

TRIP REPORT

Rapid Food Security Assessment in Gedo Region: The Epicenter of the Drought

Even camels, the most drought resistant animals, are currently weakened by the drought. This camel was found along the road between Garbahaarey and Faaweyn village of Bardera districts.



March 25, 2006

Decision Maker Summary

The population of Gedo Region has experienced two consecutive rainfall and crop failures coupled with persistent insecurity since the collapse of Somalia state. This has led to loss of human life and severe erosion of productive assets.

Widespread livestock deaths have occurred. Cattle, the most important livestock specie in southern Somali, have been the worst affected species with mortality rates ranging between 50 and 70 percent of the pre-crisis herds.

Malnutrition and mortality rates are severe and alarming. The assessed global acute malnutrition (weight for height <2z score or oedema) was 23.8 percent, while the severe acute malnutrition (weight for height <-3 Z score or oedema) was 3.7 percent, indicating a severe nutrition situation. Alarming crude and under-five mortality rates were assessed at 1.04 per 10,000 persons per day and 2.46 per 10,000 persons per day, respectively.

Severe water shortages are exacerbating the situation. Expenditure on water, and other essential non-food items, now makes up 80 to 90 percent of poor and middle income households expenditure in the region. Moreover, pastoralists are forced to trek long distances to find water, which is often contaminated.

This crisis has surpassed the community's capacity and all existing coping strategies are exhausted. The assessment team recommends following:

- Blanket food aid distribution should be continued regardless of the rainfall conditions up to the harvest of *Gu* season (August 2006);
- If the rain is late, water trucking should be continued especially in remote rural areas;
- Seed and hand tools should be provided to rain-fed farmers;
- Riverine communities should be assisted with canal rehabilitation projects and the provision irrigations pumps, fuel for irrigation and spare parts;
- Additional feeding centers should be established to combat high rates of acute malnutrition;
- Cash relief to bolster household income and thus improve market access should be distributed;
- Blanket supplementary feeding should be provided with micro-nutrient fortified blended foods;
- More health posts need to be established in remote rural areas;
- Mobile veterinary teams need to be established to try to save as many animals as possible;
- Existing boreholes in inland areas need to be rehabilitated; and
- A massive campaign to collect and burn livestock carcasses before the rainy season sets in is urgently required.

Background

Gedo Region is situated in south-western Somalia, bordering both Ethiopia and Kenya. The region consists six districts including: Bula Hawo, Bardera, Dolow, El Wak, Garbaharrey (the regional capital), and Luq. About 75 percent of the population is pastoral¹. The remainder of the population is comprised of urban dwellers, agro-pastoralists and riverine agriculturalists along the Juba and Dawa rivers.

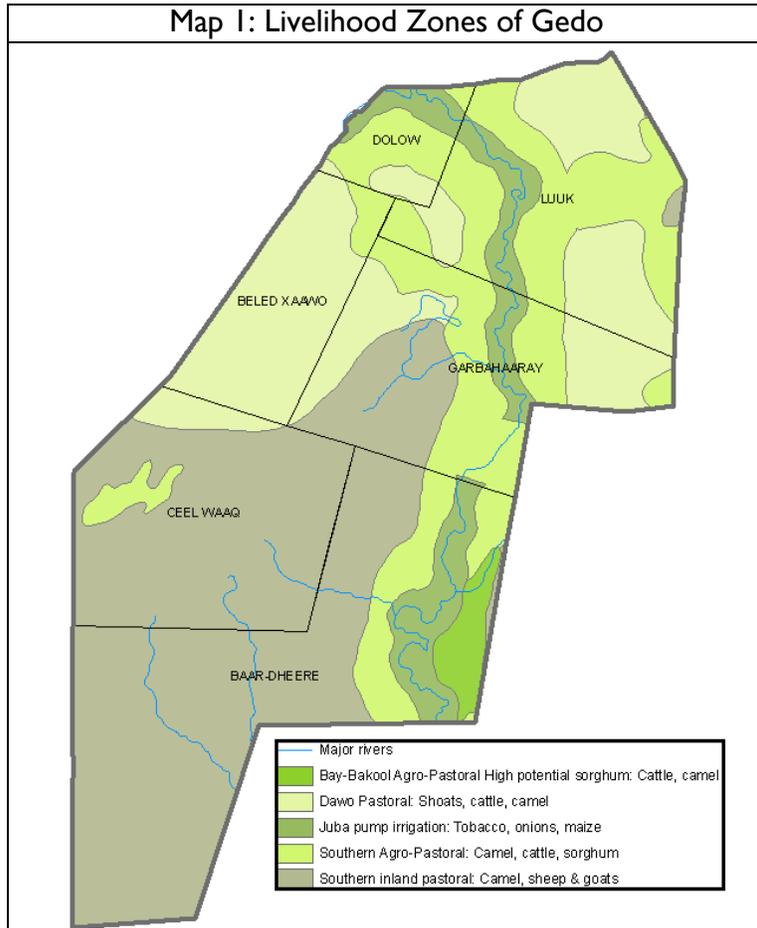
Gedo is inhabited by people of different clans, including the Marrehan clan which represents the majority, especially in the southern parts of the region. The population in the northern districts is of more diverse origin. Northern areas are poorer and marginalized politically and economically. In the past, food security in the southern districts was stable, while in the northern districts successive droughts and recurrent conflict have lead to high levels of chronic food insecurity.

According to Somalia Food Security Analyst Unit (FSAU) post-*Deyr* (minor rainy season) analysis report (February 2006), most of districts in Gedo region face a humanitarian emergency²,

due to two consecutive seasons of rain failure coupled with persistent insecurity. Severe drought has resulted in widespread human suffering, including death, as well as massive livestock losses especially cattle – the main livestock holding in the south.

The population has recognized the severity and the magnitude of the current drought as the worst in living memory. Locally the drought has been named *Sima* (equalizer of all areas in the region) and *Oday Ka weyn* (beyond the memory of living elders).

This rapid food security assessment report was compiled to complement the interagency regional nutrition survey led by FSAU.



¹ FSAU Food Economy Baseline

² Based on the FSAU Food Security Phase Classification System

The main objective of the assessment was to determine the severity and the magnitude of the current humanitarian emergency in Gedo. Within that remit, the assessment team set out to address the following specific issues:

- The effect of the drought on livestock body condition and production;
- Livestock mortality rates;
- Human mortality trends; and
- The impact of the crisis on livelihoods, both in terms of people assets and livelihood strategies

Methodology and participants

The assessment was carried from 22 to 30 March 2006 and covered all six districts of the region. Thirty randomly selected clusters were assigned for the collection of qualitative information. Various factors were examined including rainfall, water availability and quality, household cereal stocks, pasture and grazing, livestock conditions (production and body condition), market prices, migration patterns, mortality trends, security and population movements.

Semi-structured interviews with key informants and community focus groups were used to collect information. Proportional piling was used to identify livestock mortality rates. The team also stopped randomly at settlements along the road for brief assessments to ensure that rural communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) living outside the main villages were included in the assessment.

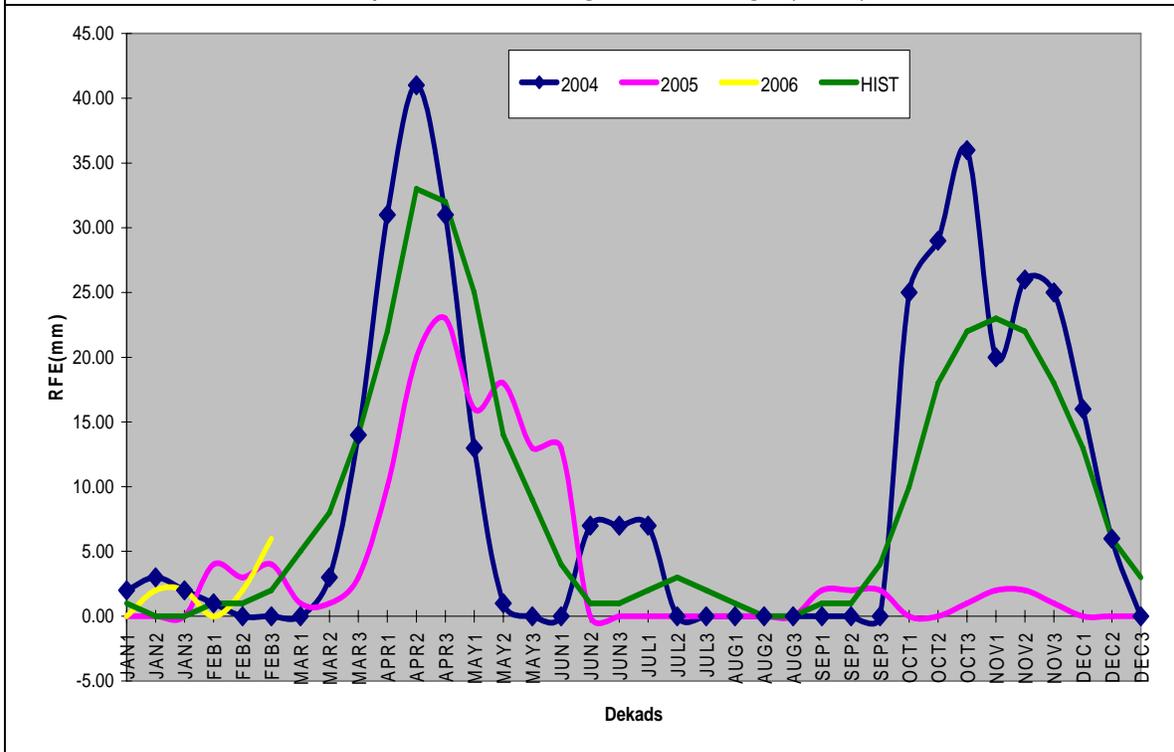
A multi-sectoral team comprised of FSAU/FAO, WFP, CARE Somalia/Southern Sudan, FEWS NET Somalia, Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), UNICEF, and the Gedo Health Consortium conducted the assessment.

Key Findings

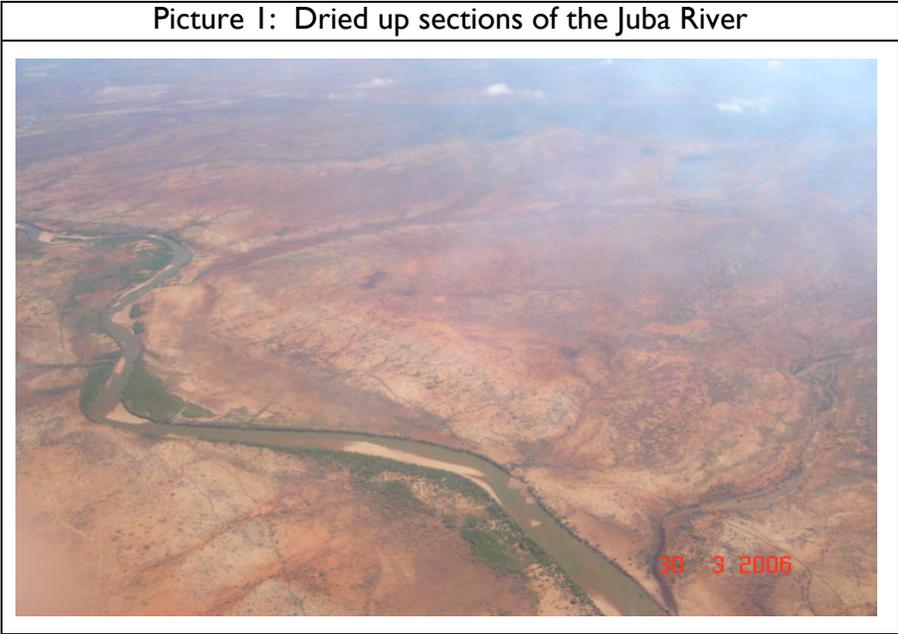
Rainfall and weather conditions

The consecutive failure of two seasons has resulted in a severe drought affecting southern Somalia, especially the Gedo region. Figure 1 provides a comparison of 2005 rainfall versus the long-term average and recent year's rainfall, and clearly shows how poor the 2005 rains were.

Figure 1: Gedo Region Rainfall Estimate from February 2004 – February 2006, compared to the long-term average (HIST)



Usually the *Gu* (main) rains start in mid-April in Gedo Region. However, a few days of light showers known as *Todob* were received in February and March 2006. These rains fell in Dhubaa, Daabley, Yucubley of Garbahareey District, La Haley, Tubako, Daar of Bardera District, Hufeey, Ajawe, Weeldheen of Burdubo District, Busaar and Garsaal of Elwak District, Khadiijo Haji, Gaddoon Dhawe of Bulo-hawa District, Bohol-Garas, Yurkut villages of Luuq District. While these rains will have a short lived benefit in some localized areas, the impact of these showers was generally insignificant and the region will continue to experience severe water shortages until the main *Gu* rains have established themselves.



In addition to the lack of water, weather conditions are currently harsh with higher than average temperatures for this time of year.

Water resources

After two consecutive rainfall failures water shortage are severe particularly in the hinterland areas of Southern Inland and Dawo Pastoral Livelihood Zones (See Map 1). Other livelihood zones, however, have access to water from nearby rivers. Most pastoral herders have moved towards permanent water sources and the riverine areas of the Juba and Dawo rivers.

However, the water quality (color and taste) of Juba River, which is the main source of water for pastoralist in the region, has deteriorated to the point that the risk of an outbreak of water borne diseases is very high. In addition, parts of the river have dried up (See picture 1).

Bardera Case: Water shortages are severe in many hinterland areas of Bardera. The most affected areas are from Jungal to Gerileey (150 KM²) and from Bardera town to Ilbeeto. In these areas deaths related to thirst are being confirmed. The former government drilled boreholes in four sites, however, all produced hard water unfit for human and livestock consumption with exception of one borehole in Dhuumo-dheere 25 km from Gerileey. In these areas all water catchments have dried up as result of the drought. A few shallow wells are the only water points available in remote areas. Shallow wells are spread out over large distances that pastoralists can not easily trek with their animals. A pastoralist in Gerileey has to travel about 80 KM to reach the nearest water point in Bardera. If the rains fail to come in April the few remaining water points are expected to dry up, making the situation even worse.

Water available in the shallow wells is unfit for human and livestock consumption as these wells have become salty and contaminated.

Around 10 people died after they drank water from shallow wells in Indhoceel and Garsaal villages of Elwak district. Water trucking is the major source of water for pastoralists.

Pasture and grazing conditions

Dawo and Southern Inland Pastoral Livelihood Zones are good grazing areas especially during the dry seasons. However, two failed seasons have resulted in a considerable degradation in the pasture and grazing conditions in these areas. Overall, the grazing and browsing³ situation has deteriorated to the point that most animals are being fed either by hand or eating the palm leaf roofs of huts (see Picture 2 and 3). In some cases households are sharing their own food with their animals to keep them alive.

As a result of feeding animals hut roofs, the roofs are gone from some villages. The result is that the owners of the houses are essentially living outdoors and exposed to the elements. This practice is a last resort and many pastoralists are complaining that the palm leaves eaten by their animals are affecting their cattle's health.

Pictures 2 & 3: Cattle feeding on palm roofing and a hut with no roof left



Livestock conditions

Livestock body condition and productivity are significantly below normal (see Picture 4). The prices of cattle have reduced sharply as the drought has progressed. At present, one local cow in good condition sells for 800,000 Somali Shillings (S.SH) (USD70), compared to the normal price at this time of year of 1,800,000 S.SH⁴ (USD150). A goat in good condition fetches about 50,000 to 60,000 S.SH (USD5) at present, instead of 170,000 S.SH (USD14) normally.

³ The consumption by animals of tender shoots, twigs, and leaves of trees and shrubs

⁴ March 2002 is used as a reference point here.

However, there are rare cases where the prices of hand fed local quality goat are higher than normal.

The price of fresh camel's milk has reached the highest level ever recorded. One litter of fresh camels' milk costs 6,000 to 12,000 S.SH compared to 2,000 to 3000 S.SH normally, as a result of severely constricted milk supply due to drought. The shortage of milk and the lack of access to it because of

Picture 4: Poor cattle body condition



high prices is cause for serious concern, because milk is one of the most important sources of nutrition for the affected population, especially children. As a result of poor milk availability and access, combined with the other effects of the drought and an extremely poor underlying nutritional situation, malnutrition in the region has increased to dangerous levels – especially for children under five years old and the elderly.

Livestock mortality rates are very high. Table 1 below provides estimates of livestock mortality, based on the assessment data, for the most affected species. The lower range of mortality rates were found in north Gedo, while the upper range was found in southern Gedo. Northern Gedo faces a long-term humanitarian emergency; thus, herders have adapted to smaller herd size and developed better coping strategies compared to those in the south. Bardera, Burdubo, Elwak and Garbahareey Districts are the worst affected areas.

| Table 1: Estimated livestock mortality rates for Gedo Region, Somalia, for most affected species | |
|--|---|
| Animal Type | Estimated percentage mortality since mid-2005 |
| Cattle | 50% to 70% |
| Sheep | 40% to 50%, |
| Donkeys | 20% to 30% |
| Camels | 5% to 10% |

After two consecutive rain failures and the increasing severity of the drought, cattle pastoralists have migrated in huge number towards riverine areas alongside the Juba River including in the lower Juba Valley. As a result of this long trek, many cattle have perished on the road. In addition, pastoralists also incurred huge expenses to save the lives of the livestock.

Health and Nutrition situation

Health sector generally is supported by UNICEF and Gedo Health Consortium (GHC) in all districts of Gedo Region, with exception of Elwak and Bardera. No major outbreak of disease has been reported.

However, in remote areas, health services delivery is limited. Several cases of measles were reported in Bardera and Burdubo districts. A measles campaign is ongoing in all district of the region supported by GHC and UNICEF. The assessment found reports of high prevalence of diarrhoeal disease mainly attributed to poor sanitation.

Qualitative information collected from key informants and community elders interviewed in the Gedo region indicated high rates of mortality associated with the crisis. According to elders, 45 people (11 people between Bardera and Gerile, 9 people in Fanweyn, 6 people between Garbahareey and Caracase, 4 people in Dolow, 11 people in Luuq District, and 4 people in Burdubo) have been confirmed dead during the month of March due to drought related factors like lack of food and water, as result of distress migration (see Picture 5 - an man walking with small child to reach a village that received a small rain shower), waterborne diseases and malnutrition.

Picture 5: Family migrating in search of water



The preliminary results of the nutrition survey, conducted in parallel with this assessment, indicate a critical nutrition situation and as well as alarming crude and under five mortality rates. The assessed global acute malnutrition (weight for height <2z score or oedema) was **23.8 percent**, while the severe acute malnutrition (weight for height <-3 Z score or

oedema) was **3.7 percent**, indicating a severe nutrition situation. The crude mortality rate was assessed at **1.04 per 10,000 persons per day** and the under-five mortality rate at **2.46 per 10,000 persons per day** (see the FSAU Monthly Nutrition Update from March 2006 for more information)

Livelihood Strategies

The main food source for poor and middle income groups at present is food aid. This is followed by food gifts from better-off relatives and food purchased on credit. At the same time, poor and middle income groups are collecting and producing bush products (firewood, construction material, charcoal burning) to gain income as well as relying heavily on remittances from abroad.

Due to the extreme shortages of water, poor and middle income groups are spending between 80 and 90 percent of their income on non-food needs which predominantly consists of water, rather than the 30 to 40 percent of their income that the spend in normal times. This is clear indication of drastic reduction of non-staple expenditure and that food access is severely compromised in the region.

To cope with this extreme situation, households are employing the following response strategies:

- Reduction of meal frequency from 3+ to 1 to 2 meals per day;
- Reduction of quantity of food consumed per meal;
- Households have divided with the stronger members migrating in search of labor opportunities;
- Intensification of collection and production of bush products (firewood, charcoal burning, etc);
- Increased seeking of social and kinship support; and
- Reliance on food aid

Humanitarian Interventions

The World Food Programme (WFP), CARE International, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), African Muslim Agency (AMA), ZamZam Foundation, the Drought Relief Committee of the Mogadishu business community and Somalis in Diaspora are all implementing humanitarian interventions in Gedo.

WFP distributed food in Garbahareey and Burdubo during March, while CARE and ICRC distributed food aid in north Gedo and Bardera respectively.

ICRC also implemented a de-stocking or off-take program for 5,000 head of goats from drought affected herders and the meat from these animals was later distributed to affected households.

AMA opened 8 feeding centers in Bardera, Elwak, Garbahareey and Belet-Hawa and started water trucking in Garbahareey, Bula -Hawa and Dolow. They also distributed a one-time dry ration in the same districts.

The ZamZam Foundation distributed food aid comprised of rice and oil. While the Drought Relief Committee of Mogadishu provided 200,000 USD for water trucking and food distribution. Finally the Somalis in Diaspora implemented a cash relief distribution.

Despite these varied interventions, the needs of the affected populations have far exceeded the level of the humanitarian response has so far.

Future Outlook

The severity and the magnitude of the crisis will continue to intensifying until the *Gu* rains establish themselves. Given the severity of the crisis even if the 2006 *Gu* rains are normal, the population of the region will still need humanitarian assistance until August 2006. However, if the 2006 *Gu* season rains are below normal (as predicted by GHA Climate Outlook Forum) the population will face a humanitarian catastrophe with famine conditions emerging over the coming 6 months. Finally it is important to note that with the rains, the weakened human and animal population will be exposed to higher risks of morbidity.