

Hararghe Agro-pastoralists Face an Uncertain Future

Focus on livelihoods in selected belg dependant areas of East and West Hararghe

(Mission undertaken from 14 to 21 March 2000)

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Introduction and background

General overview

Hararghe is situated in the eastern part of Ethiopia, bordering Somali Region as well as the urban administrative regions of Dire Dawa and Harari. In the sub-regional context of Djibouti, Northwest Somalia, and East Ethiopia, Hararghe is the only place where climatic conditions allow rain fed agriculture. Hararghe enjoys a privileged position for cash crop production such as *chat*¹, which is exported to Ethiopia's neighbouring countries to the east and north-east (Djibouti, Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia). Other cash crops include coffee, Irish potatoes and onions produced in the highland areas and to some extent groundnuts grown in the southern lowlands of East Hararghe Zone. Despite the agricultural system's strong subsistence component, there has been an accentuated trend towards cash crop production over the last two decades. And *chat* became by far the major cash crop replacing coffee since the beginning of the 1970s. Because *chat* is a highly valued cash crop and has a certain drought tolerance, Hararghe farmers increased and intensified *chat* production and started to grow it even in the lowlands.

But in recent years climatic hazards such as erratic or failing rains coupled with pest infestations and crop diseases have been hampering crop production to the point that part of the population has become highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Furthermore, high pressure on land is progressively narrowing farmers' agro-economic decisions and forcing part of them to encroach and cultivate previously unused marginal or pastoral grazing lowland areas. Farmers have been and still are pushing crop cultivation into lowland areas of obvious climatic and biophysical limits and hence putting themselves at high risk. After subsequent unsatisfactory and failed *meher* and *belg* rains in 1997 and 1998, severe food insecurity forced people to sell off assets such as oxen and other livestock. Furthermore, food shortage caused large stress and labour migration in October 1998 among the population living in the south-eastern lowlands of East Hararghe². Stress and labour migration continued well into 1999 because early warning mechanisms failed to predict and react timely to the disaster situation and furthermore, another *belg* rain failure in 1999 further aggravated the food security situation³. It was not before the middle of last year, that food and other relief operations reached the size to match the crisis and the emergency situation could be controlled by bringing to a halt stress migration and allowing people to return to their homes.

Nevertheless, Hararghe, particularly its northern and southern lowlands, is one of the most drought-affected areas of the country with an officially estimated 370,000 needy people⁴. Whereas in parts of the highlands usually pockets of high vulnerability always exist due to well known structural development problems⁵, people living in mid- and lowland areas, especially those making a living from agro-pastoralism, are the most vulnerable to food insecurity. There are a number of factors to be

¹ For further reading on this mild narcotic drug, refer to the following articles and reports which are listed at the end of this report: Getahun & Krikorian, 1973; Krokorian & Getahun, 1973; Guinand, 1999; Klingele, 1998b;

² For detailed account and evaluation of 1997 and 1998 *belg* and *meher* performances and relief activities see Ahrens, 1997, 1998a, 1998b; Klingele, 1998a.

³ See Guinand, 1999b and Hammond, 1999b.

⁴ Unofficially and adding up wereda and zonal level data, the number of needy people is way beyond double the official number.

⁵ For example in Anchor-Goba Koricha and Doba weredas of West Hararghe Zone, and Meta, Goro Gutu, Kersa, Kombolcha and Jarso weredas of East Hararghe Zone.

discussed below, which make them more vulnerable to food insecurity than other segments of the population in Hararghe.

At the time of the evaluation mission to Hararghe from mid to end of March 2000, not one drop of the expected *belg* rains had then fallen onto farmers, fields. The vegetation in general and in particular on farmed fields, has become completely dry. Rain fed perennial vegetation including the major cash crops *chat* and coffee, are in poor physical condition with dry and in many cases without any leaves at all. Even drought tolerant shrubs and trees such as acacia species lost many of their leaves and look physically poor. The few available water sources are intensively used for cash crop irrigation in the highlands and to water animals in the lowlands. It is very likely that similarly to the *belg* growing areas in Welo and North Shewa, this season's *belg* rains may fail yet again, further aggravating the already prevailing critical emergency situation in the country.

Objectives

The objective of the mission fielded by the United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UN-EUE) was to evaluate the prevailing agricultural and food security situation in drought affected lowland areas of West and East Hararghe and to estimate consequences of most probably yet another *belg* rain and forthcoming harvest failure.

The mission held discussions with West and East Hararghe Zonal Administrations, the Zonal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Departments (DPPD) and the Zonal Agricultural Offices. Additional consultations with NGOs operating in drought affected areas led to field visits to Babile and Fedis weredas in East Hararghe and to Daro Lebu, Anchor-Goba Koricha and Mieso weredas in West Hararghe. For the field visits to Fedis wereda in East Hararghe, Hararghe Catholic Secretariat (HCS) representatives accompanied the mission. In West Hararghe the mission joined forces with the World Food Programme (WFP) and members of the Zonal Early Warning Committee to visit Daro Lebu wereda and confirm recent wereda administration reports on stress migration and urgently needed relief assistance.

In the light of the severe drought and humanitarian crisis actually striking neighbouring Somali Region and parts of Borena and Bale zones of Oromyia Region, the mission investigated probable inter-action and competition for water and grazing land between Somali pastoralists and Hararghe agro-pastoralists settled in the southern lowlands.

Field visits and discussions held with knowledgeable key informants revealed that Hararghe agro-pastoralists living in the lowlands, between and along perennial rivers such as Ramis and Wabe Shebele in the West and along Fafen and Jerer Rivers in the East, are among the most vulnerable population segments. They also have been hit hardest by the ongoing drought. Therefore, this report concentrates on these agro-pastoralists and tries to find hints and reasons why they have to be considered more vulnerable than others.

Agro-pastoralist livelihoods become fragile due to drought conditions

General livelihood situation

Most people living in the southern Hararghe lowland areas of Daro Lebu, Boke, Malka Balo, Gola Oda, Bedeno, Girawa, Fedis and Babile weredas are making a living as agro-pastoralists because the climatic and biophysical environments do not allow pure crop farming. Agro-pastoralists are settled but confine cropping to particular niches in the environment or to opportunistic cropping in wet years. They are cultivating land, mostly in valleys along river beds such as Dungeta, Ramis, Wabe Shebele, Mojo, Chulul, Gobebe, Erer and to a lesser extent along Dakata rivers. Agro-pastoralists are using grazing resources, mainly bush land, on a large-scale in animal husbandry. Their livestock herds are predominantly comprise cattle and goats. They move their livestock for part of the year following grazing opportunities and water availability. Certain members of the Hararghe agro-pastoralist's family, usually women and children, are settled and do not move. Only male members of the family are moving with their livestock during the dry periods of the year, when grazing and water become scarce in the vicinity of their homesteads. They either gather around water- and boreholes or they move further down towards the few perennial rivers of the Hararghe mountains. But unlike the Somali

pastoralists, the southern Hararghe agro-pastoralists do not cover long distances with their livestock in search for grazing land and water due to their relatively settled way of life.

Agro-pastoralists, livelihood ratio can be described roughly as 40% agriculture and 60% animal husbandry. Most agro-pastoralist families are polygamous. Labour within the family is usually divided as follows. The men take care of the animals. The women cultivate and take care of the household, and additional family members such as able-bodied youngsters, may be sent to search for daily labour in nearby villages. They may even go as far as to the state and private enterprise farms along Awash river. The later has been reported from Anchor-Goba Koricha and Mieso weredas of West Hararghe Zone.

Bushlands encroached to establish new settlements

In the lowland areas, like in Fedis wereda, people are encroaching further into virgin bush land and new settlement areas have been opened during the last six to ten years. Families originating from Babile wereda, Fik zone (Somali Region) and from Fedis kebeles along Erer river, have recently settled in the area. Particularly the settlements after Midega, which is situated 32 kilometres south of Boku, the wereda capital of Fedis, are of recent origin. Recently a foot track leading to the Gobebe river valley has been cleared for a distance of approximately 30 kilometres. This new track, upgraded through EGS activities, is very rough though clearing stones and trees out of the way has enlarged it. The track is manageable by a good four-wheel-drive vehicle, but certainly not by lorries and other



Gobebe river valley with irrigated fields

bulky vehicles. The EGS track ends, becoming a foot path again, just before leading down to perennial Gobebe river⁶. People living in this area fetch their water from and bring their animals for watering to the river. Both sides of the Gobebe river valley bottom are cultivated with the help of small irrigation systems (see picture). Even at the time of the visit the river's water was flowing at a steady pace. For agro-pastoralists living on the plateau, the river is the only source of water besides their artificial water ponds (also constructed through EGS activities) which dried up some time ago. Usually these ponds have a capacity to withhold water for a maximum of three to four months. Besides Gobebe river, there is only one bore hole near Boku town where people can get water now,

representing the only two alternatives left for people in the Fedis lowlands (see picture). Some agro-pastoralists may now have to walk distances up to 30 kilometres to fetch water, because Erer river in between Fedis and Babile weredas, is not perennial and ceased to carry water by now. Similar situations prevail in other lowland areas of Hararghe, i.e. in parts of Gola Oda, Daro Lebu, Babile, Boke and Girawa weredas.

The vulnerability of agro-pastoralists

What makes these agro-pastoralists more vulnerable to consecutive droughts than their fellow highland farmers and the Somali pastoralists who are moving with their animal herds in the adjacent Somali Region, is the sum of a number of unfavourable livelihood factors and circumstances they have to deal with. As explained above, these people encroached and settled in agriculturally high risk areas where erratic climatic conditions are often coupled with poor soil quality. Moreover, they are settled and hence, their opportunity for wide-ranging movement is limited. Most families did not deliberately choose to live in these marginal areas, but were rather forced to do so due to circumstances. Many originate from overcrowded highland areas or from other environmentally worse off neighbouring lowland areas.

⁶ The Midega Kebele Administrator who accompanied the UN-EUE mission affirmed that we were the first visitors from outside the kebele to visit and to use the newly opened track.

Putting into relation the Hararghe agro-pastoralists, livelihood conditions and their wealth status with their fellow high- and midland farmers and even with the neighbouring Somali pastoralists, they undoubtedly figure at the far end of the ranking list. Their primary and often sole coping strategy for dealing with drought and food shortage is selling off more animals than usual to buy food, as do farmers and pastoralists. But this coping strategy is limited due to the fact that they cannot afford to keep large numbers of animals like pastoralists. Consecutive droughts in 1997 and 1998 left many of the poorer families without plough oxen and with just a few or even without any animals in 1999 when the *belg* rains failed again. Living mostly in remote areas without or very limited road access, charcoal burning and fire wood selling as an additional coping strategy, is not a viable option for everybody such as it is for the highlanders living near main roads.

Labour migration too does not seem to be a viable option. As mentioned before, families may send able-bodied male members to look for work. But in times of drought, nearby wereda villages and zonal towns become crowded with people looking for daily labour. Hence, many will not find work, and those few who are fortunate to find work are paid wages far below normal rates. Furthermore, family members sent for labour elsewhere, are alleviating the family's burden only in the sense that there is one mouth less to feed. Migrant workers are hardly ever able to bring back cash savings for their families' benefit.

Concerning agricultural practices, in particular cash crop production, conditions for *chat* and coffee are unfavourable in the lowlands. Even though *chat* is rather drought tolerant and grown in a number of fields, the drought has seriously hampered production, which eventually came to a standstill. And *chat* is difficult to market in remote areas with limited access. Hence, it is mostly produced for home consumption and therefore income generation is rather limited, even in normal times.

According to a non-representative case study by the international NGO Save the Children Fund United Kingdom (SCF UK) undertaken in the lowlands of Girawa, East Hararghe, approximately 50% of the households were classified as "poor" and "very poor" out of four wealth categories⁷. Households from these categories had lost virtually all of their livestock by mid-1999 due to forced selling or to death (Mathys, 2000). Even though the data presented is non-representative, it can be assumed that the picture does not vary much in other lowland areas of West and East Hararghe. And as a matter of fact, most of the stress migrants encountered in Harar, Babile, Jigjiga and around the refugee camps in Somali Region at the end of 1998 and in the beginning of 1999, belonged precisely to the poor agro-pastoralists, wealth groups who became destitute after having sold off and lost most or all their livestock. Even though last year's emergency operation managed to return most of these destitute stress migrants to their homes, they have since found themselves in a rather fragile livelihood situation depending entirely on relief food distributions they earn through EGS activities.

Drought and food shortage indicators

In Daro Lebu wereda, particularly in the remote lowlands of Daro Abona, people are collecting and consuming available wild food plants to face the current food shortage situation. Deprived of any relief assistance, people are consuming fruits from a widely spread cactus species (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) widely available all over the area at this period of year. Children and women collect the ripe fruits with a long wooden stick with a large nail at its end (see picture). The fruit is pierced by the nail and torn off. It is then rubbed on the ground to remove the needles. The upper end of the fruit is sliced-off with a knife and the remaining piece sliced open on one side so that the thick skin can be easily removed by hand to



Cactus (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) with fruits and harvesting stick

⁷ See the annexed table for more details on the wealth groups and their assets, taken from the SCF UK report.

eat the inner part (see pictures). High consumption of *Opuntia ficus-indica* fruits, even though rather tasty, causes intestinal problems.

One indication for serious food shortage in Daro Abona is the number of malnourished children brought to the health post. In January 2000, 15 patients were registered weekly. In March the number rose to weekly 50 kwashiorkor and marasmus cases among children. The primary school of the same place registered 182 first grade children at the beginning of the school year in 1999 of whom 48 remain in March 2000. Similarly for second grade pupils: 60 enrolled in September 1999 and at the time of the mission's visit only 22 were attending classes. Most children dropped out at the end of January or beginning of February 2000. The number of school drop-outs gives an indication of children's physical weakness and also for stress migration of whole families. Daro Lebu wereda administration requested immediate relief assistance for 5000 people in four kebeles (Bilika, Chobi, Wenchebe and Rimeti) in February 2000, after having received reports of unusual and significant population movements away from these localities.

In Fedis wereda, along Gobele river, the cactus plant, *Opuntia ficus-indica*, is not available. The mission inquired therefore on alternative wild food plants. People interviewed by the mission mentioned a number of such plants and three species were found in the field. But unfortunately the drought has reached a stage where even these wild food plants are parched or carry neither fruits nor any other edible parts. Even leaves have dried and fallen off.



Edible inner part of the fruit

The encroachment of farmed fields by elephants in two kebeles of Girawa wereda, Kufa Kas and Hafeie, near Gobele river, is another drought indicator. Normally elephants do not come out of the bush to encroach on farmed fields for food along the river. Apparently encroachment of farmed fields by elephants happened also last year in Fedis wereda. The German NGO, Menschen für Menschen, (MfM), which is working in 7 kebeles along Erer river in the eastern part of the wereda, reported that farmers faced problems with elephants in 1999. The population tried to frighten the elephants away by blowing horns all day and night. So far, elephants have not troubled localities along Erer river or created any problems among the farming population.

Scarce water resources for livestock



Livestock concentration at the water holes near Daro Abona, Daro Lebu wereda, West Hararghe

In 1999 some of the East Hararghe weredas had to put up with serious livestock losses. The HCS office in Dire Dawa estimated that more than 40,000 heads of livestock died all over the zone due to critical shortage of water. The DPPC zonal pre-harvest assessment report estimates that livestock herd size were reduced by approximately 50% in Babile, 30% in Fedis and 50% in Gursum (DPPC, 1999d). The remaining livestock seems to have recovered and still is in good condition. But near Daro Abona, Daro Lebu wereda, the mission visited a place with three deep water holes where agro-pastoralists from nearby kebeles are watering their animals. These are actually the last remaining water sources in the vicinity. Next water points are found along Wabe Shebele river, approximately 30 kilometres further south.

To get the water out from the deep hole, five men form a chain passing kettles from the approximately 15 metre deep hole to pour the water into small ponds where animals gather and drink (see picture). Four neighbouring kebeles have set up a water-management system, whereby livestock from each of the three kebeles has the right to stay at the holes and water for one day (see picture). The following day they leave the water holes for animals of another kebele and look for grazing land. Presently agro-pastoralists have to walk with their animals for approximately half a day to find fodder. Animals

get watered every fourth day. Hence, they have to remain without water for three consecutive days. People interviewed in the vicinity of the water holes told the mission that an unknown number of animals died already due to physical weakness. Families, who left for the rivers as well as families who use the water holes, both lost animals. When asked about livestock sales, people denied this option categorically. The wereda capital Machara is the nearest trading centre, almost 100 kilometres away. In between Daro Abona and Machara there is no water. Therefore, neither people nor animals would survive a five-day walk. "We have no other alternative than to stay and pray for rain", answers one of the men in the water hole while passing a kettle full of water to the man next to him.



Men passing kettles full of water from a water hole for their livestock near Daro Abona, Daro Lebu wereda, West Hararghe

Aspects of relief activities in the Hararghe lowlands: confusing, complex and difficult

General food security situation⁸

In general, the food security situation is presently under control in the Hararghe highlands, where most farmers will have enough food stock until the end of May and the beginning of June. Nevertheless, chronic food insecure pocket areas remain in the highlands of Anchor-Guba Koricha (25,000 people⁹) and Doba wereda (30,000 people) in West Hararghe and Meta (15,000) Goro Gutu (6,000), Kersa (13,892 people), Jarso (22,700 people), Kombolcha (24,000 people) and in Fedis wereda (50,100 people). Most of these areas face permanent structural problems such as lack of basic infrastructure facilities, overpopulation, remoteness and the like.

The food security situation looks more precarious in the mid- and lowland areas of the two Hararghe zones. Currently most food stocks are being emptied. On March 16 the mission attended two food distributions in Boku and Fechatu villages of Fedis wereda in East Hararghe. In both sites the Hararghe Catholic Secretariat (HCS) organised the food distributions for their Employment Generation Scheme (EGS) activities. These were the last distributions and the warehouses are empty by now. Empty warehouses were indicated also in Asbe Teferi, the zonal capital of West Hararghe as well as most stores and depots at wereda level.

As of DPPC's (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission) 1999 pre-harvest assessment, the total number of beneficiaries has been estimated at around 370,000, that is 112,500 for West Hararghe and 257,500 for East Hararghe¹⁰. In all the weredas of West Hararghe the distribution of relief food has been scheduled from April onwards for a duration of six months. In East Hararghe most food distributions for the 15 affected weredas have been scheduled before May, yet it has been confirmed that no food has arrived for the scheduled April distributions in either of the two zones. A further and significant increase of the beneficiary numbers is inevitable with the prospect of yet another failed *belg* season.

Seed procurement and distributions have been satisfactory last year. For 2000, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has already bought more than 2000 MT of cereal seeds to be distributed to drought-affected areas in Tigray, Amhara Region and the Hararghe Zones of Oromya Region. Even though the mission was unable to get a clear picture of the seed provision situation in Hararghe, a number of organizations have already pre-positioned seed in their warehouses.

⁸ For an actual update on the current agricultural situation, including market prices and trends, terms of trade and yield expectations for major crops in East and West Hararghe, please refer to CARE Ethiopia's most recent post-harvest assessment report published in March 2000 (CARE Ethiopia, 2000).

⁹ These beneficiary numbers include only needy people from the highland areas of the mentioned weredas, excluding mid- and lowland beneficiaries.

¹⁰ Zonal and regional estimates from the pre-harvest assessment 1999 suggest 269,481 and wereda estimates suggest 349,406 eligible beneficiaries (DPPC pre-harvest assessment zonal report: DPPC, 1999d & 1999e).

Furthermore, FAO deliveries should not delay. In general, seed provision does not seem to cause major problems for 2000.

Relief food supplies; too late, too little

In East Hararghe, which was hit by drought as early as in the beginning of 1997, disaster prevention mechanisms failed to be effective. As a result, getting relief activities started took too long. In mid 1998, the untimely response and inadequate logistic support resulted in two massive stress migration movements out of the lowland areas of Fedis, Babile and Gursum weredas. Able-bodied men and also whole families left their homes towards major towns in East Hararghe (e.g. Harar) in search for daily labour opportunities and for begging. A second movement, comprising women, children, men and whole families, was directed towards Jigjiga town and the Somali refugee camps situated along the border to Somalia hoping to get some food from the refugee camps. Ever since and during the major part of last year, emergency relief food supplies arrived late, irregularly and in insufficient amount. Even though the zonal DPPD in Harar tried to truck back the stress migrants to their places of origin, the outward migration continued for a good part of 1999. In some places food deliveries were delayed by up to three months. Where there was no food and no seed, destitute families could survive no longer and left. Some families developed a distinct pattern of stress migration since 1997, having run after food and any labour opportunities for most of the time since they lost their assets and became virtually destitute. SCF UK, which is active in Gursum and Girawa weredas of East Hararghe zone, had planned to distribute relief food from September to November 1999. Unfortunately, food deliveries were so late that distributions to the beneficiaries could only be started at the beginning of January 2000.

As a matter of course, beneficiaries are not compensated for lost, skipped or late deliveries. They are expected to cope with the situation as much as they can. And surprisingly, the relief efforts undertaken, despite their unreliability and inadequacy, helped to control the situation and resulted in the normalisation of the emergency towards the end of December 1999 and the beginning of this year. But the situation remains fragile and may change anytime from now. Most of the Hararghe lowland areas would have needed to receive relief food from April 2000 onwards. Yet most warehouses are empty and none of the mission's interlocutors, except CARE in Asbe Teferi, had information regarding the delivery of further food supplies. CARE in Asbe Teferi will be getting some relief food for their EGS activities. Some weredas such as Meta near Dire Dawa and Gola Oda have some food stocks left from last year. But these stocks are small and will not last for more than a couple of weeks. Similar to last year, delayed, missed or skipped food distributions will undoubtedly once more lead to increased and perhaps even massive stress migration, not only among the lowland agro-pastoralists but possibly also from highland areas.

Potential for massive stress migration remains high

At the time of the mission, signs of stress migration had been observed and reported in the predominantly lowland weredas of Fedis, Babile, Gola Oda and Daro Lebu, as well as from Kurfa Chele, Meta and Anchor-Goba Koricha. Apparently there are three distinctive movements. (1) Able-bodied males go to nearby villages and towns to search for daily labour. (2) From Fedis (Efadin, Ibada and Bisi Dimo kebeles) and Babile (Anod, Gemechu, Tulu Haro and Erer kebeles) weredas, some people left towards Jigjiga and the refugee camps. (3) The third movement is towards the few perennial rivers in search for water and grazing land. The number of people leaving their home areas is small as yet and in the range of a couple of dozens to hundreds for most mentioned weredas with the exception of an unconfirmed 5,000 people from Daro Lebu and an unknown but significant number from Gola Oda wereda. World Food Programme food monitors visited Gola Oda wereda in February 2000 and found significant numbers of closed doors in one of the remote lowland kebeles. It was reported that these families moved with their livestock to the Wabe Shebele river. In the lowlands of Daro Lebu wereda a similar picture occurred to the UN-EUE mission. Farmers met at one of the few remaining water holes said, that many had left with their livestock towards the Wabe Shebele river. Apparently there are serious food shortages, water and grazing problems in Billika, Wenchebe and Chobi kebeles.

Relief food positioning far from beneficiaries

In most of the Hararghe weredas such as Daro Lebu in West Hararghe, adequate relief food depots exist only in the wereda capital or other accessible localities in the highlands. For many of the drought prone lowlanders, this means undertaking a one way 100 kilometre, 4 to 5 day walk to the depot to pick up food. When further considering that on the way neither water nor food is available, the undertaking becomes rather inconceivable. In Gola Oda and Girawa weredas in East Hararghe, people from the lowlands have to walk up to 80 kilometres to receive their food rations. Due to lack of appropriate storage facilities, often food is stored in offices of the local administration or in schoolrooms. Often the food is kept outside in a courtyard, just covered by plastic sheets. Hence, food tends to perish, especially when the rains start. Deplorable road conditions¹¹ often make more appropriate food positioning, further down in the lowlands and nearer to the needy population, very difficult. Similar problems prevail in other remote and chronic food insecure areas in the northern part of Ethiopia, for example in the Simien Mountains, the Tekeze River lowlands, in Wag Hamra wereda, in North and South Welo Zones (Guinand, 1999a, c, d; Hammond, 1999a; Hammond & Eggenberger 1999).

Insecurity obstructs development and relief activities

In the southern Hararghe lowlands an additional and no less important factor hindered and is still obstructing proper access, assessment and delivery or implementation of relief and development activities: insecurity inflicted through banditry. Babile, Fedis, Girawa, Gola Oda, Boke, Daro Lebu, in all these weredas at one time or another, sporadic security incidences occur and obstruct relief and development activities. The UN-EUE mission was advised not to visit the lowland areas of Babile wereda or Fik Zone in the Somali Region. Aid workers from SCF UK are unable to assess the humanitarian and in particular the food security situation in the lowlands of Girawa wereda due to prevailing insecurity. On the other hand, the security situation seems to have improved in Daro Lebu wereda. In previous years hardly anybody has dared to visit Daro Abona, to where the UN-EUE did a joint mission together with World Food Programme food monitors and members of the West Hararghe Zonal Early Warning Committee.

Somali pastoralists, Employment Generation Schemes and free food distributions

Besides the usual food targeting problems, such as dilution of rations through redistribution and equal sharing among community members, the UN-EUE mission encountered a variety of problems related to ambiguous administrative arrangements in Babile wereda and to Somali pastoralists. The administration faces the ever-existing dilemma of how to cope with very mobile and well-informed pastoralists who suffer from the drought and who are convinced that they are entitled to receive relief food wherever distributions take place. Especially the Fedis and Babile wereda authorities and concerned NGOs face serious problems and have difficulties to cope with pastoralists claiming relief food. The Somali pastoralists are often neither listed nor settled in the respective weredas and kebeles. Last year the Fedis wereda administration confronted the following rather paradoxical and uncomfortable situation: population census projections from 1994 estimated a total population of approximately 170,000 people, yet the number of beneficiaries who have been listed by the kebele Development Agents amounted to a total of around 241,000! The official number from the DPPC pre-harvest assessment figuring in the Emergency Appeal 2000 is 40,218 beneficiaries (DPPC, 2000). The most plausible reason given for this obvious discrepancy is that Somali pastoralists with their numerous clan family ties listed a number of additional clan family members in different places to make sure they will get enough food. This reaction may very well be a coping and survival strategy in times of drought and when food deliveries become erratic and unreliable such as during major parts of 1998 and 1999. Furthermore, pastoralists know that free food distributions in Somali Region tend to be planned for the same day to prevent double ration distributions for those well informed and clever families who may manage to move from one distribution point to the other.

¹¹ The track which leads from the Daro Lebu wereda capital Mechara to the affected lowland areas is very rough and even for Land Rovers and similar four-wheel-drive vehicles it can take up to four hours for the one way 100 kilometre trip. Furthermore, the track is only practicable during the dry season and its narrowness does not allow any 5 ton and heavier lorries to operate on it.

The potential for conflict builds up when Somali pastoralists challenge EGS food distributions destined to compensate those who worked to get the food. In Fedis and Babile wereda, cases of provocation have been reported where pastoralists threatened aid workers who refused to include them in the food distribution. The German NGO, Menschen für Menschen, (MfM) wants to maintain a minimal working culture and is therefore against free food distributions. It does not seem fair, that in Somali Region for the Somali pastoralists, food distributions are organised freely and in the neighbouring Babile and Fedis and other weredas of Oromyia Region, people have to work to get basically the same rations and kind of food.

In Babile, rather peculiarly two administrative systems exist side by side: the Oromyia wereda administration and the Babile, Somali Region district administration, both administering the same area. This set up has a complex historical and political background. The Oromyia wereda administration and involved relief and development NGOs such as the Italian CISP (Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli) are confronted with similar problems like in Fedis. For an official estimated total population of approximately 47,000, listed beneficiaries are approximately three times as high (~120,000). But the officially accepted number of beneficiaries for this year is around 27,000 (DPPC, 2000). Wereda Development Agents and other humanitarian actors organising food distributions are unable to control the number of people claiming food rations. To prevent disturbances, tumults and the like during food distributions, all food is distributed to everybody present. But the mission heard serious and bitter complaints from wereda officials about the impertinence of the Somali pastoralists and the lack of support and understanding from official regional and federal authorities. The Somali administration officials met in Babile town told the mission that they received from Somali Region DPPB a certain amount of relief food late in December 1999 (the amount of food could not be recalled). However, 50kg monthly food rations per four household members (12.5kg/person/month) were distributed freely to, poor, Somali pastoralist households. The Somali administration in Babile town stated that they would only provide food for the Somali pastoralists and only to the ones they will be registering (currently the Somali Region Administration requested the Babile administration to register families who have nothing to eat). On the other hand, the Oromyia administration would provide food for the Oromo agro-pastoralists and destitute farmers of Babile wereda. Free food distributions by the Somali Region DPPB to Somali pastoralist are meant to ease the pressure on Oromyia Region EGS food distributions. But the quantity distributed does not seem to have any impact on the pastoralists' interference on EGS food distributions in Babile and Fedis weredas.

Somali pastoralist movements and herd concentrations

At the end of March herds of cattle and goats were seen in the vicinity of Babile town, coming up the Dakata River. People reported that they were moving further than they would normally because the shallow wells around Fik town in Fik Zone, Somali Region, are becoming very crowded. Estimations on animal numbers gathered around Fik are as high as 25,000. People arriving from Fik fear that the water, which is getting salty by now, would not last very long and opted to leave for Gursum in East Hararghe. The same people reported that cattle and goats are dying in Somali Region. They have seen many animal carcasses on their way. Only camels are resisting the present harsh drought conditions. One herder stated bitterly that from his initial 167 head of cattle he owned before he began to move one month ago, only 50 survived. He lost two thirds of his herd. He is no exception. Other people tell similar stories. Many pastoralists who have walked hundreds of kilometres for more than one month from south and south-eastern areas of Somali Region (Korahe, Kebri Dehar etc.), lost most of their animals, mostly cattle on the way.

Another reliable key informant, who recently travelled from Babile through Fik, Hamero and Imi to Gode town, reported that literally thousands of camels are being watered around Fik town every day. There are big animal concentrations in two different locations of Somali Region: south-west of Fik town, between the Wabe Shebele and the Erer and Mojo rivers, in an area called "Salahad" and south of Jijjiga town, between Fafen and Jerer rivers. These two localities received some rain in October and November last year and hence can still provide animal fodder. Cattle and camels seen walking along the Fik – Hamero track still seem to be in an acceptable physical condition. But as the water wells in the area are getting salty and dry, the situation may deteriorate from one week to the other.

Free relief food distributions have been organised in February 2000 in Fik, Hamero and a number of other places in Fik Zone. In Fik town, food was distributed to 35,000 people of whom 12,000 were originating from neighbouring Korahe Zone, of which its zonal town Korahe is located 250 – 300 kilometres southeast of Fik town. This is a clear indication that herders are moving towards the north.

Conclusions and recommendations

Generally, at the end of March 2000 the food security situation was under control in both West and East Hararghe Zones. Nevertheless, with a high probability of yet another *belg* rain failure, taking into account that food stocks at local level are low or are already exhausted and the uncertainty of new food deliveries, the food security situation remains extremely fragile. The most vulnerable segment of the population in Hararghe are the agro-pastoralists living in the lowlands. They have been the hardest hit in previous drought years. Therefore, the potential for yet more stress migration from this population segment remains high.

To prevent a repetition of the stress migration seen in previous years, a continuous and steady flow of assistance using mechanisms such as EGS activities and timely food ration distributions will be crucial. Many families have lost all their assets in previous years and remain virtually destitute. The response of these families to any interruption in food deliveries will unquestionably be migration. Knowing that the long *kiremt* rains usually isolate areas that are barely served by neglected dry-weather tracks, pre-positioning of the planned and necessary relief items for the coming months will be crucial. But when facing a situation where the timely arrival of relief supplies is difficult to manage and delayed or cancelled distributions are the norm rather than the exception, it is doubtful whether pre-positioning of food and other relief items in affected areas will be possible at all. Presently food deliveries face unexplained bottlenecks at federal and regional level. Transport availability at zonal and wereda level is another often mentioned, well-known and unresolved issue. Lack of sufficient transport capacity created delivery interruptions and was one of the causes for stress migration in 1998 and 1999.

The actual beneficiary numbers listed at wereda level being by far higher than officially accepted at federal level (particularly for Fedis and Babile weredas) may cause serious shortfalls in food requirements and deliveries in the coming months, more so if there is no rain.

Unfortunately there is little that can be done to save dying livestock and replenish exhausted water resources in the lowlands. Their remoteness and inaccessibility prevents the delivery of adequate relief assistance.

As more and more Somali pastoralists are concentrating in just a few places and are coming up to Babile and Gursum weredas, future relief operations should take this fact into account. If the rains do not commence soon these people will require urgent food and water assistance. Identifying a viable solution regarding how to handle the serious targeting problems in East Hararghe lowlands where Somali pastoralists request food destined for EGS workers remains unresolved. This is a sensitive and complex issue, especially in the current context in the weredas of Babile and Fedis, and is a matter requiring close attention from the concerned authorities. Currently, there seems little alternative other than increasing food deliveries to meet local requests. Nevertheless, the potential for conflict between the Somali pastoralist communities and the Hararghe agro-pastoralists will remain high but will hopefully not be aggravated through competition for limited food resources.

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

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- Ahrens J D (1998a) West and East Hararghe After the Meher Harvest: Significant Yield Reductions, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 20 to 25 January, Addis Ababa
- Ahrens J D (1998b) Food Shortages Force Oromos of East Hararghe into Migration, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 19 to 27 October, Addis Ababa
- CARE Ethiopia (2000) Post-harvest crop assessment report; East Shewa, East & West Hararghe, report prepared by the CARE Ethiopia Food Information System (CEFIS), Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1998) Food Supply Prospect 1999, Report published by the Early Warning System Department, December, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1999a) Emergency Relief Needs in Ethiopia, Inadequate Donors Response Against Increasing Needs, Report published by DPPC, 8 April, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1999b) (No title), Trip report on Belg season production and general food security, unpublished internal report on a multi-agency mission, 1 – 12 June, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1999c) Assessment report on non-food requirements in East Hararghe Zone, internal report on a multi-agency mission, 17 – 23 June, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1999d) 1999 meher season pre-harvest assessment in East Hararghe Zone (Oromiya Region), unpublished DPPC zonal report, assessment mission 19 November to 1 December, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (1999e) Pre-harvest zone level report, West Hararghe (Oromiya Region), unpublished DPPC zonal report, assessment mission, November, Addis Ababa
- DPPC (2000) Food supply prospect in 2000, Volume 3 of 3, Early Warning System Report, Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission, January, Addis Ababa
- Getahun A and Krikorian A D (1973) Chat: Coffee's Rival from Harar, Ethiopia. I. Botany, Cultivation and Use, in *Economic Botany* 27, October to December issue, p. 353-377
- Guinand Y F (1999a) North Welo – Food Security Situation: Effects of Consecutive Crop Losses on Farm Households in Selected Areas, UN-EUE Rapid Assessment Mission, 15 to 20 March, Addis Ababa
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- Hammond L (1999a), Belg Labour Dependency, Contributes to Food Shortage in Wag Hamra, UN-EUE Assessment Report, 25 May to 9 June, Addis Ababa
- Hammond L (1999b) Localized areas of extreme vulnerability and targeting problems persist in East Hararghe, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 25 – 29 July, Addis Ababa

- Hammond L, Eggenberger W (1999) Food deliveries to South Welo increased, but targeting remains a problem, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 22– 27 August, Addis Ababa
- Klinge R (1998a) West & East Hararghe Zones at the End of the Belg Season, UN-EUE Field Mission Report, 18– 23 May, Addis Ababa
- Klinge R (1998b) Hararghe Farmers on the Crossroads between Subsistence & Cash Economy, UN-EUE Study, Addis Ababa
- Krikorian A D and Getahun A (1973) Chat: Coffee's Rival from Harar, Ethiopia. II. Chemical Composition, in *Economic Botany* 27, October to December issue, p. 378-389
- Mathys E (2000) Assessment of the impact of food aid on household economies of North Wollo, South Wollo and East Hararghe, Ethiopia, Save the Children (UK), Food Security Unit, Consultancy Report, February, Nairobi
- Sharp K (1997) Targeting food aid in Ethiopia, consultancy report for Save the Children Fund (UK), Addis Ababa
- Yesus A H (1996) Field Trip Report to East and West Hararghe Zones of the Oromiya Region (Region 4), UN-EUE Field Mission Report, April, Addis Ababa

NGOs and other organisations operating in East and West Hararghe

CARE Ethiopia	Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CISP	Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (International Committee for the Development of People)
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (at federal level)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (mostly at regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (mostly at zonal level)
EGS	Employment Generation Scheme
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
HCS	Hararghe Catholic Secretariat
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MfM	Menschen für Menschen
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
SCF/UK	Save the Children Fund United Kingdom
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

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 southeasterly winds produce the main rain in southeastern Ethiopia and the little spring rains to the east central part of the northwestern 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*)

Annex: Wealth Groups in the Girawa wereda lowlands, East Hararghe

	Very poor HH	Poor HH	Middle HH	Better off HH
Description	very small land and animal holdings labour migration	labour migration	ox owning may trade	ox owning may trade
Animal holdings in, normal, years	0-1 oxen 0-3 cows 0-4 shoats 0 pack animals	0-1 oxen 2-5 cows 3-4 shoats 0-1 pack animals	2-4 oxen 8-15 cows 8-10 shoats 0-2 pack animals	4-8 oxen 20-30 cows 20-25 shoats 2-3 pack animals
Animal holdings in 1999	0 oxen 0 cows 0 shoats 0 pack animals	0 oxen 0-3 cows 0-3 shoats 0-1 pack animals	1 oxen 3-7 cows 3-6 shoats 0-1 pack animals	2 oxen 5-10 cows 5-20 shoats 1-2 pack animals
HH size in, normal, years	3-4	5	6	6
HH size in 1999	3-4	5-6	5-6	5-6

(Source: Mathys, 2000)

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