

Afar Pastoralists Face Consequences of Poor Rains

Rapid Assessment Mission: 19–24 April 2000

by Yves Guinand, UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia

Introduction and background

The Afar Region, structured into 5 zones and 29 weredas, is located in the Northeast of Ethiopia, sharing international borders with Eritrea and Djibouti. The Afar people are a Cushitic, predominantly nomadic race, of whom more than 80% are practising transhumant pastoralism for subsistence¹. The Northern part of Afar Region around the lower Danakil Plain, is predominantly a semi-desert with thorny species of shrubs and acacia, which have developed dwarf forms. Further south, Steppe is the dominant vegetation pattern.

The area and its population have long been neglected by national development efforts due to its pastoralist origin (MEDAC, 1996). It is only in recent years, that efforts have been undertaken to provide basic infrastructures such as road accessibility and basic health services for each of the weredas. The main transit artery of landlocked Ethiopia to import and export goods, formerly through Assab and presently through Djibouti port, leads through the Afar Region. This road led to a typical 'truck-stop economy' with towns such as Logia, and commerce servicing mainly the needs and desires of truck drivers.

Presently, there are two main factors which negatively affect the livelihood of Afar people: the border conflict with neighbouring Eritrea and persisting drought conditions in parts of Afar Region. The conflict has displaced some 30,000 Afar people and cross-border animal trading stopped since the first days of the conflict. This represents a major cut back for the Afar economy, which is mainly based on income generation through pastoralists' livestock sales. On the Eritrea border areas, fortunately the demand by the army for goats and sheep has a stabilising effect on local livestock markets and prices. The semi-arid main parts of Afar Region should normally benefit from a long *karma* rainy season (from June to September) and two short *dadaa* (in December) and *sugum* (from March to April) rainy seasons. In 1999 *sugum* failed, the *karma* rains were late and in the northern part too short and the *dadaa* rains in December failed as well. During the mission's visit, fortunately the *sugum* rains, even though late by one month, have now started in the southern part of the region slowly turning the landscape into a flashy light green. Nevertheless, the northern zones 1, 2 and 4 did not yet get any rain. Water and animal fodder is getting scarce and especially in the northern part wide spread water shortage, animal diseases and weakened physical human conditions have been reported by the Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) operating in the area (APDA, 2000).

The objective of the United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UN-EUE) mission was to collect first hand impressions and information on the general situation prevailing presently in Afar Region. The original mission plan was to visit and evaluate the humanitarian situation around Afdera in Zone 2 and to follow up APDA's development and relief activities. But after discussions with regional government representatives from the DPPB office in the regional capital Assaita, the mission had to opt for a visit to parts of Zone 1, 4 and 5 from where human and animal disease outbreaks have repeatedly been reported. The DPPB Regional Department Head accompanied the UN-EUE mission to guide and facilitate communication with local Afar people and authorities. Furthermore, discussions were held with DPPB in Assaita and DPPC in Addis Ababa on prevailing beneficiary numbers, both internally war-displaced people and drought victims.

¹ For further reading on livelihood and socio-economic background information of the Afar society, please refer to Bryden, 1996a & c; Farah, 1992; Woldemariam, 1993; and Ahrens, 1999, mentioned in the annexed literature list.

Usual and unusual Afar pastoralist movements for grazing and water

About the traditional Afar pastoralist system

The traditional Afar pastoralist system involves transhumant migration between dry and wet season pastures within a radius of approximately 50 kilometres. In times of drought the perennial Awash River with its fertile riverbanks and some smaller rivers such as Logia, Mile, Whama, Anderkalu, Borkena, Jara, Ataye can offer some security as an alternate source of water and grazing. Usually and therefore, the Afar pastoralists do not see water as the main problem which makes them move. It is rather the circumstance and the fact that prolonged drought periods exhaust grazing areas near water points and animals have to cover ever-longer distances for fodder. The northern Afar living in arid desert-like environments are relatively more mobile than their southern affiliates and depend more upon water drawn from shallow hand dug wells along rivers which usually run dry after a certain period of time.

The Afar pastoralists raise mixed species of primary livestock, usually camels and cattle and keep supplementary herds of goats and sheep. Camels are best suited to the arid desert-like area of Afar. In times of water scarcity they can endure without water for more than two weeks. Furthermore, they are browsers as are goats and feed on the foliage of trees and bushes. Hence, they are not dependent on surface grass like cattle and to a lesser degree sheep. Cattle are definitely the most vulnerable livestock to drought. They have to be watered at least every third day and are unable to survive on tree and shrub foliage. Furthermore, unlike camels, which are able to move fast and frequently to make maximum use of the existing but widely distributed pasturage and water, cattle are not very mobile. The relatively less arid and climatic more favourable southern part of Afar Region from Awash up to Mile and especially around Gewane offer opportunities for cattle production. Whereas north of Mile shortage of water and relative scant pastoral resources are serious constraints to cattle production, Afar pastoralists are taking the risk to breed and raise cattle in a primarily unfavourable environment. In these areas of Zone 4, the western part of Zone 1 and Zone 2, adjacent to neighbouring Amhara and Tigray Regions, Afar pastoralists have to cover long distances, especially during the dry season and even more in periods of drought. Having to cover relative long distances with cattle in northern Afar always bears the risk that part of the herd perishes due to water or grazing shortage. But cattle like camel are primary stock and status indicators and represent the nomadic capital wealth of the Afar society and are essentially raised and kept for this reason. On the other hand sheep and goats are considered consumer and market goods, which are frequently sold and traded for grains and basic household goods of primary necessity².

Western weredas of Zone 1, 2 and 4 attracting Afar herders from the drought hit eastern lowlands

The western Uwa, Gulina and Yalow weredas of Zone 4, Chifra wereda of Zone 1, and Megale and Ab Ala weredas of Zone 2 are now attracting substantial numbers of pastoralists with their herds from arid lowland areas situated in the east. Pastoralists from Aura and Teru weredas, from western Dubti wereda and from Erebtii wereda headed westwards. Within the aforementioned western weredas enough grazing land is available for the time being and some of the rivers such as Whama, Uwa, Mile and Logia still carry surface water. Most other rivers are now dry but hand-dug wells, some of which are as deep as 15 to 20 metres, supply water in sufficient amount to welcome additional consumers.

Further west towards Mile and in Dubti wereda the situation looks more uncertain for many pastoralists. The mission visited a couple of shallow hand dug wells along Weranso River, which crosses the Mile- Bati road approximately 30 kilometres from Mile. The Afar people who were watering their animals at one of the hand-dug wells confirmed the seriousness of the situation in the arid lowlands of the north-western part of Afar Region (see picture in annexe 2). In the vicinity of the visited well, about a dozen similar ones exist. All of them are dry now and no other water is available within a radius of at least five hours walk. Due to water scarcity, many families have left the area. Water and grazing land began to become scarce before the month of Ramadan in November last year. Presently only 10 families are left sharing the last water resource among themselves and their livestock. One elder of the community estimates that the remaining well may supply water for another

² For more in-depth information on Afar pastoralist livestock economy, please refer to the consultancy report of Ahmed Yusuf Farah (Farah, 1992).

month before becoming dry. The 10 remaining families are left with 500 or so goats and sheep, around 150 camels and approximately the same amount of cattle. They used to have more cattle. One of the herders bitterly tells the mission, that from his former wealth of 40 cattle, he remains with only 5. Cattle started to suffer from the drought conditions as early as October last year and calves started to die before Ramadan in November 1999. From then onwards livestock has gradually been fading away. The majority of their fellow pastoralists left the area towards Awash river near Mile town and westwards into higher mountainous areas where rivers and shallow wells still supply sufficient water and where grazing is still possible. The cycle for watering at the hole in the Weranso river bed and grazing in a location called 'Idrissa' is the following: cattle, goats and sheep are left grazing for three days before taken to the water hole for one day of drinking, camels are allowed to water every seventh day. Water hole and grazing area are half a day apart from each other.

At Hafelu River on the way to Whama in Chifra wereda, Zone 1, the mission interviewed two young women fetching water from a deep well to water their goats. They stated that there exist a couple of similar wells in the vicinity and that pastoralists from Eli Woaha, a place further east of Chifra wereda in the Afar lowlands, have recently arrived. They now share the wells and the water with the new arrivals. In the vicinity, about one hour walk away from the well, there is a large grazing area, which is locally referred to as the 'Whanaba Fields'. There is still plenty of dry grass available and in fact the mission witnessed large cattle herds grazing.

North of the Mile-Bati road, from the weredas of Zone 1 and 4, Afar pastoralists are usually not moving up to the Amhara highlands due to lack of grazing land. Most of the western Amhara highland areas in Oromiya, South and North Welo zones are densely populated and intensively cultivated. And Amhara farmers are not allowing Afar pastoralists to graze livestock on their fields.

Significant temporary Afar pastoralists settlements in 'Chefa' valley in Oromiya Zone of Amhara Region

One of the few places where Afar pastoralists usually move in substantial numbers into the highlands of Amhara Region is from Zone 5. They usually walk up the Borkena river into the Oromiya Zone to settle temporarily in the 'Chefa' valley, approximately 15 kilometres south of Kemise town. The 'Chefa' valley consists mainly of grass- and marshlands. Afar pastoralists living in Zone 5 of Afar Region are used to settle in 'Chefa' valley for part of the year. They regularly move and settle around June. Last year as well, a couple of hundred Afar pastoralist families moved to this area for temporary settlement (see picture in annexe 2). But this time many families came to settle as early as in December 1999. Since then only few new arrivals were observed. The World Food Programme (WFP) office in Dessie stated that in addition to the Afar pastoralists a number of Oromo families, mostly farmers from Oromiya Zone, settled in this area of Artuna Gile wereda. Core cause for migration of both Afars and Oromos is the absence of rains (*belg* for the highlands of Amhara and *dadaa & sugum* for the Afar lowlands) and hence the partial or total absence of pasture. Presently, the Wereda Council of Artuna Gile wereda estimates the livestock population (mainly cattle) of the temporarily settled migrants in the 'Chefa' valley between 37,000 and 40,000 heads. The Agricultural Office of the same wereda estimates the number of cattle belonging to migrated Afars in 'Chefa' valley between 19,000 and 21,000 heads. According to a WFP Food Monitor who recently visited the area, such a huge livestock population has not been observed for a long time. This situation is a clear indication that the present drought situation has to be considered as serious both in the eastern Amhara highlands as well as in the Afar lowlands of Zone 5.

On the way from Uwa wereda in Zone 4 towards Woldiya, near a place called Hara in Amhara Region, there is a small area of swamp with a little lake. In and around this area many animals were observed grazing and the mission was told that part of the animals belong to Afar people who migrated to this place from the lowlands. Most likely Afar pastoralists are originating from around Alalesubla village in Uwa wereda where the mission was told that some people had moved with their cattle to higher areas in Amhara Region.

Afars, as a predominantly pastoralist society, have experienced traditional and historic conflicting relations with their neighbouring highland farmer communities, particularly with Oromo, Amhara and Tigrinya social groups. Conflict potential is based on highlanders of the aforementioned social groups who became short of land and therefore are encroaching customary grazing land used by Afar pastoralists. Population pressure in the highlands caused the expansion of rain fed agriculture further

towards the lowland Afar pastoralist areas and taking away valuable and much needed grazing land from the Afar pastoralists.

Livestock herds, population concentrations and pastoralist movements observed in and towards Gewane and Lake Yardi

Gewane, the zonal capital of Zone 3, Afar Region, and its extensive marshy areas in the south-west attract Afar pastoralists during dry spells and in between rainy seasons from areas within Zone 3 as well as from the southern part of Zone 5. Fodder and water are available all year round. The mission interviewed a trader living near by on the main road from Awash to Mile just beside the swamp. As far as the trader could remember, he has not seen the swamp and its surroundings so crowded by livestock and people for many years. Because it has been raining precisely in and around Gewane for a couple of days, more caravans of Afar pastoralists were seen along the road heading towards Gewane (see picture in annexe 2). Even on the mission's way back to Addis Ababa a couple of days later, heavy rain and thunderstorms have been witnessed in the area, further attracting Afars with their herds of cattle, camels, goats and sheep. Within a few days the landscape changed its colour from its arid and dusty kaki-brownish-grey to a light green originating from all the fresh leaves growing and the grass which germinated. This represented a striking contrast to the still completely dry northern part of Afar Region where only lightning and far-away heavy clouds could be noticed in the sky but unfortunately without a drop of water reaching the cracked and burnt soil.

Specific human and animal health issues

Possible Anthrax epidemic transmitted from livestock to humans in Afar Zone 5 and Zone 4 and in 'Chefa' valley, Oromiya Zone of Amhara

Part of the UN-EUE mission was to investigate on a "peculiar killer syndrome" reported by APDA in their March/April progress and regional update report (APDA, 2000). APDA together with a medical doctor from the international NGO Medecins Sans Frontieres France (MSF-France), which is also operating in Afar Region running the Dubti hospital, investigated on the unknown disease beginning of April. The disease was being reported in Zone 5 and Zone 4 of Afar Region. The APDA report mentions that "the disease has killed some hundreds of people over the past two months". Furthermore, the French doctor who carried out further investigations found in an Afar settlement where approximately 120 people lived, that 17 had died since January. The UNEUE investigations in Zone 4 and 5 revealed that around Whama village 51 people died in February and March alone. The deaths were due to "bloody diarrhoea, a disease similar to measles or measles, and an unknown disease" described by the health workers of the Whama health post as showing similarities with meningitis, i.e. swelling of the neck and cheeks but without the characteristic neck stiffness. At present it is viewed that many of the symptoms such as bloody diarrhoea, neck swelling and the-like may have been caused by Anthrax³ transmitted from livestock to humans. The Artuna Gile Wereda Agricultural Office in Oromiya Zone of Amhara reported an Anthrax outbreak among cattle owned by migrated Afar pastoralists originating from Afar Zone 5. Furthermore, it was reported that people who ate contaminated meat from infected livestock have died recently. Nevertheless, nobody has been able to estimate the number of livestock and of human deaths related to Anthrax in the 'Chefa' valley. The approximately 30 patients originating from three neighbouring keels around Whama in Zone 4 are presently being treated at the Whama health post with antibiotics (penicillin) and malaria medicine (chloroquine & fansidar). The patients are reacting positively to the treatment and none of the patients who received the treatment died so far. Fortunately, penicillin is the indicated treatment to cure Anthrax in humans if applied at an early stage.

³ Anthrax is an acute infectious disease caused by the spore-forming bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax most commonly occurs in warm-blooded animals, but can also infect man. Anthrax infection can occur in three forms: cutaneous (skin), inhalation, and gastrointestinal. *B. anthracis* spores can live in the soil for many years and humans can become infected with anthrax by handling animal products from infected animals or by handling anthrax spores from contaminated animal products. Eating undercooked meat from infected animals can also spread anthrax. The incubation period is usually within seven days. If untreated the disease can be fatal. Inhalation anthrax for example usually results in death in 1-2 days after onset of the acute symptoms. (Source: Arnot Ogden Medical Center, <http://www.aomc.org/ComDiseases/Anthrax.html>)

A thorough and systematic medical investigation should be launched immediately by the Ministry of Health, supported by WHO and/or other specialised institutions, to determine the nature of this outbreak and understand better the origin and means of transmission of the disease. In parallel, measures may need to be taken to prevent any further spread of the disease and to protect people from the possibility of further contamination.

Malaria, even though less acute than in previous years when rains had started by this time of the year, is still among the top diseases. Malaria will become a main cause of death when rains will start and mosquitoes will begin to breed. People's physical condition is generally weak and therefore susceptible to any disease.

According to APDA measles has killed more than 30 and infected some 95 children in March only in Geega, western Dubti wereda, Zone 1. Measles were also reported in Afdera, Zone 2, in Eli Dar and Assaita, Zone 1, Uwa wereda, Zone 4.

Dysentery, which is usually associated with scarce and contaminated water resources, seems now to be widespread in Zone 1, 4 and 5 of Afar Region.

Tuberculosis is still being one of the major causes of death and social impairment in Afar Region. But at the time of the mission, the health post workers did not report any deaths related to this disease.

Nutritional status in visited areas

Chronic malnutrition is being reported in a number of weredas from different zones, e.g. Eli Dar wereda in Zone 1, Erebti and Afdera weredas in Zone 2, and Teru wereda in Zone 4. Chronic malnutrition, similar to other pastoralist areas in the Horn of Africa, is caused by unbalanced diet rather than by acute food shortage. Health posts visited by the mission in Chifra, Uwa (Zone 4) and Dawe weredas (Zone 5) said that they had not come across malnourished children and people recently. First hand observation among Afar families in the visited zones did not reveal widespread malnutrition. In fact the mission did not come across any cases of malnutrition apart from the few encountered in the visited health posts. Therefore, the mission is unable to draw a clear picture on the nutritional situation in Afar Region. APDA in their April report (APDA, 2000) inform, that they will undertake together with the Ethiopian Nutrition Institute and the Regional Health Bureau a nutritional baseline survey in Afar Region. The survey is expected to provide data on the over-all nutritional status as well as on micro-nutrient deficits.

Human health situation difficult to assess – no coherent information available

The mission found it very difficult to draw a consistent and coherent picture on the health situation in Afar Region. First of all, the mission could not visit some of the areas, where serious health problems have been reported, i.e. Afdera, Eli Dar, Geega, Erebti weredas of Zone 1 and 2. Hence, some of the above given health information could not be verified. Secondly, information obtained for one and the same area could often not be correlated. This is the case for Dawe wereda and Zone 5 in general. ADPA and MSF-France reported that the area seemed to be the epicentre of this strange disease outbreak, which most likely is anthrax and which has killed already a significant number of people. On the other hand, the mission discussed health matters at length with one of the health workers of the Dawe wereda health post in Wederage village in Zone 5. According to him there is and has never been an outbreak of any unusual disease nor has there been any malnutrition among children. The health worker is relying on information he gathered during a recent food distribution in Wederage village, when the health post personnel screened all the people receiving relief food. The screening confirmed; there is no serious health problem in the area.

Some food shortage indicators investigated

Increased 'famine food' consumption

Like in the southern part of Ethiopia, in Konso and Burji Special Weredas and parts of South Omo Zone, *Dobera glabra* (*Garsa* in Afargna) is an important famine food tree Afar pastoralists rely on to get some additional food intake in times of drought. *Dobera glabra* is also known as a local drought

indicator plant. It is a much-branched evergreen shrub or tree of up to 10 meters in height (see picture in annexe 2). New shoots always grow during the dry season. If rains are delayed or fail, the tree typically shows an enhanced production of new shoots, fruits and seeds. In normal times, when rains are on time or abundant, *Dobera glabra* does not produce much fruit and seed. When the tree is blooming abundantly, a drought may very well be under way and hence, food may become scarce. Besides its drought indicator qualities, *Dobera glabra* produces edible fruits (see picture in the annexe 2) and the seed is considered a typical 'famine-food' (Guinand & Lemessa, 2000). It has to be cooked for a long time for up to 24 hours, and it produces a bad smell. Excessive consumption causes stomach-aches and other intestinal problems (Guinand & Lemessa, 2000). The *Dobera glabra* tree is abundantly found in Zone 4 and Zone 5 of Afar Region and can easily be recognised in times of drought because of its deep green colour, which stands out in the otherwise uniform grey-kaki coloured dusty arid landscape. The settlement at the branch-off from the Mile-Bati road to Zone 5 and Zone 4 is called 'Garsa Gita', which means 'the place where 'Garsa' trees are found'. Afar pastoralists have a proverb saying: 'the one who finds 'Garsa' is lucky and will not suffer'. Finding a 'Garsa' tree in times of drought is a good sign for somebody suffering from hunger, because he knows he will survive. At several occasions, when interviewing Afar people near water points and questioning them about wild-food consumption, they immediately mentioned and also presented samples of cooked or fresh fruits of *Dobera glabra*, which indicates that people are consuming the seed right now.

There were a few other mainly wild fruit trees identified, but which are not considered as typical famine food. These trees grow mostly near riverbanks and bear fruits once a year. The mission was able to compile information on three additional tree and shrub species, locally called 'Madera' (*Buddleja polystachya*), 'Haballe', 'Gusura' (*Ziziphus sp.*) and 'Fo' (*Grewia ferruginea*)⁴.

Terms of trade and market conditions

Main market places for Afars to trade their livestock for grain and other commodities of primary necessity are situated at the edge of Afar Region towards Amhara and Tigray Regions where highland farmers meet with lowland pastoralists. Other important markets are found on few places along the main Djibouti-Addis Ababa and the Mile-Bati roads. Presently neither camels nor cattle are traded. Cattle are not traded either due to their weak physical condition or because of lack of interest and purchasing power. Camels do not sell because of a general lack of purchasing power among interested parties. However, cattle and camels are not primarily raised for trading. But even goats and sheep have become difficult to trade because the highland traders do not come to market places in Afar Region anymore. In most places sheep also cannot be traded any longer because of their weak physical condition. For example on the Mile-Bati road there is a market place called 'Eliwoaha' where highland traders used to come and buy livestock. For the time being this trade has ceased and the market place stays empty even at the weekly market day. Before, Afar pastoralists could earn around 100 Birr for a matured goat in good physical condition. Prices for goats are now below 50 Birr. Terms of trade have deteriorated in the sense that previously an Afar pastoralist could get a 50kg bag of maize grain by trading one of his goats. Now he has to sell two or three goats to purchase the same amount of maize grain. Terms of trade for livestock against grain are pretty much similarly unfavourable in all the localities visited, e.g. Bati, Chifra, Hara, Yalow etc.

Afar pastoralists lost their cross-border trade opportunities with Eritrea since the start of the border conflict. They were even more at a loss at the time when the armed forces used to purchase food, particularly meat elsewhere. But presently the armed forces changed their attitude towards meat supply and are purchasing part of their meat supplies locally to allow Afar pastoralists to maintain at least a minimum level of business and hence partially compensate for their lost livestock-market opportunities with Eritrea.

Afar pastoralists increased firewood and charcoal production as a coping mechanism and sell it along main roads (Awash-Mile & Mile-Bati) to counteract income losses emanating from deteriorated terms of trade for livestock against grain. And thus, by cutting down indigenous trees they are further damaging on an already fragile biophysical environment, increasing the depletion of natural resources.

⁴ For more information on these tree and shrub species please refer to 'Useful trees and shrubs in Ethiopia (Bekele-Tesemma et al., 1993).

Humanitarian aspects concerning war-displaced population and drought victims

Drought situation and clarifications on drought and flood victim numbers

Water shortage has been reported in 4 weredas of different Zones (Afdera and Erebti in Zone 2, Eli Dar in Zone 1 and Teru in Zone 4). The mission was unable to verify this information given by the regional DPPB office in Assaita. But APDA also reported acute water shortage in some of their intervention areas. In some places such as Guyah, in the north-western part of Dubti wereda, it was reported that people are drinking water only every second day. In other places in northern Afar Region (Zone 1 and 2) people walk long distances for water. Afar pastoralists mostly set up their temporary settlements near grazing areas. As water and grazing gets scarce, they have to walk ever -longer distances. APDA is urging to do something about this situation. The organisation wants to procure a second hand water tanker to bring water from Logia to two empty so-called 'Birkuts' (concrete underground water tanks) in Guyah. Another four 'Birkuts' exist in Manda which could be used to supply IDPs and the local population with drinking water. There is also demand to build more 'Birkuts' in the vicinity of Afdera in Zone 1.

The number of IDPs has not changed much with an estimated total of approximately 30,000 for Afar Region. With regard to the current number of people in need of relief assistance due to natural disaster, however, there continues to be a lack of information on the extent of current needs. In the national relief appeal launched by the Federal Government of Ethiopia on January 21 it was indicated that a total of 272,704 people in the region would be in need of relief food assistance in the region during 2000, a figure that was considered high by some observers familiar with the region. It is understood that in addition to the findings of the DPPC-led inter-agency assessment undertaken in December 1999, the number of people in need had been determined after a subsequent survey conducted by the regional authorities. In the analysis of food prospects given in the appeal, however, the impression given was of a fairly stable situation, certainly at the time the inter-agency assessment team completed its work (DPPC, 2000). According to the appeal document, though the 1999 *sugum* rains were a failure and the main *karma* rains late, once the latter rains began in the south they were favourable in both coverage and duration. In terms of outlook, the report said "Overall pasture and water condition is rather good and should be sufficient until the next rainy season". The report went on to say livestock prices had "improved markedly" though there were marketing problems in the northern part of the region. Given the concerns over current figures for the region, now that the *sugum* rains have started it is recommended that the DPPB in Assaita and DPPC in Addis Ababa should consider a review of relief food needs in Afar.

The first relief food distributions for this year in Afar Region, which were scheduled for March and April, took place as planned. Unlike in East and West Haraghe, no food distribution delays have been reported so far. The only problem mentioned by the Regional DPPC in Assaita is the lack of adequate storage facilities at almost all levels but particularly at wereda and kebele level. Food is mainly kept open air with the usual inconveniences, i.e. climate, pests and insects.

Non-food item distribution to war-displaced population

The UN-EUE made some financial resources available for APDA to purchase much needed non-food relief items for part of the internally war-displaced Afar population. These goods have been purchased by APDA and discussions are under way with the Regional Administration in Assaita, the Displaced People Committee and the Front Line Committee in Eli Dar and Bure on the distribution of the items. The non-food items will be distributed to those of the approximately 17,000 IDPs who did not yet benefit from such items. The Regional DPPB and APDA do screening of households to be chosen as beneficiaries as well as the monitoring of the operation jointly.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is an immediate need to investigate, detect and confirm fears of an anthrax epidemic in Zones 4 and 5 of Afar Region and which appears likely to spread into Amhara Region and other areas of the country. WHO may link up with MSF-France and other experienced agencies and institutions such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) which have information and experience with previous anthrax outbreaks in the country. The important temporary Afar and Oromo settlements in 'Chefa' valley are a major source of danger. If

reports on anthrax outbreak and transmission onto humans are confirmed, the area bears a major threat to human health in general.

In Afar Region, the human health situation is still very difficult to assess but the increase in 'amine food' consumption such as *Dobera glabra* fruits and seeds in certain areas, is a clear indicator for food shortage. The human health situation is difficult to assess because the Region still lacks basic health facilities at wereda level. Even though being built, most of them are not yet operational. On the other hand, more efforts should be undertaken to properly train and educate health personnel. There still is a lack of health training facilities in Afar Region even though some NGOs such as APDA and MSF-France have initiated basic health training in a number of localities.

Terms of trade have deteriorated and market opportunities remain bleak for Afar pastoralists.

Drought hit especially the northern part of Afar Region, where there has not been any rain yet. Substantial rain fell in the southern part of Afar, especially around Gewane in Zone 3, but none north of Mile town.

Confusion on drought and flood victim beneficiary numbers needs to be clarified by the federal DPPC and the regional DPPB. It may make sense to reassess the situation and adjust relief needs according to the presently worsening situation in northern Afar Region, where there has been no rain since September last year, and to take into account the apparent commencement of the sugum rains elsewhere in the region.

Annex 1

UN-EUE mission itinerary

Addis Ababa – Assaita (19 April), Assaita– Bati (20 April), Bati – Garsa Gita – Whama (Chifra wereda) - Chifra – Alalesubla (Uwa wereda) – Woldiya– Dessie (21 April), Dessie – Bati – Garsa Gita – Talalak wereda– Wederage (Dawe wereda) – Dale Fage & back the same road to Garsa Gita – Mile (22 April), Mile – Logia – Dubti & back to Mile– Gewane – Addis Ababa (23 April)

List of useful reports, papers and previous UN-EUE mission reports

- Ahrens J D (1999) Situation of displaced people in Afar Region remains sketchy, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 22 to 26 March, Addis Ababa
- APDA (2000) Programme and Region Update: March, April 2000, regular update on APDA (Afar Pastoralist Development Association) project activities and general overview of the regional situation, Assaita
- Bekele-Tesemma A, Birnie A, Tengnaes B (1993): Useful trees and shrubs for Ethiopia, identification, propagation and management for agricultural and pastoral communities. Regional Soil Conservation Unit/SIDA, RSCU, Nairobi.
- Bryden M (1996a) Situation Report on Region 2 (Afar National Regional State), United Nations, Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UNDP-EUE), Mission undertaken from 5 to 24 December, Addis Ababa
- Bryden M (1996b) Concept Paper: Outline of a proposed Strategy for UNICEF Engagement in Ethiopia's Afar Region, United Nations, Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UNDP-EUE), February, Addis Ababa
- Bryden M (1996c) Report on Mission to Zone 2 Afar National Regional State, United Nations, Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UNDP-EUE), Mission undertaken from 28 April to 20 May, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (2000) Food Supply Prospect in 2000 (Volume 3 of 3), DPPC, Early Warning System Report, January, Addis Ababa
- Ethiopian Mapping Authority (1988), National Atlas of Ethiopia, People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa
- Farah A Y (1992) A general introduction to obscure society: the pastoral economy of the Ethiopian Afar herdsmen in disarray, consultancy report for SCF/US (Save the Children Fund United States), June, Addis Ababa
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- Guinand Y F (1999), Afar Region – Awash River Floods, UN-EUE Rapid Assessment Report, 7– 10 September, Addis Ababa
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Some NGOs and other organisations operating in Afar Region

- Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) - Assaita
- Afar Regional Health Bureau - Assaita
- Action Internationale Contre la Faim (AICF) - Dubti
- Médecins -Sans -Frontières -France (MSF-France) - Dubti
- The Northwest Rangelands Development Project – Mile
- Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) – Gewane
- Farm Africa - Gewane

Abbreviations and NGOs and other organisations operating in Afar Region

APDA	Afar Pastoralist Development Association
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (mostly at Regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (mostly at zonal level)
IDP	Internally Displaced People
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
MEDAC	Ministry of Economic Planning and Co-operation
MSF	Medecins-Sans -Frontieres
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

Glossary

Meteorological Drought Defined

Drought is a period of insufficient water initiated by reduced precipitation. The impacts of drought on crops and society are critical but not easily quantified. The result is that "drought" does not have a universal definition. "Meteorological drought" is defined as a sustained period of deficient precipitation with a low frequency of occurrence. While crops may be damaged by lack of precipitation and high temperatures in just a few days, such short periods are not considered to be meteorological droughts. A three-month period is defined by the American Meteorological Society to be the shortest period that can be defined as a drought. (Source: *The American Meteorological Society*)

Ethiopia's *Kiremtor Meher* Rains Defined

Since Ethiopia is in the tropics, physical conditions and variations in altitude have resulted in a great diversity of climate, soil, and vegetation. Rainfall is seasonal, varying in amount, space, and time. There is a long and heavy summer rain, normally called the big rain or *kiremt* which falls from June-September. It is followed by the *baga* hot, dry period from October through February. In some areas there are short and moderate spring rains in March and April known as the little rains or *belg*. These rainy periods correspond to Ethiopia's primary and secondary agricultural seasons, known as the *meher* and *belg*. (Source: *FEWS*)

Ethiopia's *Belg* Rains Defined

In spring, a strong cyclonic centre develops over Ethiopia and Sudan. Winds from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean highs are drawn towards this centre and blow across central and southern Ethiopia. These moist, easterly and south-easterly winds produce the main rain in south-eastern Ethiopia and the little spring rains to the east central part of the north-western highlands. The little rains of the highlands are known as *belg* rains, referring to the second most important sowing season of the region. (Source: *FEWS*)

<i>kebele</i>	Smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia
<i>kolla</i>	Expression for one of the altitudinal agro-ecological belts in Ethiopia. In Welo between ~1200 to ~1600 msl.
<i>meher</i>	Expression for the main growing season in parts of Ethiopia
<i>wereda</i>	Local administrative unit
<i>sugum rains</i>	Local Afar expression defining the short rains which usually occur between March and April in the Afar Region of Ethiopia. They can be compared to the short <i>belg</i> rains (see definition below) in the neighbouring Amhara highlands.
<i>dadaa rains</i>	Local Afar expression defining few days of showers which normally occur either in November or December.
<i>karma rains</i>	Local Afar expression defining the long rains which usually occur between June and September in the Afar Region of Ethiopia. They can be compared to the long <i>kiremt</i> rains (see definition below) in the neighbouring Amhara Region.

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UN-EUE
PO Box 60252
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Tel.: (251) (1) 51-10-28/29
Fax: (251) (1) 51-12-92
E-mail: undp-eue@telecom.net.et
www.telecom.net.et/~undp-eue/