



Assessment Report

On the current situation in Zones 1& 4, Afar National Regional State

23rd to 29th January 2005

BACKGROUND

Afar region is an arid and semi arid area divided into five zones. The region has three rainy seasons: *Karma* is the main rainy season (mid June to mid September); *Sugum* rain corresponds to the short rains (March - April). The third rain is called *Dada*, very short from mid November to mid December; it covers only the areas at the escarpment of the highlands (western part of Zone 4).

The livelihood of Afar pastoralists is based on the rearing of livestock. The availability of pasture and water is dependent on the performance of the rainy seasons. Overall, rainfalls in 2004 have been erratic, with limited pasture regeneration affecting the animals and ultimately the livelihood of the pastoralists.

Since September 2004, abnormal and significant losses of livestock (mainly cattle and sheep) are reported in most of livestock concentration areas of zone 1 & 4.

ASSESSMENT - JUSTIFICATION

ACF has been implementing watsan and animal health activities in Zones 1 & 4 ANRS since 1999. General situation monitoring is conducted by ACF on a regular basis.

Sugum, karma and dada rains this year were observed as generally poor¹. As a result of rain deficits, the situation in the area is reported alarming and needs close follow up and monitoring, with focus on the zones 1 & 4 and the neighboring highlands where livestock from Afar concentrated for grazing.

The objectives of the assessment were i) to assess the situation of livestock that migrated earlier to neighboring Amhara and Tigray regions ii) to understand the current crisis situation in the area, and iii) to identify possible interventions, especially in the field of animal health.

The assessment was conducted by using questionnaires, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. Pastoralists, key informants and woreda administrations were contacted. Transect walk in the grazing lands, the watering points and visual observation were also part of the assessment.

¹Assessment on the impact of karma rain in zone 4 of ANRS, 28th October to 2nd November 2004 – ACF Ethiopia mission.

OCCASSIONAL RAINS AND IMPACT IN ZONE 1 & 4

Rainfall situation

In the second decade of January 05, one to five days of shower rains were reported in southern Dubti, and northwestern Chifra woredas of zone 1 as well as in western Awra, Gullina, Teru and southwestern Uwa woredas of zone 4. These shower rains, were sporadic and localized.

It is to be noted also that some *Belg* rains in adjacent highlands flooded the lower parts of Teru woreda.

Pasture and browse availability

As a result of poor performance of the 2004 rainy seasons in zones 1 & 4 pasture have not been properly regenerated, with poor availability on the long term. As early as of October 2004 (*Karma* rainy season ends in September), herds of zones 1 & 4 started to move in search of pasture within and outside the region.

The unusual rains in the second decade of January 05 supported some regeneration of pasture, especially in some pocket areas of Dubti and Chifra woredas of zone 1 as well as in Gullina and Awra woredas of zone 4. Grass regeneration has been observed in Fokissa kebele of Gullina woreda of zone 4 and south of Dubti woreda of zone 1. However, due to the large number of livestock already concentrated in these places the little growing pasture will deplete soon: the pastures were previously overgrazed up to the root level in some cases, and herds entered these areas while it needs some more time to properly regenerate.

On the other hand at the beginning of January 05 huge number of livestock have concentrated in Dubti woreda. These animals came from zone 4 and northwestern parts of zone 1. These livestock consumed the pasture and the cotton trees from the plantations, especially Tendaho farm.

Livestock condition and health

In general livestock condition is poor, and in particular cattle and sheep are very weak. Animals concentrated in Tendaho farm in Dubti woreda are relatively in a better body condition than livestock in other places, due to the availability of some grazing and browse in Tendaho cotton farmland.

Regarding diseases, Blackleg, Anthrax, Fascioliasis, Mangemite and Anaplasmosis are reported in the adjacent Highlands where significant Afar herds moved (especially Cheffa valley, Woldiya, Mersa, Hayke, Hara and Alamata). On the other hand blackleg, anthrax and mangemite are reported in Dubti woreda.

Regarding mortality, large numbers of dead carcasses (cattle and sheep) have been observed along the roads sides (Chiffra to Hara, Awra to Chiffra and in the southern parts of Dubti woreda) and near pastoralist settlements. The diseases are the main stem for the death of livestock, as their immunity is impaired due to poor pasture availability. Milk production is reducing drastically: already cattle milk production is very poor to nil, while camels and goats are still giving poor quantity.

Since the beginning of January 05 a veterinary team from the Afar Region Agro pastoral Bureau is present in the concentration areas in the highlands to treat the sick animals and control the spread of diseases in the area.

Migrations

In normal year, at this time, parts of zone 1 (Chiffra woreda) and zone 4 would host also livestock coming from zones 3 and 5. However, with absence of pasture in these usual post-*Karma* grazing

areas, such migrations have not been observed, and even the livestock of zone 4 migrated to the adjacent Highlands and along the Awash River since the beginning of December 2004.

In the Highlands, due to depletion of pasture and crop residues as well as the starting of *Belg* agricultural season, Afar herds in Alamata, Bala, Hurogobi, Wodiya Mersa, Hike and Kara areas have started to move back to their original places in zone 4. It is also said that Afar administration entered in discussion with local administrations and Afar herders, reaching a consensus on the necessary return of Afar herds in zone 4 in order to avoid some conflicts.

The local administration in Cheffa Valley reported that over 2 000 people with 6 000 animals will stay there until the end of February 05. As the livestock condition is very poor, it is expected that many animals would die on their way back to zone 4.

In zone 1, along the Awash River, and especially in the concentration areas of Dubti woreda, many herds have already started to move further east two weeks ago to Afambo and Assayta agriculture areas, where crop residues are available.

Markets

The number of cattle available in Chiffra and Yalo markets is reducing for the past few months: most of the livestock moved to the adjacent highlands, while the few number of cattle in the markets is emaciated and the market-selling price is very low.

The table below shows the trend of the livestock number and price in Yalo and Chiffra markets October 04- January 05.

- Trend of livestock market price and supply in Chiffra and Yalo markets Oct 04 to Jan 05 -

		Sept 04	Oct04	Nov04	Dec04	mid Jan05
Chiffra	Price *	900	800	800	600 - 750	600
	No of cattle	400 – 600	500	50 - 500	200	50
Yalo	Price *	800	700	540	350	60
	No. of cattle	1200	210 – 300	120	50	60

Source: ACF monthly market monitoring report

* price of adult male cattle

Human health

According to some informant, there is high incidence of diarrhea affecting children and malaria in Cheffa areas. There was no reported case of malnutrition.

Coping mechanisms

In the current situation, it is observed that still the pastoralists are coping mainly through migrations. All movements observed are abnormal in time and space and it is to be noted these movements are “costly” in terms of animal mortality, with significant depletion of assets, especially for small herders.

EXPECTATIONS

Most of the herds that migrated to the neighbouring Highlands are now on their way back to zone 4: they will use the few pasture regenerating by the recent showers in some places. However, if some grass is made available, it is not expected to last long as it is quite localised and influx of animals is

important. It will obviously bring some relief for the animals, but at this stage, it will most probably not be enough to reach “safely” the next rainy season. It is also to be noted that animal mortality may be high on the way from the Highlands.

In zone 1, herds that concentrated along the Awash River, especially in Dubti woreda, are exhausting the very poor pasture and browse of the area and are now in process to concentrate in Afambo and Assayta woreda, where some few agricultural residues are still available. It is expected that they will stay there until the next rainy season, as there is no other alternative to move thereafter. Further assessment would determine if the availability of food for the animals would sustain them (allow them to survive) until the next rainy season.

While occurrence of epidemics is still not reported, morbidity is reported to be high due to the impaired immunity of the animals to chronic diseases, finally increasing the susceptibility and mortality of the animals.

Finally, the assessment raises concern over the food security indicators (milk production, access to cash, availability of and dependence on food aid for the poorest households, water availability). Situation is not expected to significantly improve and availability of supplementary food in the ration would probably avoid further degradation of the nutritional status of the poor households and stabilise the situation.

The current crisis, mainly characterised at this stage by significant losses of livestock follows the 2002 crisis during which most of pastoralists in zone 1 & 3 faced huge losses and depletion of assets. Accumulative death of animals, without proper period of recovery largely increase food insecurity on the short and long term with severe impoverishment of the most vulnerable fringe of the communities.

ACF propositions

ACF intends to work on the following issues:

- Immediate and efficient co-ordination between the different actors, in order to identify needs, share information and analysis, and develop a common methodology for possible responses.
- A large-scale treatment campaign should be planned to start before and during *Sugum* rains (usually expected end of March) through existing ACF para-veterinary networks (Community Based Animal Health Workers) in the herds' concentration areas of zone 1 & 4. The objectives will be to i) contribute to reduce the vulnerability of animals before the rainy season, ii) contribute to prevent a “second wave of mortality” during the rains, as changing weather patterns (cold and humidity) and diet will further affect the already weak livestock, and iii) contribute to the quick recovery of the herds, once pasture regenerate.
- Regular monitoring of the situation in the field of animal health as well as food security in general. Situation is changing quickly (recent “showers”, movements...)

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

Practically, massive veterinary drugs dumping (i.e. massive free veterinary drugs distribution) should be avoided. Past experiences in Afar during the 2002 crisis proved the inadequacy and negative long term impact of such uncontrolled inflow of veterinary drugs: improper control/monitoring of its use by herders, significant increase in black market. In addition to not being necessarily effective and cost-efficient, these short-term interventions tend to undermine the sustainability of a necessary permanent para-veterinary network in the pastoral context.