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ETHIOPIA

Conflict and drought in the Afar region

Executive summary

- Pastoralists living in the Afar region, in north-eastern Ethiopia, have been badly hit by recent serious drought conditions. Extensive loss of cattle due to poor rains and the resulting decrease in grazing and water resources have seriously compounded their capacity to cope with an environment known to be one of the harshest in the world. Drought has also exacerbated ethnic tensions and conflict in the region between the Issa and Afar communities over limited resources and further decreased grazing. As a result, these nomadic households find themselves facing destitution as they are forced to sell their remaining livestock assets to meet their essential needs.
- In response to this worsening scenario, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) have decided to launch an urgent preventive action for pastoralists in the region suffering from the combined effects of drought and conflict that aims at preserving their health and nutritional status, by firstly stabilising their nutritional situation and preventing them from falling into absolute destitution. General food distributions for some 100,000 people over a four-month period will cover Afar (Zone 3) and neighbouring Shinile Zone in the Somali Region (Afdem and Mieso woredas), where on-going clashes and conflict between the Issa and the Afar have concentrated. Distributions have commenced this week in both zones.

Humanitarian situation

The Afar region in north-eastern Ethiopia is one of the poorest and least developed parts of the country. Some 80% of the population are pastoralists whose livelihoods are based almost exclusively on livestock.

During July, the ICRC was alarmed by indications of the serious humanitarian situation affecting pastoralists, especially in zones 1, 3 and 5 of the Afar region and Shinile zone in the Somali region. In August and early September, ICRC specialists carried out a series of detailed health, economic security and livestock assessments in these areas that confirm the severity of the current plight of nomads and agro-pastoralists who are becoming completely decapitalised.

Successive poor rainy seasons (the failed *Daddah* rains in October-November 2001, the below-normal *Sugum* rains in March-May 2002 and delayed *Karma* rains from mid-July to mid-September 2002), with the corresponding diminished grazing and watering options, have significantly reduced the economic status of this population, with substantial loss of livestock over the past months.

Recent drought conditions have also further exacerbated the historic and on-going conflict between the Issa and Afar communities over natural resources (access to grazing land and water points) and control of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti road. Owing to this conflict, livestock movements for grazing and accessing water resources has been seriously hampered, which in turn fuels the tensions. Since March 2002, new and intense armed clashes have erupted, cattle has been stolen and there have been a number of casualties.

This recent acute loss of livestock due to drought has compounded the effects of prolonged and chronic economic hardship of the pastoralist population. The Afar region is severely underdeveloped and there are few economic alternatives available to the nomadic population apart from the trade in their animals and associated products. In addition, economic factors such as an extended livestock export ban and persisting poor terms of trade locally have combined to seriously destabilise the viability of the pastoralist livelihood over the years. Currently, the surviving livestock are in poor health and therefore hold a very low market value.

Nomads are also selling female livestock, whereas typically they are kept for restocking herds and are thus seldom sold. At the same time, food prices are on the increase and households are being forced to sell their few remaining livestock resources in this environment of extremely poor terms of trade to meet their essential needs.

ICRC assessments do not indicate a present acute nutritional crisis among the pastoralist populations, but clearly state that one is possible if nothing is done in the next few weeks. In such a fragile environment, where there is little nutritional diversity and low food reserves, the process of famine can manifest itself extremely quickly. Households have reported a serious decline in milk consumption that constitutes a major part of the very simple nomad diet (cereals, milk and very little meat). This decrease is primarily due to poor milk production by the livestock, but is also further exacerbated by the splitting up of families, with women and children remaining near urban settlements, while the men travel to grazing areas with their cattle and camels. Also, an increasing number of households are facing a serious decline in dietary protein, which could quickly result in negative health implications, especially among the vulnerable groups including children and pregnant and lactating women. The replacement of milk with water in certain instances is also a source for future health problems.

ICRC response

The planned ICRC/ERCS action is intended to address the consequences of the combined effects of drought and conflict. It will thus cover the areas where drought, together with persisting tensions and conflict between the Afar and Issas, are exposing the population to widespread famine. This population comprises some 100,000 most vulnerable rural pastoralists located in Afar-Zone 3 (approximately 70,000 people) and in the Afdem and Mieso woredas of Shinile Zone of Somali Region (approximately 30,000 people).

Strong evidence, as outlined in the summary of ICRC assessment findings, suggests that if food assistance is not undertaken immediately, this vulnerable population will face an extremely acute situation within a few months and will be unable to face any new hardship.

The ICRC believes that an urgent preventive general food assistance for vulnerable pastoralists is necessary to protect their livelihoods by preventing further decapitalisation and/or declining health status. The provision of essential food items will enable these households in the short term to maintain an appropriate nutritional status, while, in a longer term, retain livestock assets until they recover their market value. This is crucial in order to restabilize their household economic security.

Existing or potential non-nutritional needs resulting from this situation are being monitored in the areas of health, livestock and access to water, and will be addressed as required.

Monthly food rations will be distributed to 100,000 people over a four-month period representing a total of 2,400 kilocalories per person per day. They will consist of:

- 12 kg of wheat grain
- 4 kg of High Protein Blended Food (CSB)
- 2 litres of vegetable oil

Total commodities planned to be distributed in each area during the four months:

Area	Target Population	Wheat Grain	CSB	Oil
Afar-Zone 3 West	15,000 people	720 MT.	240 MT.	120 MT.
Afar-Zone 3 East	55,000 people	2,640 MT.	880 MT.	440 MT.
SNRS-Shinile	30,000 people	1,440 MT.	480 MT.	240 MT.
Total	100,000 people	4,800 MT.	1,600 MT.	800 MT.

Distributions are to be carried out in four cycles (four successive months), with post-distribution monitoring to confirm the right beneficiaries benefited from the right commodities as planned. This timeframe has been chosen based on the estimated recovery time for male livestock to regain market value, thus indicating the end of food support. At the same time, as a result of the upcoming harvest period, local terms of trade will further stabilise over this period. Food assistance is intended to provide essential household resources during this acute period when the poorest households may otherwise be forced to liquidate all remaining livestock assets to feed themselves.

Key elements such as rainfall, regional harvest, terms of trade, animal and human health trends, and population movement patterns will be closely monitored during this implementation period, providing indications of progress towards recovery or further deterioration.

In terms of health, the ICRC will continue to monitor the health trends in the area, but for the time being, initial assessments and monitoring show that it is not a priority at this stage for the ICRC to take an immediate active role in the health sector in the area.

In terms of livestock, erratic and insufficient rains for more than one year have reduced the availability of food for the livestock throughout the Afar region and neighbouring Shinile Zone, thus weakening the animals. Finally, a delayed onset of the Karma rains 2002 was heavily detrimental to large numbers of livestock - especially cattle – that died between June to August. Rains in August and into mid-September have put a halt to the degradation of livestock and led to a recovery phase given that normal climatic conditions persist. It is estimated, for example, that although cow milk production has restarted at a low level, significant amounts of milk will only be produced again after the cows have had calves, meaning a three-month period of physical recovery and nine months of pregnancy.

Emergency veterinary programmes have been carried out by government veterinary services and several NGOs since early August throughout Afar Regional State and Shinile Zone (Somali Regional State). They consisted mainly of vaccinations of cattle and endoparasite control measures. Since initial assessments show no major outbreaks of disease, and given that an emergency veterinary programme is currently going on, so far ICRC intervention has been limited to continuing to collect comprehensive livestock data and monitoring their health situation.

In terms of access to water, an ICRC evaluation mission is due to take place to assess the current availability of water points and drinking areas throughout the Afar region and Shinile Zone in the broader perspective of areas of conflict and access to grazing lands.

Logistics

The operation is being conducted from two logistical bases: one in Awash serving the East of Afar-Zone 3 and Shinile actions, and another in Debre Berhan for the western area of Afar-Zone 3. In these locations, the warehouses have been prepared and have been receiving stocks, coordinated by the ICRC/ERCS.

Staffing levels have been boosted accordingly, both in terms of ICRC and ERCS personnel. The field level activities will be implemented by three teams (Afar West based in Debre Berhan; Afar East and Shinile based in Awash).

Distribution committees have been set up throughout the catchment area, comprising representatives appointed by the community (i.e., traditional elders, clan leaders and other key community members). 90% of the population of the catchment area are nomadic and extensive discussions have been conducted in full concertation with the civilian authorities to ensure the structure of the committee includes the potentially lesser represented portions of the population.

There are presently 53 distribution sites divided between Afar and Shinile zone. Food resources for 100,000 people have been divided accordingly with a full ration (2,400 kcal/person/day) being distributed to between 43-50% of the total population in each area.

Monitoring

Monitoring will be an integral element in the distribution planning. As a result of the findings, recommendations will be made for adaptations for the following rounds. During the distributions the ICRC/ERCS monitoring team will be present during transportation and handing over of the food to the distribution committees. The distribution of food resources from the distribution committee to the community will be monitored by ERCS volunteers. Random household assessments take place between 1-2 weeks following the arrival of the food and are intended to check if the food is reaching the household level, as well as to see if the quantities provided are appropriate. Moreover, population movement patterns will be monitored to analyse the potential draw-effect from areas outside of the intervention catchment area. Following a thorough analysis of each round, recommendations for adaptations will be made and changes undertaken.

Finally on completion of the four-month food operation in January a comprehensive report and recommendations for future ICRC action in the Afar region will be provided. From this, recommendations for longer-term ICRC actions in Afar region will be made in the areas of health, livestock disease control and water sanitation.

Humanitarian coordination

Ongoing coordination is taking place at different levels. The ICRC is coordinating closely with the local, zonal, regional, federal and administrative authorities and other humanitarian organisations present in Ethiopia both in Addis Abeba and at field level, particularly with the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (DPPC), as well as with active international organisations and NGOs in the region (CARE, Save the Children, WFP, Goal, *Action contre la faim* (ACF), ADPA and Hararge Catholic Services). After the four-month period, the DPPC will re-assume the responsibility of provision of humanitarian assistance to the population in question.

In addition to its ongoing cooperation programme, and to address the direct results of the urgent food needs of the affected population in Afar Region and Shinile area, the ICRC and the ERCS will work together to promote efficient use of the human, material and financial resources of the Movement and to mobilize them as rapidly as possible in relief operations and capacity building initiatives in the interest of the affected population. As the Afar region continues to suffer the effects of on-going conflict, this partnership further aims to strengthen the capacity of the ERCS branch within this area. ERCS volunteers will participate in the field work, while a number of senior ERCS personnel have also been seconded to help with activities.

In response to the wider food crisis in Ethiopia, the ERCS together with the International Federation are also planning to target the households of 34,920 farmers in Ambassel, in South Wollo, who are in need of emergency assistance following the failure of the mid-season harvest earlier this year.

Other ICRC activities

In Ethiopia, the ICRC responds to needs outstanding in the aftermath of the international conflict with Eritrea and from internal conflicts and disturbances, needs which are often aggravated by poor seasonal rainfall. The ICRC focuses on ensuring that prisoners of war (POWs), civilian internees (CIs) and people of Eritrean origin enjoy the protection due to them under the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions. It also provides protection and assistance for the population affected and/or displaced by the international conflict and internal armed violence in various parts of the country, and visits detainees held in connection with the 1991 change of government and for reasons of State security. In the Somali National Regional State, the ICRC implements integrated health, veterinary and water rehabilitation programmes for nomadic populations and carries out flood-management projects in areas particularly at risk.

Release and repatriation of POWs and CIs

In August the ICRC President, Mr Jakob Kellenberger, completed his first visit to Eritrea and Ethiopia since the end of the international armed conflict between the two countries in 2000. During his official visit to Ethiopia, Mr Kellenberger met Ethiopian President Girma Wolde Giorgis and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa on 22 August.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has expressed his government's commitment to release and repatriate the Eritrean POWs held in Ethiopia and other persons interned as a result of the conflict. Release and repatriation is to take place immediately upon completion of the clarification of the pending cases of presumed or alleged POWs currently not visited by the ICRC. At the time of writing, this operation has yet to take place.

The ICRC is currently visiting some 1,300 POWs and 250 civilian internees in Ethiopia.

Since a peace agreement was signed between Ethiopia and Eritrea in Algiers on 12 December 2000, as many as 997 Ethiopian and 937 Eritrean POWs have been repatriated under ICRC's auspices. Under the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs, which was referred to in the Algiers Agreement, all POWs must be released and repatriated without delay after the close of hostilities. The ICRC promotes application of and compliance with the Geneva Conventions and has been entrusted by the Algiers Agreement with supervising the release and repatriation of the POWs.

For further information, please contact the External Resources Division.