



Assessment Report

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Impact of poor *Karma* rains in Zone 1 & 4, Afar National Regional State

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8 – 12th December 2004

BACKGROUND

Afar region is an arid and semi arid area inhabited by pastoralists and agro pastoralists. The livelihood of Afar pastoralists is based on the rearing of livestock. The availability of pasture for their animals is dependent on the rainfall situation in the rainy seasons.

The region has three rainy seasons: *Karma* is the main rainy season (mid June to mid September); *Sugum* rain corresponds to the short rains (Mid March to April). The third rain is called *Dada*, very short from mid November to mid December; it usually covers only the areas at the escarpment of the highlands (western part of Zone 4).

In the recent years the rainfall situation has been erratic. *Sugum* rains this year were observed as generally poor. As these are the most important rains in Afar, the impact is significant. The subsequent *Karma* rains were also poor in most parts of the region excluding Zone 3.

ASSESSMENT - JUSTIFICATION

ACF has been implementing activities in Zones 1 & 4 of the Afar Region since 1999. General situation monitoring is a normal activity conducted by ACF on a regular basis. Through following of developments of the *Karma* rains and their general poor performance, a more in-depth assessment was arranged with focus on Southern Zone 4 (Uwa, Gullia, Awra), and Southern Dubti woreda in Zone 1.

The objectives were i) to assess the performance of *Karma* rain and its impact on natural resources and livestock in Zone 1 & 4 of Afar Region, ii) to understand the current humanitarian situation in the area, and iii) to evaluate the possible humanitarian expectations and draft recommendations accordingly.

This assessment follows a similar assessment done in Teru woreda, Zone 4 in early November.

The current assessment was done by questionnaires, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Pastoralists, key informants and woreda administrations were contacted. Transect walk in the grazing lands, the watering points and visual observation of livestock was also part of the assessment. The team conducting the assessment was composed of ACF staff (veterinarian and animal health technician) and regional veterinarian from Dubti woreda.

POOR KARMA RAINS AND IMPACT ON AREA

Rainfall situation

Overall, in the areas assessed the last *Karma* rains were poor in addition to starting late. The *Dada* rains generally falling between mid-November and mid-December were also poor; just 1-day shower fell whereas 7-days precipitation is normal for the season.

Pasture and browse availability

The consecutive rain deficit for 2004 has not allowed for pasture to properly regenerate.

- *Very poor availability of pasture and browse in Zone 4*

Normally, at this time of year, southern Zone 4 should host a large number of livestock with plenty of pasture and browse. However, pastures at this time are dry or non-existent. Currently pasture is available in southern Chiffra and northern Mile woredas though it is of poor quality.

Many herders have remained in the neighboring highlands, grazing their animals there or feeding them by purchased bundled grasses. However, as many pastoralists are in the highlands, the available grazing is also decreasing quickly. Due to this, lowlands herders would normally have to leave soon the area; if they fail to do so, tensions with highlands herders will increase sharply, with potential for violence (as witnessed in 2002, notably).

- *High concentration of livestock in Dubti woreda of zone 1*

In southern Dubti woreda, animals are grazing in marshy areas under the trees. The former quality pastures of Awash riverbanks are no longer accessible for cattle and sheep as the banks are invaded by thick and thorny *Prosopis juliflora* bushes. Concentration of animals is high because the available pasture is small on quantity. As a result, these pastures are depleting fast. They are estimated to last for 1/2 to 1 month, according to the woreda authorities.

Browse is still available, however, thus goats and camels still have sufficient food. Nevertheless, herders have started to cut leaves from some browse in order to feed non-browsing livestock (cattle and sheep). This will lead to browse depletion, and severely slow down regeneration in the coming months.

There are reports of significant tensions between Issa and Afar herders in south Mile woreda, due to the scarcity of pastures.

Livestock condition and health

There are no reported cases of outbreaks in the areas assessed or other surrounding woredas. However, sheep and cattle are weak to very weak due to the poor pasture situation. Many animals cannot stand and herders are having a difficult time to move these weak animals.

- *Mortality*

It is difficult to quantify accurately data on animal mortality as herders are nervous about the potential of high decapitalization. Information gathered from local authorities and herders puts the mortality rates for the past four months between 20 and 30% for sheep and cattle. In some areas, however, herders reported even higher losses - Bayahale kebele in Dubti in particular. Herders have lost consider numbers while migrating. Goat and camels are not yet affected and no significant mortality increase reported.

- *Morbidity*

Morbidity is estimated at 25 to 40% of the herds for all species though no killer epidemics is reported yet: lack of food appears to be the major single cause for excess mortality at this time, even though non lethal diseases further weaken the livestock and indirectly contribute to the excess mortality. Diseases currently affecting cattle in Chiffra, Uwa, Awra, Gullina are trypanosomosis, FMD (foot and mouth disease), anaplasmosis, pasteurelosis, anthrax, bovine farsi (*kidda* in Afar language). In Dubti, cattle are most affected by fasciolosis, CBPP, and mangemitis

- *Milk production*

Milk production is significantly reducing, especially for cattle and sheep, the first affected species. Milk is still available from camel and goats but without expected improvement, it will also rapidly decline.

Migrations & concentrations

This season has seen many abnormal migrations including (See also attached map):

- Migrations from Zone 4 into the highlands are a normal feature, but this year herds have had to go further into the highlands and are staying longer than usual, as normal pasture areas are already exhausted.
- Zone 4 should be hosting many animals at this time, returned from the highlands and Zone 1. This area is generally empty of animals at this time.
- Northern Dubti herders stayed only briefly in pastures between Ragden and Chiffra. This was also the case for other herders from Dubti and Afambo woredas on their migrations to the large pastures in southern Zone 4
- Pastures in southern Dubti are still hosting herders from Zone 4 who should have normally returned to their place of origin at this time.

- *Migrations from Zone 4*

All species of animals from Uwa woreda migrated to zones 3, 5 (Shawarabit), zone 1 (Mille woreda (Galaha, Kusurtu), and to the Highlands (Bati, Kobo, Hara). In Ragden, all families left, leaving children with teachers, fed with Nido and other food stuffs (cereals mainly) provided by some project supporting school.

Cattle from Awra woreda migrated to northern kebeles and Zone 5 (Haru, Hara) and Zone 1 (Dubti woreda (Det Bahari, Tangayekoma, Babadoyta) where they left since 4 months. Shoats remain in the woreda. Except some that left to Kobo, camels also remain in Awra (Hidda, Daraytu, Aliberi Mesgid kebeles).

- *Concentrations of livestock*

In Gullina woreda, cattle did not move and are concentrated in Wanassa k Harigerbo, Daraytu, Galikoma, and Ayga k Burtale kebeles.

Animals of Dubti are concentrated in Southern kebeles (Tangayekoma, Babadoyta, Anakis k Arado, Babadoyta, Magenta, Bayahale), where they meet also animals from zone 4.

Generally speaking, in zone 4 remain mainly weak animals which were not able to travel, whereas in normal year remain in the woreda some breeding, lactating animals.

In normal year, livestock of Zone 1 (especially from Afambo, Dubti and Mille woredas) would be in Zone 4 from June until the end of October. This year they returned from Zone 4 in early September, going back to the dry season grazing areas earlier than normal.

Markets

At this time the market for animals is very poor in Afar, particularly in Dubti and Assayta. Thus access to cash is reducing. In these two markets, herders remain 3 – 4 days trying to sell their animals, as risk losing the animals is high if they try to migrate with them.

In Yalo market - the major livestock market in Zone 4- a middle-aged head of cattle was selling for 200 ETB whereas in normal year it should be 500 to 600 ETB. Prices of cereals and butter have also increased abnormally for the season. Only in Chiffra market are prices generally normal for the season.

Food aid & human health

According to Dubti authorities, the number beneficiaries for general food distribution have reduced from 41,000 to 18,000 people in the past few months. This may be a normal reduction of beneficiaries as previously forecasted. Cross check with regional DPPB and WFP reports is needed.

Regarding health, cases of malaria are reported at this time, particularly in the Dubti area.

Coping mechanisms

Current coping mechanisms in the assessed areas include:

- Feeding animals with grasses cut in Tendaho cotton plantation and with residues of productions of Dubti area,
- Feeding animals with packed grass and by-products bought on markets (Kombotchia, Chiffra, Alamata, Waldya) for herders staying in highlands,
- Abnormal migrations (as previously highlighted),
- Sale of animals at poor prices when possible.

EXPECTATIONS

The situation of most of Zone 4 and parts of Zone 1 has degraded over the past few months. Some herders have started to speak of severe drought. As the next rains are at least four months away, it will be a very difficult season for the affected herders. There was a slight chance that *Dada* rains could bring slight relief as they did in 2003, however at this stage they didn't bring much improvement. Further rain may be expected in the coming weeks, though this would be abnormal for the season.

Jillal season with its cooler weather will also bring stress to the weak animals. *Jillal* is also normally a season with higher animal health needs. Therefore, a rise in disease prevalence and potential outbreaks are real threats in the coming months.

Vaccination is not possible for most of the zones because of the weak animal condition. With very poor chances for significant improvement, mortalities are expected to increase in the coming months.

Resources will become very scarce shortly and herders will need to stay in their current locations until next rains can improve the pasture availability. Following the decline in the animal condition, the human condition is expected to deteriorate especially for children, the sick and the elderly. As herds are mixed –from different areas and clans- tensions may increase in the sharing of the scarce resources.

ACF propositions

ACF will continue to monitor closely the main distress indicators in the area including animal condition, pasture/ browse condition, water availability, migrations, and food sources and availability (linked to a possible degradation of the nutritional status of the children).

ACF intends to work on the following issues:

- Immediate and efficient co-ordination between the different actors, in order to share information, reach common analysis and possibly come with a common methodology for possible intervention. ACF will participate in collaboration to a multi-sectoral approach such as field assessments.
- A large-scale treatment campaign should be planned for the beginning of *Sugum* rains (normally April) through existing ACF para-veterinary networks (Community Based Animal Health Workers) in all the affected woredas. The objective will be to prevent a peak of mortality, as changing weather patterns (cold and humidity) will affect already weak livestock, and to contribute to the quick recovery of the herds.
- A pilot project combining animal feeding and treatment for the duration of the *Jillal* dry season could be set up in one targeted woreda (possibly Dubti), pending analysis of logistical and cost-efficiency constraints.

ACF strongly advocates that any intervention in the current crisis region should focus on linking short term and mid/long term approaches in order not to undermine, through ill planned emergency interventions, the on going longer term efforts from the few actors already present in the area.

Among other concerns, massive veterinary drugs dumping, with no proper control/monitoring of its use by herders, should be avoided. In addition to not being necessarily effective and cost-efficient, these short-term interventions tend to undermine the sustainability of a necessary permanent para-veterinary network.

**Map of livestock migrations and concentration
Afar zones 1 and 4 - December 2004**

