000	1,977,000	-	8,474,000
Kenya	3,745,000	1,022,000	296,000	-	1,318,000
Somalia	2,856,000	960,000	190,000	-	1,150,000
South Sudan	3,590,000	4,515,000	1,475,000	20,000	6,010,000
IGAD Total	20,487,000	12,994,000	3,938,000	20,000	16,952,000
CAR	1,730,000	1,240,000	375,000	-	1,615,000
DRC	20,986,000	9,956,000	3,636,000	-	13,592,000
Tanzania	1,656,000	760,000	225,000	-	985,000
Total	44,859,000	24,950,000	8,174,000	20,000	33,144,000

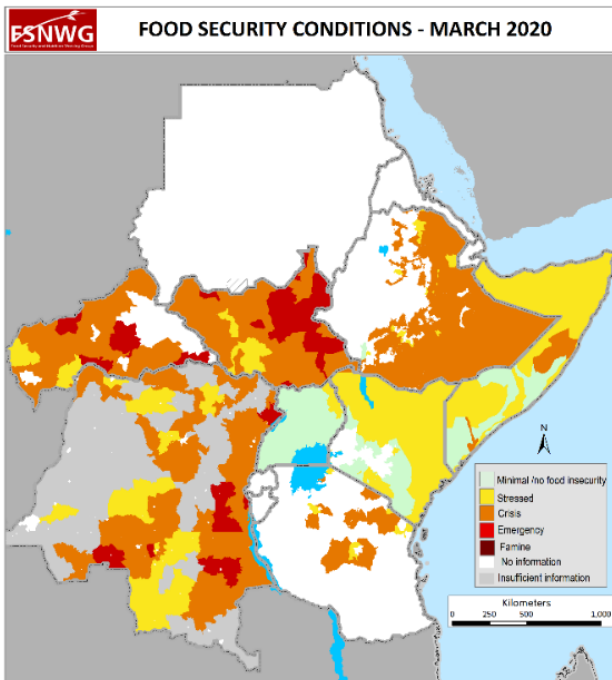
¹The East and Central Africa Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) is a multi-stakeholder regional forum, co-chaired by IGAD and FAO, mandated to provide adequate and timely information of food security and nutrition situation to planners and decision makers to ensure interventions are well coordinated to save lives, safeguard livelihoods and build resilience of at-risk populations in participating member countries.

² This is based on recent IPC analyses. Countries which do not have recent analyses have been left out.

Sector Updates

Food Security Situation and Outlook

Despite the general improvement in food security outcomes across the region towards the end of 2019, high levels of food insecurity still persist in some parts of the region, driven primarily by the impacts of past climatic shocks, compounded by conflict and adverse macro-economic factors.



FSN WG Regional Map. Source: IPC & FEWS NET

Based on the most recent IPC analyses, 33.1 million people in CAR, DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Tanzania are currently food insecure (IPC² Phase 3+), and require urgent assistance. This is a slight improvement from the 33.8 million in IPC Phase 3 and above reported in the February 2020 FSN WG update.

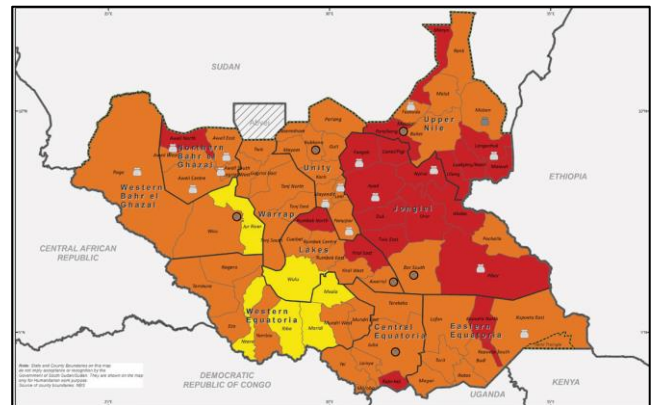
Nutrition

High levels of acute malnutrition, attributable to a combination of factors including food insecurity, high morbidity, poor care practices and conflict, continue to persist in the region, with the risk of further deteriorations due to the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. Of the countries with recent IPC analyses, South Sudan and Somalia have the highest burden of malnutrition.

In South Sudan for example, the national Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence stands at 12.6%. The burden of acute malnutrition observed in 2020 represents an increase of 0.6 million people as compared to 2019, mainly due to deterioration of nutrition situation (70%). At the state level, Jonglei at 23.8%, Upper Nile at 16.4% and Central Equatoria at 15.3% have the highest GAM rates. Moreover, 28 and 20 counties are classified in IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) Phase 3 and Phase 4 respectively.

Protracted food insecurity, limited dietary diversity limited access to safe water and hygiene practices coupled with sub-optimal feeding practices and a high disease burden are key drivers of these elevated rates.

According to UNICEF, just 4.1% of children aged 6-23 months in South Sudan met the minimum acceptable diet at the time of assessment in January and more than 55% had reported fever and diarrhoea two weeks prior to the assessment.



Acute Malnutrition in South Sudan: Source: IPC

In Somalia, a similarly elevated national GAM prevalence stands at 13.1% based on the results of 2019 post-Deyr IPC analysis. Of further concern is an even higher GAM prevalence (>15%) recorded predominantly in areas hosting large IDP populations and riverine areas affected by flooding during the Deyr³ season. Morbidity and food insecurity are the main contributing factors of this level of malnutrition.

In case of adverse impacts due to the desert locust infestation, the ongoing heavy rains and/or the COVID-19 pandemic, then the

³ Short rain season in Somalia beginning in late September and ending in November/December

already fragile nutrition situation in the region could worsen.

While nutrition programmes focusing on prevention and treatment of wasting continue to be delivered across the region, coverage gaps still exist due to limited resources, and gaps may widen with ongoing travel restrictions in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

Of main concern is the recent closure of schools particularly where school feeding programmes have been active. According to WFP, 4.7 million children have already missed meals in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda alone. Closure of schools and the resulting suspension of school meals threatens the food security and nutritional status of millions of school going youth.

Displacement

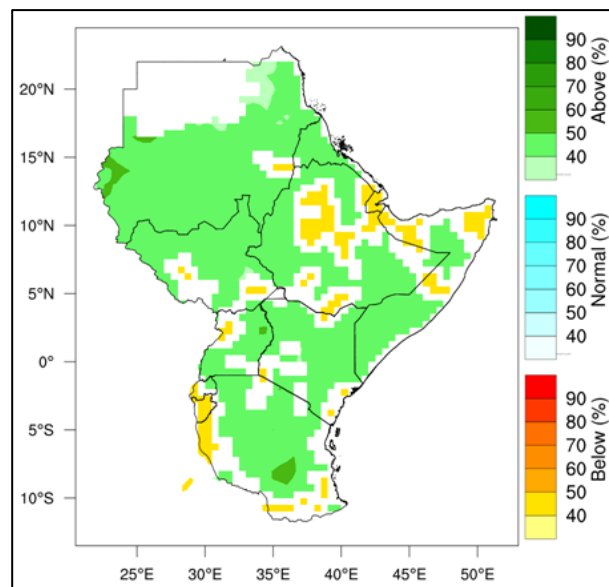
The region continues to witness an increasing number of displaced populations with the main push factors being conflict and/or insecurity and climatic shocks. Predicted heavy rains and flooding during the MAM season could lead to additional temporary displacement. According to UNHCR, there are about 13 million IDPs⁴ and 4.6 million refugees and asylum seekers (the majority of whom, 2.14 million, are from South Sudan).

Uganda is hosting the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers (estimated at 1.4 million), while Somalia has the highest number of IDPs at (2.7 million). According to FEWSNET, new arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers may be observed, especially in Uganda, in the coming months due to continued localised conflict and food insecurity in South Sudan and the DRC.

While displaced persons tend to rely on humanitarian assistance to a large extent due to disrupted livelihoods, humanitarian funding constraints have prompted food ration cuts below the recommended 2100 kilocalories per person per day, notably in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan. As a result, refugees and asylum seekers have resorted to negative coping strategies including skipping meals, begging, selling productive assets and child labour.

Climate

Much of the southern and equatorial agricultural areas covering northern Tanzania, southern western Kenya, much of Uganda, Rwanda Burundi and south western Ethiopia received at least 25 mm of rainfall during the first 20 days of March, marking the start of the March to May (MAM) season, and prompting commencement of seasonal agricultural activities.



Rainfall Forecast for April 2020: Source: ICPAC

Most parts of the region, with the exception of Burundi, Djibouti and much of Rwanda are forecasted to receive average to above-average rains in April. As April is the peak of the MAM season, rainfall performance during this month is important for both crop and livestock production and should therefore be closely monitored.

Overall, rainfall performance during the MAM season is forecasted to be average to above-average, presenting positive prospects for both agricultural and livestock performance, notwithstanding the potential risk of flooding and landslides in prone areas, and related destruction of crops, loss of assets, disruption of livelihoods, disruption of transportation with negative impacts on supplies and upsurge in water and vector borne diseases such as cholera and malaria.

Food Security Outlook

According to FEWS NET, the potential risk of flooding, inadequate control of desert locust, and impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic

⁴ IDPs: Burundi (0.11M), Ethiopia (1.73M), Kenya (0.16M), Somalia (2.65M), South Sudan (1.67M), Sudan (1.87M) and DRC (5M).

among others will likely contribute to a deterioration of food security and nutrition outcomes across the region between April and September 2020.

Areas with high flood risk include the Lake-Victoria Basin, central, southern and eastern Tanzania, eastern DRC and parts of Rwanda and Burundi border areas, along the Rift Valley regions of Kenya and southern Ethiopia as well as northwestern and northern Somalia coastal regions.

The continued presence, re-infestation and emergence of mature and immature locust swarms and new generations of hopper bands and groups in some cropping and pastoral areas, particularly in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia raises further concern over food and fodder production in the coming months.

In the worst-case scenario whereby locusts are not adequately controlled, they will cause widespread destruction of crops and pasture and could lead to a deterioration of food security outcomes, given the already high levels of acute food insecurity in the Eastern Africa region.

Stringent control measures intended to curb further spread of COVID-19 will likely have negative impacts on food security arising from limited population movements, high transport costs, reduced agricultural production, decline in household incomes, high cost of inputs, increased pressure on health facilities, and high transactional costs on informal trade and SMEs, reduced or loss of livelihood options, reduced livestock market transactions as measures to control human concentration intensifies.

These challenges could limit food access among the poor and vulnerable populations.

Sustained assistance to affected populations as well as continuous monitoring of the situation is therefore crucial.

Issues of Concern

COVID-19 Threat

The unprecedented spread of the novel *Coronavirus* (COVID-19) across the world is threatening almost all sectors including food security. Its spread has not spared the eastern Africa region, which continues to witness a worrying rise in the number of the novel COVID-19 infections on daily basis. While very little is

documented to date on its impact on food security, both lives and livelihoods are potentially at risk from the already declared pandemic. The World Health Organisation has already raised concern over the impact COVID-19 could have among populations with high HIV prevalence, in malaria-affected areas, and/or among malnourished children.

With border closures, lockdowns and restricted market access in various parts of the region and the globe, supply chain and trade disruptions could limit population's access to sufficient and nutritious foods more so in countries already facing high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition.

The humanitarian situation across the region could worsen with far reaching consequences on populations already receiving or in need of assistance considering that humanitarians may not be able to efficiently operate due to the ongoing travel restrictions.

Generally, the severity of impacts will depend on the scale of the spread, the type of policies governments will put in place to respond to the crisis as well as the underlying vulnerabilities of populations.

Concerted effort is therefore crucial to ensure that this health crisis does not translate into a food crisis.

In this regard, the FSNWG has formed a Task Force on COVID-19 which has written an alert, calling upon all concerned partners to be aware of and prepare for the possibility of increasing food and nutrition insecurity in the region because of the effects of this pandemic on local livelihoods and markets. [The full alert can be found here.](#)

Recommendations

The FSNWG recommends;

- Continued coordinated planning and response by all concerned actors, including Governments, UN and NGOs to effectively address food security gaps especially among populations categorised in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+). Furthermore, in light of ongoing ration cuts, especially among displaced populations who tend to rely significantly on humanitarian assistance, there is need for redoubling efforts around resource mobilisation.

- Integrated interventions at scale for the prevention and treatment of wasting and stunting should be prioritised to prevent a deterioration in the nutrition situation given the multiple shocks at play. As with food security and given the current Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) gap in Kenya, resource mobilisation should also be prioritised to address essential intervention gaps.
- Governments and partners are urged to continue supporting the fight against the ongoing desert locust invasion, taking necessary precautions and guidelines provided by public health departments to prevent spread of COVID-19. Assessments to ascertain impact and contingency planning to support impacted livelihoods is also critical.

As the region continues to witness a rise in the number of the new COVID-19 infections,

contingency planning is recommended for a worst-case scenario. With severe economic ramifications associated with the pandemic almost apparent at the global level, the already fragile food insecurity and nutrition situation in the region could be exacerbated.

- In light of the above, there is a need for special arrangements to allow humanitarians to travel and continue providing essential humanitarian services to populations in need, while respecting the necessary public health measures.
- Humanitarian partners are also encouraged to preposition items closer to the affected populations and to support community groups, while providing them with necessary tools to comply with public health measures.

The FSWG will continue to monitor all issues and provide updates for proper planning.

FSNWX has recently created a taskforce on COVID-19 as well as four taskforces on desert locusts (Remote Sensing and Mapping, Harmonisation of Impact Assessment Tools and Methods, Impact Assessment for Food Security Analysis, and Community Engagement). If you are interested in joining any of these taskforces, please reach out to the FSNWX Secretariat.

Please download [here more detailed FSNWX Slides for March 2020](#) for in-depth sectorial analyses.

Contacts

For questions and /or any other feedback, please contact the FSNWX Secretariat through:

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