

Kefa, the Cradle of Coffee - a Situation Report on the Western Zones of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State

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1. Introduction and Objective

In the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) the zones requiring close monitoring are primarily North Omo, South Omo and Konso. While the UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (EUE) conducted again this month an assessment mission to North Omo and Konso, another mission was carried out at the same time to the rarely visited western zones of the Region: Keficho-Shekicha with its capital Bonga (100 kilometres south-west of Jimma) and Bench-Maji with its capital Mizan Teferi (112 kilometres south-west of Bonga). All of Bench-Maji and parts Keficho-Shekicha used to belong to the former "Kefa Region", of which Jimma, now in Oromia Region, was the capital. As the name *Kefa* (sometimes also spelled *Kaffa*) indicates, the area represents the cradle of the coffee plant (of the highland variety "arabica"). Moreover, the area, enjoying an abundance of rainfall, is home to Ethiopia's most important reserves of rain forest. However, timber processing, fuel wood consumption and general population increases with growing demands for arable land have led to deforestation, the magnitude of which is currently being assessed by the Department of Agriculture in Mizan Teferi.

Although the survey area is traditionally not seen as being specifically vulnerable in terms of food security, some pocket areas in the lowlands of Bench-Maji zone do require monitoring. Therefore the mission was primarily focusing on the latter, gathering only some limited general information in Bonga.

While the objective of the mission was mainly to obtain a brief overall impression of the general conditions in the western parts of SNNPRS, research on food security at wereda level was hampered by the remoteness of scattered settlements and by the lack of accessibility. Moreover, in some southern parts of the survey area security of travellers is at risk due to occasional banditry.

Included in the mission's field observation programme was a visit to the Dimma Refugee Camp run by ARRA and financed by UNHCR, although since a restructuring of regional boundaries early last year, the site, connected to the nearest urban centre of Mizan Teferi by a 95 kilometre track road, is no longer part of SNNPRS but of Gambella Region.

2. Keficho-Shekicha Zone

Located in the north-western part of SNNPRS, Shekicha and Keficho were combined into one zone early last year, and the town of Bonga became the zonal capital, connected to Jimma by a good all-weather gravel road (100 kilometres, two hours driving time) crossing the Gojeb river, which forms the boundary between SNNPRS and Oromia Region. Keficho-Shekicha zone has eight weredas that, while being partly densely forested, are entirely dependent on agricultural and forestry activities. According to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (DPPD) in Bonga, the main food crops include *enset* (“false banana”) and maize, which are also the staple foods, as well as wheat and barley. Coffee and tea (there is a large tea plantation in Wishwish 15 kilometres west of Bonga) are the major cash crops exported to Addis Ababa and from there to the international markets.

Food production in this zone, which enjoys plenty of rainfall, is said to be sufficient to support the population of an estimated one million. While the majority of the population is composed of the ethnic groups of *Shekicha* and *Keficho* respectively, some Amharas, Oromos and Tigreans have also settled in the zone, particularly in urban areas. The cultures and languages (*Kaffigna*, *Shekigna*) of the two major groups are closely related, enhancing a peaceful coexistence with no ethnic problems. Equally, general security in the zone is described as being very reliable.

As pointed out by the DPPD, no food relief distribution has been necessary in recent years; currently, after last year’s good production, no people have been identified to be in need of assistance. The major problem the DPPD had to deal with last year were landslides, particularly during the June/July *kiremt* rains, which caused some crop losses and damage to property. In Menjeo wereda two people lost their lives due to landslides.

The zonal capital Bonga, being an important market centre (main market day is Saturday, with smaller markets held on Tuesdays and Thursdays), suffers from a lack of infrastructure. The town - and with it the zone - unlike the neighbouring zone of Bench-Maji, has no hospital but only a health centre, with health stations of limited capacity available in the weredas. While malaria, diarrhoea and other common diseases occur randomly, those patients requiring major medical assistance are referred to the nearest hospital in Jimma. The inadequate health facilities, as emphasised by the DPPD in Bonga, ought to be upgraded by building a hospital.

The modest infrastructure of Bonga is also reflected by the fact that no airfield is available and that the town’s generator usually provides electricity only at night. Clearly of major concern for Shekicha-Keficho, as well as for Bench-Maji, is the lack of a direct road link between the western zones of SNNPRS and the regional capital at Awasa. Virtually all road traffic between the two parts of the region has to go through Jimma and Addis Ababa, which means a trip of at least two days out of Bonga and up to three days out of Mizan Teferi. Fortunately, the problem is being dealt with.

Road Link with Sodo and Awasa under Construction

Both in Keficho-Shekicha and Bench-Maji area there is a lack of all-weather roads linking the weredas with the respective zonal capitals. Road access to the town of Maji is, according to local information, currently non-existent. The road linking Jimma with Bonga (100 kilometres), as stated above, is in good condition, as is the extension from Bonga in south-western direction to Mizan Teferi (112 kilometres, 2 hours 30 mins). From this main road there is a northbound connection with Tepi, Masha and Gore (the latter located on the Bedele - Gambella highway). Out of Mizan Teferi there is a westbound road going through the state

coffee plantation of Bebeke to the area of Gura Ferda, then turning south to the Dimma Refugee Camp, located near the Akobo river in the south-eastern part of Gambella region (95 kilometres from Mizan, two hours). The shortage of roads is, however, recognised by the government authorities and at least on the principal axes the problem is being addressed. For instance from Deri to Masha a 140 kilometres rural road development project is about to materialise. Of equal importance is a direct road link between the western zones with the regional capital Awasa. Currently the road eastbound out of Bonga goes only as far as Felege Selam. The link between Felege Selam in Keficho-Shekicha zone and Ameya in North Omo zone is missing. However, according to local information a project study to connect Felege Selam with Ameya is currently being undertaken.

Out of Jimma the mission explored the present road situation in the north-western area of North Omo zone, east of Ameya and Chida. From Jimma a good gravel road leads to Chida (80 kilometres, 1 hour and 45 minutes drive), where work on the construction of a new 73-kilometres-road to Waka commenced in October 1995. While the German company "Gauß Ingenieure" is the technical consultant, the Italian company "Salini Costruttori" is the contractor, having a base camp in Chida. The Chida-Waka-Road-Project, being financed by the Ethiopian Government and the African Development Bank at a cost of 93,325,438 Birr, was initially scheduled to be completed by 30 November 1997. But since heavy rainfall in the area was hampering the work, Italian experts in Chida estimate that it might take at least another year to complete the road up to Waka. Currently about 30 kilometres have been completed. However, further on it is possible with a good 4WD vehicle to continue traveling to Waka on the extremely difficult and narrow old road - although it is very time consuming and possible in the dry season only.

Under a second contract another team from Salini is working in the east on the new construction of the Sodo-Waka-Road (75 kilometres) hence aiming at providing an all-season-link between Ameya/Chida and Sodo/Awasa. With works in progress and the temporary bridge across the Omo river being usable (for vehicles up to 30 tons), it is now possible again to drive along this way, undertaking the stretches of old road in the dry season. The stretch between Sodo and the Omo river (45 kilometres) being completed, Waka is now reachable out of Sodo in three hours while it takes about five hours out of Jimma. We elaborate on this, because after a previous interruption only since October last year this link across the Omo river - one of the crucial infrastructure requirements of the western zones of SNNPRS - had become passable again.

3. Bench-Maji Zone

As with Shekicha and Keficho, the two zones of Bench and Maji have likewise been combined into one last year, with Mizan Teferi being the capital of the new zone. Unlike the neighbouring zone to the North, Bench-Maji has a rather heterogenic population of an estimated total of 400,000 living in the five weredas of Bench (predominantly sedentary lifestyle), Sheko (sedentary with the exception of Gura Ferda area), Meant (semi-sedentary), Dizi (semi-sedentary) and Surma (nomadic). Major ethnic groups include the indigenous tribes of *Bench*, *Sheko* (both culturally related to each other), *Meinit*, *Majenger*, *Shuro*, *Tama*, *Dizi*, *Surma* and *Bumi* (the latter immigrated from South Omo). While most groups appear to lead a peaceful life, the three last groups (mainly to be found in the southern lowlands of the zone) seem to be in confrontation to each other. It is said that the Dizi and Surma are traditionally involved in inter-ethnic conflict due to mutual cattle looting and that the Bumi are hostile to the Surma. The most original lifestyle is pursued by the Surma who as recently as 1994 underwent a drastic cultural change by adopting the habit of wearing clothes. As in

most peripheral areas of Ethiopia, the main urban centers have a significant number of inhabitants from the central highlands (Amharas, few Oromos and Tigreans). Among most indigenous groups paganism - or rather animism - is widespread, while the Protestant and Pentecostal churches have a significant number of followers. A minority of orthodox Christians and Muslims are also to be found.

As in the neighbouring zone in the north, agriculture is the main source of income. Main food crops - and staple foods - are maize, *godere* (Taro root), and *enset*, while sorghum, *teff*, wheat and barley are cultivated to a significant extent. Cattle, shoats and poultry are produced in limited numbers; nonetheless meat and milk are very much appreciated. The main cash crop is coffee which in 1996 had recorded a cultivated area of 18,911 hectares (of which 6,537 hectares belong to the state plantation in Bebeke, some 25 kilometres west of Mizan Teferi) with an estimated yield 5,460 tons (source: DoA). Other cash crops include fruits (bananas, pineapples, oranges) and spices (e.g. coriander and ginger). For the future a rubber tree plantation is planned (also in the Bebeke area).

According to the Department of Agriculture (DoA) the major crops in the zone had reached "little higher yields" in 1996 than in the two previous years. Maize, the most important crop, recorded last year a cultivated area of 19,268 hectares with an estimated yield of 18,752 tons, while sorghum was planted on 8,161 hectares (yield 6,820 tons) and *teff* on 3,012 hectares (yield 1,098 tons). The zone, having tropical rainfall patterns, usually records rain in every month to various extent (the high rainy season occurs in June, July and August, while the low rainy season takes place in November/December). Overall, last year's rains are described as having been "excessive" but it seems that the above average rainfall had no significant impact on major crops (stockborer infestation was kept under control) except in those areas where semi-sedentary population groups are pursuing traditional slash and burn agriculture methods. These ancient techniques were indeed hampered by the rains last year, resulting in production shortages in some areas. (Therefore, the DPPC is about to begin providing relief food aid to the population in need - see below.)

Another traditional source of income, the collection of wild honey in the forests, was similarly hampered since the rains led to a lower honey production (figures not available). Other problems mentioned by the DoA include Trypanosomiasis affecting cattle to a minor extent, tick related diseases affecting cattle and shoats and the lack of medicines and equipment to treat those animal diseases adequately. Moreover, farmers usually do not have the financial means to purchase pesticides.

With reference to the semi-sedentary groups and their slash and burn techniques, the DoA pointed out that a major educational task remains to be pursued: to convince people to settle permanently and modernise their agricultural techniques. But the fact that the temporary settlements are widely scattered around the zone and that there is, due to the shortage of rural roads, a significant lack of accessibility, make this educational programme very difficult.

A major problem in the zone, according to the DoA, is the continuing process of deforestation. According to the only data available, in 1992 Bench-Maji zone had a shrub and tree covered surface area of 377,929 hectares (which represents about 47 percent of the current total land area). No comparative figure is available showing the present forested area, but the DoA initiated an assessment to provide the needed data in order to establish the magnitude of deforestation which is, according to visual assessments, "very significant". The reasons for the fast progress of deforestation given by the DoA are: population increase, uncontrolled timber production and fuel wood cutting, and poor reforestation efforts (last year a reforestation programme grinded to a halt due to the lack of funding). Officials in

Mizan Teferi point out that as recently as ten years ago wildlife in the forests of Bench-Maji included big game such as elephants. Now virtually “nothing” is left.

DPPC to assist 6420 beneficiaries with relief food

As mentioned above, last year’s excessive rainfall had an impact on semi-sedentary population groups practising slash and burn agriculture. The Mizan Teferi Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department identified in the Gura Ferda area of Sheko wereda 6,420 people in need of food relief in eight kebeles. As a result of the rains these people, who had no livestock and no plough oxen, were not able to apply their traditional slash and burn techniques to cultivate maize and sorghum. Equally, their other source of generating food and income, that is collecting wild honey, was affected since the rains had reduced the wild honey production. At the time of the mission’s visit, the DPPD was prepared to start distribution of 3.3 tons sorghum to the affected population of two kebeles (Bibita and Quiqui, both in the surroundings of Biftu village, some 10 kilometres west of Bebekka). However, since the DPPD in Mizan has no trucks at its disposal, distribution will have to wait until individuals and private companies, asked for logistic support, provide the necessary means of transport. When and how the other six kebeles in need of relief support would be assisted was unsure at the time of the visit.

The DPPD, based on unconfirmed narrative reports, also expressed the possibility that in Surma wereda, located in the lowlands between the Omo river and the Sudan border, an unknown number of people may be in need of relief support. However, in order to verify the actual situation, the office, that does not even have a motorcycle, would have to conduct a helicopter survey into the area, which is not accessible by road.

Dimma Refugee Camp

Although due to the restructuring of regional boundaries the Dimma Refugee Camp is now part of Gambella Region, the mission included the site also in its field observation programme. The camp, located about 95 kilometres south-west of Mizan Teferi on the Akobo river and next to Fandiga town, has a certain impact on the economy and the movements of the people living in this remote area. Fandiga, a town of some 2000 regular dwellers (highlander merchants) mainly catering to the needs and trade interests of goldminers (golddust is panned at some rivers in the area), serves as a transit and market town for Surma people traveling on foot from south Maji in direction to Mizan. This frontier town, which at peak times might house up to 5000 people including the temporary transit visitors, caters as well to the inhabitants of Dimma Refugee Camp, where income generating activities (weaving, leather works, bamboo furniture production etc.) provide people some money to spend for personal needs in Fandiga.

At the time of the visit (15 January), the camp had a population of 12,500 the vast majority of whom are Sudanese (from 29 different tribes with Nuer people making up 80.5 percent of the entire population), although a few Ugandans and Kenyans are also present. The camp is assisted by UNHCR, which has a field office in Mizan Teferi, and the implementing partners are led by the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA); WFP is in charge of regular food supply. Divided into ten villages (residents had built their own *tukuls*), the camp has a good infrastructure including a water supply system installed by Oxfam (also serving Fandiga town with potable water), a health centre, a vocational training centre and schools. The camp, initiated in 1986, was reopened in February 1992 after the change of government. No tensions between national inhabitants of the area and the camp-refugees were reported but security in the surroundings of the camp is a risk due to occasional activities of *shiftas*

(bandits). Traveling from Dimma back to Mizan Teferi, the UNDP/EUE - UNHCR convoy was escorted across the critical stretch of road by an army vehicle.

Health Coverage insufficient in Bench-Maji Zone

The zonal capital Mizan Teferi has clearly a better infrastructure than, for example, Bonga in the neighbouring zone of Keficho-Shekicha. Mizan, which was already an important regional centre during the times of Emperor Haile Selassie, had its services expanded under the former Derg government. The town, being the seat of an UNHCR Field Office and housing religious organisations such as Mekane Yesus and the Baptist Society for International Missionaries (SIM), nowadays enjoys 24 hour electricity, potable water services and nearby (7 kilometres) an airstrip in Aman. Located near the airstrip is also a well equipped 70-bed-hospital, which was built in 1989 and has now among other professional medical personnel eleven physicians and one surgical specialist. However, as pointed out by the zonal Department of Health (DoH), only a limited area of Bench-Maji zone is in the position to enjoy primary health care. As stated by the DoH, primary health care coverage in the weredas of Bench and Sheko is “almost 100 percent”, while it reaches “only 5 to 10 percent” in the weredas of Meant, Dizi and Surma. Although all weredas have at least health stations and some also have health centres, the reason given for the low health care coverage in Meant, Dizi and particularly Surma is mainly the lack of roads and means of transport. Remote locations are accessible by air only. Moreover, with Surma wereda for instance there is no radio communication available. As mentioned above, in some southern areas of the zone security risks are also hampering delivery of basic health services. Among the common diseases named by the DoH are malaria, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, TB, pneumonia and waterborn diseases.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Keficho-Shekicha and Bench-Maji, the western zones of SNNPRS, are traditionally not particularly vulnerable areas in terms of food security and susceptibility for natural disasters. Even the current, exceptional food shortage identified in a limited area is well taken care of by the DPPC in terms of relief food allocation. However, it is recommended that officials look into the possibilities of upgrading the logistics capacity (means of transport and distribution) of the DPPD in Mizan Teferi, which is currently not in the position to assess a suspected food shortage in the lowlands of Bench-Maji zone. It may also be useful for the central DPPC in Addis Ababa to consider helicopter support in order to carry out an assessment mission to that area.

In the forestry sector the endeavours of the local authorities to assess the actual magnitude of deforestation are highly appreciated. Moreover, new sources for funding a reforestation programme should be sought.

In the health sector it is recommended that the relevant authorities look into possibilities to build a hospital in Bonga for the zone of Keficho-Shekicha. Furthermore, ways should be found to upgrade the primary health coverage in the remote weredas of Bench-Maji zone - either by improving road connections or (e.g. in Surma wereda) by increasing the number of health stations.

Overall it is encouraging to note that one of the main infrastructure needs of the western zones, an all-season road link with the regional capital Awasa has been taken care of. With major road works in progress, it is now only a matter of time.

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