

May 2009

## Taking drought into account

### Addressing chronic vulnerability among pastoralists in the Horn of Africa

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EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

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#### Key messages

- Drought must be seen as a normal and often predictable event in the Horn of Africa. As such it needs to be planned for and taken into account in donors' policies and approaches.
- Strengthening pastoralists' resilience requires livelihoods-focused programming tailored to the different stages of a crisis.
- A livelihoods-based response requires long-term engagement and flexible funding mechanisms which go beyond the division between humanitarian and development assistance frameworks and instruments.

In 2006, a particularly severe drought hit the Greater Horn of Africa, plunging some 11 million people into crisis. The pastoral areas on the Ethiopia–Kenya–Somalia border were badly affected, with livestock losses of up to 70% and the mass migration of pastoralists out of drought-affected areas. This HPG Policy Brief argues that such catastrophic effects can be averted if pastoralist livelihoods are supported with timely and appropriate livelihoods-based interventions.



Diko Damte

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The Damte family live in Magado, in the Borana zone in Ethiopia. Before the drought, the family's 30 cattle and 25 sheep and goats had provided a regular source of milk and meat. They also supplied milk, hides, meat and calves for sale in the local market. In the Borana zone, livestock accounts for more than 90% of the local economy, and the marketing

of livestock and livestock products generates more than 60% of household income.<sup>1</sup> The drought left the Damtes with two weak cows and one goat. With almost all of their animals

<sup>1</sup> F. Demeke, *Pastoralists Livelihoods Initiatives (PLI) Enhancing Afar and Borana Livelihoods Efforts (ENABLE): A Baseline Survey Report for Fentale and Borana Areas of Oromia Region*, CARE Ethiopia, unpublished draft, 2006.

dead, the mother, Diko Damte, thought that her 'life had ended right then and there'.<sup>2</sup> Before the drought the family had been self-sufficient, able to feed their children and provide for their other needs through the cash generated in the market. The loss of their livestock plunged the Damtes into deep destitution. No longer able to make a living as pastoralists, the family was forced to settle and resort to casual labour for subsistence. The money that they earn is barely enough to meet their food needs.

### Building resilience through livelihoods support and appropriate funding

The story of the Damte family illustrates the devastating effects drought can have on the lives and livelihoods of millions of pastoralists in the Horn of Africa. Extensive research and evaluations of drought response carried out in the region over the last decade and more have demonstrated that such disastrous consequences can be averted by strengthening and protecting pastoral livelihoods systems, building their resilience and capacity to survive the inevitable occurrence of drought.

Livelihoods interventions, such as livestock-related initiatives (for example destocking) and water-related interventions (including creating and rehabilitating wells and boreholes), contribute both to saving lives and to strengthening pastoralists' resilience. By equipping communities with the ability to manage and respond to shocks in the early stages of a crisis, strategic livelihoods interventions allow for more timely and appropriate responses to disasters than is possible with typical emergency relief assistance. In addition, the early protection and promotion of people's livelihoods significantly reduces the need for massive food aid operations when malnutrition and disease reach acute levels.

The socio-economic value of strategic livelihoods interventions in pastoral areas has long been documented.<sup>3</sup> For example, an assessment of a destocking intervention in Moyale *woreda* in Ethiopia during the 2006 drought reported an approximate benefit–cost ratio of 41:1 in terms of aid investment. Over half – 52.4% – of the income of the households in the programme was derived from destocking, and the income was used to buy food, care for livestock, meet various domestic



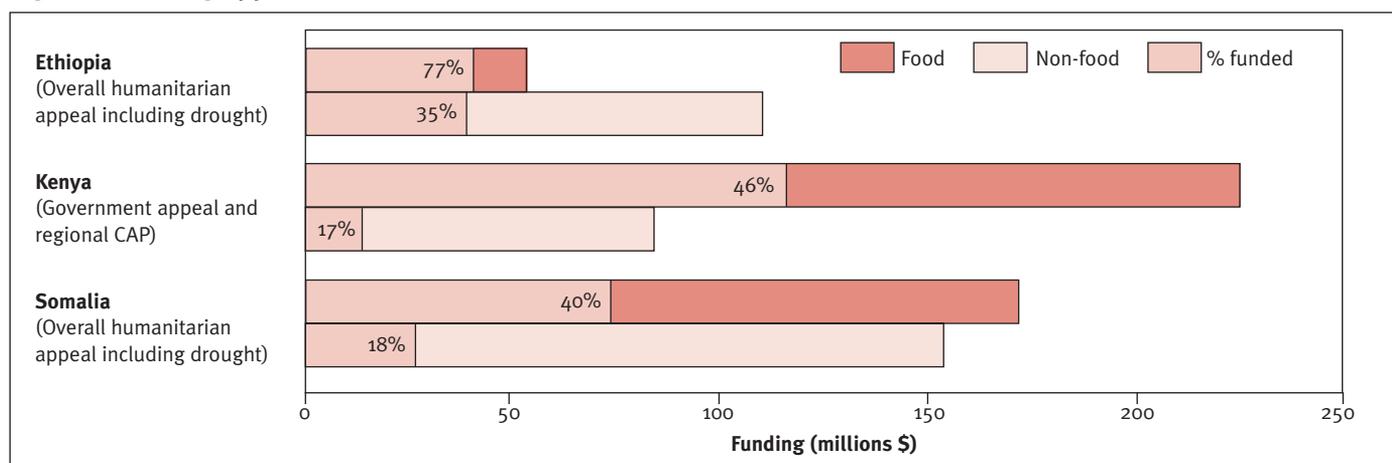
Drought in the Borena zone (Ethiopia)

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<sup>2</sup> L. Ogwell, *In My Own Words: Diko Damte on the Hard Life of a Drop-out Pastoralist Woman*, CARE International, unpublished, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> S. Desta, *Cattle Population Dynamics in the Southern Ethiopian Rangelands* (Addis Ababa: GL-CRSP Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA), 2001); Y. Aklilu and M. Wekesa, *Drought, Livestock and Livelihoods: Lessons from the 1999–2001 Emergency Response in the Pastoral Sector in*

*Kenya*, Network Paper 40 (London: ODI, 2002); A. Cullis et al., 'Case Study 1: Livelihoods Impact of a Commercial De-stocking Relief Intervention in Moyale Woreda, Oromia Region', in A. Catley (ed.), *Impact Assessments of Livelihoods-based Drought Interventions in Moyale and Dire Woredas*, PLI report produced by the Feinstein International Center in partnership with CARE, SC-US and USAID/Ethiopia (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Center, 2007).

**Figure 1: Funding appeals and contributions**

Source: *Saving Lives through Livelihoods: Critical Gaps in the Response to the Drought in the Greater Horn of Africa*, HPG Briefing Note, 2006.

expenses, support relatives and either pay off debts or add money to savings, allowing families to survive the drought without being stripped of all their assets.<sup>4</sup> Extensive research by the Pastoral Risk Management Project (PARIMA) in Borana plateau has estimated the economic losses from cattle deaths as a result of drought.<sup>5</sup> PARIMA observed longer periods of gradual herd growth, interposed by sharp ‘crashes’ in 1983–85, 1991–92 and 1998–89, when between 37% and 62% of the cattle population perished; the overwhelming majority of cattle losses stemmed from starvation, with few being sold or slaughtered.<sup>6</sup> The monetary value of the losses during the 17 years under investigation was estimated at \$6,523 per household, and \$893 per person. When extrapolated to the entire Borana plateau, PARIMA estimates that total losses may have exceeded \$300 million. Such loss of capital could have been mitigated with interventions aimed at facilitating accelerated offtake at the onset of crash periods.<sup>7</sup>

A timely and appropriate drought response in pastoral areas must be supported by adequate, predictable and flexible funding. Analysis of funding patterns during the 2006 drought response in the Horn of Africa, however, points to a continued imbalance between food and livelihoods interventions. As shown in Figure 1 (see above), the percentage of funding for food aid in Ethiopia, Kenya

and Somalia during the 2006 drought was consistently higher than for livelihoods interventions.

An adequate response to drought must be premised on the fact that it is a largely predictable event in the Horn of Africa’s arid and semi-arid lands. In addition, the adverse effects of climate change are expected to intensify the frequency and magnitude of droughts in coming years. Planning for the occurrence of drought within an overall framework of assistance to pastoralists means that dealing with drought becomes part of a long-term strategy to address pastoralists’ vulnerability. Such a framework would necessarily combine relief and development policies and activities. Crucially, funding mechanisms must be flexible enough to allow agencies to switch quickly from development to emergency mode.

### The Regional Resilience Enhancement Against Drought (RREAD) initiative

The Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative (PLI), a two-year programme funded by USAID, began in 2005. It was implemented by a consortium of NGOs, with different agencies leading in different regions of Ethiopia. The PLI aimed at strengthening pastoralist livelihoods through a variety of livelihood interventions. One innovative aspect of the PLI was that it allowed implementing agencies to identify the type of response required, and reallocate up to 10% of total budgets without permission from the donor.<sup>8</sup> This mechanism was put to good use during the 2006 drought, where agencies were able to implement timely livelihoods-based responses. This encouraging initiative signalled an important recognition of the need for flexible programming and funding grounded in developmental relief thinking and practice.

<sup>8</sup> Catley (ed.), *Impact Assessments of Livelihoods-based Drought Interventions*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> PARIMA is a project of the Global Livestock Collaborative Research Support Programme, led by the University of California in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI).

<sup>6</sup> Desta, *Cattle Population Dynamics in the Southern Ethiopian Rangelands*, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> S. Pantuliano and M. Wekesa, *Improving Drought Response in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia. Somali and Afar Regions and Borana Zone of Oromiya Region* (London: ODI, 2008).

Further similar initiatives have followed, including the Enhanced Livelihoods in the Mendera Triangle/Southern Ethiopia (ELMT/ELSE) programme, a cross-border initiative funded by USAID and implemented by a consortium of NGOs including CARE International, and the Regional Resilience Enhancement Against Drought (RREAD) programme, funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO) and implemented by CARE International. The two initiatives are meant to be complementary, and cover different areas of the Mendera Triangle and contiguous parts of the Ethiopia–Kenya–Somalia border.

RREAD is an example of ECHO's readiness to introduce more flexible and longer-term funding frameworks (its funding envelope is 18 months), to ensure that drought response is geared towards 'saving lives and livelihoods', and that it bridges the relief and development gap. The project – part of ECHO's Regional Drought Decision (RDD, formerly the Drought Preparedness Programme or DP2) – aims to enhance the capacities of local actors operating in pastoral environments, to improve their resilience to drought and other crises through livelihoods-based interventions. RREAD has allowed for the development of innovative approaches to facilitating cross-border livestock trade. RREAD also aims to provide an evidence base to inform regional policy and practice. The project includes a partnership with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), which provides learning support to CARE International with the aim of documenting and

strengthening best practice in drought cycle management in the Horn of Africa.

### Interventions under RREAD

HPG's learning support role in the project has entailed the facilitation of a process of reflection and discussion of key elements of livelihoods programming, as well as the provision of practical guidance and mentoring. HPG has focused on facilitating learning around RREAD's successes and best practices. Two of the most encouraging examples are presented here.

The first example relates to rangeland reclamation through bush clearance and burning in the Borana zone. Pastoralist groups in the Horn have used the customary practice of rangeland management for centuries to address rangeland degradation and exhaustion and to mitigate the impact of droughts. For example, traditionally a section of pastureland would be preserved for feeding weak and small animals during the dry season. However, for the past 20 years growing demand for land and a general disregard of traditional management systems have led pastoralist communities in the area to neglect this practice, and bush encroachment and the consequent reduction of grazing areas for livestock have become increasingly problematic as a result.

Since the early 1990s, CARE International has focused on rangeland reclamation to rebalance rangeland ecosystems. This work also involved the planting under cover of species palatable to



*Rangeland reclamation in Borena*



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*Hay-making in Southern Ethiopia*

livestock. The project continued under the PLI, and today is part of the RREAD and ELMT/ELSE programmes. Under the RREAD initiative, community members have been trained in rangeland management techniques, such as which species of tree to cut down and which to retain to provide shade for grazing animals, and have been employed to work on rangelands against the payment of a small fee by CARE International. A total of 345ha of pastureland have been reclaimed through rangeland management. The Dikale Rangeland was established in this way in 2004; today it serves over 150 pastoralist households, feeding more than 400 calves and small animals over a period of three months. An important achievement of the rangeland reclamation intervention is that communities have now started to appreciate the long-term benefits of natural-resource management. In the words of a community elder: 'all of us, including the animals, have realized the importance of the [Dikale] rangeland'.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the benefits of rangeland reclamation have been noted by nearby communities who have also started to engage in rangelands management activities spontaneously.

The second example concerns income-generating activities for women, in particular hay-making for lactating cows and calves during the dry season. CARE International began interventions in this area in 2002. They continued under the PLI and RREAD and ELMT/ELSE. Women, who are usually in charge of looking after small and weak animals, often have to walk long distances to fetch water and feed during the dry season, and face risks from snake bites,

<sup>9</sup> L. Ogwell, *Ethiopia: Reclaiming the Rangelands in the Borana Zone*, CARE International, unpublished, 2009.

injuries and exposure to high temperatures. Under the RREAD initiative, CARE International has trained a group of women in the Darara community in the Madhacho area in Southern Ethiopia in hay-making. Immediately after the rains stop, women cut the hay and collect it as it begins to turn yellow, thereby retaining the hay's nutritional value. The hay is then laid out to dry on specially made beds to prevent it decaying. Afterwards, it is piled in stacks and stored for use in the dry season. This practice makes pasture readily available for small and weak animals during the dry season and droughts, thus increasing their chances of survival.<sup>10</sup> The RREAD project has also provided women's groups with a one-off payment of 25,000 Birr (\$2,500) to strengthen their trading business and livestock marketing, and has trained them in basic auditing, financial management and record-keeping. Providing women with income-generating opportunities has reduced their workload and exposure to risks, raised their profile in the community and shown that women can make a meaningful contribution to the household economy.

It is important to note that most of the successes identified in Ethiopia are the result of long-term interventions initiated well before the RREAD project began. RREAD has built on those initiatives and allowed them to continue. Conversely, in Kenya delays to the start of the RREAD programme and fighting in Elwaq at the Kenya–Somalia border have meant that interventions have only been operational for six months, which means that it has been impossible to identify areas of success. Even if the project had not encountered such problems, it would still be difficult for it to stimulate lasting change in

<sup>10</sup> Ogwell, *In My Own Words*.

just over a year. RREAD's positive outcomes, built on many years' engagement in Borena communities, demonstrate once again the importance of long-term, predictable and flexible interventions to support pastoralist livelihoods in the Horn of Africa.

### Conclusion

The problems pastoralists face in the Horn of Africa are structural, and protecting, building and rebuilding their livelihoods assets requires an integrated approach to risk management that addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability. This means going beyond food or cash transfers.<sup>11</sup> ECHO's emphasis on reducing pastoralists' vulnerability in the region through initiatives such as RREAD is a welcome and encouraging step forward. The short timeframe of this initiative is however not a cost-effective way of achieving the sorts of changes in approach which ECHO's RDD is hoping to stimulate. Bolder steps are necessary if pastoralists' vulnerability is to be meaningfully addressed, recognising that this is a long-term process requiring long-term engagement and flexible funding mechanisms.

Drought must be seen as a normal and often predictable event, and efforts must be focused on strengthening response capacity while at the same time continuing long-term development efforts. There is an urgent need to scale up and expand

<sup>11</sup> Pantuliano and Wekesa, *Improving Drought Response in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia*.

'joined up' humanitarian and development interventions based on a sound understanding of local livelihoods systems. ECHO is to be commended for its leadership in using humanitarian funding to build capacities to ensure that the consequences of future crises will be less severe. Current efforts to integrate the EU's development and humanitarian instruments must be continued. ECHO and its development partners in the European Commission are well-placed to experiment with mechanisms that institutionalise flexible funding patterns and develop more conducive assistance policies that overcome the humanitarian-development divide. ECHO, the EuropeAid Cooperation Office (AIDCO) and the Directorate General Development of the European Commission (DG DEV) should also champion good practice models with other donor agencies.

Pastoralists themselves recognise the vital importance of early activities to prepare for drought. 'My husband and I were not well prepared for the 2006 drought and that is why we lost so much', concluded Diko.<sup>12</sup> There is no getting away from the fact that drought will remain a feature of life in the Horn of Africa. However, by supporting pastoralists at an early stage and ensuring that this support is sustained long enough to help them recover from the catastrophic effects of drought on their lives and livelihoods, the suffering of millions of pastoralists like the Damtes will be significantly reduced.

<sup>12</sup> Ogwell, *In My Own Words*.



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