

# El Niño in Ethiopia

## Early impacts of drought in South Tigray Zone

Update – February 2016

### Introduction

In January 2016 the AKLDP produced a set of Field Notes that documented the early impact of the El Niño on smallholder farmers in selected drought affected zones in the three main regions of Tigray, Amhara and Oromia. In this Field Notes the AKLDP presents information on the continuing impact of the El Niño on smallholder farmers in South Tigray, in particular in the most severely drought affected woredas of Raya Azebo and Raya Alamata.

### Early onset of rains and farmer response

Unseasonal rains fell in the second half of December 2015 and were sufficient to encourage smallholder farmers to plant maize and sorghum, with a view to harvest in April 2016. Farmers also reported that if the rains continued well that they would plant teff in the first week of February 2016. However, the rains did not continue and so some of the early planted maize and sorghum has started to wilt. Without more rain, farmers confirm that the maize will dry and will be grazed by livestock. It is now unlikely the farmers will plant teff as planned.

The Tigray National Regional Government has rehabilitated more than 200 deep boreholes in the drought affected areas of Raya Azebo and Raya Alamata to increase the area of irrigated crop farming. Farmers have taken advantage of this opportunity to plant maize and sorghum. The crops are established and growing well and a good harvest is expected. In some areas however an outbreak of maize lethal necrosis has required farmers to harvest the maize early and to use for supplementary feed for livestock.

### Impact of the El Niño drought on markets

Despite the severity of the drought, sorghum and teff prices have remained stable over recent months, partly due to emergency food distributions. However, January 2016 cereal prices in markets in Raya Azebo and Alamata are, on average, 60% higher than in January 2015 (Figure 1).

Livestock prices recovered in November and December 2015 due to unseasonal rains and improvements in pasture. However, January 2016 prices for plough oxen, cows and goats are below January 2015 prices by 22%, 86% and 28% respectively (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Trends in sorghum and teff prices, South Tigray, 2014 to 2015

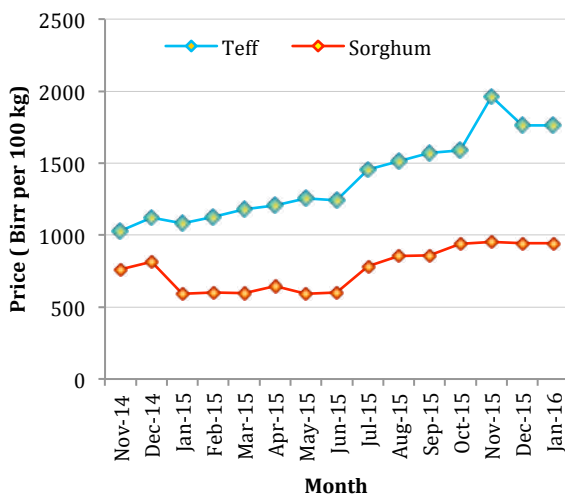
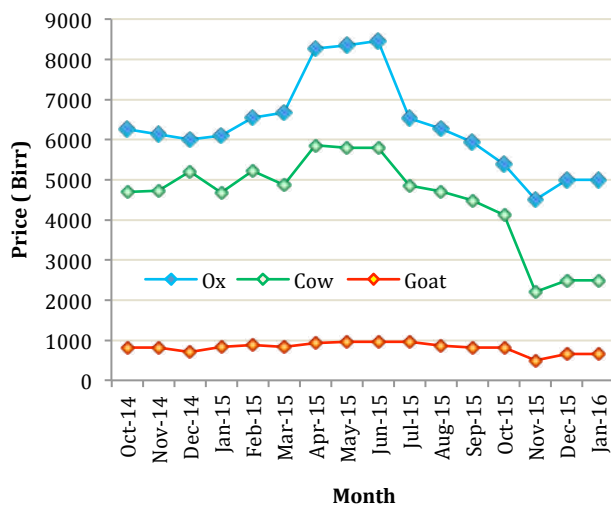
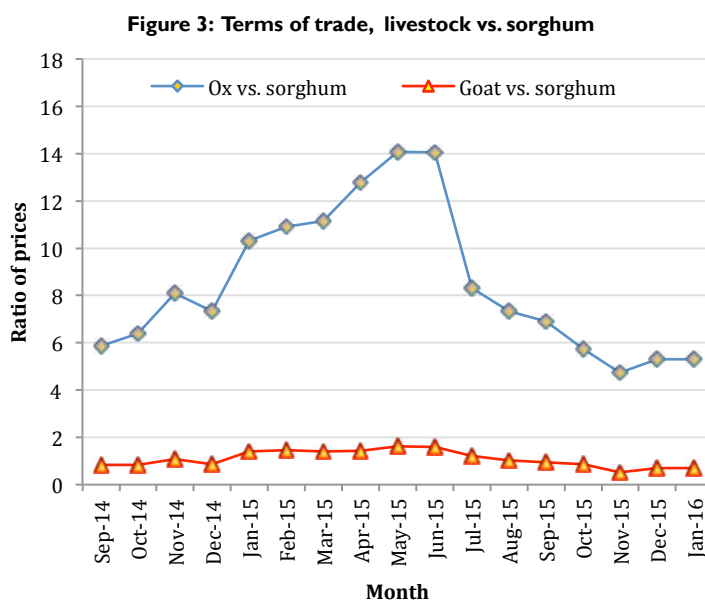


Figure 2: Trends in livestock prices in South Tigray, 2014 to 2015



The price of plough oxen is supported by the rising demand for oxen to plough for the spring *belg* planting season. However, prices are 66% below the peak month of June 2015. As a result, terms of trade – livestock to cereals in particular sorghum – in January 2016 are roughly half of what they were in January 2015 and are expected to continue to fall if the spring *belg* rains are delayed (Figure 3).



### Concluding remarks

Despite smallholder farmers' best efforts to make full use of the December 2015 rains, the rains have not continued as hoped. As a result, early-planted rainfed maize and sorghum is now wilting in many areas. Unless the rains return in the next week to 10 days, these crops will be grazed by livestock. While grazing may not improve food availability it will at least help to sustain livestock. In other areas, farmers have been assisted by Tigray Region to develop irrigated agriculture and in these areas farmers are expected to harvest crops and household food security be improved.

#### For further information:

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