

## **SUCCESS STORY**

### **USAID/OFDA REBUILDS LIVELIHOODS IN SOMALI REGION**

People often struggle to survive in the drought-stricken area of Ethiopia's Somali Region. The majority of the people from Fik Zone in western Somali Region rely on livestock to meet their basic food and health needs. Approximately half of the population sells animals or milk and uses the money to pay for food, health services, and school fees. Others in Fik use the milk and meat from livestock to feed their families.

Just as the people rely on livestock for their well-being, the animals are dependant on adequate rainfall to replenish water sources, and to grow grasses and other types of animal fodder. However, in recent years, rainfall in Somali Region has been inadequate, resulting in dried up water sources and decreased pasture and animal fodder, leaving the livestock with insufficient food and water. Without enough to go around, animals in Fik grew thinner and began producing less milk. As a result, the value of the animals decreased, so the livestock owners received less income and often could not afford to pay for food and other necessities.



*A woman and her child care for animals purchased at a livestock product fair with SC/UK-provided vouchers (Courtesy of SC/UK).*

Insufficient food and water also caused the animals' immune systems to fail, leading to an increase in livestock diseases. In Somali Region, animal health services are difficult to find and often too expensive for livestock owners to afford. As a result, many sick animals went untreated. Compounding the situation, people in Fik started moving animals to other regions in search of food and water. The protracted traveling distances further weakened the livestock, leading to stress-induced miscarriages and low conception rates. With the animals unable to produce offspring, herd sizes began to decrease and the people of Fik had no means to replenish herds, which often takes an extended time and multiple seasons of sufficient rain. Since people in Fik rely on livestock to meet their basic needs, insufficient animal herds can leave them with inadequate coping mechanisms to overcome the next extended dry season.

As part of the overall response to agriculture and food security concerns in Ethiopia, USAID/OFDA supported a livelihoods protection program implemented by Save the Children/United Kingdom (SC/UK) in Fik Zone, Somali Region. The program benefited more than 155,000 people through activities designed to strengthen animal health, increase income for livestock owners, and help replenish livestock herds.

#### **STRENGTHENING ANIMAL HEALTH**

To help animals in Fik survive and to increase livestock production of meat and milk, SC/UK implemented an innovative system to improve the delivery of veterinary medicine, whereby families received vouchers they could exchange for livestock treatment. To ensure a high quality of service, SC/UK trained 136 community health workers to provide the livestock treatment and supplied them with basic veterinary kits. Due to the severity of the situation, and the possibility of another season of inadequate rainfall, SC/UK supplemented the community animal health care program with an emergency animal health campaign, which increased the number of animals provided with life-saving treatment. Overall, the SC/UK animal health activities treated more than 424,000 livestock for diseases.

Since insufficient food decreases an animals' ability to produce milk—which directly affects children's diets—SC/UK distributed food to 2,000 animals. As a result, 95 percent of the beneficiaries reported that their livestock produced an average of 1.015 additional liters of milk compared to production amounts before the program. Increased production allowed struggling families to provide milk for their children and, in some cases, it allowed families to sell the extra milk and use the money for food, health services, and school fees.

A pastoralist interviewed by SC/UK stated, “If the animal health campaigns were not undertaken, camels, sheep, and goats in this area would have died in big numbers... people here remember how well this intervention saved them.” Overall, the SC/UK activities improved animal health, increased the amount of meat and milk that animals produced, and improved the chances of survival when the animals contracted illnesses.

## REPLENISHING DEPLETED ASSETS

Since livestock owners could not sell their animals for enough money to buy food on the market, many people in Fik were forced to use the meat and milk from their animals to meet immediate food needs. As a result, the number of animals owned by poor households decreased significantly. At the same time, better-off families were forced to maintain excess animals because livestock prices had declined significantly or because insecurity and poor roads prevented them from reaching the market. To help poor families restock depleted livestock herds, and to allow better-off families to sell their animals, SC/UK held livestock product fairs throughout Fik. SC/UK provided vouchers to beneficiary families to purchase livestock or livestock products from local residents who needed to sell their animals. Following the transaction, the sellers took their vouchers to SC/UK's local area office to exchange for cash. The program provided buyers an opportunity to choose among different types of animals based on household preferences, and the sellers often injected the cash they received into the local economy, thereby benefiting the entire community. Approximately 3,500 vulnerable individuals benefited from 40 livestock product fairs held throughout the area.

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO INCOME

Outside of farming and livestock, communities in Fik have few sources of income. When crops and livestock are lost, pastoral communities largely depend on the market to purchase their food. However, during long periods of inadequate rainfall when animals become sick and are unable to produce enough milk and meat, people often have difficulty selling their livestock or livestock products and have few alternatives to make money.

To provide families in Fik with additional income that could be used to purchase food and other necessities, SC/UK implemented cash-for-work programs, which provided Fik residents with temporary employment and immediate access to cash, while also contributing to the community by building or restoring infrastructure, such as water sources and roads. SC/UK's cash-for-work program provided nearly 16,500 people with access to cash in return for labour and the program participants constructed and/or rehabilitated 55 water sources and four foot paths, benefiting nearly 119,000 people. According to SC/UK, Fik community members reported increased access to safe drinking water and women reported walking shorter distances to collect water.



*Local boys gather water from a well restored through SC/UK's cash-for-work program (Courtesy of SC/UK).*

By helping the people of Fik restore and preserve their livestock herds, which they rely on to meet their immediate food and health needs, USAID/OFDA and SC/UK strengthened the local communities' ability to sustain themselves during the drought and overcome the next extended dry season.