



**Report on Short Assessment Mission in
Afar Region and North Wollo,
January 24th-26th, 2005**

27th January 2005

1. Background Information

Some 1.2 million people live in Afar, a lowland region bordering Djibouti and Eritrea, covering 270,000 sq km - about one fifth of the entire country. A number of recent assessments have been undertaken in Afar by AICF, MSF France, ICRC, World Vision and ICRC. USAID field monitors also undertook recent visits, and the Afar Pastoralist Development Association has also provided information. All are consistent in their findings – serious malnutrition with inevitable deterioration due to lack of pasture for livestock, no current rainfall and the real likelihood that the situation will persist for the foreseeable future. The recent nutrition survey conducted by World Vision in Zone 1 found GAM rates of 11.9% and SAM rates of 2%. There are also current ongoing assessments by Oxfam, UNICEF and UNOCHA. The current available information indicates that the Zones in order of need are as follows: Zone 4, 2, 1, 3 & 5.

The Afar region, whose pastoral population are mainly nomadic herders living off their livestock, receives less than 200 mm of rain a year. However, the 2004 main rains failed, as did the subsequent smaller rains. This has resulted in a lack of pasture for the Afar livestock, with a subsequent serious impact on the nutritional status of the Afars themselves, reliant as they are on animal and dairy products. This will have had a particularly serious impact on the younger children and older people, who are particularly reliant on dairy/milk produce.

The UN World Food Program (WFP) said its assessments had revealed dwindling pasture, causing abnormal migration of herders and their livestock into neighboring areas. Similar information has been collated by NGOs and UN agencies in the region. The Regional Government has declared an emergency and reported that the beneficiary numbers have increased from 500,000 to 600,000. The number of people receiving initial food aid is about 200,000 while the actual figure requiring relief food assistance is 560,000, according to regional authorities which means about 300,000 additional people require immediate relief food and non-food assistance. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission state that the January allocation of 6,000 MT has begun to be dispatched to the region. The regional government has requested assistance for 50,000 people displaced from zones 1, 4 and 5 for supplementary foods and clothing. The NGO Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) which has recently completed an assessment in Teeru woreda warns of pending human starvation and massive livestock deaths from disease. It estimates at least 20,000 people are at critical risk in the woreda. Pastoralist families who migrated to the highland areas of Amhara Region in search of pasture remain there creating possible tensions with local communities. Large-scale cattle deaths also occurred in 2002, again undermining the Afars' assets.

GOAL has extensive experience of conducting nutrition surveys and implementing supplementary feeding programs in Afar. GOAL was active in Zone 3 in Afar from August 2002 to February 2004. During this period GOAL conducted three nutrition surveys, and implemented both blanket and targeted supplementary feeding during this period.

On 13th January, Beth Dunford, Office of Assets and Livelihood Transition, USAID and Heather Evans, OFDA, requested GOAL to undertake a rapid assessment of the Afar region with the view to implementing supplementary feeding if required.

2. Assessment Team

Dawit Hagos, Nutrition Surveillance Co-ordinator, GOAL Ethiopia.
John Rynne, Assistant Country Director, GOAL Ethiopia.

3. Assessment Route

24th January: Addis Ababa – Semera
25th January: Semera – Mille – Chifra Woreda, Jarra kebele - Hara – Woldiya (Wollo)
26th January: Woldiya – Mersa – Girana – Kombolcha – Cheffa – Kemissie – Addis Ababa

The route took in Zone 1 of the Afar region, then followed the Afars who have migrated to the highlands. Many Afar were encountered who were en route back to their zones of origin in Afar.

4. People Encountered

Semera: Ato Tamrat Mengistu, Early Warning Team Leader, Afar Region DPPFSB
Ato Adugna Kasse, Department Head, Afar Region DPPFSB

Ato Awall Wagris Mohammed, Afar Regional Health Bureau Head

Chifra: Ato Hamid Said, Woreda Representative

Mersa: Ato Alem Tekuare, Woreda Administrator

Numerous discussions were held with Afars both in Zone 1 and those who had migrated to the North Wollo highlands. Discussions were also held with Amhara farmers who are living in close proximity to those Afar who have migrated to the highlands.

5. Documentation

‘Integrated Emergency Project Plan’, Afar Region DPPFSB, January 2005. This was received in Semera. This outlines a multi-sectoral approach to dealing with both the current crises and to strengthen livelihoods and assets in the future.

6. Summary Information

- Both the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Food Security Bureau (DPPFSB) and Regional Health Bureau officials confirmed that they view the current

situation as critical. This is because there is little prospect of rains in the near future; the livestock are dying in large numbers; the value of livestock has sharply depreciated; the assets of the Afars have already been eroded from very recent droughts (2002, 2003); the survival strategies currently adopted, whereby there has been significant migration of whole families (men, women and children) with their livestock are usually not required until much later into a drought.

- Zones 4 and 2 are described as being the neediest.
- In Zone 1, Afar Region, Jarra kebele, approximately 20 dead livestock (all oxen of different ages ranging from calves to mature adults, save for one donkey) were observed around an Afar encampment. However nearly all the children in the camp (approximately 10) were observed – none showed any visible signs of malnutrition. See accompanying photos.
- Large numbers of Afars have just returned or are on the journey back to the homelands. There are a number of reasons for this, according to the Afar we spoke to in the North Wollo highlands:
 - the locals are stealing their livestock.
 - they have agreed with the local woredas to return as the planting/agricultural season means that the local farmers must now plough and plant the land that the Afar livestock have been grazing upon.
 - they have heard that there has been rain (there was a small shower on or near to 20th January).
 - there is conflict between themselves and the local people, as some Afar cattle are eating animal fodder saved by local farmers for the rainy season.
- Discussions were held with numerous Afar in various highland locations – Hara, Mersa, Girana, and Cheffa. All the Afar, except those in Cheffa, were in transit back to Afar. Those in Cheffa stated that they were allowed to graze their cattle on a large private farm along the river banks of the Borkana river, and had no intention of returning to Afar in the near future.
- No obvious signs of malnutrition were observed in any of the Afar children encountered in the highlands.
- All the Afar spoken to had received some food aid, from a variety of different sources – DPPB, Ethiopian Red Cross and Mekane Yesus. However, they all described the rations as being very small. One Afar boy said that each child had only received two biscuits. An Afar man from Zone 4, Ewa woreda, Alele Sulula kebele, said that non food items (blankets) and some biscuits had been sold by those Afar administrators charged with distributing them.

7. Current Issues

As outlined above, unless there is a significant amount of unexpected rainfall in the near future, the current situation will not only persist but also will continue to deteriorate. The Afar have obviously evolved quite sophisticated survival strategies but these strategies are ultimately dependent on an end to the drought, which is not in sight.

Whilst there have been numerous assessments carried out in recent weeks, there are still areas that need further investigation. Both Zones 2 & 4 have been described as facing the most serious problems, but because of their remoteness, there is very little information about what is actually happening.

There is a lack of independent nutritional data from the Afar region, particularly from the areas described as most affected, Zones 2 & 4.

8. Recommendations

Nutrition Surveys: It is recommended that **two** nutrition surveys be conducted, one in Zone 4 and the other in Zone 2, in the most affected woredas. These surveys should be carried out as soon as possible. Currently GOAL has the capacity to conduct one of these surveys starting immediately, depending on funding. GAOL will endeavor to encourage another NGO to undertake the second nutritional survey.

Sharing of Information: The recent number of assessments carried out by UN agencies and NGOs need to be disseminated at a meeting hosted by OCHA in the near future.

9. Future Interventions

The combination of information derived from the proposed nutrition surveys, recent UN, NGO and DPPFSB assessments, and from discussions with the Afars themselves, will provide a clear understanding of the essential issues that are integral to the proper planning and implementation of any supplementary feeding program that may be required in response to the nutritional status of the target population:

- beneficiary numbers
- location
- security issues
- distribution sites
- methodology (blanket or targeted)
- logistic issues

10. Estimated Cost of Nutrition Surveys

The estimated cost of the nutrition survey is Br 97,350, or approximately \$ **11,000**. This also includes the cost of the pre-survey assessment. This is around 50% higher than similar surveys conducted in more populous accessible areas. The combination of distances, logistics issues and remoteness are that main reasons for this. The timeline for these surveys is as follows:

- Week 1: Pre-survey assessment of both Zone 4 or 2; collating data such as population figures, area maps, accessibility, logistics and security issues, confirming most affected areas and woreda selection.
- Week 2: Survey preparation; questionnaire preparation, survey material preparation, vehicle and staff preparation.
- Week 3/4: Survey Zone 4 or 2, including training enumerators and actual implementation.
- Week 5: preliminary results (GAM and SAM).