

Situation overview

- Moderate rains were recorded in most parts of the district during the month under review, with the Kenya Wildlife Service station at Mweiga recording a total of 180.5mm for 18 rainy days.
- The rains progressed well with coverage and distribution, thus assisting in pasture regeneration.
- The amount of forage available remained inadequate for livestock, thus animal body condition was not fully improved.
- Recharge of the major rivers emanating from the region was observed, thus improving water flows.
- Water conservation structures such as water pans, ponds and shallow wells filled to capacity due to the ongoing short rains.
- With the ongoing natural vegetation regeneration in lower zones, livestock remained at wet season grazing areas within the households.
- The livestock adapted to the weather change slowly, though lush pasture led to increased diarrhoea cases and worm infestation in all species.
- The body condition of all livestock types remained poor but improving.
- Farm activities were on the increase as early planters were busy undertaking second weeding, with crops slightly above knee height while late planters were at their first weeding with crops below knee height.
- A large number of farms remained unattended and the area under crop production during the short rains season dropped significantly due to high prices of farm inputs. Further, interest in farming also dwindled after farmers suffered two consecutive crop failures.
- High food prices and low livestock prices in major markets contributed to the poor standards of living in major households in the region.
- Cases of pest infestation remained high, with the most common pests being aphids, bean fly, red spider mites and Irish potato tuber moths rampant in Gakawa Location.
- The nutritional status of children below 5 years was stable, with the number of those rated as being at risk of malnutrition (based on MUAC measurements) standing at 4.2 percent from 4.1 percent in October.
- Reports of petty crimes in the region were common, which was a sign of food stress in the district.
- Cases of primates destroying crops in farms around Solio Ranch became more frequent during the month.

Recommendations to DSG and KFSSG

- Promote pasture planting, bailing and preservation for use during dry season.
- River line protection on major river lines where farming activities were ongoing.
- Deworming of the vulnerable group of livestock i.e. calves - 22,800, goats - 28,000 and sheep - 51,000 for improved utilisation of scarce feed resources.
- Construction of large dams upstream which impound floods and store the same for irrigation use.
- Provision of water for domestic and livestock use in drought prone areas i.e. Lamuria, Burguret, Mugunda and Kinyaiti area. Also water harvesting techniques at household level should be encouraged.

- Vaccination of at least 50,000 animals against foot and mouth disease (FMD) and lumpy skin disease (LSD) to replicate the just concluded exercise on Anthrax, Black Quarter and Lumpy Skin Disease for 30,000 heads of cattle.
- Expansion of school-feeding programme to cover an additional 29 schools with a total enrolment of 8,350 pupils in drought prone regions.
- Support communities with drought recovery farm inputs such as certified seeds and fertilizer to assist farmers recover from the previous two consecutive poor seasons.
- Provision of food relief should be considered as a short term measure to cater for 74,250 people experiencing food deficits.
- Introduction and promotion of drought tolerant crops in drought prone areas.
- Introduction of farming techniques such as drip irrigation for water conservation.

1.0 Environmental indicators (Stability)

1.1 Rainfall

- An average of 6 days of heavy rainfall was recorded in various parts of the district throughout the month. The rains were good in terms of coverage and distribution, though erratic in nature in lower zones.
- All environmental indicators remained outside the expected seasonal range though there were signs of improvement with the ongoing short rains.
- Environmental indicators in Gatarakwa, Mweiga, Mwiyo, Burguret, Mugunda and Thegu locations showed considerable improvement compared to the previous month but still far below normal thresholds.
- Kenya Wildlife Service station at Mweiga recorded 180.5mm of rainfall for a total of 18 rainy days on average.
- The situation was outside normal seasonal range and close monitoring is required.

1.2 Condition of natural vegetation and pasture

- Scarcity of pasture continued being felt, especially in the lower regions as the regeneration of the same was slow, leading to poor quality and quantity in these regions.
- Over reliance on the sprouting natural vegetation by all stocks in the region contributed to poor development of the same. It's anticipated that with the current short rains, natural vegetation coverage was going to improve considerably.
- The cloud cover in the region played a significant role in reducing frost attacks, a common menace whenever there are open skies.
- Though there were signs of recovery from the previous dry spell, the situation was outside the usual seasonal range.

1.3 Water sources and availability

- Rivers remained the major sources of water throughout the district.
- Most water conservation structures in the district were full to capacity due to the rains experienced during the month. As a result, household access to water stabilised.
- Recharge in major rivers was realised, resulting in increased water flows.
- Average return distance to water sources was 2.3 km from homesteads and 2.4 km to grazing areas, with an average return time of 1.5 hours.
- Mugunda location recorded the highest distances of 3.5 km and 4.5 km to homesteads and grazing fields respectively and an average return time of 1.8 hours.
- The situation was stable.

1.4 Emerging issues

- Effects of the previous dry spell on livestock hindered in the immediate improvement of milk production after pasture availability improved.
- Livestock mortality rate was heightened by a rise in incidences of diarrhoea caused by the lush pasture, upsurge in worm infestation and effects of sudden weather change.
- Also notable were improvement of greens at household level attributed to the ongoing short rains.

1.4.1 Migration

- A good number of people from the lower regions moved to high potential regions along the mountains in search of casual labour in exchange for food stuff.
- Livestock movements were minimal as the short rains assisted in natural vegetation regeneration throughout the district, leading to retention of livestock within household reach.

1.4.2 Implications on food security

- Food security at household level was still wanting as continued reliance on food purchases was still eminent over and above additional expenses for hay and fodder purchases as a substitute to the sprouting natural vegetation for livestock's at household level.
- Poor availability of pasture, increased cases of diarrhoea and an upsurge in worm infestation led to a further deterioration in livestock body condition. This led to reduced milk production in the region. As a result, highest milk price per 750ml bottle of Ksh29.30 was recorded in Mweiga.
- The sky rocketing prices of food and non-food items in major markets and lack of reliable daily sources of income in most households contributed to the unfavourable living conditions for majority households.
- Agricultural activities picked up, with quite a substantial acreage of arable land under food production.

2.0 Rural economy indicators (Food Availability)

2.1 Livestock production

2.1.1 Livestock body condition

- Livestock body condition remained poor, with over 80 per cent of the livestock showing signs of general body weakness.
- Though livestock body conditions remained poor, the regeneration of natural pasture assisted in arresting drought-related livestock deaths. The deaths stood at 33, 21 and 98 cattle, goats and sheep deaths on average down from 37, 42 and 170 of these deaths recorded last month.
- The poor body condition exposes livestock to common ailments, a situation that requires close monitoring.
- The condition was outside normal seasonal range but improving.

2.1.2 Livestock diseases

- General livestock body weakness contributed to increased deaths during calving as well as poor development of calves as lactating cattle were unable to recover within stipulated shorter periods for them to produce milk for the young ones.
- At least 30,000 heads of livestock were vaccinated against Anthrax, Black Quarter and Lumpy Skin Disease an activity which should be emulated for FMD and PPR.
- Cases of tick-borne diseases such as ECF were common occurrence in areas, where livestock share grazing fields with wildlife especially along the forest.

- Livestock slowly adapted to the weather change though lush pasture led to increased diarrhoea cases and worm infestation in all species.

2.1.3 Milk production

- Effects of drought from preceding months contributed to the continued reduction in milk production throughout the district. Production stood at 25 per cent of the average total production.
- Milk prices remained high, with a 750 ml bottle retailing at Ksh24.1 compared to Ksh.14 during normal periods.

2.2 Crop production

2.2.1 Timeliness and condition of various crop production activities

- Farm activities were on the increase as early planters were busy undertaking second weeding, with crops slightly above knee height while late planters were at their first weeding with crops below knee height.
- However, the acreage cultivated remained below normal threshold as most farmers remained undecided on crop production.
- Crops were below average as uncertified seeds were used for planting over and above in accessibility to farm inputs whose prices remained beyond reach for most households.
- Crop production therefore, will decline this short rainy season as predicted.
- The situation was outside seasonal norm and close monitoring is required.

2.2.2 Pest and diseases

- Irish potatoes tuber moths' infestation remained a thorny issue in Gakawa location.

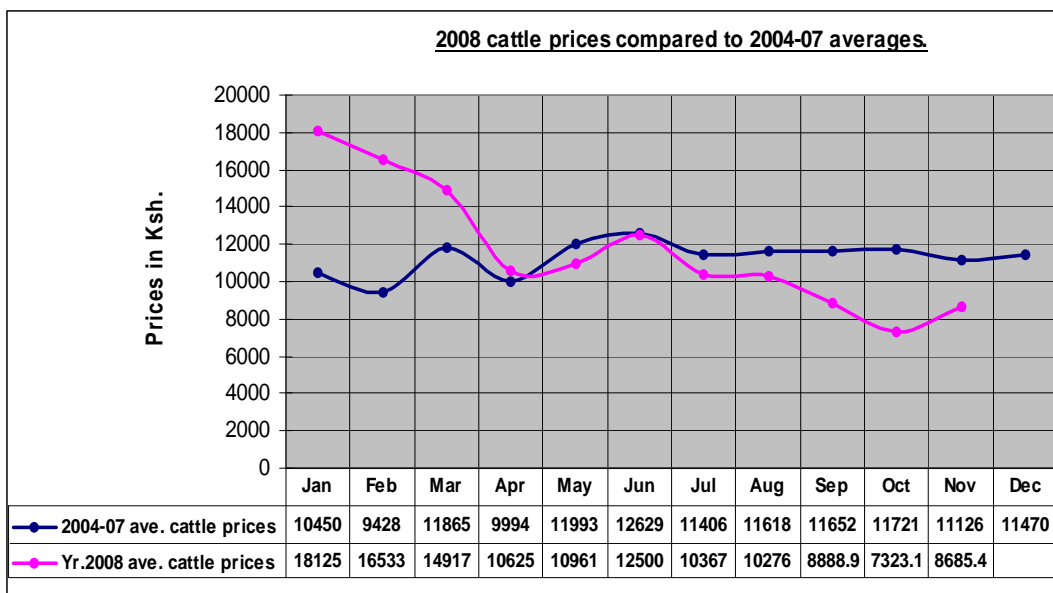
2.2.3 Implications on food security

- Scarcity of livestock products was experienced in major markets within the district as livestock body condition remained poor.
- Terms of trade for households continued being unfavourable as livestock sales prices were on a downward trend for all species compared to the long term averages, whereas food prices remained high, thus compromising their purchasing power.
- Though there was an improvement in various environmental indicators with the short rains season, most households continued employing various coping strategies.
- The situation was outside seasonal norm and was anticipated to improve with the ongoing short rains season.

3.0 Access to food

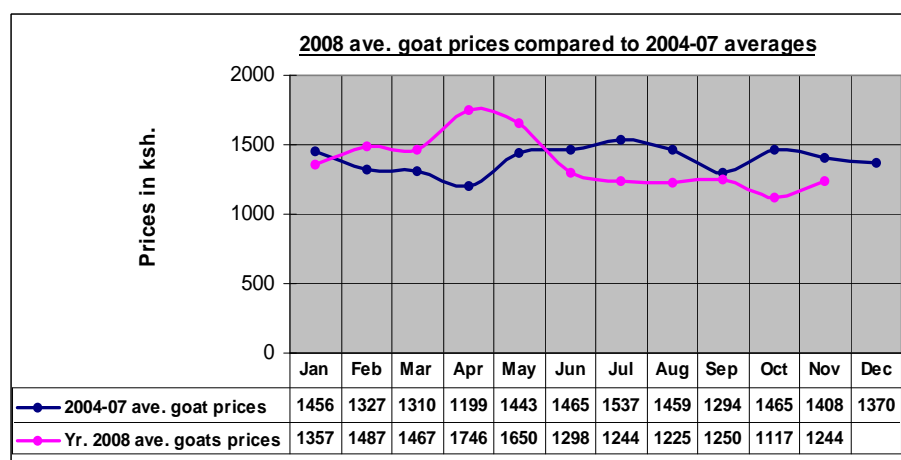
3.1 Livestock marketing

3.1.1 Cattle prices



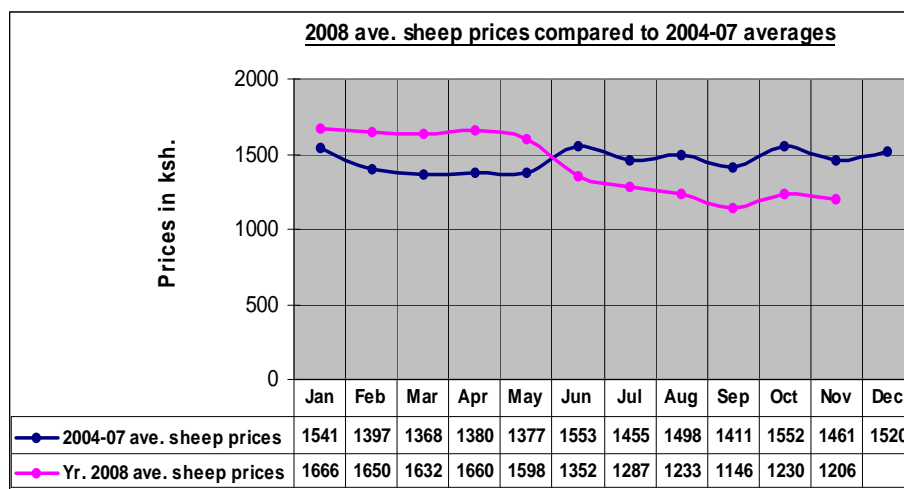
- Cattle prices improved from Ksh 8,685.40 up from Ksh7,323.10 recorded last month.
- Compared to the long term averages of 2004-07, these prices were slightly below normal seasonal range.
- Though livestock body conditions were poor, pasture regeneration in the region renewed hope for cattle rearing, leading to improved marketing.
- With the improvement in livestock feeds in the region, prices were expected to continue an upward trend.
- Highest cattle prices on average of Ksh13,050 and a low of Ksh5,000 was recorded in Kiamathaga and Mweiga locations respectively.

3.1.2 Goat prices



- The average goat price was Ksh1,243.80, from Ksh1,117.00 last month.
- The highest price at Ksh1,400 was recorded in Lower Mugunda and the lowest of Ksh 1,075.00 in Thegu.
- Goats remained relatively marketable compared to other species.
- The prices were within normal range though below the long term average.

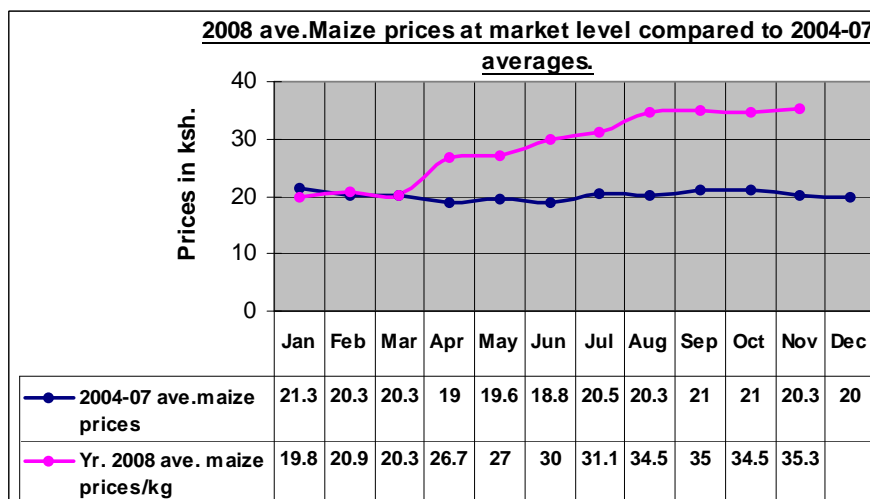
3.1.3 Sheep prices



- Sheep prices were within normal range during the month under review.
- The average price was Ksh1,205.80, down from Ksh1,230.00 recorded last month.
- Highest sheep price of Ksh1,320.00 was recorded in Naromoru and lowest in Gatarakwa location at Ksh1,078.60.
- With regeneration of natural vegetation, sheep body conditions improved, leading to stabilised market prices.

3.2 Crop prices

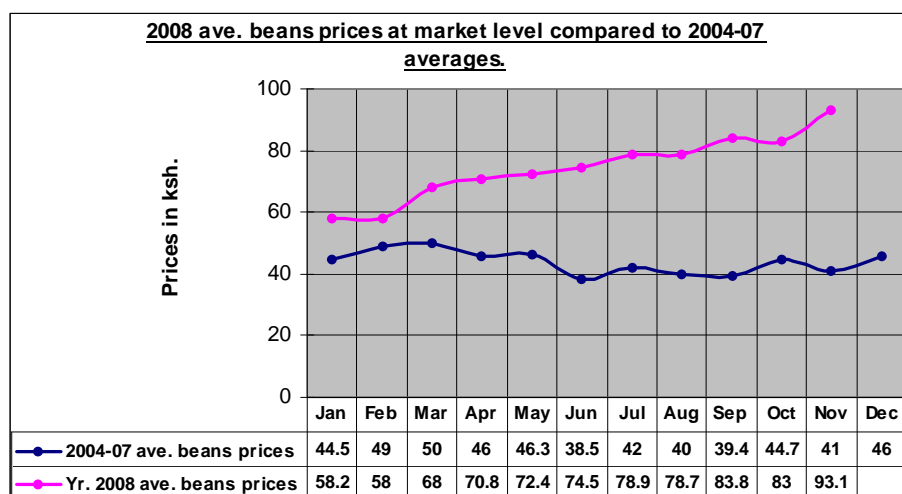
3.2.1 Maize prices



- A kilo of maize retailed at Ksh 35.30 per kilo up from Ksh 34.50/kg recorded last month.
- The highest cereal prices of Ksh40 per kilo was recorded in Kiamathaga and a low of Ksh 32.30/kg in Naromoru.

- Households exhausted their food reserves, hence no sales were made during the month under review.
- Only by realisation of the short rains harvests will these prices be cautioned.
- Compared to the 2004/07 long term averages, the prices were outside seasonal norm, a condition that requires close monitoring.

3.2.2 Beans prices



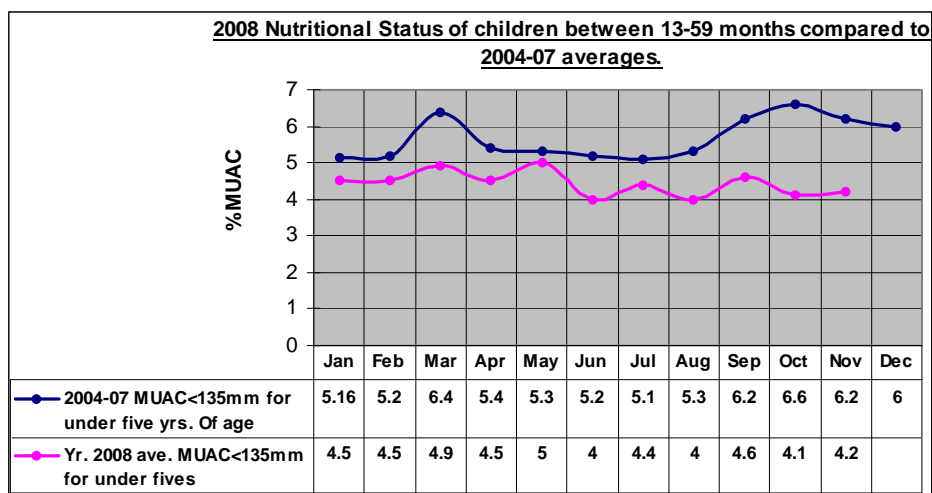
- Beans prices at market level remained higher than normal at Ksh93.10 per kilo, up from Ksh83 recorded last month.
- A high of Ksh106.70 per kilo was recorded in Naromoru and low of Ksh76.70 in Endarasha.
- No harvests were realised for two consecutive seasons due to poor weather conditions, leading to households over reliance on market supplies.
- Inadequate supply of the same within the district contributed to high prices in major markets beyond normal seasonal averages.

3.3 Implication on food security

- Poor living standards were observed at household level as majority of the people were unable to break even due to the escalating cost of living.
- As a result, signs of food stress were looming in majority of households in the region.

4.0 Human welfare indicators (Utilisation of food)

4.1 Nutrition status



- The nutrition status of children below 5 years was stable during the month under review.
- The number of children rated as being at the risk of malnutrition (based on MUAC measurement) rose to 4.2 per cent from 4.1 per cent in October.
- High cost of living combined with ongoing scarcity of food and non-food items in the markets contributed to the deterioration on the nutrition status.
- Reduction in milk production in the district also had a negative impact on the nutrition status.
- At least 1,395 children were monitored during the month under review with 4.2 per cent of them having MUAC < 135mm from 4.1 per cent recorded last month.
- The percentage represented an average of 4.2 children per sample area.

5.0 Coping strategies

- Petty trade.
- Charcoal burning.
- Ballast making along the roads.
- Sale of scrap metals.
- Borrowing from friends and relatives.
- Preference for payment in kind e.g. a bucket of potatoes in exchange for farm labour.
- Hunting wildlife for food.
- Taking porridge as the main meal.
- Youths were harvested grass/forage along road reserves, forests and public institution grounds for sale at Ksh150 to 200 per sack.
- As schools closed, cases of pupils skipping tuition sessions to look for food were common.
- Food shortage also led to expulsion of a number of IDPs who were living with friends and family members.
- Households were currently consuming wild vegetables.

6.0 Recommendations

- Promote pasture planting, bailing and preservation for use during dry season.
- River line protection on major river lines where farming activities were ongoing.
- Deworming of the vulnerable group of livestock i.e. calves - 22,800, goats - 28,000 and sheep - 51,000 for improved utilisation of scarce feed resources.

- Construction of large dams upstream which impound floods and store the same for irrigation use.
- Provision of water for domestic and livestock use in drought prone areas i.e. Lamuria, Burguret, Mugunda and Kinyaiti area. Also water harvesting techniques at household level should be encouraged.
- Vaccination of at least 50,000 animals against foot and mouth disease (FMD) and lumpy skin disease (LSD) to replicate the just concluded exercise on Anthrax, Black Quarter and Lumpy Skin Disease for 30,000 heads of cattle.
- Expansion of school-feeding programme to cover an additional 29 schools with a total enrolment of 8,350 pupils in drought prone regions.
- Support communities with drought recovery farm inputs such as certified seeds and fertilizer to assist farmers recover from the previous two consecutive poor seasons.
- Provision of food relief should be considered as a short term measure to cater for 74,250 people experiencing food deficits.
- Introduction and promotion of drought tolerant crops in drought prone areas.
- Introduction of farming techniques such as drip irrigation for water conservation.