

HPG Briefing Note

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Saving lives through livelihoods: critical gaps in the response to the drought in the Greater Horn of Africa

Yet again, drought has hit the Greater Horn of Africa. The UN estimates that at least 11 million people in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are in crisis, making this the region's worst drought in a decade. The impact has been most severe in pastoral areas on the Ethiopia–Kenya–Somalia border, with reports of malnutrition levels far beyond emergency thresholds,¹ livestock losses of up to 70%² and the mass migration of pastoralists in search of water, food, jobs and relief aid.

Many humanitarian actors have expressed frustration that the drought has had such a disastrous impact. They point to widely available research which shows that, if urgent action is taken early in a crisis to protect livelihoods, the effects of drought on pastoralists can be mitigated and the need for a massive emergency response to save lives can be reduced. Yet agencies, donors and national governments proved unable to address the crisis effectively in its early stages. Livelihoods interventions have been limited, and the response has focused overwhelmingly on food aid.

This HPG Briefing Note reviews the extent of emergency livelihoods responses in the crisis in the Horn. Drawing on secondary data and interviews with national and international actors in affected areas, it asks why accurate and timely early warning did not lead to a rapid and appropriate response to mitigate the drought's effects, and highlights how inadequate contingency planning, limited capacity in livelihoods programming and inflexible funding mechanisms resulted in delays and deficiencies in livelihoods interventions, and the predominance of food assistance in the emergency response.

¹ Nutrition assessments coordinated by the Kenyan government and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicate global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates between 17% and 30%, and severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rates between 2% and 4% in Moyale, Samburu, Marsabit and Mandera districts of Kenya.
² Oxfam Press Release, *Update on the East Africa food Crisis*, 9 May 2006.

Box 1

Pastoralism misunderstood

Pastoralism describes a way of life in which rearing livestock is the main source of income. For centuries, pastoralists have used sophisticated methods to optimise the use of water and land and to deal with the effects of cyclical droughts by moving, sharing, exchanging and selling animals.

The chronic vulnerability of pastoralists in East Africa is seen by some as an indicator that their livelihoods are unsustainable, and that they should be helped to undertake farming or other productive activities. However, this ignores the range of external factors which have contributed to undermining their resilience. Pastoral groups suffer from political and economic marginalisation in most countries in the Horn of Africa. Their increased vulnerability is a direct consequence of adverse national policies which have restricted their access to key natural resources such as land and water.

Few national governments or external actors recognise the importance of pastoral livelihoods, or support them with appropriate policies and interventions. There is also little understanding that livestock is an important economic resource that could be positively harnessed. In such a fragile ecosystem, no other productive sector could at present effectively absorb so many people.

Early warning, delayed response

Unlike many similar crises, including the 2005 drought in Niger and the Sahel, the quality and credibility of early-warning systems have not been called into question in this case. The progressive deterioration of pastoral livelihoods in

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The Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute is Europe's leading team of independent policy researchers dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice in response to conflict, instability and disasters.

Overseas Development Institute, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD

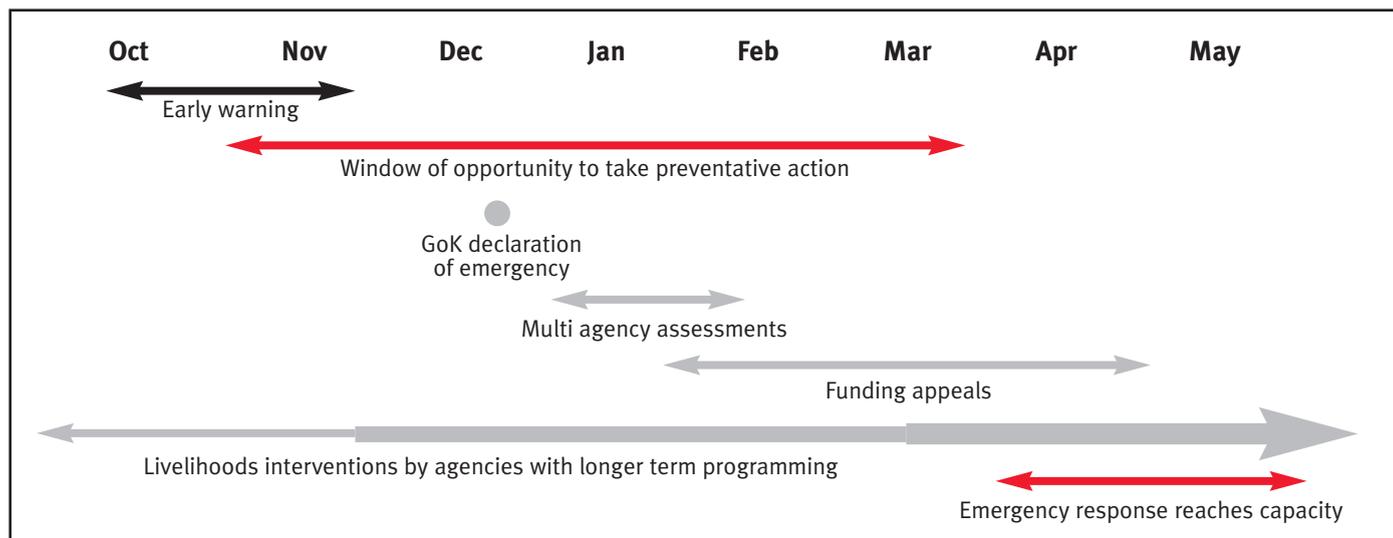
Tel. +44 (0) 20 7922 0300 Fax. +44 (0) 20 7922 0399 odi@odi.org.uk – www.odi.org.uk

For information about HPG's work, contact James Darcy (j.darcy@odi.org.uk) or Paul Harvey (p.harvey@odi.org.uk)

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Figure 1: Timeline of key events, October 2005–May 2006



the region was well documented. International systems such as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) and the Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) for Somalia, as well as Kenya’s Early Warning System (EWS), reported growing destitution amongst pastoralists and other groups throughout 2004 and 2005. By November 2005, there were emergency warnings of ‘pervasive pre-famine conditions’, with the potential for widespread famine in pastoral areas.³

in response to the crisis, it was not until the situation was extremely acute that it attracted meaningful attention. Arguably, the catalyst for a major response across the region was the official declaration by the Kenyan government that the drought was a national disaster. As this happened only on 31 December 2005, critical time had already been lost: it is estimated that in some pastoral areas along the Kenya–Somalia border nearly 40% of livestock had already died.⁴

While aid actors with a long-term presence in drought-affected areas moved quickly to modify and scale up their interventions

Figure 1 outlines the key stages in the response to the crisis. Multi-agency needs assessments were conducted in Ethiopia,

Box 2

Livelihoods interventions

Livelihoods interventions aim to protect or enhance livelihoods assets, strategies and outcomes, or the context, structures and processes that influence these three elements. Livelihoods interventions can contribute both to saving lives and to building resilience and addressing vulnerability.

Livelihoods support is often considered to be distinct from relief aid, in that it is more ‘developmental’ and usually implemented over a longer period. Such an either–or distinction between ‘development’ and ‘relief’ modes of assistance is particularly misleading in the Horn: the form of urgent, large-scale livelihoods support required fits neither paradigm well, and requires new ways of thinking about the problems that people are actually facing.

In the water sector, livelihoods approaches should focus on maintaining existing water sources and building local capacity to monitor and respond to changing patterns of demand for water. Examples might include:

- Emergency water supplies to prevent distress migration and loss of life/livestock.

- Establishing strategic water sources. This requires a detailed understanding of livelihoods and population movements.
- Providing storage or transport facilities to reduce time spent collecting or queuing for water.
- The subsidised provision of fuel and pumps.

Livestock interventions could include:

- Destocking: early off-take when terms of trade for livestock are still favourable.
- Supplementary livestock feeding, which is more cost-effective than restocking or buying fresh animals after a drought (supplementary feeding should be done only for reproductive animals).
- Emergency veterinary programmes, which can prolong the life of vulnerable animals for several months, even where pasture and other conditions remain unchanged.
- Transport subsidies to support the off-take of large numbers of animals from drought-stricken areas to markets.
- Restocking, with a focus on those who have not dropped out of the pastoral system.

3 See reports at www.fsasomali.org and www.fews.net.

4 Mass deaths of livestock in Mandera and Marsabit, Kenya with mortality rates of 30-40% for cattle and goats, and 10-15% for camels, reported in IFRC Press Release, 23 December 2005.

Kenya and Somalia between December 2005 and February 2006, and appeals for funding were launched between February and April. Limited international funding was made available once the emergency alerts were sounded, as well as funds from national governments. For instance, the Kenyan government transferred development funds for the emergency response in January. However, the bulk of funding from international donors was disbursed following an awareness-raising mission in late February by Kjell Magne Bondevik, the UN Special Humanitarian Envoy for the Horn of Africa. Although some agencies were already responding to the crisis, it is generally acknowledged that emergency operations did not reach full capacity until March or April.

Given the widespread consensus that the early warning was accurate, the delayed response highlights the limitations of early warning in the absence of direct links to plans that set out rapid and appropriate response options. As regional analysts reported, in a context of chronic food insecurity where emergency alerts are signalled repeatedly, many humanitarian and development actors found it difficult to distinguish the symptoms of chronic destitution from those of a critically unstable situation. Others felt that these repeated alerts had inured agencies to crisis.

Saving livelihoods, saving lives

There is a vast amount of research on how to support pastoralists in the Greater Horn in times of scarcity. Drawing on the lessons of the 1999–2000 drought in Kenya, for example, Yakob Aklilu and Mike Wekesa stress that effective humanitarian assistance for pastoral communities rarely resembles what is required for settled communities, and should be geared towards protecting livestock – the pastoralists’ livelihoods base.⁵ Early-warning reports throughout 2004 and 2005, as well as the emergency alerts of November 2005, also emphasised the need for livelihoods programming, in addition to food assistance.

National and international actors with infrastructure and programmes in affected areas were flexible in rapidly adapting and expanding pre-existing livelihoods interventions in response to the crisis. Ongoing programmes – such as the Kenyan government’s Arid Lands Project, the Ethiopian Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative (PLI – see Box 3) and livelihoods programming by international actors like Oxfam in Wajir and Turkana and ICRC in Somalia – rapidly adapted long-term programming to ensure that water development and rehabilitation activities, herd survival actions, human and animal health assistance and cash interventions were possible right from the start of the emergency.

Opportunities were not, however, taken to build on longer-term work by heavily front-loading the emergency response with livelihoods interventions. Food requirements constituted 85% of total needs identified under the Kenyan

⁵ Yakob Aklilu and Mike Wekesa, *Livestock and Livelihoods in Emergencies: Lessons Learnt from the 1999–2000 Emergency Response in the Pastoral Sector in Kenya*, Feinstein International Famine Center, Medford, MA, 2001, http://famine.tufts.edu/download/pdf/working_paper_3.pdf.

Box 3

Case study: the Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative (PLI) in Ethiopia

The Pastoralist Livelihoods Initiative (PLI) is a two-year livestock programme in the Somali, Afar and Oromia regions of Ethiopia. Its main activities focus on enhancing early-warning systems, increasing access to markets, improving livestock production and facilitating policy reform. Early warnings of failed rains were issued in October 2005, just as the project was due to start. In response, the project rapidly switched to emergency livelihoods interventions. By facilitating meetings between traders and pastoralists, it supported the commercial de-stocking of approximately 10,000 animals, the first time commercial de-stocking was assisted on this scale in Ethiopia. Approximately 4,000 additional animals were de-stocked directly by NGOs, while support from the Ethiopian government enabled large-scale animal health interventions, including the vaccination of over a million animals.

Flash Appeal, and 83% of the revised Somali Consolidated Appeal Process was for food assistance.

Why was there such a disconnect between long-term programming and the emergency response? HPG’s analysis suggests that large-scale emergency livelihoods programming in pastoral areas calls for a different form of intervention that is not immediately familiar to either humanitarian or development actors. This is because it requires an understanding of pastoral communities, and a capacity to provide relevant interventions in times of plenty as well as scarcity. Such an approach is possible in the context of longer-term programming, but difficult in an environment of short-term humanitarian programming, especially in insecure environments such as Somalia. It calls for urgent and large-scale water and livestock interventions, which are complex, time-consuming and expensive. It also necessitates a level of operational responsiveness uncommon amongst development actors and a level of technical capacity often lacking amongst humanitarians, and requires readily available funds for livelihoods interventions. This is often impossible in a context where there is a predisposition towards food assistance as the priority response in emergencies, as well as limited contingency funding.

Inadequate preparedness

Robust drought-preparedness plans can help national and international actors to react swiftly to early warnings of crisis, and mount coordinated responses. A good plan includes appropriate programming options and triggers for action, and predetermined roles and responsibilities amongst different actors.

Despite the cyclical pattern of droughts in this area, there are no national preparedness plans in Somalia or Ethiopia. Kenya is more advanced, and has community- and district-level drought-preparedness plans. The main constraint appears to have been the absence of national and

sufficiently large local contingency funds to rapidly implement these plans on a large scale. The lack of effective coordination between district and national levels meant that these contingency plans did not form the basis of wider national and international responses. As a result, international actors largely bypassed national structures in each country. Since international actors also lacked pre-existing emergency plans for collective work, there was little consensus on the balance to be struck in the emergency response between preventative livelihoods interventions and food assistance. This dearth of preparedness was compounded by an absence of clear leadership, and the failure of agencies with pastoralist experience to influence the shape of the overall response. In Kenya, for example, the government appears to have led calls for food assistance despite appeals for more resources for livelihoods interventions by officials in individual ministries and at the district level. In Ethiopia, by contrast, food was less dominant, reportedly because of lobbying of donors by international NGOs.

Capacity imbalances between food and livelihoods programming

One of the key difficulties in swiftly mounting livelihoods interventions during the early stages of the emergency stemmed from technical and organisational weaknesses in assessing, designing and implementing them. In the face of a well-understood, analysed and accepted food system and widely available food assistance, donors were simply not convinced that livelihoods interventions stood a better chance of saving lives.

A major issue was the quality of livelihoods assessments. Many observers saw them as generic, and lacking the hard data that food assessments were able to provide to

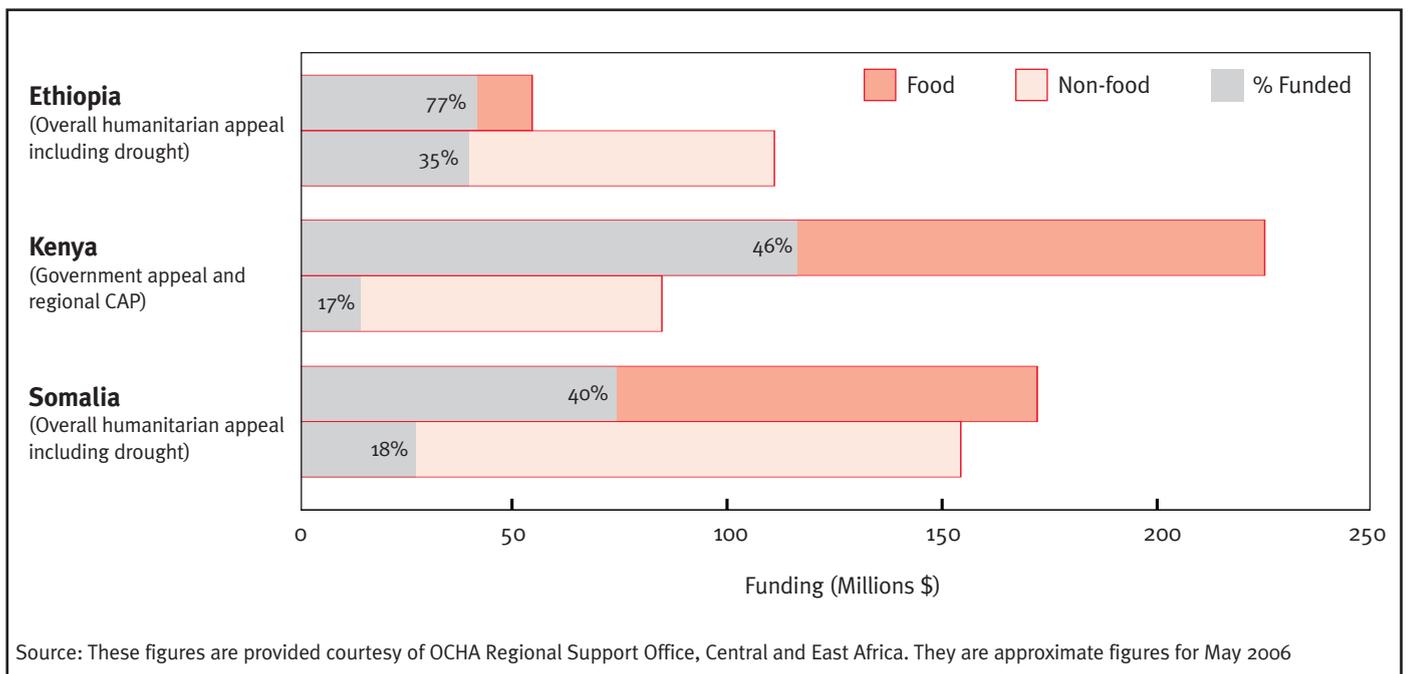
demonstrate potential life-saving impact. In addition, there appears to have been significant delays in planning for large-scale livestock-related livelihoods interventions. Many donors, especially in Kenya, felt that plans for de-stocking were being submitted at a time when it was no longer appropriate to intervene to accelerate livestock off-take. Some agencies, particularly international relief organisations, also mentioned a lack of capacity to implement these programmes. Both implementing agencies and donors reported a dearth of innovative approaches: many claimed that the crisis was so severe that less established programming, such as cash transfers, was too risky.

There is no doubt that livelihoods interventions in emergencies are more complex than food aid responses, and that greater capacity is required to design and implement them. However, well-designed and timely livelihoods interventions were possible where agencies had longer-term programmes and an intimate understanding of the local context.

Funding constraints

While overall funding for the crisis has not matched needs, funding for livelihoods interventions has been much lower than for food assistance, as shown in Figure 2. The difficulty of attracting donor funding for livelihoods projects was widely reported by humanitarian agencies, with donors in return indicating a lack of receptivity at headquarters to such interventions. This was reportedly due to an overload of requests for non-food resources globally, as well as a lack of contingency funding. Although the Consolidated Appeal for the Horn of Africa focused primarily on non-food interventions, it was not launched until April, and is in any case critically under-funded. Clearly, the global preference for food aid over non-food assistance has been maintained in the Greater Horn response.

Figure 2: Funding appeals and contributions



A new and important element in the response to the crisis was the use of the expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Despite difficult negotiations, UN agencies reached swift agreement on the division of the first \$10m tranche of CERF funds on 9 March, with the majority earmarked for health and nutrition, water and sanitation and livestock, and minimal support (\$250,000) for food assistance. Later that month, however, a new allocation of \$3.6m from the CERF was made to WFP to fund food aid. Given that bilateral and multilateral donors had already made large amounts of food assistance available, the rationale behind this choice is unclear.

Conclusion

The humanitarian response to the crisis in the Greater Horn of Africa has done very little to date to protect livelihoods. However, it is not too late. The current rainy season has brought respite to many areas. Where rains have been good, water is readily available and pastoralists have begun to return to grazing areas. While many have suffered massive livestock losses and malnutrition rates are still high, national and international actors can act swiftly to preserve remaining livestock and help to restore herds. While life-saving support should continue, attention must now also focus on those who have lost their livelihoods assets, to determine how these assets can be rebuilt or replaced.

It is critical that the current attention on pastoralists is harnessed to ensure that lessons are learned about how to respond more appropriately the next time a drought occurs, as it inevitably will. This Briefing Note has highlighted that effective early warning alone does not ensure a timely or adequate response in slow-onset disasters. While the situation may be improved by new classifications being developed by FSAU in Somalia, which aim to link stronger analysis to strategic decision-making, collective action to improve emergency responses to drought is also required. Preventative action can significantly alter the evolution of a

crisis, but this demands a capacity to 'change gear' and ensure a step-change in the scale and mode of operations. It is also crucial that the apparent divide between developmental and relief approaches is overcome, and that there is a recognition that neither approach – as currently conceived – is well placed to prevent livelihoods from collapsing.

One key lesson of this crisis is that, where agencies had a long-term presence and were flexible in redeploying funds earmarked for long-term activities, livelihoods interventions were implemented in a timely manner. This technical capacity and funding flexibility must become the norm if livelihoods are to be protected in future emergencies. While it is important to enhance the capacity of humanitarian actors to undertake robust needs assessments and devise appropriate livelihoods responses in slow-onset crises, it is also essential that relevant national preparedness plans are in place in contexts where vulnerability is chronic, and where acute crises are likely to develop. In order for these plans to be effectively put into operation, there must be investment in national capacity to implement emergency livelihoods programming on a large scale. Adequate contingency funds must be available, both at national levels (centrally and locally) and from bilateral and multilateral donors.⁶

Recurrent drought in the Greater Horn of Africa need not mean recurrent distress for pastoral communities. From a long-term development perspective, this particular crisis must serve as a rallying call to national governments and international actors to implement policies and interventions to strengthen pastoral livelihoods systems. This emergency should not be used as an excuse for the increased settlement of pastoral communities. The focus of this Note has been specifically on drought preparedness and emergency action, which can only alleviate the symptoms of the problem. But to effectively address the impact of drought, responses must be based on a more in-depth understanding of pastoral livelihoods systems.

⁶ Oxfam, *Making the Case: A National Drought Contingency Fund for Kenya*, Policy Paper, May 2006.

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For agency updates, UN appeals and press coverage, see ReliefWeb (www.reliefweb.int) and AlertNet (www.alertnet.org). For Early Warning Systems see www.fsasomali.org and www.fews.net, and for real-time tracing of funding flows to affected countries, see OCHA's Financial Tracking System (<http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/index.aspx>).