



## BRIEFING PAPER

# Recommendations for addressing drought displacement in Ethiopia

### INTRODUCTION

Pastoral communities in the Doolo zone of the Somali region of Ethiopia refer to the 2015 to 2017 drought as Af-gudhiya, which means “nothing to put in your mouth”. The drought was the worst in living memory and triggered the displacement of more than 300,000 pastoralists in the eastern part of the Somali region.<sup>1</sup>

Such displacement occurs when pastoral livelihoods reach a critical threshold, below which pastoralism is unsustainable because of the death of livestock. As a result of Af-gudhiya, households lost up to 80 per cent of their livestock. Local authorities in the Doolo zone estimate that the proportion of pastoralists in the area decreased from around 80 per cent to 20 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Families were forced to move to peri-urban areas where they hoped to find clean water and humanitarian assistance. Once there, they became heavily reliant on that assistance.

Drought-related displacement affects more and more people, but it is not the only type of displacement Ethiopia faces. More than a million new displacements associated with conflict and violence were also recorded in 2019.<sup>3</sup> As aid must also be directed to people affected by inter-communal conflicts, humanitarian aid available to people displaced by drought has ended up being insufficient.

The humanitarian response in the Somali region is led by the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau in coordination with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the implementation of the humanitarian response plan and the humanitarian preparedness plan. The region is also home to the country’s most active Durable Solutions Working Group (DSWG), which includes the key bureaus for humanitarian response, as well as UN agencies and NGOs. The DSWG is led by the Somali Region’s disaster prevention bureau and coordinated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Implementing durable solutions in a scenario where humanitarian needs are still unmet is a challenge. Many stakeholders in Ethiopia continue to focus on responding to humanitarian emergencies and rarely support longer-term development efforts. At the national level, the Ethiopian government, in collaboration with the UN and NGOs, launched the first federal Durable Solutions Initiative (DSI) in December 2019.

In this context of increasing needs and the risk of future displacement associated with drought, as well as limited resources to support IDPs, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) took action. It engaged with key humanitarian actors in the Somali region of Ethiopia to try and identify recommendations to address the issue of durable solutions more efficiently. Building on a study conducted by IDMC in



*Workshop participants engaged in group discussions*

July 2019, a workshop was organized in December 2020 in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).<sup>4</sup> This note summarizes the key findings from that workshop.

Four challenges were discussed during the workshop and are analysed in the following sections:

1. Loss of livestock as a result of drought can make pastoralism unsustainable, leading to displacement;
2. People displaced by drought live in protracted displacement in temporary shelters, dependent on decreasing amounts of humanitarian assistance;
3. Loss of livestock and the ability to access services in host communities leads to a preference for local integration among IDPs, but there are few opportunities for self-reliance;
4. In areas experiencing water shortages, IDPs put pressure on overstretched water infrastructure, contributing to water insecurity.

## **CHALLENGE 1: LOSS OF LIVESTOCK BECAUSE OF DROUGHT**

### **| MAINTAIN LIVESTOCK AND SAFEGUARD PASTORALISM**

The study conducted by IDMC in 2019 focused on two camps for IDPs in the Somali region of Ethiopia: Gafow and Koracle.<sup>5</sup> Interviewed IDPs agreed that the 2015 to 2017 drought was the worst they could remember. Rangelands were still dry and degraded, while the availability of water for livestock and human consumption was limited. This resulted in smaller herds of livestock and insufficient access to food and incomes in pastoralist areas.

The pastoralist livelihood is based primarily on the production, sale and consumption of livestock and its products. This includes meat, milk and other dairy products, as well as hides. Nearly 94 per cent of households in Gafow and Koracle defined their lifestyle before the displacement as nomadic.<sup>6</sup> During the 2015 to 2017 drought, households lost up to 80 per cent of their livestock. There is no official figure for the number of animals that died during that event.

Efforts can be made to maintain livestock and safeguard pastoralism before households have to move into IDPs camps. Such initiatives focus on fodder production and improving the ability to grow and manage forage. Community-led initiatives are needed to find more collaborative solutions focused on crop production, with the support of local governments, in rural areas close to cities. Sustainable jobs in host areas must also be created, based on market assessments, animal fattening and the production of concentrate feed, as well as the introduction of cash-crop farming.

## **CHALLENGE 2: PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT AND AID DEPENDENCY**

### **| PROMOTE LOCAL INTEGRATION**

People displaced by drought in the Somali region are in protracted displacement, with scarce opportunities for self-reliance and local integration. A majority of households surveyed in Gafow and Koracle intend to remain in their peri-urban host community, predominantly to remain close to their families and places of origin.<sup>7</sup> This means that there is generally peaceful coexistence between IDPs and the host community.



*The workshop participants*

IDPs also pursue local integration because they have better access to food, economic opportunities and services in the urban areas where they have found refuge. Having lost their livestock in the drought, they have no reason to return to their former, semi-nomadic lifestyle, which focused on moving with their animals to find better pasture and water.

Local integration is a situation where former IDPs, based on a voluntary and informed decision, have achieved a safe, dignified and sustainable integration in the location to which they were displaced. Those who do not meet these criteria should still be considered as IDPs.

IDPs were asked what they would need to locally integrate. The most common responses were job creation, vocational training, livestock and cash.<sup>8</sup> Others emphasised the importance of education, health, clean water, latrines, accommodation, blankets and mosquito nets.

Interventions based on local integration cannot be limited to humanitarian aid, but must look beyond it to longer-term development and livelihoods recovery. Regionally coordinated programmes oriented around income-generating activities should be introduced, focusing mainly on livelihood support, small-scale trading, vocational training and skill and capacity building based on market demand. Many displaced pastoralists arriving at IDP sites have never made a living without livestock. They find it difficult or impossible to survive on their alternative sources of earning and depend on support from NGOs and family members to make ends meet.

Livelihood options combining agriculture and livestock as well as small business ventures seem to be the most promising

means of supporting IDPs' local integration. Building local capacities and resilient livelihoods is at the heart of durable solutions initiatives. It is also a fundamental demand of IDPs. Improving access to local markets and to market projects oriented around early recovery is also important.

Further research could try to identify skill gaps and individualised solutions, such as vocational training, the provision of start-up capital, and the enhancement of social protection benefits, such as the productive safety net programme, launched in 2005, is a policy initiative by government and donors to shift millions of chronically food-insecure rural people from recurrent emergency food aid to a more secure and predictable, and largely cash-based, form of social protection.<sup>9</sup> A number of activities have already been successful. These include training in entrepreneurship for female heads of households so they can set up small- and medium-sized businesses, start-up grants, the establishment of communal farms where agro-pastoralists can plant cash crops, the re-establishment of pastoralist livelihoods through the provision of goats and other livestock, and vocational skills workshops.

Some interventions could be also based on food or cash incentives to build resilient community assets such as roads, marketplaces and water and sanitation systems. These incentives could also support community-based rehabilitation or construction of permanent and safe shelters, one of the priorities for IDPs displaced by drought. Such approaches to rural income generation and community infrastructure are common for development programmes, but they can be useful for actors addressing internal displacement.



*Group discussion on agreed-upon solutions*

## **CHALLENGE 3: FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-RELIANCE IN THE HOST COMMUNITIES**

### **| IMPROVING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES**

Peri-urban host communities such as Warder are characterised by pre-existing and precarious socio-economic conditions. These include chronic malnutrition, limited access to basic social services and economic infrastructure, poor livelihood opportunities and a diminishing natural resource base. Consecutive years of drought and a profound nutrition crisis have accentuated the hardships faced by the region's population, severely depleting communities' coping mechanisms and resilience at a time when they are most needed.

More than 50 per cent of the displaced households surveyed were living in emergency, temporary or poor-quality, makeshift shelters, made of old tarpaulins, old cloths and sticks.<sup>10</sup> In Gafow and Koracle, families are sheltering outside peri-urban Warder in small plots under the trees, sometimes sharing their living space with three or more households. More than 90 per cent of households said they lived in a makeshift shelter made of plastic sheeting. These shelters fall significantly below Sphere standards and offer a limited defence against the elements. Poor shelters also leave inhabitants vulnerable to a variety of protection concerns, including gender-based violence, child abuse and psychosocial distress.

Improving basic services for both IDPs and host communities is a priority in promoting social cohesion. The construction of environmentally friendly and sustainable community spaces could encourage communities to meet and make joint decisions.

## **CHALLENGE 4: PRESSURE ON OVERSTRETCHED WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **| CREATE WATER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES**

In some parts of the Somali region, rains were reported to have fallen unevenly and to have been significantly below normal levels, while certain places were dry. Some areas received only one or two days of rain, dramatically affecting the availability of surface water and groundwater for human and livestock consumption. Most water sources consist of natural and artificial ponds, boreholes and hand-dug wells.

Most of the population (95 per cent) depend on these seasonal berkas.<sup>11</sup> At least 184,000 people in Doolo zone require water trucked in on an emergency basis. The water that is available is very salty and unfit for human consumption, and the large numbers of IDPs hosted in Doolo zone are putting pressure on already overstretched water infrastructure. Twenty-four per cent of the camps for IDPs report that there is less than five litres of water per person per day. The main sources of

drinking water in Gafow and Koracle are public water taps, boreholes and water trucks. The situation is better in Gafow than Koracle, which is suffering from a serious water shortage.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the recommendations discussed in challenge one, developing facilities that permit water harvesting, like the Hafir dam, is key. It would allow for climate-smart agriculture based on effective water management.

Strengthening the capacity of the water management committees so they can better oversee water resources is also important. Permanent water systems that benefit both IDPs and host communities must be established. Most importantly, existing ones must be regularly maintained and rehabilitated. Extra resources from multiple donors also should be allocated for drilling additional boreholes at IDP sites, for rehabilitating and expanding existing sources of water, improving water distributions systems with multiple water points, and the better coordination of the committees.

## CONCLUSION

Pastoralists displaced by the 2017 drought in the Somali region of Ethiopia are aiming to integrate locally in woredas such as Warder and Kebridahar. In this process, the recovery of previous livelihoods or the generation of new ones has emerged as the cornerstone on which to build the future. The Somali region's Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau, UN agencies and NGOs all have a role to play.

In addition to the recommendations presented in this paper, there is a need for an improved understanding of how displacement occurs as a result of droughts, the risks of future displacement and the principal impacts on affected people, the region and the country. More data is collected on this issue every year, but major knowledge gaps remain. The actual number of people displaced by drought is still unknown, and estimates of future displacement risk are incomplete. The consequences of displacement on IDPs' and host communities' livelihoods, health, security, education, housing conditions and social life, as well as on the environment, must be measured more systematically to inform more comprehensive responses. In the effort to achieve sustainable and effective local integration of IDPs, more analysis of community priorities, needs and capacities is also required, as well as research to determine which projects are most effective in bridging the artificial gap between humanitarian aid and development.

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 2 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 3 IDMC, [Country profile : Ethiopia](#), 2020.
- 4 The workshop held in December 2020 to discuss the findings of this study and identify a way forward was organised jointly with the Norwegian Refugee Council's Jigjiga Area Office. It was attended by representatives from the different levels of regional government, and by UN organizations, international NGOs and local NGOs operating in the region.
- 5 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 6 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 7 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 8 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019
- 9 ODI, [Productive Safety Net Programme \(PSNP\) Ethiopia](#), 2006
- 10 Shelter & NFI Cluster Ethiopia, 2019 Gu' Assessment Report: Somali Region, July 2019, p.5
- 11 2019 Gu Assessment Report, Somali Regional State Government, July 2019
- 12 IDMC, [Nothing to put in your mouth. Seeking durable solutions to drought displacement in Ethiopia](#), 2019

Cover photo: This family was displaced in 2017 by the drought and now they live in the Gaafaw IDP site, IDMC/2019.

Pablo Cortes Ferrandez  
Research Associate  
pablo.ferrandez@idmc.ch

IDMC  
NRC, 3 rue de Varembé  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
www.internal-displacement.org  
+41 22 552 3600  
info@idmc.ch