



Vulnerable Livelihoods in Somali Region, Ethiopia

Issues Paper

The Pastoralist Communication Initiative

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Summary : Livelihoods in rural Somali Region are subject to numerous shocks and stresses, including recurrent drought, livestock marketing constraints and restricted mobility due to conflict and insecurity. Pastoralists and agro-pastoralists face higher risks of premature mortality than urban households. Health and education services are nonexistent in most rural communities, where immunisation rates are low and illiteracy is over 90%. Responding to these multiple sources of vulnerability with food aid is inadequate and inappropriate. Improved governance is needed at all levels, as is better provision of basic services, and support to livestock marketing.

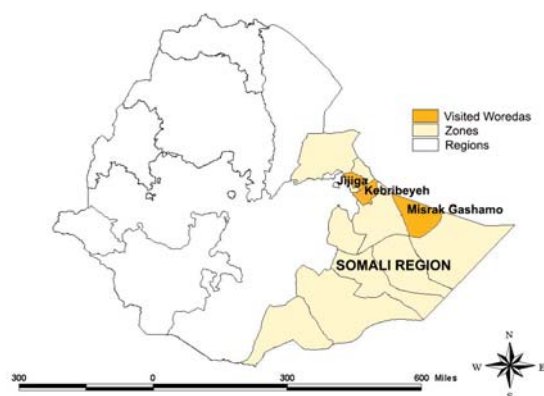
Background

This Issues Paper reports on selected findings from the first phase of fieldwork on the UNOCHA-PCI study, '*Vulnerable Livelihoods in Somali Region*'. The study objectives are to improve understanding of food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability in lowland Ethiopia, to contribute to informed policy-making. This paper hopes to promote discussion of the trends identified so far. The full report of the study will be published after the completion of all the fieldwork.

Phase I fieldwork was conducted in October-November 2004, in 3 districts in northern Somali Region:

- **Gashamo** (a pastoralist district - camels, sheep and goats - the epicentre of the 2004 drought);
- **Kebribayah** (agro-pastoral - livestock, sorghum, maize - also affected by drought in 2004);
- **Jigjiga** (urban - the capital of the region).

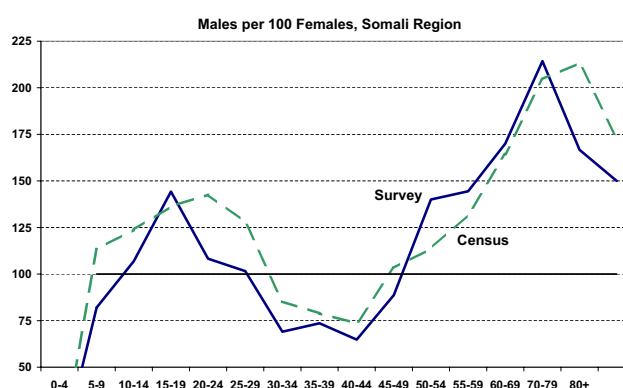
In each district, 100 households were surveyed and key informant interviews and focus group discussions were held in several communities. Report-back workshops were held in Jigjiga and Addis Ababa in January 2005. Fieldwork for Phase II is now underway in central and southern districts.



Demographics

The average size of these 300 households is 8.2, larger than in highland Ethiopia. Rural households are larger (averaging almost 10 members each) than urban households (7 members each). One household in ten is female-headed. The gender ratio is skewed, with 104 males for every 100 females.

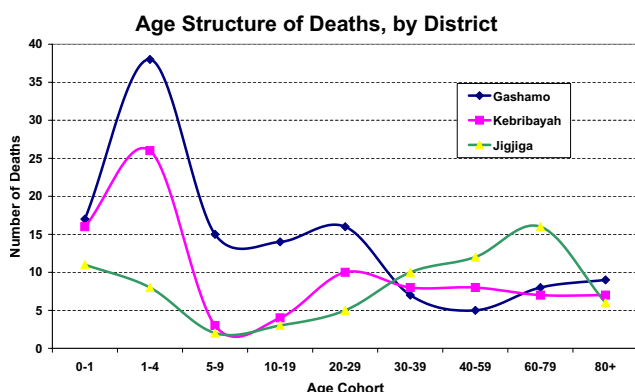
Household composition mirrors 1997 Census data for this region, and reveals striking gender imbalances - large numbers of "missing females" among young and elderly age cohorts. Males outnumber females among the under-25s and over-45s, but there are more women than men aged 25 to 45 years.



Reasons for these demographic patterns are unclear, but are being investigated in ongoing fieldwork. One explanation might be gender-based discrimination, which takes many forms in Somali region, including women having limited decision-making power within the home. Another possible factor is differential mobility between men and women - young men are more likely to travel to the Gulf or elsewhere for extended periods, in search of work.

Health

High health risks and poor access to health services are a major source of vulnerability, as is evident in mortality data from our household survey. In urban Jigjiga, death rates peak among the over 60s, but in Gashamo and Kebribayah life expectancy is lower, and most deaths occur among children under 5. A high proportion of these deaths are preventable. The most common causes are illness and disease, but in rural areas much reported premature mortality is due to malnutrition or famine, violent conflict, accidents, and deaths in childbirth. In Jigjiga town, by contrast, no deaths were attributed to malnutrition or conflict.



Almost twice as many deaths were reported by rural households than urban, which must be at least partly due to differential access to health services. Over 90% of rural households stated that they have no access to health services, while this figure was only 5% in Jigjiga town.

Also in Jigjiga, 58% of children had been vaccinated, but in Gashamo the figure was 33%; and in Kebribayah, 19%. Rural respondents often reported going for treatment to Somaliland, because this is the closest health facility available to them and because the quality of treatment is better.

Health services in Somali Region must be improved. Investment in health is vital for development, and lack of access to basic health care is costing lives. It is not good enough to argue that pastoralist communities cannot be reached with public services because they are often on the move. As one respondent told us: *"There are mobile teams that visit the communities for vaccinations, like 'National Immunisation Day', and the 'Campaign Against Polio'. There is also the 'Eye Mobile'."*

Education

Literacy in Somali region is low, but is much higher in urban areas than rural areas. In Jigjiga town, half the population sampled can read and write, but in rural Gashamo and Kebribayah, literacy is only 7%, and 93% of people surveyed have never been to school.

The reasons appear to be a combination of demand constraints (poverty, costs of education), and supply constraints (lack of schools and qualified teachers).

Many parents expressed strong interest in educating their children, and complained about lack of access to schools. In many rural communities, school buildings are known jokingly as *"hyena schools"*, as they often stand unused. The drought also disrupted available education services, as parents withdrew their children because of hunger and inability to pay the costs of fees, uniforms and school materials.

Education is vital if rural households in Somali Region are to have access to alternative livelihoods, should pastoralism become too difficult. Without functional literacy, people who are "pulled" or "pushed" to urban areas have little prospect of securing employment, apart from low-return unskilled activities such as collecting firewood or carrying water. In Jigjiga town, schooling is seen as important for learning English.

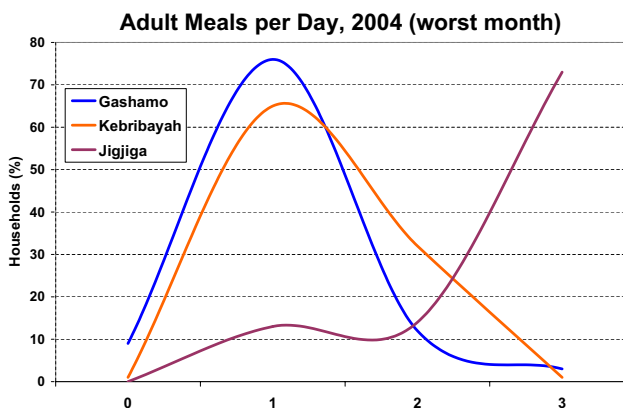
What people said about education:

- *"Our children are our assets and educating them is our priority - but where are the schools?"*
- *"There is no school here, only one Quranic school."*
- *"Since the drought, teachers cannot teach due to hunger, and students can't attend school - also because of hunger."*

Drought Impacts and Responses

Three of the last five years have been drought years in Somali Region. The 2004 drought was especially severe in Gashamo District, where livestock died in large numbers. The local name for the drought was *Tuur ku qaad* ("carry on your shoulder"), a comment on the fact that so many pack animals, even camels, died.

Three in four rural households said they had suffered hunger during the drought. Most adults in Gashamo and Kebribayah reported cutting down to one meal per day, while adults in Jigjiga continued eating three



meals daily. Parents protected their children from hunger by rationing their own food consumption more severely. Several people were displaced to urban areas. In Kebribayah one household divided "due to hunger", with the wife and children moving to Jigjiga until the crisis had passed.

People emphasised that they tried to help each other, but the severity of the drought undermined informal assistance. *"Everyone in this community is at the same level of income, so we couldn't help each other this year."* In Gashamo, where 67% of households surveyed had paid *zakaat* contributions in 2003, only 3% managed to pay in 2004. People in Kebribayah said receiving *zakaat* requires patronage connections to wealthier people: *"Zakaat is for rich people and those who know them; it is not for people like us."*

Food aid was distributed as a drought relief measure in 2003 and 2004. In Gashamo, 72% of households had received some food aid at least once in 2004. In Kebribayah, the figure was much lower, at 42%, and in Jigjiga, only 10%. No households had participated in food- or cash-for-work. Informal redistribution of food aid at various levels reduced the food received by each household. One household of 3 adults and 6 children was given 50kg of wheat as food aid in 2003, but only three cupfuls of wheat in 2004, about 1½ kg.



Photo UNOCHA

Attitudes to food aid were more often negative than positive. Many people complained about receiving food aid in the form of wheat, which is unfamiliar and unpopular. Both pastoralists and agro-pastoralists suggested that food aid is an inappropriate and inadequate response to their problems, and that more sustainable forms of livelihood support are needed.

What people said about food aid:

- *"We could not eat it because it was dry and hard to eat. So we gave it to our livestock."*
- *"When the food aid reaches the elders they take half of it and the rest disappears. We don't know where it goes."*
- *"What we need is help with reconstructing the livelihood we used to live, not food aid. Restocking, veterinary facilities, health care, employment opportunities, education for our children - that's what is important to us."*

Conflict and Governance



Conflict and insecurity impact in multiple ways on lives and livelihoods throughout rural Somali Region. A disaggregated analysis is needed to understand the legacy of past wars (displacement, rehabilitation, contested territory); ongoing conflicts between clans (over access to resources, or blood feuds); militia activity; border disputes (mainly with Oromiya); livestock raiding; small arms proliferation; and *"aabsi"* (fear of conflict or attack, which restricts pastoralists' mobility along unsafe migration routes).

In 14 of 200 rural households surveyed (7%), one or more members had lost their lives in violent conflict. Inter-clan conflicts often occur over access to grazing land or water points. Recent violent episodes have caused loss of property, livestock and lives. Several trucks carrying food or livestock have been attacked. In Kebribayah, many disputes are over farming land. In one case, two sub-clans quarrelled over land that had belonged to the community and was allocated by the elders. Tensions ran high and a man was killed. Relations between the two sub-clans remain tense.

Traditionally, conflict resolution has been the role of clan elders. In Gashamo and Kebribayah, people still turn to the elders to resolve conflicts in most cases. In Jigjiga town, the police are more often approached to resolve disputes, ahead of the elders.

There is widespread disillusionment with the ability of government at any level to improve living conditions in Somali region. Over 70% of respondents in all 3 districts felt they were not fairly represented in local, regional or federal government structures, and over 80% felt their representatives were not representing their interests effectively.

What people said about government:

- *"No-one talks to us to ask what we need. The government does not exist here."*
- *"What government are you talking about? We only see the army, if that's what you mean."*
- *"We do not know if we have representation. It seems no-one is conveying our problems to the government."*

Livestock Marketing

Contrary to stereotypical images of pastoralists as self-sufficient nomads who depend almost entirely on their animals for food (meat, milk and cheese, blood) pastoralists generally depend heavily on the market. They sell livestock for cereals, other food and various goods and services for which cash is needed. When livestock marketing channels are disrupted for any reason, this has impacts on their livelihoods that are potentially as damaging as severe drought or conflict.



Livestock owners have faced a number of shocks to their efforts to market their animals in recent years. In 1997, an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever dealt a triple blow to pastoralists and livestock traders: (1) large numbers of animals died; (2) prices for livestock and livestock products collapsed; (3) Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states imposed a ban on livestock imports from Ethiopia. Since Somali pastoralists depend most heavily on exports to the Gulf for their income, this was a severe blow to their livelihoods, that persisted for several years.

In 1999/2000 and most years since, Somali Region has been afflicted by droughts that have resulted in heavy livestock losses and have undermined the wealth basis of local communities. These droughts have come in quick succession, leaving no time for herds to reconstitute.

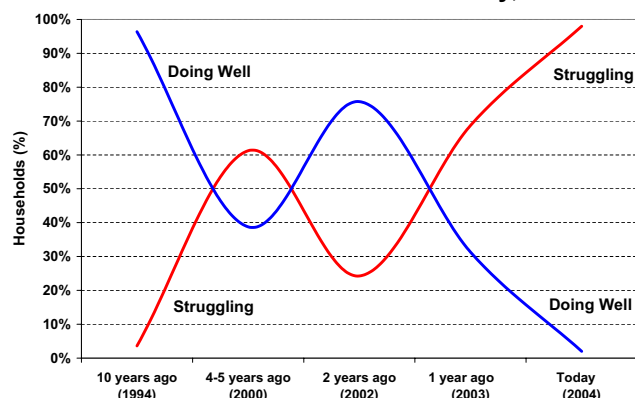
Impacts of Drought on Terms of Trade

"People are dependent on animals which are affected by the drought. Most of the animals are very ill and weak, and we can no longer barter exchange a grown sheep for a 50-kilogram sack of food."

"Poverty Cycles" or "Poverty Ratchets"?

When asked to assess their well-being status over the past 10 years, the responses of pastoralists in Gashamo reflected a high degree of livelihood volatility. Most households said they were doing well in the mid-1990s, but the drought of 1999/2000 caused a steep rise in those who were 'struggling'. This was followed by 2-3 years of recovery, before the droughts of 2003/04 devastated livelihoods, reversing the positive pattern of 10 years before. Similar trends were reported by agro-pastoralists in Kebribayah, but in urban Jigjiga there was much less variability in self-assessed well-being over time.

Trends in Self-assessed Vulnerability, Gashamo



Most observers would draw one of two interpretations from this evidence. One is that rural livelihoods in Somali region are becoming increasingly unviable, and that strong intervention is needed including perhaps the 'sedentarisation' of pastoralists, to stabilise their livelihoods and improve access to basic services such as schools and clinics. An alternative interpretation is that the last few years represent a bad phase in the 'dynamic disequilibrium' cycles of accumulation, collapse and recovery, that are normal in pastoralist systems - what is happening is a 'poverty cycle' rather than a 'poverty ratchet'.

But it is most likely that the impacts of these recurrent shocks and stresses are differentiated, so that more resilient households will survive the downturn and recover, while others have been forced down and out of pastoralism altogether. This has already happened for many IDPs and people who have migrated to the edge of towns like Jigjiga and Gode.

The *Vulnerable Livelihoods in Somali Region* Study was initiated by the UNOCHA Pastoralist Communication Initiative (UNOCHA-PCI), in partnership with the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the Somali National Regional State. The project leader is Dr Stephen Devereux of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. For further information, please contact Alastair Scott-Villiers at scott-villiers@un.org. The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations