

## Pastoral Early Warning and Response Systems

*During the crisis last year in much of the Greater Horn of Africa, a major problem was timely information about badly affected groups in pastoral areas — or where this information was available — the timeliness of the response. In recognition of this problem, a workshop was held to address this issue in November 2001. The workshop brought together an impressive amount of experience and expertise on pastoralist systems in the Horn of Africa. Seventy-five participants from seven countries in the Greater Horn, international agencies and NGOs, took part. Elements of Action Plans for assessing and improving pastoral early warning and response were developed for both the countries represented and for the region.*

*This issue of the Greater Horn of Africa Food Security Update draws from the discussions to highlight major obstacles to improved pastoral early warning and response, as well as some options identified for addressing these obstacles.*

### The context of pastoralism

Pastoralist systems function in very different contexts in the Greater Horn of Africa, and their worsening vulnerability provides the framework for early warning and response activities. In most countries there is a strong State, and hence scope for developing a national disaster policy. Indeed, in the cases of Kenya and Uganda these are in the process of being enacted within each country's respective legislature. Responsibility for early warning and response in these cases lies clearly with district and national government institutions, even if these lack capacity and need to be strengthened. In contrast, in much of Somalia and South Sudan there are no state institutions, raising difficult issues: Who should take the lead in early warning and response? What is the role of international organizations where there are no obvious counterpart institutions? How can sustainable systems be built?

The political and economic significance of pastoralism varies considerably between different countries. In most of the Greater Horn (Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia), pastoralists are a small percentage of the population, living in remote areas and contributing a relatively small amount to GDP. In these contexts pastoralists tend to be marginalized politically and economically. Even in an emergency there is a tendency for their needs to be accorded relatively low political priority. In contrast, in Somalia pastoralism is a mainstay of the economy and hence of much greater political and economic significance.

Pastoralism in the Horn of Africa is also an international issue — both the nature of the pastoral economy and the shocks that affect it pay little heed to national boundaries — hence the imperative of exploring the regional dimensions of early warning and response. Yet the political tensions within the Horn, and the associated weakness of regional organizations mean that cross-border/ regional responses have been relatively unexplored and only limited progress has been achieved.

### Early warning of what?

Most Early Warning Systems (EWS) in the region have been designed to warn of drought-related crises. But this is not the only hazard to pastoralist livelihoods. They are also affected by floods, economic shocks (for example the ban on livestock exports to the Gulf States) and, most importantly, conflict.

Early warning of drought and conflict raise many questions: What indicators should be monitored? How can the information be used? While there is an obvious area of convergence between drought and conflict-related early warning there are also limitations in integrating the systems because of the sensitivity of 'conflict indicators', and the sensitivities (indeed often the responsibility) of making the analysis and early warning public. This is an area of significant concern but with few practical 'models' to build on. Clearly much work remains to be done.

### **A framework for early warning and response**

There is concern about the way that EWS are dominated by international donors, in terms of funding, but especially in terms of who they address. Many EWS are designed to service the information needs of international aid agencies – where resources are usually required to relieve an acute emergency beyond a national government's capacity to respond. However, EWS need to be more balanced in their approach, to address local communities, district and national governments, as well as international aid donors.

Kenya has articulated a useful framework that seemed to address these concerns. In this framework, the first response to early warning and to an imminent crisis is sequential, begins with the pastoralists themselves and their coping strategies, then moving to district and national government, and finally to the international aid community, as the coping capacity of the previous level is exhausted. The EWS needs to address all three of these user groups; simultaneously rather than sequentially. However, as most of the information used by an EWS is collected from pastoralists themselves, it is doubtful whether the EWS can provide them with any *new* information, except perhaps climate forecast information as forecasting models become more accurate.

There is now a consensus that the objectives of a pastoralist early warning and early response system should be to save livelihoods, as well as lives. A major emergency can develop very rapidly in a pastoralist area if there has been no genuinely *early* response, and if the cause of the emergency continues to intensify. The international donor community's usual reaction to provide food aid in response to a crisis was criticized on a number of occasions, amidst calls for a more imaginative and more appropriate phased responses as an emergency develops. Kenya probably has most experience of a phased response in pastoralist areas, including interventions such as de-stocking, cash-for-work, water interventions and re-stocking—experience that could usefully be applied in other contexts.

EWS do not exist in isolation, but are parts of the larger systems that provide information about the likelihood of shocks, when and how they are developing, and what the appropriate response should be. There is also a link between early warning and poverty monitoring, not least because of an awareness of increasing impoverishment and the intensifying chronic nature of food insecurity within many pastoralist communities. This must be reflected in an EWS. And the EWS must be sensitive to the particular condition and threats faced by 'diversified pastoralists' – those who have lost almost all their livestock and are dependent upon an ever more precarious livelihood based on marginal economic activities. But above all, an EWS must remain 'light on its feet' and sensitive to both exogenous and endogenous changes in pastoral areas which may threaten livelihoods and ultimately human lives.

### **An agenda for the future**

The Mombasa Workshop generated a number of issues for important consideration and future planning. Some common themes included:

- There appears to be a general need to strengthen government institutions that are responsible for early warning and response in pastoralist areas — where government exists. But there are often numerous actors involved in aspects of early warning (even – or perhaps particularly – where there is no government, for example in South Sudan) and therefore a pressing need for coordination and cooperation amongst those actors. In this case, a lead organization needs to be clearly identified.

- The sustainability of EWS emerged as a key concern implying that, as far as possible, EWS set up by international organizations (donors and NGOs) must take this into account when designing and establishing the system. Two strong messages emerged: keep it simple and be aware of who will eventually be running the EWS with whatever resources are available to them.
- It is not sufficient for EWS practitioners to collect and analyze data, and simply to deliver an early warning message. They must also be prepared to take on the role of advocates, to lobby decision-makers to respond, particularly where there is little political will and/ or bureaucratic inertia to do so.
- Contingency planning will help to forge the link between early warning and response. But a plan alone is not enough. It must be backed up with the capacity and mechanisms to respond – ideally with a contingency fund.

#### **At country level:**

- The **Uganda** country team placed a lot of emphasis on taking forward the Disaster Management Policy as a bill, and following up the legislative action with workshops and conferences. There was a strong commitment to developing early warning for pastoralist areas and for pastoralist ‘corridors’, which may require advocacy and lobbying to ensure that pastoralists are appropriately recognized in the formulation of national policies.
- The **Ethiopia** country team acknowledged the task ahead in strengthening early warning and response in pastoralist areas. It will feed back its action plan to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee (DPPC). Significantly, it plans to hold a national workshop on early warning for pastoral areas where expertise from elsewhere in the region can be drawn upon.
- The **Kenya** country team emphasized the importance of taking forward the National Disaster Policy and working towards sustainability of the EWS. It also drew attention to the need to strengthen early non-food responses to deteriorating pastoralists livelihoods and the usefulness of contingency plans in conjunction with flexible response funding.
- The **South Sudan** team focused on the need to promote coordination between the different actors involved in early warning activities, the advocacy role associated with early warning and the importance of strengthening community level analysis and feedback to communities. A meeting scheduled for mid-December is seen as an important opportunity to take forward some of the ideas discussed in this workshop.
- The **Somalia** country team emphasized the importance of working with local communities in both early warning and response, and having an exit strategy in mind when designing an EWS. There needs to be an improved understanding of pastoralist livelihood systems in order to identify the threshold at which external intervention is required.

#### **At the regional level:**

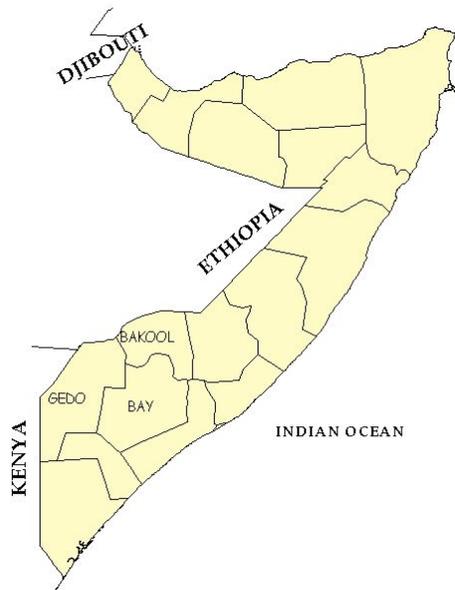
- As a priority, regional bodies should strengthen national EWS where they are weakest. Any form of regional early warning must add clear value to existing national EWS.
- The flow of information across borders, particularly between neighboring pastoral areas that straddle borders, needs to be facilitated. This should cover early warning and relevant information on imminent or current emergency responses, to assist in coordinating national response plans.
- The flow and exchange of technical expertise on pastoralist areas between countries in the Horn could also be usefully strengthened. This might be assisted by developing a regional database, or amending existing databases so that countries know who to contact if they are looking for technical support on a particular topic.

- The above activities should be done by existing regional institutions. New institutions and structures are not required. Alternatively national EWS institutions could be encouraged to network directly and share information. However, some kind of steering group could usefully be established at regional level to act as a catalyst for some of these ideas to be taken forward, and to ensure coordination between the different regional initiatives.

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## Update: Acute Crisis in Southern Somalia

A deteriorating humanitarian situation has been developing in Southern Somalia for the past several months following the failure of the main *Gu* rains in several of the main grain producing areas, as well as pastoral areas. Much of Southern Somalia has had erratic weather since the El Nino related floods in 1998, and only one good harvest during this period. A number of factors complicate the failure of the *Gu* rains:



- ✚ The following short *Deyr* rains have been erratic and generally below average, reducing the prospects for a short-rains harvest in the sorghum-producing Bay and Bakool Regions. There has been little regrowth of range pasture to support any kind of pastoral recovery in hard-hit Gedo Region. An FSAU survey estimated a 50-60% mortality among livestock (mainly small stock) that did not migrate out of the district.
- ✚ The situation is complicated by on-going inter-clan conflict, which makes humanitarian access problematic. The insecurity led to the closing of the Kenya/Somalia border for several months, restricting potential trade responses to the food shortages, although the border has recently been reopened.
- ✚ Several economic factors also affect the crisis. The import ban in a number of Gulf States on livestock from the Horn continues to depress

livestock markets. And several major Somali telecommunications and money transfer companies have been closed down after being accused of funneling money for terrorist organizations. These companies serve as the main conduit for remittances back to Somalia from Somalis living and working abroad. While the exact amounts of money remitted to Somalia from abroad each year isn't known, it is estimated that two of the biggest firms account for about \$650 million into Somalia per year. This source of income for Somalia has now been disrupted, with a myriad of knock-on effects for local economies across Somalia.

- ✚ A respected Nairobi-based newspaper, *The East African* ran a cover story on November 19 noting the possibility of military action against known terrorist training camps in Somalia. The UN withdrew staff from Somalia at the outset of the action against terrorists in Afghanistan, but has since allowed them to return to post. Needless to say, should military action take place in Somalia, it would seriously complicate the situation, and would make humanitarian access much more difficult.

The humanitarian situation remains serious in Somalia. Nationwide, some 800,000 people face an immediate shortfall in food consumption, 450,000 of whom are in the three Southern regions of Gedo, Bay and Bakool (see Table 1). Gedo is the hardest hit, with some 200,000 people facing acute food insecurity. However, it is the depth of the problem, not just the total numbers, that is focusing attention on Gedo. While the current prevalence of malnutrition is not known, the agency operating supplementary and therapeutic feeding centers (Action Contre la Faim) has noted an increase in admissions of 250-400% in Gedo in recent months.

**TABLE 1: Number of people affected and estimated food aid requirements in Somalia**  
*Source: FSAU and FEWS NET/Somalia*

Region	Number of People Affected	Total Amount of Food Aid Required
Gedo	197,000	20,000
Bay	228,300	18,000
Bakool	21,300	1,030
Other regions combined	334,400	17,970
<b>TOTAL (all Somalia)</b>	<b>781,000</b>	<b>57,000</b>

*For further details please refer to the FEWS NET (Somalia) / FSAU reports ([www.fews.net](http://www.fews.net))*

## Announcement

The Overseas Development Institute, Nutrition Works, and CARE International are hosting a workshop in Nairobi entitled "Soup Kitchens or Solidarity" on principled approaches food distribution in conflict situations. The first half day of the workshop is a presentation and discussion of research conducted on the topic in 1999-2000 by Susanne Jaspars. There is an open invitation to attend the half day session on Tuesday morning, December 11. Please send an e-mail to [maxwell@care.org](mailto:maxwell@care.org) to confirm participation and receive directions.