



# Cheffa Valley: refuge for 50,000 pastoralists and 200,000 animals

*Present humanitarian situation and livestock conditions in selected areas in and around Afar region*

*Assessment Mission: 21-26 July 2002*

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## 1 Introduction and background

The mission's major objective was to assess the humanitarian situation and livestock condition in selected surrounding areas of Afar region and in the Cheffa valley (Oromiya zone, Amhara region). The mission also cross-checked the situation in Afar region zone 5 and the Argobba special woreda (Afar region zone 3), from where unusual pastoralists movements started in January 2002. The assessment focused on animal condition, migration, marketing conditions and



Cheffa Valley with temporary Afar settlements (Photo by Yves Guinand, UN-EUE, June 1999)

terms of trade, food availability and the nutritional situation in pastoralist settlements, particularly availability of milk. The mission hoped to get a better understanding of pastoralist stress migration and coping mechanisms in the western border zones with the Amhara highlands.

During the field trip the following areas were visited: Adadlehangege Sinkinamelket kebele in Simurobi Gele'Alo woreda (zone 5, Afar region), Bati woreda (Oromiya zone, Amhara region), Telalak and Dewe woredas (zone 5, Afar region), Dalifage in Artuma woreda (zone 5, Afar region) Kemise (Oromiya zone, Amhara region), Showa Robit (North Showa, Amhara region) and Gacheni in Argobba special woreda (zone 3, Afar Region). Except Fursi woreda still located off-road, the four other woredas of zone 5, Afar region were visited.

South-western areas in Afar Region: zone 5 as well as Dulecha close to Argobba woreda in zone 3, Afar pastoralists are usually moving to the western escarpment (Oromiya zone in Amhara Region and North Showa) and/or to Zone 3, along the Awash River. Following stress generated by local failure of *dedaa* (November) and *sugum* (February-march) short rains as well as the

Issa-Afar conflict that has restricted grazing in zone 3, a greater number of families have moved westwards with their animals.

## 2 Mission findings

### 2.1 Cheffa valley and Kemisse area: refuge to 50,000 Afar and Oromo pastoralists and 200,000 animals

The Cheffa valley situated in Oromiya zone consist of a complex agro-pastoral system where a highly productive agricultural enterprise, the Cheffa Valley Farm ELFORA plc, has to coexist with numerous pastoralists herds in search of grazing. Recently there were some problems between pastoralists and the commercial farm in Cheffa valley because the farm forced Afar and Oromo pastoralists to buy grazing areas on contractual basis for a period up to 15<sup>th</sup> July 2002. As this contract expired and it now has started to rain, many Afar pastoralists have been leaving the area to return to their places of origin in zone 5 and zone 3 of Afar region (for more detailed information please consult report: Abate & Lemma, 2002).

Indications given by the woreda authorities in Kemisse as well as in zone 5 woredas estimate that probably 50,000 people and about 200,000 animals, essentially cattle and camels, moved to Cheffa valley, both Afar from zone 5, Afar region and Oromos from surrounding areas of Oromiya zone, Amhara region. Afterwards, as rain started in Kemisse on July 24, numerous emaciated cattle herds could be seen along the Kemisse–Senbete road, moving out of the swampy areas. Several weak animals died trapped by water, others too weak to walk have been slaughtered along the road and pastoralists could only use the skin. In Senbete, Oromiya zone, Amhara region, fodder was available on the market at 25 to 35 ETB a bundle, when during normal conditions, prices don't exceed 3 to 5 ETB.



Senbete market, livestock fodder for sale (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, July 2002)

#### 2.1.1 Main rains started with at least one month delay

The main rainy season (*kiremt* or *kerma* in Afar) just started in late July with at least a one-month delay. Already last year the main rainy season has been delayed. Up to now, the amount of feed available in the Cheffa valley was not enough to keep all the livestock population alive, and even now with the rain, weak animals will continue to die and impact of low milk availability will continue. Only a few lactating animals, mostly goats and camels are still producing milk and are exclusively used to feed children. Adults and children over five years old are eating maize bread and/or boiled cereals. Furthermore, pastoralists stress that overgrazing and scarce water resources have engendered clashes with agro-pastoral Liban-Balah Oromos near Showa Robit. Recently several casualties were reported, resulting in people wounded by gunfire and one Afari killed. Agricultural activities have also been affected by the long dry-spell. All over the area sorghum and maize are not growing normally. Even if the head of the Agricultural Office in Kemisse confirmed that recent rains have been good in terms of amount and distribution, earlier

drought conditions and delayed rains have had negative consequences. At the end of June, for example only 48% of the available land for cultivation has been sown. Local species of drought resistant sorghum might reach maturity, but already some maize crops that can never reach maturity are being used as fodder. Farmers are now busy with ploughing or preparing the fields for re-sowing and most of them will shift from maize to teff.

## 2.2 Population and livestock movements from Afar region zone 5

Since January 2002, most of the population and their livestock have moved out of zone 5 in search of pasture and water. Since July 2002, pastoralist groups split up and went to Gewane and Boromodaitou woredas in zone 3, along the Awash River and up the escarpment between Harbu town and Showa Robit. Both Afar and Oromo pastoralists concentrate in Cheffa valley where they share grazing resources. Pastoralist movements have reached unexpected proportions compared to 2001 when only few Afar transhumant movements have been reported.



Skinned dead cattle near Karakore, Amhara region (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, July 2002)

In zone 5, the second most populous area of Afar region with about 300,000 people, woreda interlocutors have indicated that pastoralists have sent most of the animals out of the zone to secure them. It is estimated that approximately 15,000 people left to zone 3 to Gewane and Boromodaitou woredas and probably 50,000 to Cheffa valley. In Talalak, it is estimated that only 15,000 to 17,000 people remain in the woreda. In the neighbouring woreda Dewe, about 20,000 people left, 15,000 up the escarpment and 5000 to zone 3. In Artuma woreda, all kebeles have reported departures and about 300 to 500 families migrated to the west, even further than the Oromiya zone. Such movements involving the whole family and all kind of livestock constitute a good indicator of pastoralist stress. Movements out of zone 5 have brought pastoralists groups all along Awash River tributaries from the escarpment down to the zone 3.



Slaughtered calves along the main Addis - Dessie road near Karakore, Amhara region (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, July 2002)

### 2.2.1 Livestock losses in zone 5 important but not critical

As far as livestock census is concerned evaluations made in the last seven years vary from 700,000 cattle to 5.5 million for the entire Afar Region<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless in zone 5, livestock losses remain limited. Simurobi Gele'Alo woreda (zone 5), the southern zonal area counted about 40,000 cattle and up to now, losses are evaluated at 2000 heads. In Talalak, Dewe and Artuma woredas dead animals are reported but only a few carcasses are visible. In Dalifage camels are affected by diarrhoea due to grazing scarcity. The situation seems to be rather similar to Simurobi woreda. Emaciated cattle are actually outside the zone and might face high losses when returning. Mid-July, zone 5 has received DPPC food and in Dalifage woreda people lined up to grind maize and wheat bags in the two mills<sup>2</sup> located near the market (cf. Annex 2)

### 2.2.2 Low livestock market prices

Actually the main problem faced by zone 5 "residents" is related to the market opportunities for shoats. Along the road to Talalak, women indicated that they recently sold three goats for 60 ETB on Garsagita local market. On Tuesday 23 July in Dalifage, highland traders purchased hundreds of shoats for 10 up to 50 ETB per head. All those animals were driven to the highlands following river courses to be fed on better grazing areas. Most of those animals are slightly emaciated sheep and goats in good condition. The market in Dalifage shows that now traders are mostly targeting local markets to purchase animals at the cheapest price. Those animals are then sent to better feeding areas and later marketed at better prices on bigger and more important urban markets.



A group of highland traders in Dalifage, zone 5, Afar region (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, July 2002)

### 2.3 Bati market down-sized to local dimensions from once being one of the most important markets in Ethiopia

Bati, the main contact market between Afar and mostly Oromo highlanders, is right in the heart of an agro-pastoral area. Like in Ifat and Cheffa valley, Bati woreda has suffered from erratic rains and *kiremt* delay. As most of the crops rely on rain fed agriculture, maize and sorghum have been heavily hit by a prolonged dry-spell. Sorghum and sesame sown in April and May dried up. Many farmers are now obliged to shift to short cycle maize or sorghum varieties requesting only 85 to 90 days for maturation. Others might shift to teff or grow lentils, field peas or linen (flax). At this stage, the biggest problem farmers face is a lack of seed to secure the shift to short cycle crops<sup>3</sup>. Even if such a shift is secured by the agricultural extension package that is offered on loan, only 10 to 15% of all farmers have chosen this solution. Facing recurrent drought conditions and without any safety system, most farmers do not take the risk to buy the extension package on

<sup>1</sup> CSA (1996), total population of farmer associations by sex in rural areas, with livestock population from different sources.

<sup>2</sup> A 50 kg cereals grinding cost 7 ETB.

<sup>3</sup> Varieties mentioned by the head of the agricultural office are Katomani maize and Gambella 1107 sorghum variety, as well as Cross 37 teff.

credit. The head of the Bati Agricultural Office admitted that repayment was a problem, but did not produce data that would support defaulting on credit repayments.

In the past, Bati market was one of the most important in Ethiopia assuring contact and transactions between highlanders and the pastoral lowlands. Since the closure of the border to Eritrea in 1997, Bati is suffering from depressed livestock demand. Trading activities has been downsized and the market only serves the local demand. Furthermore, import-export traders opted for Kombolcha to become the main staple food market place. Kombolcha is situated at an important crossroad with important grain storage facilities from the Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR) initiated by the government and international relief organisations. In Bati, a few kilometres away, most of the Afar who used to come to the market on Monday are not present anymore, because they have nothing to sell. Their livestock is not in good condition and they have no milk or ghee. Even contraband goods from Djibouti offer fewer opportunities because of tougher custom controls and the old competition with the Issa. Tigray livestock traders, who used to trade animals for the Sudan are now operating on local markets such as Yallo or Chiffra in zone 4 and 1 respectively. Afar retailers are now forced to give credit to their customers. And according to them, if in two months time the affected population does not get humanitarian support and rain, the situation could be similar to 1984. Prices for traded animals are very low. Whereas at the same time pastoralists and agro-pastoralists are facing difficult climatic conditions, market demand slowed down and traders de-stocking caused a rise in staple food prices (cf. Annex 1).

#### **2.4 Argobba special woreda: Unknown contagious disease killed 15**

Northern Argobba people live in an area formerly known as Yifat. This is a plateau south of Borkena and Kesseme Rivers, that is bordered by Menz River in the west. The Argobba people are also found in North Shewa and South Wollo. The Argobba in South Wollo distinguish between Argobba *Serte* and Argobba *Wata* according to race and settlement. The Argobba *Serte* are pure Argobbas, whereas the Argobba *Wata* are nomadic and mixed with Oromo and Afar people. In addition, the Southern Argobba people are those who live around Harar in Fedis and Bisidemo (Asfaw, 2000).

Argobba special woreda (zone 3, Afar region) situated between Ayilu Amba (North Shewa) and Dulecha woreda (zone 3, Afar region) is the only non-Afar woreda within the Afar region<sup>4</sup>. This woreda is remote and isolated between North Shewa and Afar Region due to poor road condition linking Ayilu Amba to Dulecha. With a population estimated to be some 18,632 people, 85% are agro-pastoralists depending on rain fed agriculture producing mainly cereals and cotton. The area did not receive any rain since last August and farmers are now facing food and fodder shortage. It first rained on 25 July but farmers lack seeds. Emaciated cattle along the road were observed and current animal diseases have been reported, mostly pasteurellosis and CBPP (known locally as *samba*), as well as foot and mouth disease.

Water born diseases are the major problem concerning human health in the woreda. Actually, four kebeles are facing water shortage (Taata Methkleya, Lay Methkleya, Bilu, Chisa) and since

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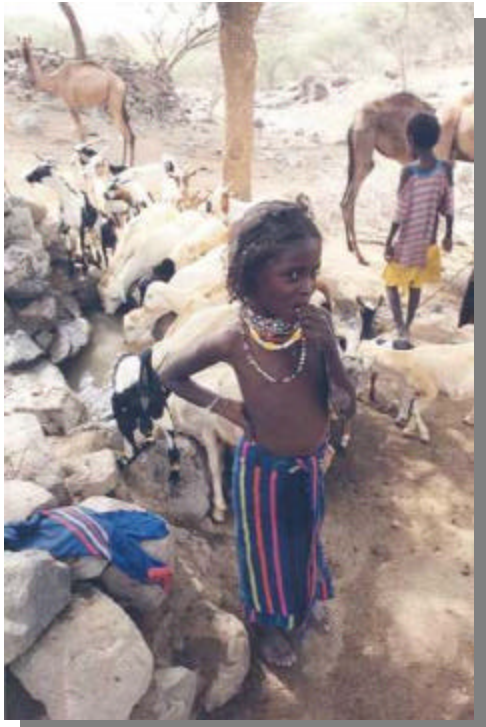
<sup>4</sup> 13 kebeles: Gacheni town, in north direction Cheno, Geberock, Werk Amba, Gozei, Debreko, Koka; south direction: AbaAu, Sofi Harer, Taata Methkleya, Lay Methkleya, Bilu, Chisa.

one month, northern kebeles (Geberock, Werk Amba, Gozei and Koka) are facing a water-related human disease outbreak. It is an unknown contagious disease that provokes vomiting and fever and shows dysentery symptoms. Already 15 deaths have been reported. More information was difficult to obtain because neither health nor water personnel are currently present in the woreda.

The woreda's water system is exclusively supplied through run-off water that comes from mountains around Ankober and Aliyu Amba (North Shewa). This run-off water bears high risks of human and animal water contamination. Food appears to be the second issue even if DPPC has distributed 150 MT of cereals at the beginning of July (cf. Annex 2). No abnormal livestock movements and tensions with neighbouring Afar pastoralists have been reported.

### 3 Conclusions and recommended actions

Afar people are having more and more difficulties coping with prolonged dry-spells due to chronic economic difficulties and under-development. 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. In the past most of the Afar Region was attached to western provinces in Tigray in the North, and Wello and Shewa in the South. This induced strong economic ties with the highlands west of the Afar lowlands and a highlander trade and business domination over all non-pastoral activities and particularly shops and local trade. The process of regionalisation and the creation of the Afar Region did not cut those economic ties. But Afar Regional State has now set up its own administration trying to become more efficient even if social services such as health and education remain problematic in terms of staffing and geographical coverage. The new political and ethnic regional borders do not prevent Afar pastoralists from keeping their usual migration patterns allowing them to leave their region regularly in search of grazing and water during the dry season.



Animal watering at a well near Talalak, zone 5, Afar region (Photo by Francois Piguet, UN-EUE, July 2002)

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At the household level, Afar, Oromo and Somali pastoralists affected by drought and tribal conflicts will most likely not recover with the next rains. During the coming days, great number of cattle will continue to die as they are too weak to resist animal diseases linked with humidity or to walk back to higher dry rangeland. Since the *kerma* rains have now started, it will take some time to recover a minimal camel and goat milk production in order to supply both children and adults in the

settlements. In case of insufficient rain, milk production will not increase. The affected population and children in particular will be in danger of facing severe nutritional problems within the coming four to six weeks.

*Recommended short-term interventions*

- To monitor the situation carefully in order to report any deterioration, which will now affect humans directly and not just animals anymore.
- To provide financial support to NGOs operating in the Afar region as well as in Shinille zone of Somali region and in Fentale woreda, Oromiya zone, Oromiya region.
- To conduct nutritional surveys within the most vulnerable groups and areas.
- With immediate non-food interventions in the affected areas of Afar and neighbouring areas, it is still possible to save part of the livestock, which will contribute to save human lives.
- If necessary, to bring logistical support to DPPC.

*Recommended mid- to long-term interventions*

- Peace building between Issa and Afar communities along the main road in zone 3 should be one of the long-term intervention priorities together with water intervention in Shinille in order to decrease competition for resources.
- Water and sanitation interventions together with health service strengthening in the long term have to be initiated in Argobba special woreda.
- Cut and carry grazing system in case of early livestock migration supported by food aid could be initiated in areas with agriculture and grazing resources like Kemisse. This “food for work” system could contribute to minimize conflicts between farmers and pastoralists and livestock concentration at different points might preserve cattle movements, which weaken animals and facilitate animal health monitoring.
- The early warning systems in the Afar Region should be strengthened and linked to other regional EWS, e.g. EWS in the Somali Region.
- Agencies should promote the use of media, particularly radio broadcasting in Afar, with a provision of early warning information related to human and animal health, weather situation as well as marketing information.
- Training and capacity building in marketing through pastoral market associations should help to increase trading abilities of Afar pastoralists and increase their profit share.

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## Annexes

### Annex 1 Market price Bati in ETB (EUE assessments)

(June 2001 / June & July 2002)

	June 2001	June 2002	July 2002
<b>Staple food</b>			
maize 100kg	68 - 70	100	100 - 110
retail 1 tin/kg	0.7 - 0.8	1.25	1.3 - 1.4 up to 2
wheat 100 kg	110 - 140		160
retail 1 tin/kg			2.2 - 2.25
sorghum 100kg	75	90 - 100	100 - 107
retail 1 tin/kg		1.25	1.3 - 1.4 up to 2
teff white		200	240
retail 1 tin/kg	2.5		3.5
teff red	2	170 - 175	210
retail 1 tin/kg			2.8
barley 100kg		130	150
retail 1 tin/kg		1.6	1.8
sugar retail 1 tin/kg	4.3 (apr02)	6	6.4
salt bar 25 kg/50kg	70	50	50
retail 1 tin/kg	1 to 3	0.8 to 3	0.8 - 3
butter		7 for a kg	10/13 kg

### Annex 2 - DPPC Kombolcha

Afar zone 5 distribution in July 2002  
(Metric Tonnes)

Woreda allocated:	Artuma /Dalifage	Dewe	Fursi	Telalak	Simou Robi
Grain	328	331	367.9	378.5	357.1
CSB	35	31.8	35.3	36.3	34.3
already dispatched:					
Grain	31.1	38.3	64.8	44.3	66.5
CSB	12.8	15.8	26.4	18	27

In Argobba special woreda, DPPC has distributed 115.2 MT of grain and 34.8 MT of rice

## Abbreviations

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
ANRS	Amhara National Regional State
APDA	Afar Pastoralists Development Association
CARE	Cooperatives for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CFEE	Centre Français d'Etudes Ethiopiennes
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)
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EWS	Early Warning System
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
LWF	Lutherian World Federation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MT	Metric Ton
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
SF	Supplementary Feeding
TF	Therapeutic Feeding
ToT	Terms of Trade
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
WFP	World Food Programme
WV	World Vision

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