



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
MINISTRY OF STATE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN KENYA AND OTHER ARID LANDS
ARID LANDS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT II

DROUGHT MONTHLY BULLETIN, DECEMBER 2008

Tharaka District

Warning Stages



Livelihood Zone	Warning stage	Trend
Marginal Mixed farming	Alert	Deteriorating
Mixed farming	Normal	Stable
Rain fed cropping	Normal	Stable

TIMELINE ACTIVITIES

Short rains			Short dry spell		Long rains			Long dry spell			
Planting/weed & pest control Milk yields increase Low HH food stocks			Short rains harvest Reduced milk yields Increased HH food stocks		Planting/weeding High calving rate Milk yields increase			Long rains harvest /Land preparation Increased HH food stocks High kidding rate(Sept)			
Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept

Situation overview

- Slight and negligible showers were experienced in a few parts of the district. These had no impact on the crop and forage situation.
- Poor crop performance was the key characteristic of the just-ended rainfall season, especially in the marginal mixed farming livelihood zones.
- Field pests and weed control as well as harvesting of the ready pulses such as cow peas, green grams and beans (very minimal) was the key agricultural activity in the month. This was mainly in the rain-fed cropping and mixed farming livelihood zones where crops performed slightly better.
- Crop prices remained high in all market centres, with minimal supply of beans. Fresh crop harvests hit the market in the last two weeks of the month.
- Water situation was stable in the month, but on a downward trend, as rains were hardly adequate to replenish the sources.
- Livestock body condition and health was stable in the month, and therefore equivalent stable prices, probably due to the season's festivities.
- The nutrition status of children below five years declined during the month under review. The percentage of children rated as being at the risk of malnutrition rose to 9.2 from 8.8 in November. The decline was attributed to probably due to hunger being experienced among households, especially in the marginal mixed farming livelihood zones.

Current interventions

- Control of quelea quelea birds by the MoA and ALRMP.
- Security patrols along the border conflict zone of Tharaka and Tigania/Igembe districts.
- Routine extension services by various ministries and departments.

DSG recommendations

In the technical DSG meeting held on 30th Dec 2008 to review the district contingency plan, poor short rains performance was the key point of discussion. The following recommendations were made:

- Assessment of food stocks at household level to determine the impact of the just-ended short rains on the household food security. This was set for 13th-15th January 2009.
- Sensitisation of the community on aflatoxin control and monitoring the same as majority of the households mainly depend on market purchase of food.
- Control of quelea quelea birds, which had infested the district (Several night roosts were identified in the district). This was a great threat to the little millet and sorghum in the fields.
- Peace forum and baraza among the communities and elders/leaders in the disputed boundary area to preach peace and co-existence as the government sought solution to the boundary dispute.
- MUAC assessment among children under five years to be conducted by the Ministry of Health to assess the magnitude and impact of the food stress on the vulnerable age category.

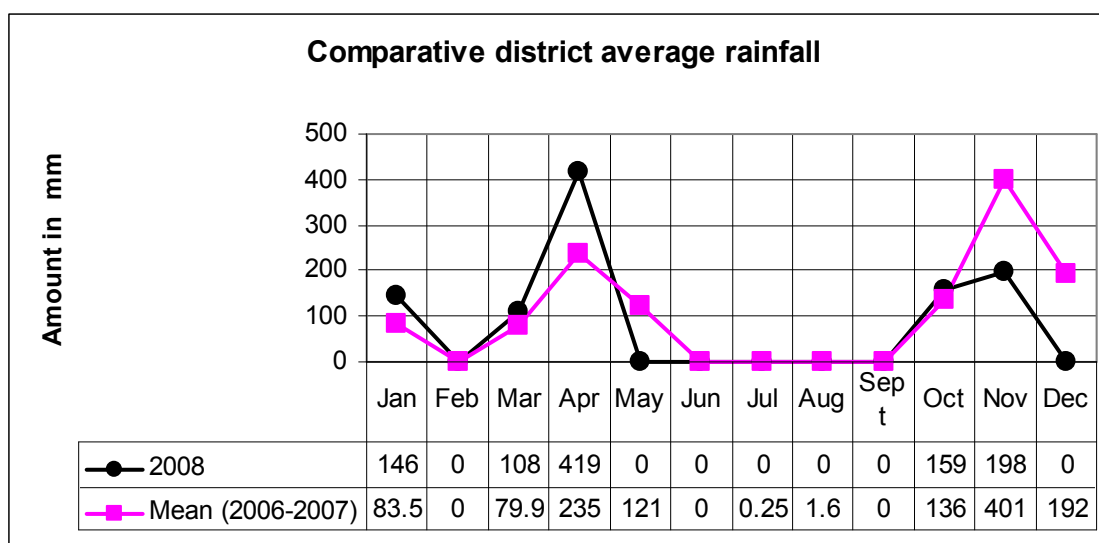
- Sensitisation of livestock farmers on livestock off-take before the peak of drought period, as it is already evident.
- Deworming of livestock to control endo parasites.

Recommendations to DSG and KFSSG

- A rapid food security assessment is necessary to assess household food security as the short rains, which are mainly depended on, performed poorly. This will help plan for appropriate interventions.
- Border conflict resolution ought to be sought to end the border dispute that has been detrimental to development and normal way of life for the two districts.

1.0 Environmental indicators (Stability)

1.1 Rainfall



- Unlike in the normal years, the entire district experienced sunny weather throughout the month, with a few cloudy days but no precipitation.
- As a result, most of the crop, which was at the critical physiological stage of growth, suffered water stress and either wilted or had suppressed grain production.
- This effect was mainly evident on cereals. Pulses were not spared either, especially the late planted crop, which withered completely and no proceeds expected.
- The worst affected areas, where total crop failure was expected were the lower zones of Gituma location, Maragwa and Kamanyaki locations.
- Regions adjacent to these zones had a very poor crop performance also, implying a worsening trend on the food security situation in the afore-mentioned areas and the district in general.

1.2 Condition of natural vegetation and pasture

- Forage was on an abnormally early decline in all parts of the district as its development was not adequate following poor rains.

- This means that the available forage may not be adequate to sustain livestock till the next rains in April.
- The early cessation of rains may impact negatively on livestock production at the critical period when the major coping mechanism during a crop failure as this, is livestock sale.

1.3 Water sources and accessibility

- The water situation was not normal, as most of the sources that flow with water during the rainy season were dry, unlike in the normal years.
- This was as a result of inadequate rains received in the season, hardly adequate to replenish the seasonal sources that are normally utilised from November to January.
- Water sources in use during the month for both livestock and households included rivers, a few springs that flow all year round, shallow wells and boreholes. Majority of these may last till the March-May long rains.
- Distances to water points increased in the month.

2.0 Rural economy indicators (Food availability)

2.0 Livestock production

2.0.1 Livestock body condition and health

- The general body condition of livestock was fairly good but on the decline for cattle.
- This observation could be as a result of the declining forage condition, especially in the marginal mixed farming livelihood zones.
- Milk production also declined in the month.
- Livestock health was nevertheless good for all livestock, except for a few cases of Newcastle disease among poultry and worms, which farmers managed through veterinary extension services.

2.0.2 Milk production and consumption

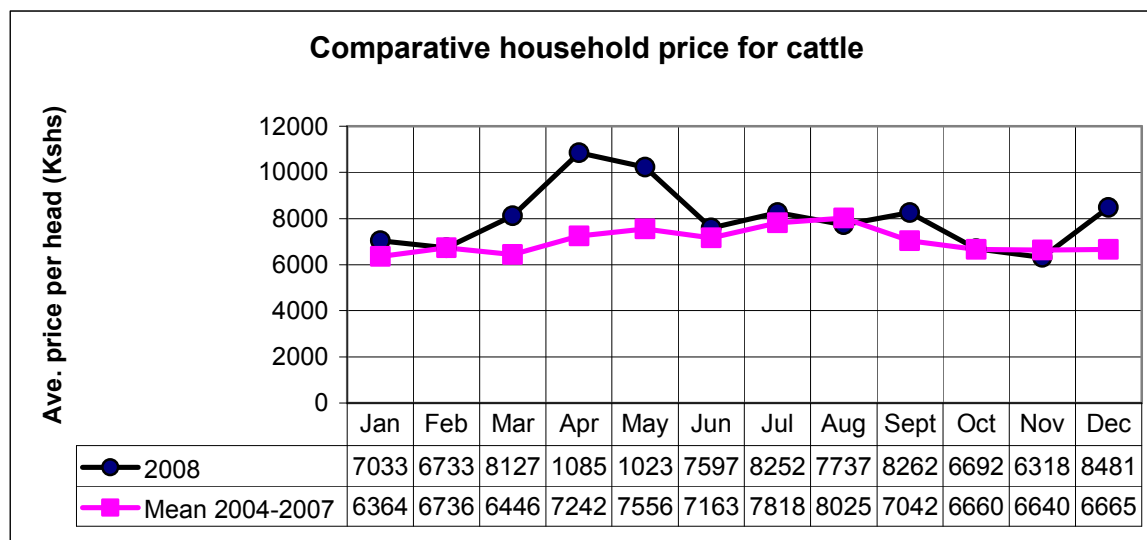
- A decline in milk production at household level, and consequently increase in price was observed in the month under review.
- While a litre of milk traded at Ksh28 in the last two months, the price rose to Ksh32-40.
- Milk production was also lower compared to last month, as found out in the ad hoc interviews with the 300 households in the month under review.
- This was not normal for the time of the year.

3.0 Access to food

3.1 Livestock marketing

3.1.1 Cattle prices

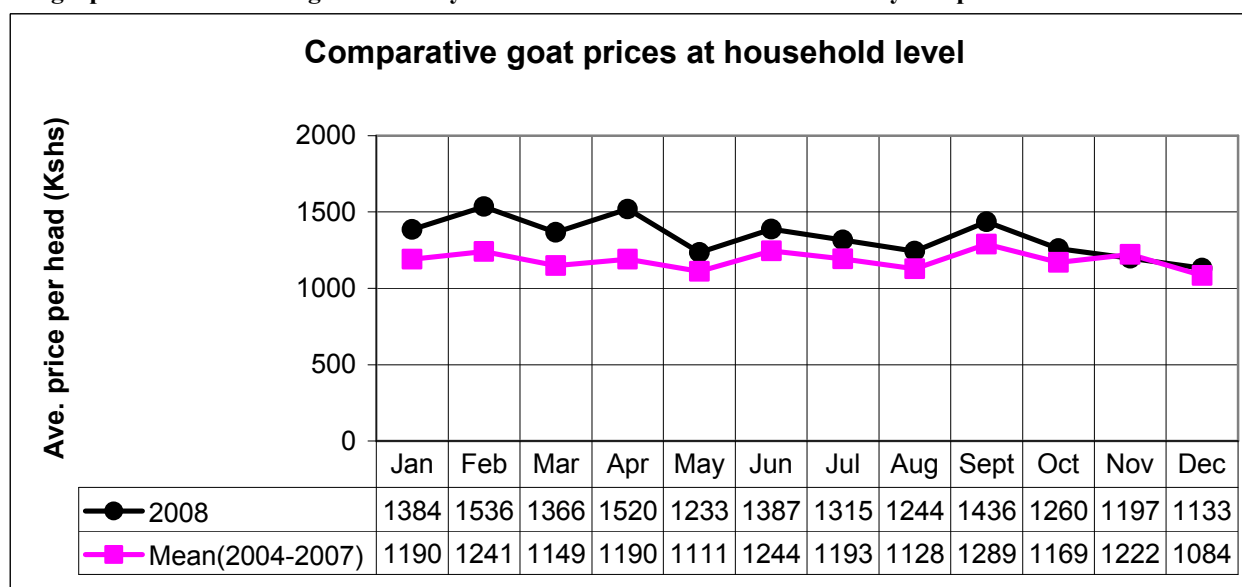
Comparative cattle prices at household level



- The average price of cattle improved during the month, compared to the last two months.
- The price rose slightly to Ksh 6,665 from Ksh 6640 in November.
- The increase was probably due to the December festivities, which created good market for them.
- This trend, however, may take a different turn, with the schools reopening in January and consequently sales rate increase as households seek school fees.
- Deterioration of body condition as a result of forage depletion may also contribute to price decline.
- The cattle prices were relatively good and above the mean for years 2004-2007.
- The above are findings of a survey carried on 300 households sampled across the district.

3.1.2 Goat prices

The graph indicates findings of a survey conducted on 300 households randomly sampled across the district.



- A normal trend in goats prices was observed in the month under review.

- The average price of goats was slightly above the long term average price for the years 2004-2007 for a similar period.
- The price, however, slightly declined from the previous month, probably due to influx in the markets following the December festivities as well as high demand for food purchases at household level.

3.2 Livestock sales

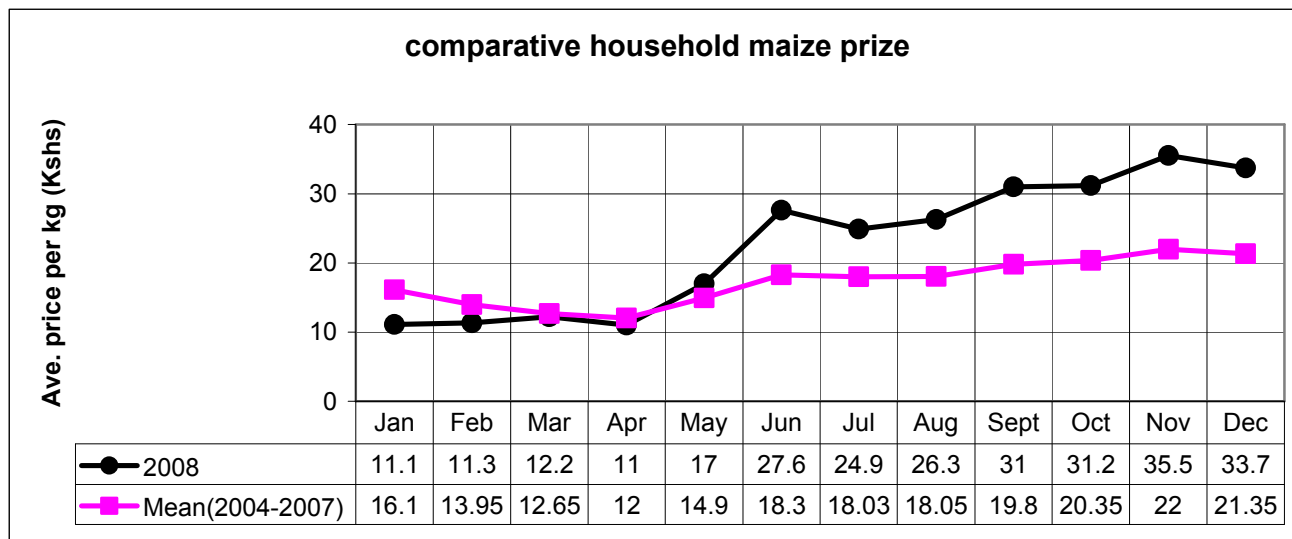
- Livestock income was the major household income source in the month, unlike normal times when crop sales contribute largely to the household income.
- This was because of the crop failure experienced in most parts of the district, that even the fast maturing crop had no proceeds in the season.
- The same livestock income may constitute school fees in January as well as source of money to purchase food stocks for till the next season proceeds in June, to the majority of farmers whose crop failed.
- With the declining market prices as it has been observed in the past three months, household's bargaining power will be affected.

3.3 Crop prices

- Crop prices remained relatively high, unlike the normal times when crop harvests flood the markets, leading to low crop prices.
- Some crop harvest, however, hit the markets, but only had a slight impact on the crop prices, which were far above normal.
- Harvests in the markets include green grams and cowpeas, whose prices increased in the month.
- Household's dependency on market food purchase remained high, a situation that may persist until the next season's harvest in six months time.

3.3.1 Maize prices

Comparative average price for maize.

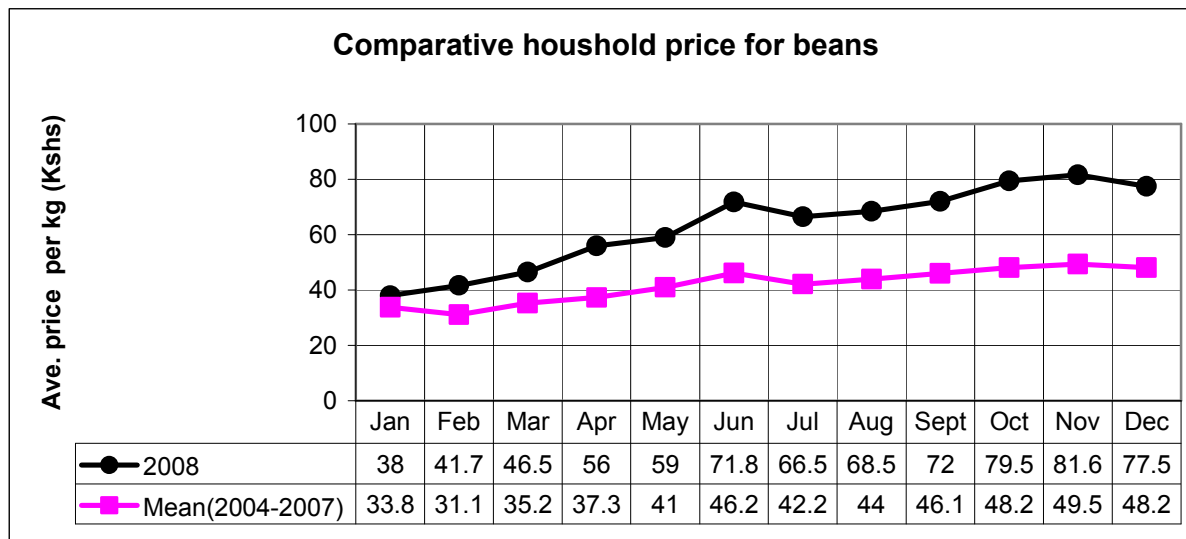


- Though there was a decrease in the average price of maize, the price remained above normal, as majority of households relied more on its purchase.
- The average price was Ksh 33.7 per kilo compared to Ksh 35.5 in November.

- The crop performed poorly and only a slightly fair harvest was expected on fields planted before the rains onset.
- Its availability in the markets was good as the demand was an attractive market for traders to do business.
- The prices were far above normal and prices varied across livelihood zones, with highest and lowest prices recorded in marginal mixed farming, mixed farming and rain-fed cropping livelihood zones respectively.

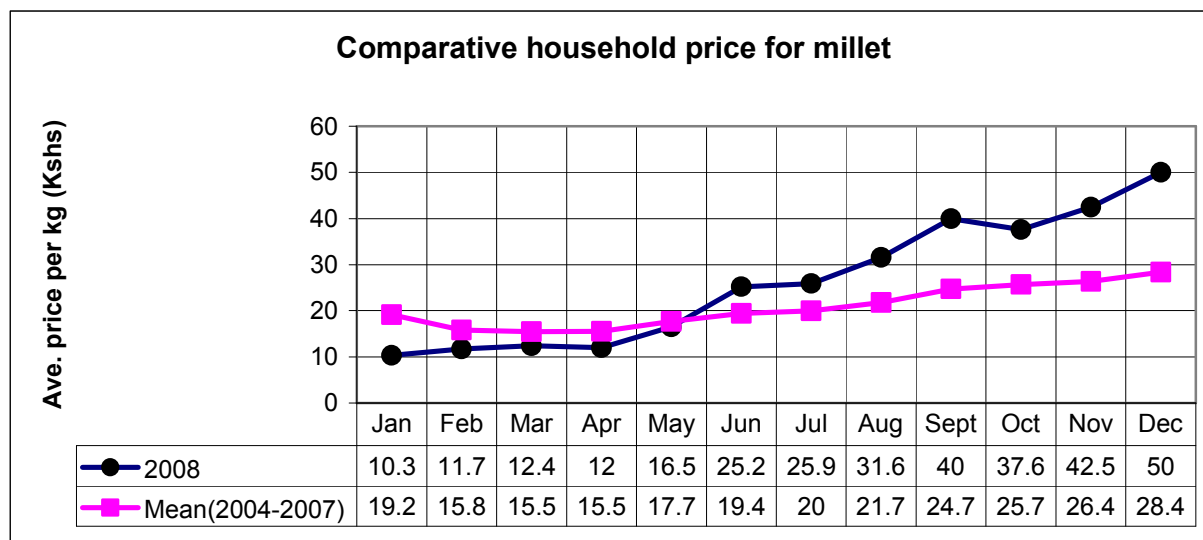
3.3.2 Beans prices

Comparative average price for beans



- Beans prices remained high during the month under review, though with a slight decline.
- The average price dropped to Ksh 77.5 from Ksh 81.6n recorded in November.
- This was attributed to availability of cheaper alternative pulses such as cowpeas and green grams in the market.
- Supply of beans in the market was relatively low since the crop performed poorest.
- The prices were too high for the majority poor.

3.3.3 Millet prices



- Similar to other crops, millet prices increased sharply in the month.
- This crop had performed fairer than other cereals, but the recent infestation of quelea quelea birds in the district was a great threat, forcing farmers to harvest some of the crop prematurely.
- However, several roosts were identified and control measures put in place to avert further damage.
- Owing to the above scenario, poor proceeds were expected, and this may affect the prices further in the near future.
- This deficit may affect the next seasons crop cultivation as farmers may require relief seed, for various crop varieties.

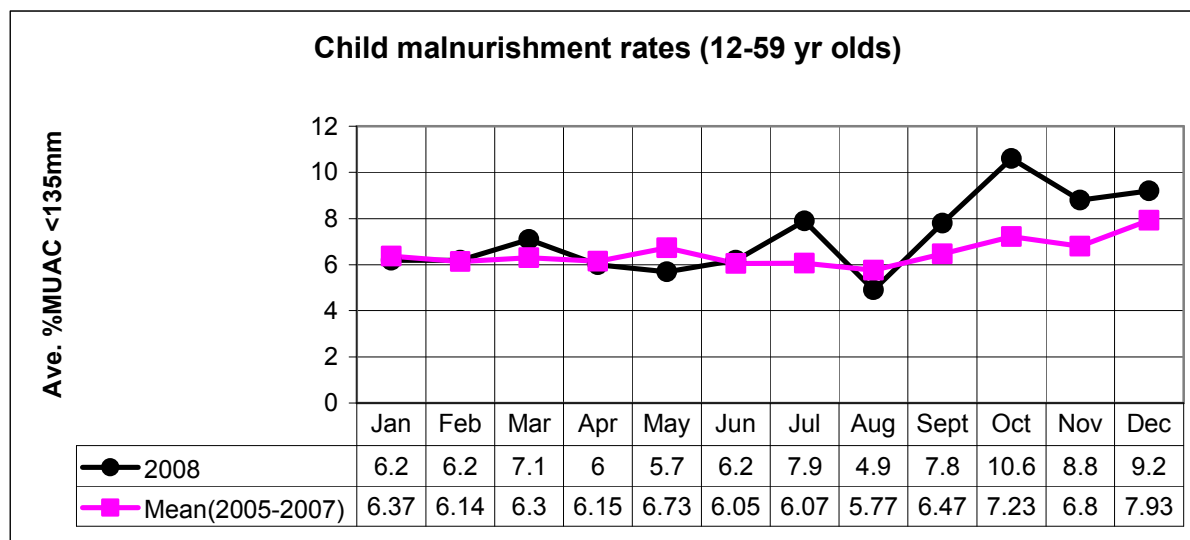
3.4 Income

- Households applied various mechanisms to provide household income. The most applied source of household income in the month was livestock sale.
- Other income sources included; sale of crop (both grains and horticultural produce), petty trade and sale of charcoal.
- An upcoming source of income was observed;-roadside food kiosks, which are normally common during droughts. Here, chicken soup or tea is prepared by the busy paths on a market days for sale.
- As households struggled to earn a living, hygiene was neglected as majority of these businesses were put up under trees, hence a possible risk of disease outbreak.

4.0 Welfare indicators (Utilisation of food)

4.1 Nutrition status

Comparative malnourishment rates for children 12-59 months



- The nutrition status of children below five years declined during the month under review. The percentage of children rated as being at the risk of malnutrition rose to 9.2 from 8.8 in November.
- The decline was attributed to probably due to hunger being experienced among households, especially in the marginal mixed farming livelihood zones.
- The survey conducted on 1,138 children between the ages 12-59 months, randomly sampled in various parts of the district indicated that 9.2 % of them had MUAC <135 mm.
- While ailments such as malaria, which are quite prevalent among the age category, may have contributed to this observation, food stress could have contributed to this observation, on the larger extent.
- This was a clear implication of food stress among households.

4.2 Human health

- There were no incidences of disease outbreak reported in the month.
- The most prevalent ailments reported in the month were malaria and upper respiratory tract infections.

5.0 Other coping strategies

During the month, households applied various coping strategies (index 0-10 coping strategies) to deal with their daily needs. These include;

- Purchase of food on credit.
- Consumption of less preferred food.
- Borrowing of food from relatives.
- Reduction of meal size.

6.0 Observations and Recommendations

- The poor crop performance and crop failure in the district may worsen the already fragile food situation and therefore an impending drought.

- Measures ought to be put in place to reduce the impact of food stress, such as livestock off-take now that the livestock prices are fair, to ensure farmers spare the little harvests and buy more food stocks.
- Rapid food security assessment to assess the current food security situation, impacts of the last rains and possible interventions to the food stress and other appropriate interventions.
- Quelea quelea birds control in order to save the crop that may be in the field. The birds have been a threat and menace to millets and sorghums in the fields and a major drawback to food security.
- Tension at the disputed border between Tharaka and Tigania/Igembe districts ought to be dwelt with, and peace preached to the communities affected, preferably through peace forums and barazas, for both the communities as well as the local leaders, even as the Government establishes the true boundary to end the problem.
- Land adjudication and registration in the area would also work much in restoring peace in the area also. (**Action: District Steering Group**)