

Situation Overview

- Showers were recorded in almost all the regions during the month under review apart from Mwiyo Location, which remained relatively dry. The Kenya Wildlife Service station at Mweiga recorded 87mm of rainfall for 12 rainy days.
- The rains assisted in sprouting of pasture but the forage available was still inadequate for livestock.
- Water flow in major rivers originating from both Mt Kenya and Aberdare Ranges improved as a result of the rains. Lachuta and Karemeno rivers, which had dried up in August, started flowing again towards the end of the month.
- Water levels in most water conservation structures such as water pans, ponds and shallow wells improved with the onset of the short rains.
- With the ongoing natural vegetation regeneration in lower zones, livestock moved out of Mt Kenya and Aberdare forests, where they had moved in search of water and pasture.
- Increased cases of livestock deaths were reported as most animals were unable to withstand the sudden change in weather from hot and dry to cold and wet condition. The situation was worsened by a rise in incidences of diarrhea caused by the rush pasture that livestock were feeding on and high worm infestation.
- The body condition for all livestock species remained poor and on a worsening trend.
- The prolonged drought forced most households to feed on their seed stock, hence majority of the farmers did not have seeds for planting.
- A large number of farms remained unattended and the area under crop production during the short rains season was projected to drop as a result of high prices of farm inputs. Interest in farming has also dwindled after farmers suffered two consecutive seasons of crop failure.
- Food prices remained high, while livestock prices were on a downward trend. This impacted negatively on food security since households continued relying on food purchases for their daily food requirements.
- 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 nutrition status of children below 5 years was stable during the month, with the number of those rated as being at the risk of malnutrition (based on MUAC measurement) falling to 4.1 per cent from 4.6 in September.
- Petty crimes were reported in a number of areas, which was a sign of food stress in the district.
- Human/wildlife conflicts were on the decrease as livestock moved out of forest reserves where they had gone in search of pasture and water.

Recommendations to DSG and KFSSG

- De-worming 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 to impound floods and store the same for irrigation use.
- Increase provision of water for domestic and livestock use in areas hard hit by drought including Lamuria, Burguret, Mugunda and Kinyaiti area.
- Encourage water harvesting techniques at household level.
- Due to increased livestock movement in search of pasture, at least 50,000 animals should be vaccinated against Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD).
- Expansion of school-feeding programme to cover an additional 29 schools with a total enrolment 8,350 pupils affected by drought.
- Provision of 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 affected by drought.
- 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

- Showers were recorded in almost all the regions during the month under review apart from Mwiyo Location, which remained relatively dry.
- The Kenya Wildlife Service station at Mweiga recorded 87mm of rainfall for 12 rainy days.
- The rainfall was erratic in lower zones, although heavy downpours were recorded along the mountainous area.
- All environmental indicators remained outside the expected seasonal range, leading to continued deterioration in both economic and social conditions.
- Most affected areas were Gatarakwa, Mweiga, Mwiyo, Burguret, Mugunda and Thegu locations.
- The situation was outside normal seasonal range but on a recovery trend.

1.2 Condition of natural vegetation and pasture

- Pasture scarcity continued being experienced in all parts of the district, with the lower areas suffering more from poor availability and quality of both pasture and browse.
- The little showers realized during the month under review assisted in regeneration of natural vegetation in the lower regions. This is expected to go on if the showers persist.
- Sheep were the major beneficiaries of the ongoing weather conditions but the rest of the herds still fed on the sprouting natural grass but with a little difficulty for cattle.
- The conditions were outside the usual seasonal range but an improvement.

1.3 Water sources and availability

- Rivers remained the major water sources throughout the district.

- Water levels in the main water conservation structures in the district improved as a result of the rains experienced during the month.
- As a result, household access to water was expected to stabilise in the short run.
- Recharge in major rivers was realized, resulting in an increase in river flows. On the other hand Lachuta and Karemeno rivers, which dried up in August, resumed flow during the month under review.
- Average return distance to water sources was 2.1 km from homesteads and 2.3 km to grazing areas, with an average return time of 1.6 hours.
- Mugunda location recorded the highest distances at 3.5 and 4.5 km to homesteads and grazing fields respectively, with an average return time of 2 hours.
- The situation was stable.

1.4 Emerging issues

- Continued restriction on irrigation activities contributed to high food prices in major markets as food scarcity was felt throughout the district. As a result, household food preferences changed, with most households consuming only those food items within their means.
- People continued moving from the lower regions to high potential areas of Endarasha and Kabaruru in search of labour, which was done in exchange for food.
- Food composition at household level was poor as food was inadequate and most households could not afford three meals daily. This could lead to high cases of malnutrition.
- There were increased cases of invasion of wheat farms by crane birds, which was expected to impact negatively on food security.

1.4.1 Migration

- Movement of people from the lower regions to the high potential areas along the mountains in search of food was on the increase. In most cases labourers exchanged a days wage with a bucket of potatoes.
- Movement of livestock from the mountainous region, where they were taken in search of pasture to their respective areas, was also common as pasture regeneration improved with the ongoing short rains.

1.5 Implications on food security

- The onset of short rains resulted in regeneration of natural pasture in the lower zones, leading to mass movement of livestock from the high altitude areas where they had migrated to in search of pasture.
- Food security at household level remained poor as households still relied on food purchases.
- Agricultural activities picked up as households prepared their land for the onset of the short rains.
- The situation was outside seasonal range as food prices were very high and most households did not have a reliable source of income.

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 cattle and goats having signs of general body weakness.
- As a result, drought-related livestock deaths were on the increase in comparison to last month.
- Averages of 42, 44 and 198 deaths were reported for cattle goats and sheep respectively, of which 37, 42 and 170 of these deaths respectively were drought related.
- The body conditions could not withstand even common ailments, a situation that requires close monitoring.
- The condition was outside normal seasonal range and was on a worsening trend.

2.1.2 Livestock diseases

- Livestock deaths during calving were on the increase, which was accelerated by the general body weakness due to the combined effects of drought and onset of the wet season.
- An outbreak of Type 'O' FMD in Guara area of Gakawa location was confirmed in September. Though no new cases were reported in October, close monitoring and vaccination are required.
- Sheep were adversely affected by respiratory ailments due to their continued exposure to dust in grazing fields, effects of which were carried over to the month under review.
- Cases of tick-borne diseases such as ECF were also common in areas where livestock share grazing fields with wildlife, especially along the forest.
- The change in weather in mountainous regions adversely affected livestock from lower regions, where they had moved in search of pasture. Consequently, deaths emanating from the same were observed as livestock migrated back to their regions.

2.2 Milk production

- The effects of drought in the district led to a reduction in milk production by over 75 percent.
- The most affected locations were Mweiga, Mwiyo, Burguret, Thegu and Mugunda.
- Milk price rose due to scarcity, with a 750ml bottle retailing at Ksh23.80, up from Ksh 14 during normal periods.

2.2 Crop production

2.2.1 Timeliness and condition of various crop production activities

- There was an increase in farm activities following the onset of the short rains.

- However, the acreage cultivated was below the normal threshold as most farmers remained undecided on crop production due to massive crop failure last season.
- Lack of planting seeds led to escalating prices of the same over and above that of farm inputs.
- Crop production was, therefore, expected to reduce during the short rains season.
- Unavailability of certified seeds for planting had a direct impact on food production as most household consumed the little seeds they had due to the persistent drought.
- The situation was outside seasonal norm and close monitoring is required.

2.2.2 Pest and diseases

- Irish potatoes tuber moths' infestation was reported in Gakawa location.

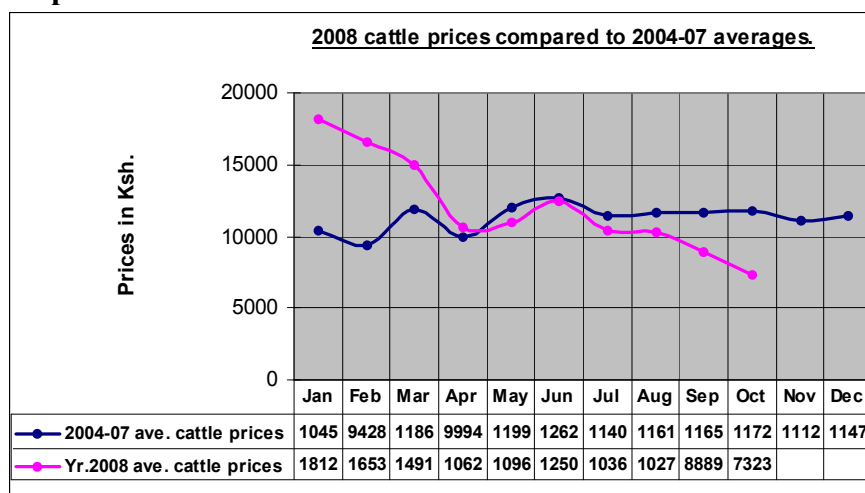
2.2.3 Implications on food security

- Though there was an improvement in livestock birth rate, a general reduction in livestock products was experienced in major markets within the district as livestock body conditions remained poor.
- As a result livestock sales and prices remained on a downward trend for all species compared to the long term averages. Consequently, terms of trade for households were unfavorable as they relied on livestock sales as the main source of income.
- Low livestock prices and high prices of basic food commodities compromised the purchasing power of most households.
- The food reserves of most households got exhausted, leading to continued employment of various coping strategies by those adversely affected.
- The situation was outside seasonal norm and was expected to improve after the short rains harvest.

3.0 Access to food

3.1 Livestock marketing

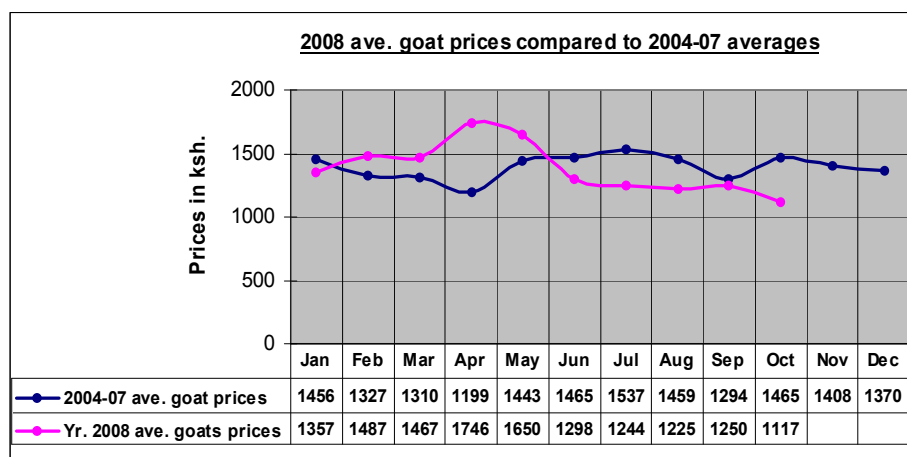
3.1.1 Cattle prices



- Cattle prices dropped to Ksh 7,323.10 from Ksh 8,888.90 recorded last month.

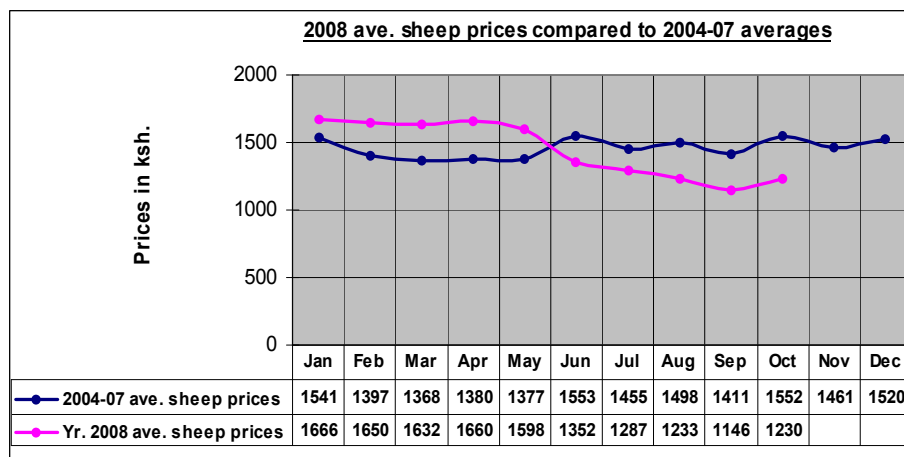
- Compared to the long term averages of 2004-07, the prices were slightly below normal seasonal range.
- Feeding animals on the sprouting natural vegetation exposed them to worm infestations, leading to increased cases of diarrhea and poor body conditions.
- The prices were expected to continue on the downward trend if the weather conditions persist or until livestock feeds improve.
- Highest cattle prices were recorded in Narumoru and Mweiga locations at Ksh 14,000 and Ksh 2,501.00 respectively.

3.1.2 Goat prices



- Goat prices were also within normal range though below the long term average.
- The average price was Ksh1,117, from Kshs 1,250 last month.
- The highest price at Ksh1,300 was recorded in Mwiyo and the lowest in Gatarakwa at Ksh 900.
- Goats were not adversely affected compared to the other species, thus boosting their demand at market level although supply was still low.

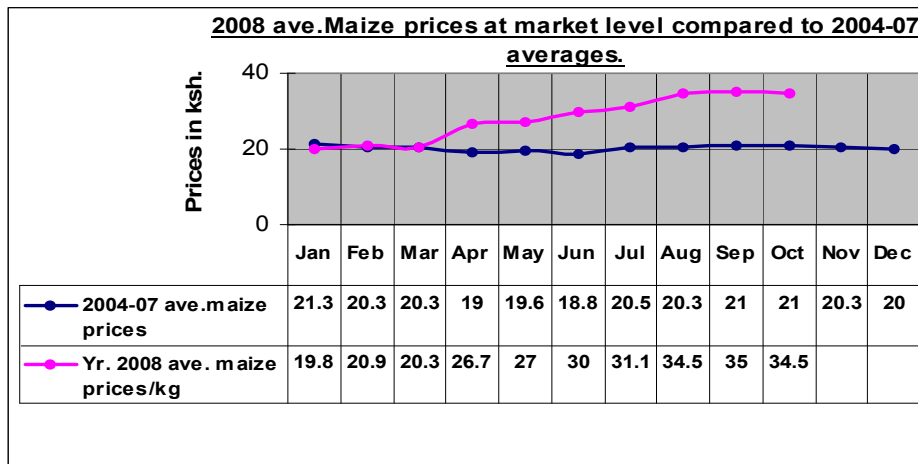
3.1.3 Sheep prices



- Sheep prices were within normal range during the month under review.
- The average price was Ksh1,229.50, up from Ksh 1,146.00 recorded last month.
- Highest sheep price of Ksh1,600 was recorded in Narumoru and lowest in Mweiga location at Ksh 550.
- Sheep prices improved as their body conditions showed signs of recovery due to the regeneration of natural vegetation as a result of the ongoing short rainy season.

3.2 Crop prices

3.3.1 Maize prices



- There were no maize sales reported at household level as cereal reserves were exhausted in all livelihood zones.
- At market level, a kilo of maize fetched Ksh 34.50 per kilo, down from Ksh 35 recorded last month.
- The highest cereal prices of Ksh36 were recorded in Gatarakwa and a low of Ksh 32 in Narumoru.
- The price is expected to drop only after the harvest of the short rains season produce. Compared to the 2004/07 long term averages, the prices were outside the seasonal norm, a condition that requires close monitoring.

3.2.2. Beans prices



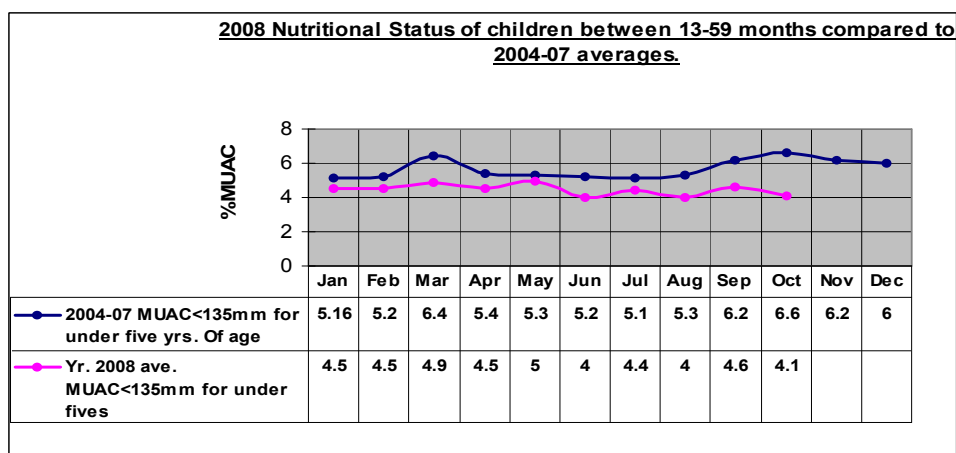
- Beans prices at market level remained higher than normal at Ksh83 per kilo, down from Ksh 83.80 recorded last month.
- A high of Ksh100.00 was recorded in Upper Mugunda and Mweiga and low of Ksh 60 in Thegu..
- Legume reserves at household level got exhausted because of the combined effect of the previous two consecutive poor rainy seasons.
- Continued low supply of the same in major markets within the district led to high prices beyond normal seasonal averages.

3.3 Implications on food security

- Ongoing poor livestock sales prices and high cost of food stuff in the market contributed to the unfavourable terms of trade for the locals.
- Consequently, signs of food stress continued being felt at household level in the region.

4.0 Human welfare indicators (Utilisation of food)

4.1 Nutrition status



N=1,356

- The nutrition status of children below 5 years was stable during the month.
- The number of children rated as being at the risk of malnutrition (based on MUAC measurement) fell to 4.1 per cent from 4.6 in September.
- The status showed signs of deterioration as food stress continued being felt at household level, heightened by the high food prices.
- Reduced milk production throughout the district also had a direct impact on the nutrition status.
- At least 1,356 children were monitored during the month under review, with 4.1 per cent having MUAC < 135mm from 4.6 per cent recorded last month. The percentage represented an average of 3.9 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.
- Harvesting grass/forage along road reserves, forests and public institution grounds for sale at Ksh150 to 200 per sack.
- Pupils skipping afternoon sessions to look for food, especially in Mwiyo and Mugunda were common.
- Expulsion of internally displaced people who were living with friends and family members.

6.0 Recommendations

- De-worming 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 to impound floods and store the same for irrigation use.
- Increase provision of water for domestic and livestock use in areas hard hit by drought including Lamuria, Burguret, Mugunda and Kinyaiti area.
- Encourage water harvesting techniques at household level.
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