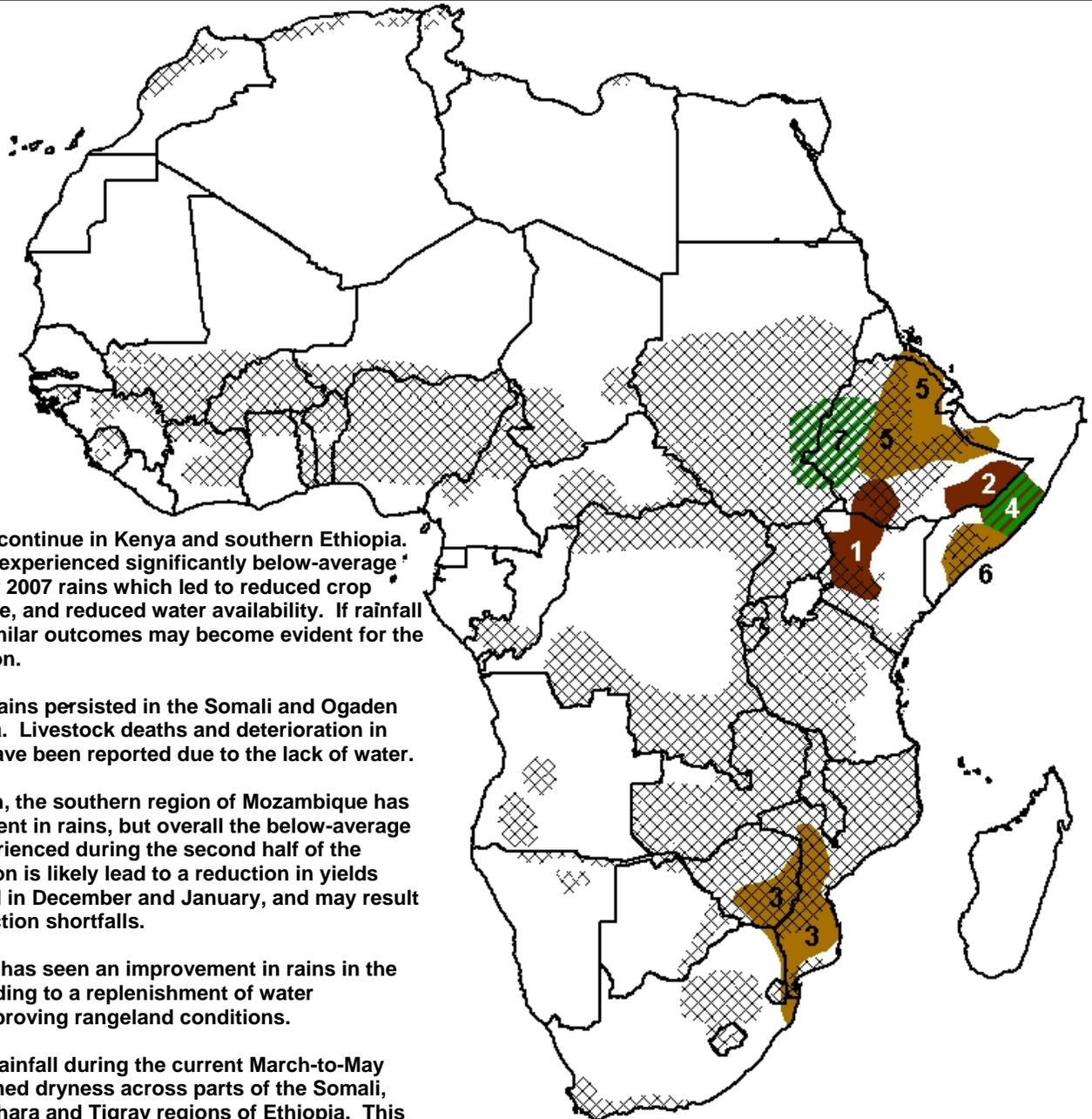


- The late onset and poor performance of the March – May rains in parts of Ethiopia have led to failure of the short-season belg crops and reduced food availability.
- As a result of the Sahelian 2007 – 2008 dry season and decreasing outflow from Mali and Guinea, water levels along the Niger River are very low and some tributaries have dried up. As the wet season begins, improvement is expected in water levels.



1) Rainfall deficits continue in Kenya and southern Ethiopia. These same areas experienced significantly below-average October-December 2007 rains which led to reduced crop yields, poor pasture, and reduced water availability. If rainfall deficits persist, similar outcomes may become evident for the March – May season.

2) Below average rains persisted in the Somali and Ogaden regions of Ethiopia. Livestock deaths and deterioration in body conditions have been reported due to the lack of water.

3) In the last month, the southern region of Mozambique has seen an improvement in rains, but overall the below-average rainfall totals experienced during the second half of the October-May season is likely lead to a reduction in yields from crops planted in December and January, and may result in localized production shortfalls.

4) Central Somalia has seen an improvement in rains in the last two weeks leading to a replenishment of water availability and improving rangeland conditions.

5) Below-average rainfall during the current March-to-May season has worsened dryness across parts of the Somali, Afar, Oromiya, Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia. This dryness has led to acute crop failure for belg crops, deteriorating livestock conditions and decreased water availability. A reduction in the planting of long cycle crops is also expected.

6) Southern Somalia is experiencing a late start of season. The gu season will be considered a failure if regular rains do not start within the next week. Crop losses are expected, further eroding food security in the region.

7) Western provinces of Ethiopia have had abundant and consistent rains.

Legend is very general, please see numbered descriptions for details.



Mildly dry start to the West African wet season

The dry season months of October 2007 to April 2008 were below average thus starting the current May to September wet season off with rainfall deficits. This is especially true in the Gulf of Guinea countries and the southern Sahel where rain gauge reports indicate negative anomalies in excess of 200 mm for the past six months. In recent weeks, rainfall totals have improved over the region as a whole with the exception of the southern Sahel. According to gauge reports Burkina Faso and localized areas of western Nigeria are 15 – 25 mm below average for the past week.

The pre-seasonal rain deficits observed in April in addition to the low rainfall totals last season in the Guinea highlands have all contributed to low water levels along the Niger River north of Niamey. Ground reports state that the current water levels of the Niger River are very low. With the start of the wet season improvement is likely, but at present there has been a decrease in outflow upstream from Mali and Guinea. However, since May 2008 rainfall has improved. The outlook for the season is favorable for improvement. According to the probabilistic forecast using the Canonical Correlation Analysis and the APEC Climate Center, odds are in favor of above average rainfall for the Sahel region during the June-July-August period (Figure 1).

Ethiopia and Somalia experience water shortages

March-May long-cycle rains have been below average and erratic for agriculturalists and pastoralists in much of the Greater Horn. This follows a failed October-December rainy season in 2007, the impacts of which are varied, but include reports of livestock death and deterioration, crop failure, and low water availability. Ethiopia and Somalia appear to have borne the brunt of the impact of the 2008 below-average rains.

In Ethiopia and Somalia, worsened dryness across parts of the Somali, Afar, Oromiya, Amhara and Tigray regions of Ethiopia as well as the southern cropping region of Somalia (Figure 2) has led to the failure of belg and gu season crops. A reduction in crop areas is also expected for the coming June to September season in Ethiopia.

Western Ethiopia experiences abundant rains and favorable cropping conditions

Since the start of April, rainfall totals in Western Ethiopia have been near or above average. This has the potential to bring about a favorable meher crop harvest to areas surrounding Gonder, Nekemte and Gambela, where April rains are important to long-maturing crops.

