

WFP Lorries Looted in Kuron

10 - 11.04.2017

Observations, reflections and photos by Per Nordmark

The areas around Kuron, all the way up from Kapoeta is at present dry. There has been some rain in some parts, and some cultivation is done. Certain fields have germinated well, others are pending. However, the rainfall is random, and crops seem to fail in some areas after germinating.

Last year's harvest was poor, and the food situation is poor. One positive factor is that rainfall in the hills around Kuron has been sufficient for the grass to grow, and it seems the animals are feeding well in these areas. On a survey to a couple of small cattle kraals near Kuron some sorghum as food as seen in one kraal, however the other was without, and depending on milk and blood alone.

At the Fr. Haumann Clinic at Matara Dr. Thomas describe the situation as dramatic when it comes to food situation. This he could tell from his consultations, and based on information he gets from the patients. He expect the local population to be desperate in need of food.



A meal in a cattle kraal when there are grass for the cows, and some sorghum available.

The harvest of 2017 will depend on the climate conditions; the amount of rainfall and periods of dry spell. Even with good conditions the food will not be available in 3 - 4 months.

The food production of these areas seems at present to be affected by climate change, as rainy season and rainfall is more unstable and

unreliable than before. Rainfall is coming at unusual times, and dry spells are coming within the traditional rainy season.

A young Toposa women, walking 3 days one way to the clinic in Matara, Kuorn.

The Toposa lifestyle is in accordance with the harsh living condition of the area, as semi nomads with animals and simple and limited agriculture. Focus is greatly on covering the most basic needs to be able to survive, and the most important of all is food. The lifestyle and traditions does not allow any major safety precautions like public or commercial stores of food items, - food which might be used during difficult periods or emergencies.

The Toposa people are not educated; 98% are illiterate. They have therefor almost no knowledge of how the greater community with authorities, institutions, organisations, responsibilities and rules and regulations are organised. This is to be considered as background for the looting which happened in Kuorn.





The lorry which was looted for 20 tons of sorghum, and the waybill of the other.

The incident happened as two commercial trucks, hired by World Food Program to transport food from Kapoeta to Boma for distribution of food in Boma. One lorry with a chapel was loaded with 20 tons of sorghum, the other carried 12 tons. They arrived at Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron after dark, around 9 pm on 10th april, and were allowed to park inside the first gate of Peace Village of safety reasons. They would spend the night in Kuorn, and proceed to Boma the next morning.

Information that these lorries were transporting sorghum/food must have spread rapidly and widely. Soon after the arrival people start to gather in the road outside the gate. Soon after a Peace Village Toyota land cruiser arrived from Kapoeta and reported that many people were on the way from distant areas, all up to Namorupus (30km). The probability of looting was obvious and increasing.

As the crowd grew, and the tension increased, staff from Peace Village started talking to the men. Outside the gate, with the men in front, and the women a bit behind Fr. Gabriel with Johnson as interpreter was leading discussions which went on for three hours. The elders were willing to wait till the next morning, and then do a controlled distribution. However, the young men did not agree and started climbing and breaking down the fence. Then the open lorry was looted, and after that also the lorry with a chapel, - after braking the lock of the door.

When the crowd broke in the personnel of the lorries, and the two watchmen of Peace Village all searched refuge behind the second gate, the gate to the offices. None of the Toposa tried to enter this gate. Still people were frightened due to the great mob.

No guns were fired, no people hurt, and only the sorghum/the food was stolen (+ one saucepan!). However, there were a lot of quarrelling among the Toposa, and fighting among them over the sorghum, fighting with sticks. It was a night of full moon. Throughout the night there were a lot of noise and shouting, - this were building up from around 10 pm, and not until around 6 am it was again quiet. It is estimated that at least 2000 persons took part in the looting, - this of course is impossible to know exactly. All the 32 tons of sorghum was gone. The Toposa only came for the food.

This incident showed however to be only face one, of looting. There came a face two.

The remaining of the WFP convoy, which was delayed due to some breakdown of one of the 5 lorries, arrived the next morning, Tuesday 11. April at around 9 am. These lorries were also loaded with Sorghum and heading for Boma.

Immediately at their arrival the Toposa started again to gather, and also locating groups on the road ahead of the lorries.



The 5 lorry WFP convoy arrives, and Toposa are quickly coming in to Kuron

Conflict between the tribes

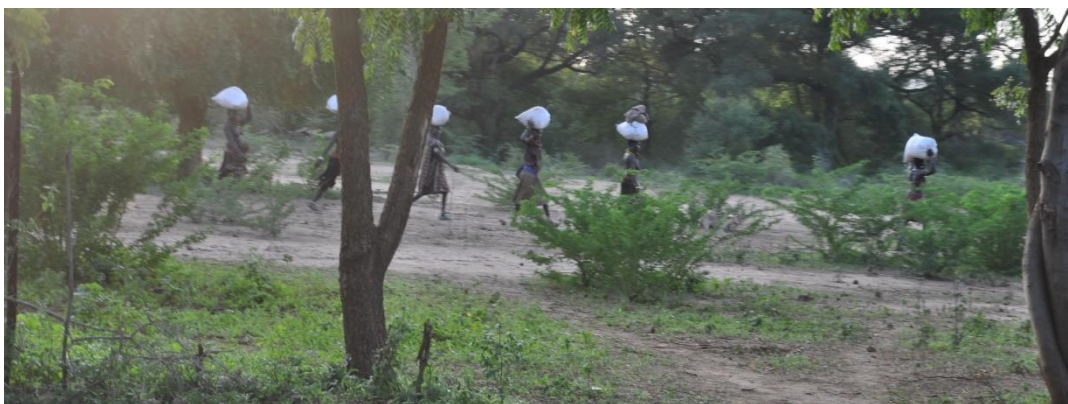
This year there have been several incidents of raiding of cattle, first some incidents where Toposa raided cattle from Jie. Later a major clash between the two tribes, ending with Jie taking some 2000 cattle and a high number of sheep and goats. One Toposa child has also been taken by Jie this year.



Due to this tense situation between the tribes it was not expected that Toposa would allow food to be transported to Boma and the Jie. Peace Village field team were informed and convinced that the convoy certainly would be stopped on the way, if they proceeded. WFP evaluated the situation and found it was not recommended to proceed.

No government authorities are present in this area, and none were able to come and sort out the situation and solve the problems. The Toposa then looted the lorries on the road in Kuorn. All the

lorries were empty by 6 pm. The drivers then packed up and prepared to depart from Kapoeta at 2 am in the night.



Carrying home the looted sorghum

After the looting the atmosphere was relaxed, and the drivers and turnboys were in good mood when it was all over. No one was hurt or beaten. The target for the Toposa was all the time to secure food for survival. There were fighting between the Toposa over the food, and distribution was not fair and just. Still Toposa is known to share food among themselves when needed.

Lessons learnt could be:

- Food distribution should be better prepared, and local communities involved in advance.
- The current food situation and the traditions and culture of the involved tribes should be more carefully investigated considered.
- The tension between the tribes is strongly influencing the situation. This is an important issue which was overseen.
- Government should have been present, to prepare the food distribution and the transportation through the area



Drivers ready to return to Kapoeta