Assessment in Teeru (English pronouncement 'Terru') Woreda – January 5th to 8th 2005

- **Situation of Pending Human Starvation and Deadly Epidemic Outbreak from Massive Animal Death**

In summary, 20,610 people are exposed to this critical risk having reached the end of their own human endurance to cope.

The main issues requiring immediate priority address are

a) Human hunger
b) Animal hunger and disease
c) Human health threat

1. Current Facts

- In 6 kebeles, as much as 85% of the cattle herd has died: cattle are dying daily
- The affected population has reached a stress – point where they have no way forward aside from assistance
- Frank malnutrition was found in ill children, breast – feeding mothers and pregnant women. Around 25% of under 5 year olds seen were mildly to moderately malnourished. See below

2. Background to the above facts

2.1 Teeru in its 'normal' status

Teeru in the north west of Zone 4 is divided into 12 kebeles. The population according to the 1994/96 census is 35,363. However, many sites were not reached and counted in that census. This number was revised during vaccination campaigns for polio and measles to be 45,600.[1] There is no estimation of the animal population aside from the fact that it was known in the Afar that Teeru had the highest cattle population in the region. Numbers had increased immensely in the last 10 years due to the fact that grazing and water was so favorable and that market very far (Yallo). It was considered that Teeru was the one place in the region immune from the effects of drought and clans from all over the region went there annually and in drought –time for grazing. Therefore, it can be said that Teeru had some of the 'wealthiest' pastoralists in the region – wealth relative term since today, their unused, unspent assets are dying in front of them.

[1] Informed by the woreda council

2.2 The progressive decline to the current situation:

- The Awra/ Goolina River changed its course causing drastic ecological change to the woreda
- Almost no water – shed from 3 perennial rivers feeding into the woreda since 2003
- No rain since September 2003
- Similar, prevailing drought – conditions in neighboring woredas and vast distance to grazing in Amhara Region led to the herders deciding not to move their animals out of Teeru in search of pasture
- Prices in the nearest market, Yallo (2 days journey) quickly fell to as low as 10% of the normal value of the animal
- Animals began to die 4 months ago. Death is now snow –balling.

Teeru is firstly dependant on water shed from 3 river systems entering into the central basin of the woreda. (The woreda is roughly a circular flood – plain of the 6 now acutely affected kebeles, rimmed by hills on all sides – the remaining 6 kebeles.) The main river system watering Teeru, the Awra and Goolina Rivers join just before they enter the woreda from the south – west corner, giving the widest water – shed. This river system changed course 8 years ago, causing the vast 'Kasaltu' (sweet – smelling acacia tree) forest and grasslands in Barantu, Yewe Duul and the eastern half of Abiidi Kebele to totally dry and die. Too, relatively accessible water in hand-dug wells in the forest also dried. Then since 1997, the Awra/ Goolina River has watered once – relatively dry land in western Ibiidi and Maraamra Kebele. There, a new Kasalto forest has generated and vast grassland but the well – water is considerably deeper than in the former water - course. Beyond this river system, two others enter and water the Teeru plain: the Magaale River entering in the north west of the woreda and the 'Asa Bara River entering in the south - west.

The second moisture source for the woreda is rain. The main rainy season is normally reliable and the short rains of March/ April are also more reliable than in some woredas such as Eli Daar in the north west of the region.

3. Situation observed

3.1 Rain and water

During 2004, the short and the main rainy seasons both failed in Teeru and only the Awra/ Goolina River system shed a relatively little amount of water in the woreda in late August. Since then, the Magaale shed a minimal amount of water into a small area for one day in late December. Otherwise, there has been no real precipitation or river – shed water since September 2003.

The Teeru community constructs its own shallow wells in 9 sites of the woreda. During this current drought, 5 of those sites have dried up. The water - table in the other sites has dropped lower. The entire woreda is now hauling water out of hand – dug wells in 4 sites with as many as 40 to 50 such wells per site. One well may only yield enough water for 3 cows to drink per day and wells are from one person – depth to 7 people depth. Wells silt up and need to be cleaned out as much as daily. People are walking up to 6 to 8 hours for this water and watering their herds at the well – sites. The community of the

kebele of Boyna ('boyna' is the Afar word for steam – well) is now only able to get enough water for human consumption from their steam-wells and must water their animals from the wells in the plain.

3.2 Animal grazing

The pasture status is the basis of this crisis. The cattle of Teeru had, until 2004 been used to an access diet of various grasses. Now more than 50% of the pasture is dried stubs of grass while other land is a dust - bowl. Otherwise, as recently as December following the water shed from the Magaale River, tiny blades of grass have appeared in perhaps 20% of the grazing land. The animal feed crisis is first for cattle and then sheep. Cattle and sheep are grazing a low, woody, ever-green shrub the Afar call 'akultu', normally the food of camels. The community has and is chopping the middle, top branches out of the 'kasaltu' (yellow-flowering acacia tree) for cattle and sheep to eat. The assessment team saw a man bringing a camel loaded with dry grass from 4 hours walk away. He reported he had got the grass from between the crags of steep hillside of Dabaaho where cattle cannot go and even goats find it hard. He left his camel below and grabbed the grass out by the handful for the sake of his 10 remaining cows. In the 5 days, the team also saw two women similarly loaded with dry grass coming from the same place. However, apparently this source is of no solution – solving consequence.

3.3 Animal death and diseases

- **Death in cattle**

The team saw massive numbers of cattle carcasses – a carcass every meter in some grazing areas as well as sheep and goat carcasses. Cattle death is accelerating daily. Having slept with one family, the next morning, 7 of his cows had died over night and another 5 were sitting waiting to die. The team watched herdsmen continually lifting up sitting cows in an attempt to push them toward grazing. Men sleep out with their cattle in the vain hope of helping them and slaughtering cows they find in a hopeless state. Several incidences of cattle dying giving birth and soon after delivery were observed. People were feeding calves on household grain. From household interviews over 4 kebeles, sleeping overnight with the family and observing the herd sheltered around the house and watching the community watering their herds at the 4 remaining well sites, one can assume at least 85% of the herd has died. Perhaps 50% of the remaining animals are in immanent reach of death. Cattle herd numbers ranged from a moderate herd of 40 to 70 cattle up to 100 to 300 cattle per household 4 months ago. There are now households absolutely destitute. All households interviewed reported having less than 20 cattle, 93% of the households talked of less than 10 cows and 80% less than 5 cows. Watching cattle over 2 watering sites for one day, a total of 1,784 cattle were counted. Since the crisis is still unfolding, it is not possible to give precise figures of herd loss. It is quite apparent, however that it is mandatory to feed the remaining cattle to prevent further destitution.

- **Cattle diseases**

Firstly to say that wherever the team went, they were asked for animal treatment help. The cattle are dying of hunger but this is compounded by 'kliim', an external parasite found on the grass that lodges on soft skin and mucous membranes, sucking the blood of the animal. If swallowed, the parasite causes gastro-intestinal bleeding. The second disease accelerating death is pasteurlosis. Reports from the community and from the 15 – trained paravets in the woreda indicate that no animal treatment has been activated for

the past 3 months aside from 24 vials of oxytetracycline used 6 weeks ago. While there has been an animal husbandry intervention in the woreda, the community was unable to purchase the medications from the paravets as required.

- **Status of sheep**

Seemingly due to the lesser mass of sheep, there were notably fewer sheep carcasses than cattle. Again, sheep are dying in lambing and pasteurlosis is apparently the chief disease along with gano (animals suddenly die), external parasites, 'caray-tiya' – suddenly get joint problem. From these, very many animals died. Due to the extreme household tasks in trying to keep the herd alive, people are herding together in groups of up to 15 households so it was very difficult to estimate the size of household sheep herd. Those interviewed talked of having 10 to 30 sheep on average, some none.

- **Status of goats**

Some recent goat carcasses were seen. While the woreda forest cover has changed, there is ample goat grazing. Therefore it must be assumed the goats are dying more from disease than hunger. Goats are grazing all shrubs including the weed – shrub that has replaced 'kasalto' in large parts called 'galaltu' – a thorn-less, wide – leaf shrub that produces a large ball –like seed pod.

3.4 Household food and marketing

The team saw some household goats producing a minimal amount of milk for toddlers to drink once daily. Otherwise, the main diet is wheat flour soaked and cooked to a sauce-like porridge. Currently, the relief grain distributed is far below the need: 50 kilograms of wheat for 5 households per month. The community is desperately trying to supplement this by selling what animals they can in the Yallo market 3 days walk away (they are taking an extra day to reach the market due to the poor condition of the animals and that there is no fodder on the way.) In Yallo, their goats and sheep are fetching 15 to 40 ETB and the cattle 40 to 60 ETB. 4 to 7 goats buys 50 kilograms of grain at 120 to 130 ETB. 25 kilograms of faffa in Fanteena, Teeru is 40 to 70 ETB, currently selling for 60 ETB.

3.5 Human nutrition health

In the 150 households interviewed and treated, 25% of under 5 year olds seen were assessed as having mild to moderate malnutrition. Almost 50% of all pregnant and breast – feeding mothers also had signs of physical weakness and weight – loss. In 119 cases, the highest morbidity seen was malaria with spleen enlargement and anaemia and diarrhea. Also, a virulent strain of influenza had recently taken grip in the district. The community spoke of 4 sudden deaths in recent days of seemingly pneumonia – like symptoms. There is no functional clinic in the woreda. During the 2002 measles vaccination campaign, woreda officials estimate 50% of the community was reached only. Under the current situation, mobile health workers are the only possibility of assisting the bulk of the population.

4. Possible Scenarios

a) The community remains unassisted

Rising malnutrition leading to starvation is the only recourse with the populations of all 6 lowland kebeles (Abiidi, Yewe Duulu, 'Asa Baxa, Maraama, Alaale, Barantu, 20,610 people, threatened). Drastic diarrheal epidemics arising from the carcasses could kill thousands. Those who remain will almost surely be rendered destitute.

b) The Teeru Woreda is assisted with food assistance only

The community will be rescued to continue as destitute dependants of food assistance. The epidemic threat from carcasses is as immanent as ever.

c) Intervention is tailored to assist both animals and humans

While this should involve the below recommended package, the Teeru society will be rescued with a herd to continue with and with the possibility of household milk.

5. Recommendations

The team urgently recommends the following:

- Immediate scale – up to full relief food assistance for all 12 kebeles including supplementary food for vulnerable people
- Immediate resumption of animal treatment in all 12 kebeles but on a free – basis
- Immediate commencement of animal feeding to preserve a minimal milking/ grazing herd in each household in the affected kebeles.
- Immediate burning of carcasses, ongoing nutritional assessment and DPT and measles vaccination. A team of mobile health workers resident inside the community would best do this for the duration of the crisis.
- The above – mentioned team should offer basic treatment, assessing the community for disease outbreak.