



# Afar Region: A Deeper Crisis Looms

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## 1 Introduction and background

The Afar Region, structured into 5 zones and 29 woredas, is located in the Northeast of Ethiopia, sharing international borders with Eritrea and Djibouti. Afar land, about 150,000 km<sup>2</sup>, stretches from Awash Station and the Allideghi plain of the Middle Valley in the south to the coastal depression of the Red Sea in the North. The Afar people, circa 1.3 million<sup>1</sup>, originally Cushitic, like their Oromo and Somali neighbours, are predominantly nomadic of origin and the majority are still practicing “transhumant pastoralism” for subsistence. The Northern part of Afar Region around the lower Danakil plain is predominantly a semi-desert with thorny species of shrubs and acacias, further south in the Awash valley, steppic vegetation is dominant. Both ecological stages are facing bush encroachment with *prosopis juliflora* (*wayane*), which take over from more nutritive browsing varieties (Guinand, 2000).

In 2002, rains have been poor as *dadaa* and *sugum*, the two small rains failed as well as the main raining season *karma* that started three weeks late, was erratic and insufficient. Up to mid-2001, rains had been rather good. Since then, two bad rainy seasons that were both delayed and erratic brought drought conditions. Already in northern zones 1, 2 and 4, water shortages have been reported and pastoralists in these areas will be soon in great difficulty.

Rainfall distribution is generally bimodal throughout the Region. The small *sugum* rains normally occur in March and April and the main *karma* rains from July to August. Some areas along the escarpment of the eastern part of Tigray and Wello, as well as the southern part of Afar near Awash town, benefited from a slight shower period in December 2001, called *dadaa*. In all these periods, the occurrence of rainfall was highly erratic. The total amount of rain varies greatly from year to year resulting in severe droughts in some



Livestock continues to die in Afar Region. Dead camel in Gululbleh Haf, Zone 2 (Photo by François Piguet, UN-EUE, October 2002)

<sup>1</sup> Actual demographic data are projections from the official figure used by DPPC from 2000 Afar Region census: total Region 1,117,148 (zone 1: 326,146; zone 2: 234,645; zone 3: 129,464; zone 4: 142,352; zone 5: 343,541).

years. Moreover, temperatures are high throughout the region and throughout the year. The hottest months are May to August coinciding with the rainy months, which contributes a deterrent effect on the effectiveness of moisture.

Presently, there are several other factors that negatively affect the livelihood of Afar people. With rising insecurity mainly in zone 3 and the closed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Afar pastoralist movements within traditional territories are restricted. Cross-border animal trading is mostly impossible, reinforcing the effects of a landlocked economy, particularly along the border in zone 2 and in Eli Daar along the Assab road. Natural conditions characterised with persisting drought in parts of Afar Region, as well as seasonal uncontrolled flooding along the Awash river represent a major draw back for the Afar economy, which is based on pastoralists' livestock sales and agricultural production. In 2002, the Lower Awash river basin experienced very unusual flooding in April but not in August or September, when they are most common following *kiremt* rains in the highlands.

Afar Region is one of the poorest and least developed Regions of Ethiopia, neglected by national development efforts. It is only in recent years that efforts have been undertaken to provide basic infrastructure such as roads and administrative buildings as well as education and basic health services for each of the woreda. Besides pastoralism and agriculture along the Awash River, the regional economy is polarised by the transit road to Djibouti port to import and export goods leading through the Afar Region. This road has led to a typical 'truck-stop economy' with settlements such as Decioto, Logiya, Mille, Adaitou, Gewane, Gadamaitou, where water facilities, commerce and services are quasi-exclusively related to truck driver needs.

## **2 Mission findings**

### **2.1 Drought and scarce resources accentuate conflict potential and security problems**

Harsh climatic drought conditions following insufficient *karma* rains caused competition over water and grazing resources. Afar and Issa pastoralists who fought bitterly earlier this year, resumed cattle and settlement raids and counter-raids. In the southern part of the region, new confrontations between Afar and Kereyu pastoralists in the Awash National Park are reported. In the west, along the escarpment, several clashes are opposing Afar and Amhara and Oromo agro-pastoralists in and around Talalak (Zone 5), that presently is characterized by a "no war no peace" situation with agro-pastoralists residing in the Cheffa valley.

In the centre of Afar Region, Issa people have already crossed the Awash River west of Adaitou and Afar are ready to fight them along River Talalak. All over the area, Issa movements westwards are significant. Cattle raids are reported to be carried out by both Issa and Afar. Conflicts in Zone 1, 3 and 5 are essentially motivated by territorial claims. The Issa want to control the main Awash-Logiya road and gain access to Awash River and are willing to take their revenge from the battle in Boromodaitou six months ago, which forced them to set back behind the hills located on the eastern side of the road.

On top of this, two sensitive questions might complicate efforts to cool down these various conflicts for natural resources such as grazing and water for animals. In Afambo and Assaita woredas, Afar people are increasingly using Awash River water further upstream

from Tendaho Agriculture Development Enterprise (TADE) in Dubti that is using enormous amounts of water to irrigate some 8,000 ha that are mostly planted with cotton. Fearing a spread of animal diseases, the Oromiya administration along the escarpment bordering Afar Zone 5, wants to stop the Afar accessing Cheffa valley with their animals. In the Cheffa valley, a former state farm run by ELFORA has some 400 ha under crop and 1678 ha of grazing and recently faced some difficulties with pastoralists concerning land tenure and grazing rights (see Piguët, 2002). Both parastatal companies (TADE and ELFORA) are consulting directly with Federal Government authorities in order to reach an agreement that satisfies both sides and all interests.

Serious clashes on October 15 in Shewa Robit resulted in the death of two Afar women. Previously two people died in inter-clan confrontation in Sembete on market day. Finally, some trucks were looted in Deciotto and in Zone 4, along the Woldiya- Mekele road near. For some few weeks, insecurity has been a principal concern in some areas of Afar Region, particularly in areas south of Mille.

## **2.2 Pastoralism and livestock condition**

### **2.2.1 Drought force Afar to push livestock for Cheffa valley and other dry season grazing areas**

Along the western escarpment, livestock and crops are both in a precarious condition. Maize and to a lesser extent sorghum, are badly affected by drought, and livestock movements have been modified due to grazing shortages. In Zone 5, Afar animals are already grazing along the Amhara regional border and further clashes with Oromo and Amhara agro-pastoralists are possible. Usually Afar pastoralists move their animal herds in January to Cheffa valley when grazing gets scarce in Afar. Then, up to more than 100,000 animals may concentrate in the swampy areas with high risk of diseases<sup>2</sup>. In Talalak, Afar people stated that they are ready to fight if they are not allowed to enter into Cheffa valley. Historically, the Afar and the Oromo of the western escarpment have grazed in each other's land, i.e., the Oromo in the lowlands during the wet season and the Afar on the escarpment in the dry season. Now the escarpment is occupied by agro-pastoralists who have seen their crops damaged by the drought. For the Afar, the loss of such additional grazing sources may mean more hardship and even lead to further clashes with their neighbours.

All along Zone 3 where Afar and Issa face each other, livestock movements have been considerably reduced because the two opposing groups deny each other access to necessary resources such as water and grazing land especially around and in Yangudi Rassa National Park between Gewane and Adaitou. Afar accuse the Issa of livestock raiding. For example, Afar pastoralists from Simurobi Gele'ala woreda in Zone 5 have claimed that some 4,000 animals have been taken away by raiding Issas. However, cattle raids are frequent on both sides and, according to the ELFORA livestock section head, Afar have recently sold Issa livestock on Bati market.

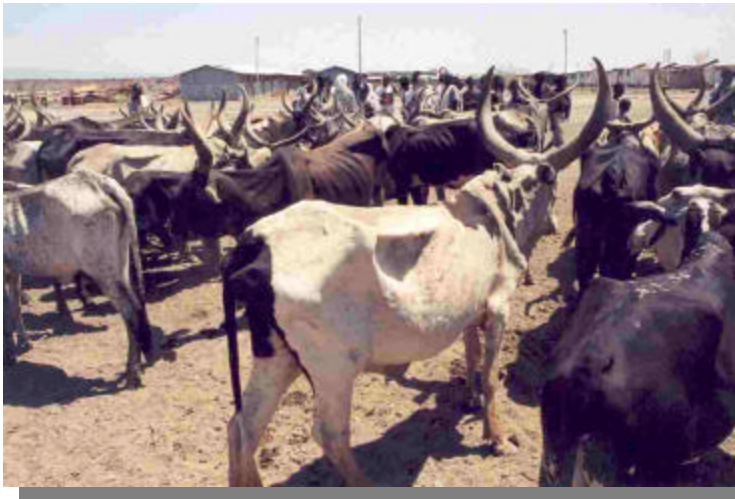
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<sup>2</sup> ELFORA-Cheffa valley farm is currently renting grazing plots of one ha each to pastoralists who have to pay 3ETB per head for a two months period. In average, pastoralists spend between 80 and 100 ETB per contract. ELFORA can "accommodate" some 50,000 heads in their grazing land. According to ELFORA livestock section head, grazing contracts have induced overgrazing, ecosystem destruction along Diko Borku River and constitute a high risk of animal diseases transmission, especially for the ELFORA dairy farm with 200 cows producing daily 700 litres of milk.

With about six weeks advance, Afar pastoralists are returning to dry season grazing land, a lot of animals could be seen around Galaha. Since one month ago, pastoralists have been moving back to their main settlements in order to be able to share resources. This is a preoccupying development and an indicator of the gravity of the current drought situation.

### 2.2.2 Disrupted livestock marketing

As most animals did not recover from the previous *hagai* dry season (May – July), livestock market prices remain very low. Emaciated animals are not marketable as such. Nevertheless, some traders are still taking the risk of buying emaciated animals if they have the opportunity to feed them before reselling. On the other hand, pastoralists are



Emaciated cattle in Assaita market (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, October 2002)

getting used to bringing back home non-marketed animals. At this stage, good prices that pastoralists are referring to are all more than a year old. Actual prices for camels are 300 to 600 ETB and cattle in good condition for meat production 400 to 500 ETB in Showa Robit. Now, mostly non-Afar cattle and sheep are brought to the market and sold at very low prices (sheep 10ETB/head and goats 10 to 30ETB/head). The worst situation has been assessed in Assaita, the capital of Afar Region, where emaciated cattle are currently offered for 100 ETB/head.

### 2.3 General water stress in all zones of Afar Region

Water stress is probably the main indicator that Afar people are now entering a new stress phase after the absence of the main rains and denied access and inefficient sharing of existing water resources. September and October are normally the months when there is plenty of water available and the Awash River floods in many areas along its riverbed crossing Afar Region. It is also the period of the year when pastoralists enjoy plentiful milk supplies and when animals have recovered from the previous dry season.

The only water supply in Kumami, the administrative centre for Simurobi Gele'alo woreda of Zone 5, are 3 birkeds that are refilled daily through a governmental water trucking programme<sup>3</sup> that was set up for a period of 60 days. After that, people will have to buy water for 3 ETB per 20 litres jerry can. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Water Resource recently conducted a survey of ground water prospects, but with the two boreholes that

<sup>3</sup> A water tanker of 15,000 litre fills daily on circa 7000 litres birked in the centre of the village and two smaller one located one in the school compound and the second one in the woreda administration compound.

were drilled, no water was found. Gululbleh Haf settlement, Zone 2, is facing similar water problems. Since September 2002, this pastoralist community gets its needed water supplies



Earth dam water pool in Gululbleh Haf, Zone 2. During normal climatic conditions this dam should be full of water in September & October, yet it is almost empty witnessing the serious water shortage conditions in this part of Afar Region (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, October 2002)

from water trucking only. According to World Vision International (WVI), in charge of the water trucking there, they are actually running out of budget to extend their water-trucking service. This is very unfortunate since now people need it most. If water trucking will stop next month in Gululbleh Haf, people will migrate, WVI adds.

Permanent water sources are now being overexploited. For example, near Talahk

(Zone 5), a permanent well is used to water small stock as well as calves whereas natural sources, springs and ponds are used to water cattle and camels. These will most probably dry up within a fortnight, i.e. by the time this report is being released. Water levels are low in the Awash River and in the canals downstream of Dubti. Agro-pastoralists could not plant, as most of the gravitation irrigation systems remain dry. The Agricultural Bureau in Assaita is requesting water pumps in order to compensate for low water levels in Awash River. But in any case, this does not seem to be a sound solution. For Assaita and Afambo woredas, water resource sharing solutions with the Tendaho Commercial Farm and its irrigation schemes are being discussed. Decisions are expected from the respective authorities. DPPB in Assaita has already addressed the problem and up to the time of this mission, they had not had feedback from Addis Ababa.



Water tankering near Gululbleh Haf, Zone 2 (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, October 2002)

#### **2.4 Livestock vaccination campaign under way**

Total livestock population in the Afar used to reach 4 million heads of which 3 million were small stock. Cattle and camel populations were estimated at 700,000 and 300,000 respectively.

Due to risk of further epizootic diseases, animal sanitation has to be a priority. Following the death of numerous animals between May and July, sanitation measures have been



taken in order to remove carcasses. ACF in Zone 1 and Oxfam in Zone 3 have already removed carcasses diminishing long-term risks of resurgent epidemics such as anthrax. In Cheffa valley, no similar measure has been taken and the ELFORA Commercial Farm manager complains that 300 to 400 livestock carcasses were left untouched in the farms grazing land.

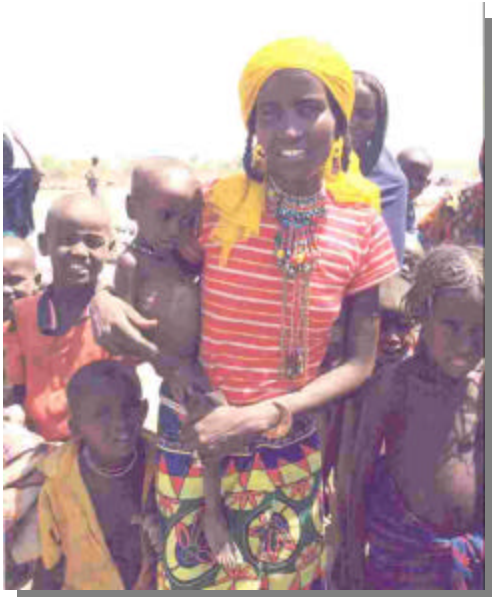
A vaccination campaign organised by the livestock department together with specialised NGOs (ACF, APDA, Farm Africa, WVI) estimated a target animal population of 600,000. The vaccination campaign is on-going but faces some logistic constraints. The campaign did not manage to cover all 29 woredas. For example in Zone 1, Chifra, Dubti, Mille and Afambo woredas that are all under the regional government's responsibility, could not be covered. APDA is covering Assaita and WVI supports Eli Daar woreda. In Zone 2, only Megale and Barhale woredas have been covered by the vaccination campaign. In Zone 3, all woredas were only covered partially, essentially due to the fact that animals are too weak and need live saving treatments first. In Zone 4 Aura, Ewa and Gulina woredas are under the responsibility of ACF. The Government covers Terru and Yallo woredas. In Zone 5, no vaccination activities have been started yet but Farm Africa will cover running costs. Globally, all animal health specialists are insisting for a linkage between animal feed and animal health with the objective to preserve at least breeding and lactating animals, the best way to assure a future "natural" restocking.

## **2.5 Basic human health facilities still lacking and tuberculosis is a serious problem**

Human health has always been a problem in Afar Region having one of the highest child mortality rates in the country, inextricably linked to the lack of medical facilities and the lack of qualified and trained local personnel. Assigned health workers, mostly highlanders because they are the ones that got trained, find it very difficult to adapt and the Government is unable to plan and guarantee a continuous presence of trained health personnel in the woreda health centres that have been set up a few years ago. The most common diseases are water borne, with diarrhoea and conjunctivitis as examples. Pneumonia and tuberculosis are endemic and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is high with probable links to the truck service economy and a permanent presence of military personnel, especially in areas near to the border with Eritrea.

MSF-France's tuberculosis programme, implemented in the hospital in Galaha along the Mille River, has to deal with increasing numbers of tuberculosis patients. The treatment is free of charge in contrast to Dubti hospital that requests a 100 ETB hospitalisation admission fee and consultation costs between 3 and 5 ETB. Presently MSF-France faces admission problems since they registered 50 patients but have only 32 beds available.

Apart from tuberculosis, MSF-France has not observed any other outbreak of diseases. An exception, nevertheless, is the unexpected registration of 5 cases of bruxellosis in the first 15 days of October when MSF-France usually only observes occasional cases. In general, the MSF-France doctor in charge of the Galaha hospital noticed that for some months now patients seeking admission are all in a late or advanced stage of their respective diseases or infections. This is due to the fact that traditional medicine is first used and if this does not work they seek admission to a health clinic or centre. Some had also waited for herd migrations before being brought to Galaha hospital. An admitted patient and one of his relatives accompanying him/her are granted a food ration with specific supplementary food items included.



Malnourished child in his mother's arms near Gewane, Zone 3 (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, October 2002)

About 20 children are currently treated in Galaha for malnutrition. Malnutrition is due to other health problems and diseases these children face, mainly tuberculosis. 50% of the malnourished children originate from the Gewane area.

## **2.6 Nutrition and food aid issues**

### *2.6.1 Supplementary food and general rations traded on markets*

Since July, efforts have been made to distribute food aid to the drought-affected population in Afar and affected neighbouring areas, i.e. East Oromiya, North Somali Region and East and South Tigray. Despite the fact that people have received some food, there have been complaints about insufficient quantities and untimely deliveries. Furthermore, in Afar Region, a debate is ongoing about beneficiary numbers as distributions are actually based on 490,000 people. DPPB in Afar is claiming that 766,900 beneficiaries should receive food rations.

Priority has been given to pastoralists in remote areas, despite logistical constraints.

There are several preoccupying issues that are related to food aid. It is assumed that it is quite normal to find gracious relief wheat grain bags for sale on markets in Assaita, Mille and Logiya. But the assessment team has been more concerned about the CSB bags that are sold by the beneficiaries to traders at a ridiculously low price of 10 ETB and re-sold on markets for 15 or 16 ETB. The fact that relief food beneficiaries are selling their or their children's CSB rations illustrates the difficulties of distributing supplementary food without disseminating information about its use and benefits for malnourished children. People sell their CSB ration simply because they do not know about the benefit and the use of this commodity and furthermore they need other foodstuff such as cooking oil that they may be able to purchase by selling CSB. To distribute supplementary food without informing about the use in societies and communities where such foodstuffs are unknown and without demonstrating how such foodstuffs can be adapted to the traditional diet ensures that a large part of this expensive supplementary foodstuff is missing its original target and that malnourished children most in need may be suffering in consequence.

### *2.6.2 No milk for babies and grain milling constraints*

At this time, people are mostly eating *Gaambo* bread made of sorghum or maize. Breakfast as well as the evening meal is generally accompanied by tea and milk. Food based on bread is difficult for weaning children, as it is too dry. Consequently, babies are often suffering from stomach disorders due to inadequate food preparation and consumption. Gewane residents stated that they normally would feed babies and very young children with a mixture coffee shells (*Buna Halla*) and milk, but they stopped preparing due to lack of milk.

Cereal grains distributed as food aid to facilitate conservation and storage are seen by the Afar people as a constraint in terms of preparation and consumption because they are used to having milled and ground flower-style foodstuffs. In Simurobi Gele'alo woreda, Zone 5, people pointed out the lack of milling facilities and long walking distances to carry grain to the nearest mill. Time, distance and grinding costs are the main constraints. As an alternative, millstones made of volcanic stones from Logiya are currently sold on Assaita market for 30 ETB and used for grain grinding.

### *2.6.3 Social change induced by the crisis*

At the household level, pastoralists affected by drought and tribal conflicts will most likely not recover with the next rains. During the ongoing dry season, great numbers of cattle will continue to die, as they were not able to recover fully during the insufficient main rainy season. Insufficient rains also mean that animal breeding and milk production are major problems for pastoralists. Livestock bred much less, calves will likely die, as there is not sufficient grass and water, and milk production is quickly decreasing directly affecting children and increasing the danger of malnutrition.

Camel milk marketing has started in Assaita where boys regularly bring milk to some restaurants and other places for selling. Apart from exceptional cases that have always existed during the past years, the recent decrease of cow milk availability and consumption is exceptional. Afar people fear cattle milk consumption due to the increased danger of catching diseases such as tuberculosis. Also, selling camel milk is unusual in Afar society. In doing so now, they are indicating that they are being forced to face important social changes due to the exceptional climatic conditions they face at the moment. In Afar society traditionally camel milk is exclusively reserved for household consumption and social exchanges motivated by contractual lent of lactating animals (*hantilla*).

## **3 Conclusions and recommended actions**

Pastoralists are having more and more difficulties to cope with the actual drought that highlights most of the chronic and structural problems that need to be addressed. These problems hindering proper development of Afar society are mainly education (literacy), provision of basic human and animal health and water supply infrastructure, rangelands management and animal marketing. The current drought emergency has also been aggravated by a variety of tribal clashes and conflicts over basic resources such as access and use of grazing land and water, as well as trading lines and territorial control. However, the new political and ethnic regional borders do not prevent pastoralists from keeping their usual migration patterns allowing them to leave their region regularly in search of grazing and water during the dry season.

Specific technical measures can minimise the impact of the drought. Such measures must cover priority sectors such as animal health, water and fodder. Vaccination campaigns against anthrax and black leg should be intensified and short-term relief, targeted to save animals, has to be organised. Forage trucking could be an efficient short-term solution and in the long run, forage-cropping projects could be implemented. Expansion of water supply facilities with appropriate technology in the pastoral areas as well as short-term rehabilitation or construction could be initiated. Once again, water and grazing land issues appear to be one of the main causes of conflict among pastoralists.



In case of early livestock migration, cut and carry grazing system supported by food aid could be initiated in areas with agriculture and grazing resources like Kemise. Such particular “food for work” systems could contribute to minimize conflicts between farmers and pastoralists. Livestock concentrations at specific places might preserve cattle movements, prevent the weakening of animals and facilitate animal health monitoring. But animal health as well as food supplements and minerals should be provided to strengthen animal resistance to epizootic infection.

Communities met are reporting that animal feed constitutes their first priority, followed by relief food. FEWS-NET already reported in July: “Saving the breeding stock will ultimately determine the scale of the current crisis and the pace of post-drought recovery, given the very high dependency on livestock (...). Without protecting and preserving pastoralist livelihoods, pastoralists are likely to quickly become highly food insecure, forced to reduce consumption below acceptable standards and dispose of their animals as productive assets, thereby undermining their future food security.”

Measures for the rehabilitation of grazing lands should be taken and in the Afar Region the proliferation of *Prosopis juliflora* controlled. The plant could be used for the production of firewood and charcoal. Top priority should be given to the various aspects of water such as selective additional water facilities as well as control of recurrent floods, water rights and the question of resource sharing between irrigated agriculture and the pastoralists.

#### *Specific sectoral measures to be implemented:*

##### *Particular food requirements in pastoral societies should be met*

In order to reach immediate needs, the **following food items could be provided quickly**: (1) **Sugar** is an important item in the local diet but prices have increased by 25%. (2) **Vegetable oil** could be an important substitute to the present milk product shortage, mainly *ghee*, common butter preparation used by most of the pastoralists. (3) **Maize** has also recently faced significant price increases. Therefore, with the crisis, affected population segments cannot afford to buy maize anymore. (4) Despite strict prescriptions related to **milk powder** use, nutrition experts should decide how far food aid could be adjusted according to local diet and nutritional coping mechanisms for babies (sugar, milk powder and coffee shells) to be supported.

##### *Ensure water supply for livestock and people*

In terms of water intervention, water tankers should be provided selectively as well as elsewhere cash or food for work programs could contribute to livestock water facilities maintenance as well as water points for human consumption. Additionally, the key question of conflict between Afar and Issa and Kereyu and Itu over water resources should be addressed.

##### *Livestock saving interventions save human lives as well*

Even though so far most donors and emergency agencies, the UN included, have demonstrated through their absolute non-intervention in livestock saving activities, it is necessary to emphasize once again their importance in pastoral areas where livestock most often constitute the main, sole and only asset for most families.

In terms of interventions to save livestock, (1) **selective interventions in animal health** constitutes a priority. By providing supportive treatments including vaccination and deworming at least the breeding and the lactating livestock can be saved. In general, there is a shortage of veterinary drugs in the region. (2) **Emergency control of animal epidemics** including a regional cross-border campaign upon outbreak, as well as community-based local disease surveillance, could increase emergency related outbreaks detection. (3) In the meantime, **additional food and mineral licks** might contribute to animal health and could represent an immediate support. Actually, hay is available at the ELFORA Cheffa valley commercial farm at a high price, i.e. 12 ETB a 25 kg bundle. (4) Animal feed and rangeland management interventions could bring feed supply (concentrates, conserved fodder, residues) for specific animals (lactating and breeding animals). (5) Furthermore, it is essential to **address issues of local conflict over resources** and to allow temporary access of livestock to National Parks and state ranches as well as in outsider grazing land like Cheffa valley.

#### DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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## 4 Annex

### **Abbreviations**

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
APDA	Afar Pastoralists Development Association
ARDUF	Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front
CARE	Cooperatives for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CSB	Corn-Soya-Blend
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (Regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (Zonal level)
EPI	Programme Immunisation
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EWS	Early Warning System
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MT	Metric Ton
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
SF	Supplementary Feeding
TADE	Tendaho Agriculture Development Enterprise
TB	Tuberculosis
TF	Therapeutic Feeding
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
WFP	World Food Programme
WVI	World Vision International

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