UNITED NATIONS

EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA (UN-EUE)

Despite a promising *belg* season, relief assistance is still required in pocket lowland areas of Hararghe

Assessment Mission: 9 to 17 April 2002

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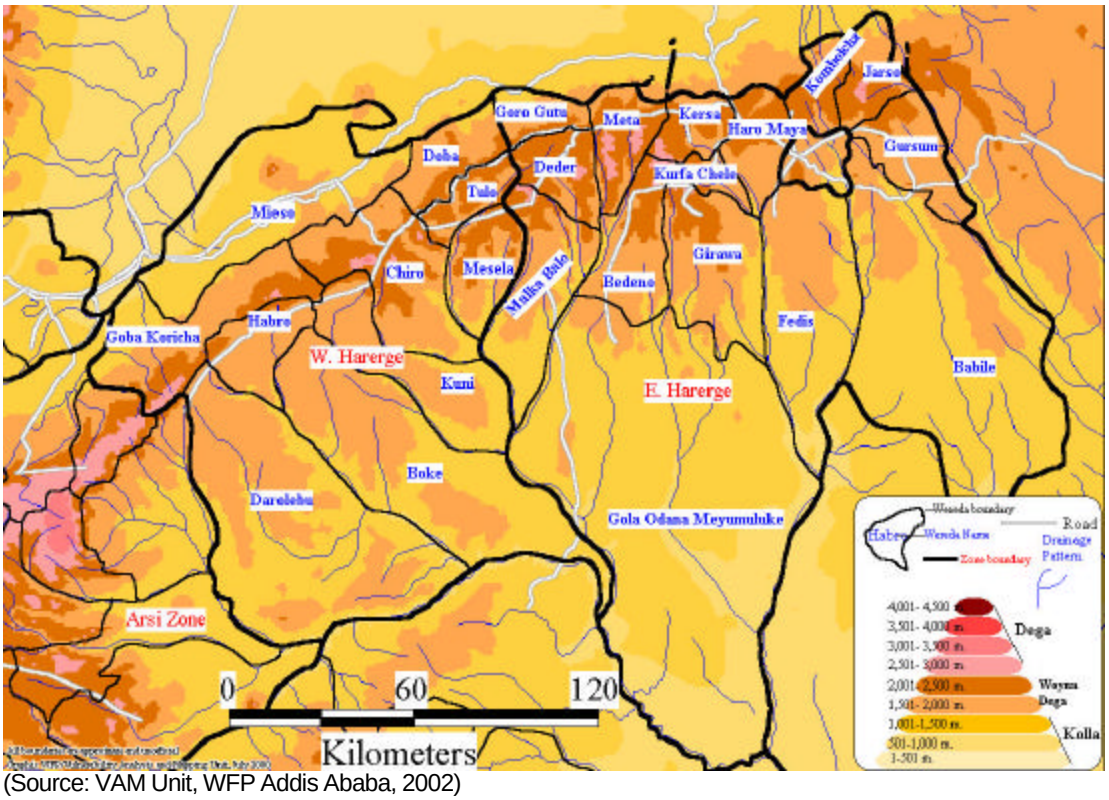
Introduction and background

The main geographical feature of east and west Hararghe zones is the Ahmar mountain range, with peaks of more than 3,000 meters stretching over 300 km from Awash town to just west of Jijiga in the east. The lowland areas of both zones stretch out in a southern direction towards the Somali plateau[1]. In Hararghe zone, living conditions and the means of generating income are defined by the altitude and its corresponding agro-climatic characteristics. Hararghe comprises three agro-climatic belts: the lowlands (Kolla), the midlands (Weyna Dega) and the highlands (Dega), covering approximately 35%, 40% and 25% of the surface area respectively. The area is irrigated through two periods of precipitation, the small belg season (March to June) and the main meher season (July to October). The population density of each area is also in direct relation to the altitude. The higher the altitude, the better the agricultural output and the higher the population density. The lower the altitude, the lower the agricultural output and the lower the population density.

In the Hararghe highlands farmers have developed a cash crop based economy through the production of khat, often intercropped with pulses and cereals, mainly rain fed but also watered through irrigation schemes. Agricultural production (both cereals/pulses and cash crop/coffee) provides for the income basis of the midland population, with small numbers of livestock roaming. The livelihood system in the lowlands is agro-pastoral and pastoral, especially in the more remote lowlands south of the Ahmar mountain range.

During the last 5 years, Hararghe has registered rainfall shortages or early cessation of rains during the meher rainy season leading to repetitive poor or failed crop production. Poor agricultural outputs, exacerbated by the lack of pasture and animal deaths due to illnesses between 1998 and 2000, have contributed to a gradual depletion of assets and livestock herds in the lowlands and to a lesser extent in the midlands. During these 5 years, the level of destitution in the lowlands of Fedis, Babile and Gursum woredas has triggered a slow but regular trickle of people migrating permanently to more temperate living areas.

[1] Mieso and Dopa woredas are the only two woredas with extensive land surface at the northern side of the Ahmar mountain range.



(Source: VAM Unit, WFP Addis Ababa, 2002)

Objectives and methodology

In accordance with its regular monitoring activities, the UN-EUE undertook an assessment mission in east and west Hararghe zones of Oromiya Region from 9 to 17 April 2002. The objectives of the mission were to gather general information on the humanitarian situation in Hararghe, focusing particularly on food security, expected effects of the current belg rains, and population movements from the lowland areas.

The mission consulted primary and secondary sources to collect data related to the set objectives. During the field visit, the author conducted interviews with the DPPD in Harar and Asbe Teferi, the Department of Agriculture (DoA) offices and members of the community in the woredas visited. The mission also reviewed existing documents concerning east and west Hararghe as well as field visit reports by WFP Food Aid Monitors from the Dire Dawa Sub-Office.

Current rainfall and humanitarian situation

Precipitation in east and west Hararghe

The Departments of Agriculture (DoA) in all woredas visited during the mission that are Fedis, Gursum, Babile, Korfachale, Girawa, Alemaya, Kombolsha, Jarsoo, Boke, Bedeso and Mieso, reported rain showers starting in early March. Except for eastern Mieso reporting a few patchy showers, the other DoA's registered 5 to 6 days of showers in the lowland areas and 8 to 10 days in the mid- and highland areas between 3 March and 10 April. During that period, between 50 mm and 100 mm of precipitation was registered by the DoA's in the various woredas.

Since 10 April more important rains have occurred in both Hararghe zones enabling the replenishment of the many dams used for water collection and regeneration of pasture to provide for sufficient fodder and water necessary for the lowland areas. The members of the mission were also able to witness an unusual thunderstorm with very intense rainfall on the night of 11 to 12 April, with up to 85mm of precipitation registered in Jarsoo woreda. Such torrential rains can prove destructive and dangerous in the highland areas. The already poorly maintained road network leading to the more remote kebeles suffered further substantial damages preventing the mission from travelling to the lower areas in Jarsoo and Girawa woredas. Furthermore, the mission also witnessed irrigated crops being washed away and the destruction of the water supply system of the village of Dawe along the Gobele river (Fedis and Girawa woredas), due to the sudden water rise of up to 4 meters in the riverbed. Such excessive and violent rainfall does little for the irrigation of fields with water unable to percolate into the ground. Also, although water reservoirs are being replenished, the increased soil and dirt contained in the fast moving water destroys and increases silting in the many dams used for water retention. This material damage is of course very little compared to the loss of 22 lives, as reported by Reuters on 17 April, in Deder and Meta woredas in Hararghe.

Planting prospects and seed requirements

These rains have also enabled farmers from both low and highland areas to prepare and plough their fields for the meher season, which represent the bulk of the agricultural production in the area. Members of the mission predict limited belg crop production as only a few fields were planted in early March in some highland areas. These anticipated belg crops were often planted by intercropping between rows of khat bushes. Also, according to the DoA in Girawa, farmers in the highlands have planted 4,800 hectares of belg crops of maize (2,939 hectares), barley (1,818 hectares), and oats (65 hectares) to be harvested in June. These same fields and an additional 18,000 hectares will be planted with meher long cycle crops such as sorghum, maize, potatoes, beans, peas, and wheat, expected for harvest in November-December. In the higher fields in Boke and Bedesa woredas, west Hararghe, the mission observed farmers planting short cycle beans intercropped with long cycle maize and sorghum.

With all the fields ready to be planted, one unknown factor remains: the provision and timely availability of seeds. Few farmers have been able to set seeds aside from previous harvests. Local seed purchases remain difficult, supplies having to come from Harar or Dire Dawa. A form of solidarity mechanism amongst farmers sharing seeds from previous harvests exists, as in Boke Woreda west Hararghe, but in insufficient supply. Requests have been made by the woreda DoA's to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (DPPD) of the zone and forwarded to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB) of the Oromiya region. At present, east Hararghe DPPD has requested 7,000 quintals of various types of long cycle seeds for the meher season. The arrival of 400 to 500 quintals for Babile woreda supplied by Menschen für Menschen, a German NGO working in lowland areas of Haraghe, as well as 960 quintals of mixed varieties of seed for Girawa, Gorfachale and Bedeno woredas to be supplied by CARE Ethiopia has been confirmed by DPPB. The balance requirement of 5,600 quintals has not been pledged so far and is urgently required for the meher May planting period. In west Hararghe, the DPPD of Asbe Teferi requested 2,475 quintals of various varieties of seeds (maize, sorghum, beans, and barley) to provide 21,419 households with enough seed to plant 12,020 hectares in low and dry midland areas for the upcoming meher season. In both cases the DPPD were unaware of the status of the delivery of those seeds.

Food aid deliveries and distributions

As highlighted in the DPPC meher 2001 pre-harvest assessments, Hararghe is well known as a food deficit area. This is mainly due to a high and increasing population density in the higher areas leading to progressive land pressure and subsequent shrinking of individual landholdings, resulting in farmers progressively switching from staple food to cash crop production to improve their financial income from their farms (Klingele, 1998).

Income reduction coupled with serious depletion of assets due to consecutive poor harvests and the exhaustion of traditional coping mechanisms on top of chronic food insecurity problems have led DPPD of east and west Hararghe to request and plan food assistance between 6 and 9 months, depending on the vulnerability of the concerned woreda. Fedis, as the most vulnerable woreda, should benefit from 9 months of food aid (from January to September). Gursum, Babile, Girawa, Meyumuluke (east Hararghe), and Daro Lebu, Boke, and Kunni woredas (west Hararghe) should benefit from 8 months of food aid (from February to September), whereas all other woredas should begin to receive food aid as of March or April.

In Fedis woreda, the DPPC food aid allocation was delivered as of 10 March. Menschen für Menschen assisted with a one off distribution in January 2002 to provide for part of the January and February supply requirements. In the other woredas visited, DPPC food aid also began to be delivered to the respective warehouses in March. This is as per plan for the less vulnerable woredas, but with a few weeks delay for the most vulnerable and more lowland based woredas. In Gursum, the local administration started to receive parts of its first consignment of the year as of 18 March. Nevertheless, distributions had not yet occurred at the time of the visit, on 12 April 2002. Registration of beneficiaries was being finalized and the local administration was awaiting the full March consignment before initiating the distribution. As such, the first food aid distribution of the year had not yet started, further weakening the already precarious situation of the more vulnerable population groups (mainly the lowlanders), inducing them to sell more livestock to purchase food. In both Gursum and Babile woreda the mission witnessed people collecting and consuming available wild food plants[2]. In Babile woreda, Menschen für Menschen, in coordination with DPPB, will supply food aid for the 53,400 identified beneficiaries from April to December.

Instigated by the national food aid targeting guidelines, woreda administrations are encouraging food aid to be channelled through Employment Generation Schemes (EGS) and food for work projects. The majority of the visited woredas are already mobilizing food aid beneficiaries in order to participate in community work through EGS. However, beneficiaries expect immediate retribution once the work under EGS is finished. Previous cases of delivery delays have generated distrust, and beneficiaries will now only provide their time and labour once their modality of payment has been secured and has safely been stored in the warehouse of the woreda. This results in EGS projects being implemented at times when farmers should be working in their fields (March and April), instead of months when the farmers are more idle (January and February). For example in Girawa, where the 2001 meher pre-harvest assessment identified 42,900 persons requiring food assistance between February and September, the 536 metric tons allocated were delivered to the woreda between 9 and 20 March. However, on 29 March food distributions had not yet taken place, due to the failure of the woreda officials to supervise and approve the 11 EGS activity sites that were started on 4 March.

[2] In lowland areas of Hararghe, people are collecting and consuming available wild food plants in periods of food shortage. One of the main consumed plant is the fruit of a widely spread cactus species, Opuntia ficus-indica (Guinand, 2000).

Impact of food aid on market prices and the population's decision making process regarding migration

The two main issues influenced by the presence or absence of food aid in Hararghe is the fluctuation of market prices, and the time at which the most destitute lowland population groups decide to migrate permanently.

One of the most vulnerable areas in Hararghe is the southern lowland part of Fedis woreda, where the last favourable cereal crop production for this agro-pastoral community occurred 5 years ago. After having been compelled to sell large shares of their livestock herds, the population finds itself very much dependent on food aid. Since the start of the present distribution cycle in January[3], cereal prices have dropped as much as 40% from 150 to 90 ETB/quintal. In Babile woreda, where food aid was distributed in March instead of as planned in February, maize prices decreased from 80 to 60 ETB/quintal within a week. The reason for the price reduction was linked to the starting of food aid distributions in the woreda. In Girawa woreda, the market prices of cereals have been rising steadily by 20% since the 2001 meher harvest (December) from 80 ETB/quintal in January to 100 ETB/quintal at the end of March for maize, and from 90 to 110 ETB/quintal for sorghum. There, as well, with the delivery of food aid, prices returned to their original level of 80 ETB/quintal for cereals. In Jarsoo woreda, the prices for cereals in 2002 are 40% lower than last year at the same time (125 as compared to 200 ETB/quintal for sorghum, and 75 as compared to 140 ETB/quintal for maize). Jarsoo is situated along a contraband road going from Jijiga to Harar. Food aid has already been distributed in Jijiga zone since January 2002, resulting in beneficiaries bringing their food allocation by road for sale to Jarsoo.

When analysing cereal prices, one must remember that, since crops are usually kept for the farmers' own private consumption, and that the 2001 meher harvest failed due to an early end of the rainy season with sorghum not reaching maturity, market price reductions did not affect the local cereal producers.

As for livestock, mainly kept to generate income from the sale and for milk production, prices just before and at the time of the mission remained low[4]. The main reasons are (1) that Christians are the main meat consumers and prices drop during fasting period before the orthodox Eastern, (2) demand has diminished since the livestock ban of the Arabic peninsula began (¾ of the market was previously destined for export), (3) herders not yet having benefited from food aid still sell their remaining livestock to purchase the items necessary for their subsistence and (4) the local market absorption capacity remains weak. One must, however, note that in Gursum and Babile woredas the price of livestock had increased by 20 to 30% since early March with the return of Somali traders purchasing livestock for export to Yemen.

The period of food aid distribution interruption also coincides with the timing of stress migration of destitute lowland population groups. Already in 1998 the UN-EUE reported Oromos of east Hararghe migrating (see Ahrens, 1998b). Although this migratory trend has subsided, it has not been temporary, with a regular trickle of people originating from the lowland areas of east Hararghe migrating in search of more temperate living conditions. Data obtained through the DPPD office in Harar indicates that during these 4 years, from 1998 till today, complete families numbering 6,500 persons from Fedis, 4,700 persons from Babile and 4,000 persons from Gursum woredas have decided to move to more hospitable

[3] A family receives rations for up to 5 family members, if there are more members in a family, no additional food aid is given.

[4] Meat is a luxury item and is only eaten by farmers a few times a year, as are chicken and eggs. The staple food remains maize porridge, maize and sorghum injera, sweet potatoes and soup.

areas. Although substantial, these numbers become even more impressive when compared to the number of population requiring close food security monitoring[5]. Such comparison suggests that 40%, 30% and 15% of the most vulnerable groups of people of Fedis, Babile and Gursum woredas respectively have migrated.

The mission further received confirmation that in 2002 this stress out-migration flow had still not been stemmed. In Fedis woreda, out of 30 houses in the village of Murkule, 5 houses had been closed and whole families had left. In Gursum woreda, the village of Bekaka counted 20 households out of which 6 had left in the previous months to Djibouti in search of better living conditions. In Babile, the woreda administration further confirmed recent out-migration from the more vulnerable lowland kebeles such as Berkele, Gemechu, Tulu Haro, Derer Arba, Anod, Erer, Sheikh Abdia, Sheikh Hussein, Aw Shariff, Efadin, Ibada, Nejata-Gemechu, Nejata-Salama, Bisi Dimo and Ramata-Salama.

The main reasons for migrating are the loss of livestock, food shortage and destitution[6]. From testimonies, the period of the year when stress migration occurs coincides with the 3 or 4 months gap in the food distribution sequence. Lowlanders having lost their livestock and sold their holdings remain without means of survival and find themselves with no other solution than to seek and establish their livelihoods elsewhere.

The prime destination of destitute Oromo migrants from east Hararghe who speak Somali or who have ties with people already in the Somali region (mainly from Fedis, Babile and Gursum woredas) has, for the past 5 years, remained Jijiga zone, and in it the regional capital Jijiga and towns such as Hartesheik, Teferi Ber (75 km north east of Jijiga), or Shinaxa. Secondary destinations are also Djibouti, as well as Boorama and Hargeisa in Somaliland. Migrants who do not speak Somali or have no ties with the Somali region (mainly from Melka Belo and Gola Oda woredas) will seek other destinations, not often to the already overpopulated highland areas of Hararghe, but mainly in Bale zone (Ahrens, 1998). For example, in Girawa woreda, the woreda administrator reported 300 to 400 families from 8 arid lowland kebeles (Haffee, Rako Kome, Rako Barzala, Jaffe Janeta, Arab Lidj, Jimma Biro, Madana Kurkuro, and Kufa Kaas) having permanently moved mainly to Bale zone. Migrants have not sought to move to Harar or Dire Dawa any longer since people are well aware of the lack of opportunities offered in those towns and the reluctance of the local authorities to see migrants settle in and around their cities. In 1999 and 2000, the local authorities systematically rounded up the migrants from lowland areas and provided transport to return them to their areas of origin. This policy has been maintained, as the mission received a report from the Kombolsha Woreda administration, where a group of 37 families that had moved out of Kombolsha woreda recently were repatriated by the Dire Dawa authorities.

Progressive intensification of cash crop production provides for daily labour opportunities

Progressive intensification of cash crop production (mainly khat but also coffee) is the main strategy used by farmers of Hararghe midland and parts of the highland areas, such as Alemaya, Kombolsha, or Deder woredas in east Hararghe, and Bedesa, Gelemso, Habro,

[5] Kebeles and people requiring close monitoring as per the 2001 meher crop pre-harvest assessment. In Fedis woreda 5,800 persons were categorized as requiring close monitoring, whereas the numbers are of 10,300 in Babile woreda, and 24,400 in Gursum woreda.

[6] For the livestock, during the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 meher seasons, rain failures provoked animal death. Furthermore, a series of Food and Mouth Disease (FMD) and sheepskin disease cases further increased the herd depletion of agro-pastoral and pastoral communities of the lowland areas. With un-clement conditions during the last 5 years, the low land population has not benefited of conditions enabling herd regeneration. Although presently, the health of the livestock is good and no main veterinary problems have been reported, people remain with either small herds or no herds at all.

Kuni or Daro Lebu woredas in west Hararghe, to break the vicious circle of impoverishment. Also, cash crop production provides opportunities for income generation for vulnerable households from the lowland areas, such as Fedis, Gursum, Babile and Korfachale Woredas, inducing temporary movements of those lowlanders seeking casual labour (Klingele, 1998).

However, the increasing number of destitute has also generated an increasing demand for casual labour, while work opportunities have stagnated. This has resulted in a reduction of daily wages offered. The wages reportedly dropped from between 5 and 10 ETB/day last year, to between 3 and 7 ETB/day this year, depending on the area and the nature of the labour required.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Food aid to enable livestock herds regeneration

The poor or failed cereal crop production, the lack of pasture and veterinary problems during the last 5 years in the mid dry and low land areas of Hararghe have strongly contributed to depleting livestock herds and assets of this mainly agro-pastoral and pastoral population. The meher 2001 harvest was not different with crops failing to reach maturity due to early end of the rain season. This extended period of hardship has induced some of the most destitute agro-pastoral people of Fedis, Babile and Gursum woredas to move permanently in search of better living conditions during December to March, a period when no food aid was provided. It is not food aid but rather the lack of it that appears to be the major reason the destitute decide to move to other areas. Even though no abnormal malnutrition status can be observed, a continuation of food assistance in the low and mid dry land areas of Hararghe remains necessary. One of the most effective ways of supporting the livestock economy during periods of stress is general food relief for the human population (Hogg, 1997). In this context food relief will reduce pressure on livestock herds by enabling pastoral and agro-pastoral groups to sell less livestock in order to subsist, providing for a better environment for herd regeneration.

Differentiate between high and lowland when targeting food aid beneficiaries

In highland and wet midland areas, farmers have resorted to concentrating their agricultural production on khat as a cash crop. Since Khat has to be consumed fresh and rapidly after picking, proximity of the production area to the main supply route, running west to east along the crest of the Ahmar mountain range, is necessary to ensure rapid delivery with an economically competitive transportation cost. Intercropping of cereals, potatoes, and pulses between the khat plants is also widely practiced. This all provides the inhabitants of highland and wet midland areas in Hararghe with a more clement agro-climatic environment than those living in the lowlands, a factor to be considered when planning food assistance.

Ensure the timely availability of seeds for the meher planting season

As explained above, although both east and west Hararghe DPPD offices have requested assistance in seed supply for the meher-planting season, a shortfall remains. Availability of the necessary seeds by early May is paramount to provide the most vulnerable farmers an opportunity to improve, if only mildly, their destitute situation.

Improvement of the secondary road network

The lack or poor quality of the secondary road network prevents farmers from more remote woredas and areas from marketing their cash crop production at a competitive price and

merchants refusing to purchase the production from remote areas since that would excessively increase their costs. Amelioration of the secondary road network is paramount in providing those farmers any opportunity to extricate themselves from their subsistence economy.

The author wishes to express his gratitude to El Rashid Hammad, WFP Head of Sub-Office Dire Dawa, and Ato Getachew Haile and Said Mussa, WFP Food Aid Monitors Dire Dawa, for their kindness, inputs and patience in guiding the author around the east and west Hararghe zones.

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26 April 2002

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Annex

Abbreviations

CARE Ethiopia	Co-operative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
DoA	Department of Agriculture
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (Regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (Zonal level)
EFSR	Emergency Food Security Reserve
EGS	Employment Generation Schemes
ERS	Economic Reintegration Support
ETB	Ethiopian ETB
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
GFDRE	Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced People/Person
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
SC-US	Save the Children Fund United States
SC-UK	Save the Children Fund United Kingdom
SNRS	Somali National Regional State of Ethiopia
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Operations
USAID	United States Aid for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

Glossary

Meteorological Drought Defined

Drought is a period of insufficient water initiated by reduced precipitation. The impacts of drought on crops and society are critical but not easily quantified. The result is that "drought" does not have a universal definition. "Meteorological drought" is defined as a sustained period of deficient precipitation with a low frequency of occurrence. While crops may be damaged by lack of precipitation and high temperatures in just a few days, such short periods are not considered to be meteorological droughts. A three-month period is defined by the American Meteorological Society to be the shortest period that can be defined as a drought. (Source: *The American Meteorological Society*)

Ethiopia's *Kiremt* or *Meher* Rains Defined

Since Ethiopia is in the tropics, physical conditions and variations in altitude have resulted in a great diversity of climate, soil, and vegetation. Rainfall is seasonal, varying in amount, space, and time. There is a long and heavy summer rain, normally called the big rain or *kiremt*, which falls from June-September. It is followed by the *baga* hot, dry period from October through February. In some areas there are short and moderate spring rains in March and April known as the little rains or *belg*. These rainy periods correspond to Ethiopia's primary and secondary agricultural seasons, known as the *meher* and *belg*. (Source: *FEWS*)

Ethiopia's *Belg* Rains Defined

In spring, a strong cyclonic centre develops over Ethiopia and Sudan. Winds from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean highs are drawn towards this centre and blow across central and southern Ethiopia. These moist, easterly and southeasterly winds produce the main rain in southeastern Ethiopia and the little spring rains to the east central part of the northwestern highlands. The little rains of the highlands are known as *belg* rains, referring to the second most important sowing season of the region. (Source: *FEWS*)

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