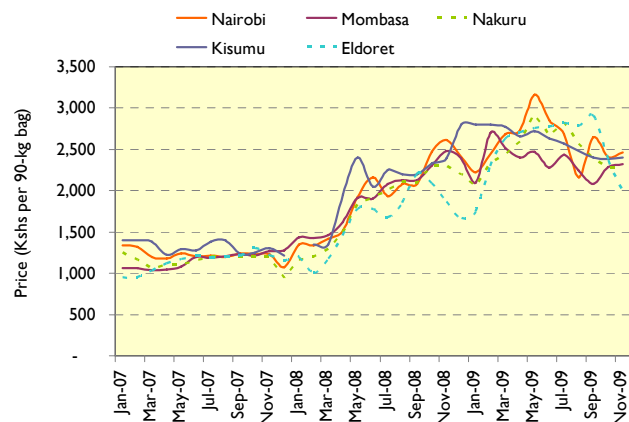


Widening maize supply deficit to accentuate food insecurity

Expectations of a significantly below-normal 2009-10 maize harvest have raised serious concerns for food security in the northwestern and southern pastoral and southeastern marginal agricultural areas of Kenya. With the long rains maize harvest drawing to a close, the Ministry of Agriculture estimates total 2009-10 production at 2.29 million MT, consisting of long rains production of 1.84 million MT (nearly 27 percent less than the four-year average) and short rains production of 450,000 MT. USDA estimates total production at 1.8 million MT, with long rains output of 1.5 million MT and short rains output at the five-year average of 300,000 MT. Regardless of the precise production output, a maize deficit is expected to manifest in the second quarter of 2010. Furthermore, this deficit is certain to have a significant impact on access to food, due to continued upward pressure on commodity prices and decreased labor opportunities and income. In pastoral areas, the combination of reduced food availability and access, along with the lingering impacts of conflict in some areas, could result in rising levels of high and extreme food insecurity beginning in early 2010. In the southeastern marginal agricultural areas, which depend on short rains production for 70 percent of annual production, food security could begin to deteriorate after the first quarter of 2010 if January rains are below average.

Figure 1. Maize price trends in reference markets



Source: USGS - FEWS NET

While the country has a structural deficit in maize production even in normal seasons, the 2009-10 deficit is significant because of well-above-average prices since late 2007 (Figure 1). Current national supply is estimated to be 720,000 MT – about 430,000 MT held by farmers in the Rift Valley, 180,000 MT by the National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB), and 144,000 by millers and traders. Although supply is likely to meet domestic demand through part of May 2010, prices are expected to increase beginning in early 2010, as households in the grain basket are unlikely to sell most of their harvest while a national deficit is manifesting. However, deliveries of maize to the NCPB have slowed because of outstanding payments of \$7.5 million due to farmers, and this could increase supply to the open market rather than the NCPB, potentially moderating the expected price increases. A temporary increase in maize supply to markets adjacent to the southeastern and coastal lowlands is also anticipated in February-March, as indebted households sell their production to meet other outstanding non-food needs. Many of these households are engaging in increasingly negative coping strategies, including charcoal production and skipping meals.

The outlook for food insecure pastoral and marginal agricultural households remains worrisome in the face of lowered national maize output. Poor rains in the northwestern and southern pastoral areas have provided little reprieve for pastoralists facing poor livestock prices, high cereal prices, lingering impacts of conflict in the northwest, and an upsurge in livestock and human disease, most notably cholera. If rains remain poor in the pastoral areas, food security will decline rapidly early in the first quarter of 2010 in Turkana, West Pokot, Baringo, parts of Marsabit and Samburu, and the southern Maasai rangelands of Kajiado and Narok. Similarly, food security in the southeastern and coastal marginal agricultural districts could deteriorate after the first quarter of 2010 in the event that January rains are below-average. In these areas, food security benefits arising from increased supply of short-cycle crops and improved livestock productivities would be quickly eroded. The increase in undesirable coping strategies suggests that heightened food insecurity could become entrenched in the event that another season fails. FEWS NET will continue to monitor the progress of the short rains season and impacts on prices to determine the food security outlook in these areas.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.