

FIELD TRIP REPORT TO NORTH SHEWA AND SOUTH WELO ZONES OF THE AMHARA REGIONAL STATE (REGION 3)

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Summary

A short mission was carried out to North Shewa and South Welo zones of the Amhara National Regional State between 10-15 February, 1997. The purpose of the mission was to obtain information regarding land preparation for the 1997 *belg*, and to review the general situation in these traditionally food deficit zones. During the field trip experts from various line departments were contacted, and the mission was able to obtain a broad overview of the current situation in the two zones.

According to zonal authorities in the Agriculture Departments, seed bed preparation has been completed in all *belg* dependent weredas of the two zones. A total area of about 120,000 hectares have been prepared in 12 weredas of North Shewa, while in South Welo about 81,000 hectares have been planned for the coming *belg* season.

In North Shewa zone it was reported that about 25% of the prepared land had been planted as the result of rains which occurred in early January this year, whilst in South Welo the area already planted is approximately 10%. During our visit planting has reportedly been discontinued due to the cessation of the early rains in all visited zones and weredas. According to local farmers, the start of the *belg* rains in January usually indicates prospects for an optimal season; however, rains as late as February are also favourable for land preparation and planting.

During the visit no major health problems were reported in the weredas visited, with the exception of several cases of measles reported in Woreilu and Tenta weredas in South Welo.

The *meher* post-harvest assessment conducted by the zonal technical team indicated the population requiring food assistance in the weredas of North Shewa (Gera Keya, Lalo Mama and Geshe Rabel) has increased by about 25% in comparison to the figure indicated in the Government December appeal for 1997. In South Welo, too, the population in need of relief interventions has increased by about 41% since the Disaster Prevention, Preparedness Commission's appeal was issued in mid-December. These figures are based on the results of post-harvest assessments conducted in late December 1996 and early January 1997 (Tables 1 and 2).

Food resources have so far been allocated on the basis of pre-harvest assessments conducted in October 1996 by the central DPPC in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture, Non-Governmental Organisations and UN agencies. However, food allocated to the weredas weredas has not been transported for prepositioning and distribution. This is primarily due to

the late preparation of relief plans at the wereda level and the delays in forwarding the plans to the zonal authorities for their compilation and subsequent forwarding to the DPPC.

According to the officials in the visited zones and weredas, post-harvest cereal prices vary from wereda to wereda and although stable in some areas, have shown an increase in several marketing centres.

North Shewa zone

Of the 17 weredas in the zone 12 are both *belg* and *meher* dependent. According to the zonal Department of Agriculture, about 120,000 hectares has been prepared for planting in the current *belg* season.

The main *belg* season crops in the zone are barley and wheat. Approximately 25% of the total planned area for this season was planted in early January 1997, when farmers took advantage of the few days of rain at the beginning of the year. However, discontinuation of these early rains is not an issue of concern at the present time, since its onset was reported to be earlier than normal and most farmers are still awaiting the seasonal start of the *belg* rains. According to the zonal Department of Agriculture, rainfall in the short season usually begins towards mid-February. The cultivation area may increase or decrease depending on the gradual progress of the *belg* season once it has fully commenced.

The 1996 *meher* crop production in the visited zones was reported to have been better than the previous year. However, three weredas located to the north of the zonal town of Debre Berhan (Gera Keya, Lalo Mama and Geshe Rabel) have been affected as a result of consecutive poor *belg* harvests and uneven distribution of rains in the preceding *meher* season. In 31 kebeles a total of 45,510 people have been registered to receive food assistance in 1997. This figure, in comparison with that of the central appeal document of December 1996, reflects a 24.9% increase.

No major health problems were reported in the zone at the time of the field visit.

South Welo Zone

Out of the total of 15 weredas 9 are reported to be *belg* dependent. According to the zonal Department of Agriculture, the *belg* rain usually start in February, during which time the main short cycle crops of barley, wheat, oats and pulses are planted. As indicated by the zonal authorities and experts in the visited *belg* dependent weredas (Tenta and Woreilu) of South Welo, a total area of 81,044 hectares is normally planned for annual *belg* cultivation, (the planned figure given here greatly depends on rainfall during the short rainy season). Land preparation for the 1997 *belg* season has been completed, covering the entire planned hectarge for this season. Moreover, farmers have taken advantage of the unexpected rainfall in January to plant 10 to 15% of the prepared land, and are still optimistic that, given favourable conditions prevail throughout the season, the remaining bulk of land will also be planted.

According to the zonal DPPD, the post-harvest 1996 *meher* crop assessment was conducted by the zonal Early Warning Committee towards end of December 1996. According to the results obtained from this assessment, the zonal authorities have established that 255,630 people will need food interventions to some extent this year. From this number, 178,940 are reported to have been seriously affected by adverse conditions in 1996 and will require assistance for 12 months starting January 1997, while the balance of 76,690 will require nine months of relief food aid, starting April 1997. As mentioned by the Department of Agriculture the post-harvest assessment figure has increased the beneficiary numbers by

73,830 in comparison to the figure reached by the DPPC (181,800) on the basis of the pre-harvest crop and food aid needs assessments of late October 1996. Furthermore, the zonal authorities have reported that the 173,790 quintals of food aid which has been allocated by the centre (on the basis of the pre-harvest crop assessment results), has not yet been transported to the zone.

Save the Children UK

The Save the Children Fund (UK) Nutritional Surveillance Programme team in Dessie recently carried out an assessment of the nutritional status of children under 5 during the post-harvest period.

According to the Dessie Save the Children NSP Technical Manager, the preliminary results of the survey will be ready in early March, following which the full report will be finalized and circulated among the relief community and counterparts. Further activities planned by the agency for the current year include about 3,500 tons of food allocated by SCF in support of development activities (soil and water conservation programmes) in eight weredas of North and South Welo, to be disbursed under the zonal Departments of Agriculture. For this purpose and also in support of other programmes in their operational area, SCK anticipate the donation of various types of tools and other inputs to support the planned activities. Funds for input purchase and administrative support costs are to be released as soon as a tripartite agreement is signed between SCF (UK), the regional Bureau of Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and the regional Bureau of Agricultural.

LWF/EECMY

On the basis of their integrated rural development partnership mandate, the Lutheran World Federation/Ethiopian Evangelical Church-Mekane Yesus have been operating in different weredas of South Welo zone for a number of years. According to a report obtained from their Dessie office, LWF/EECMY have been undertaking a number of development programmes in South Welo, including construction of schools, clinics, roads and the diversion of Mersa river for irrigation purposes. Under the current year's plan, LWF/EECMY expects to continue along the same lines, although an additional component of soil and water conservation, which is currently in its pilot phase in Tisabalima, has also been planned for 1997.

Tenta Wereda

Tenta wereda is located west of Dessie in South Welo zone, and has 29 kebeles. According to information obtained by the wereda authorities, 12 kebeles are reported to be both *meher* and *belg* dependent, while the remaining are primarily *meher* dependent.

Land preparation for this year's *belg* crops has been completed, and from the total planned area of 10,951 hectares about 15% was planted at the beginning of January, again taking advantage of the unexpected rains lasting about a week. The main *belg* crops in Tenta are wheat and barley, and the normal time for *belg* rainy season is usually the end of January. However, by the end of the visit on 15 February, the rains had not yet re-commenced.

According to the post-harvest assessment conducted by the zonal Early Warning Committee in collaboration with the wereda Department of Agriculture, the wereda has prioritized about 10,100 people for 12 months assistance starting January 1997. This population is said to be in need of relief interventions primarily as a result of the uneven distribution and early cessation of rainfall in the past *meher* season and pest infestations mainly in the midland and lowland areas.

As mentioned by a number of farmers visited during the field trip, the initial start of the *belg* rains in January is usually an indication of a good year, and a slightly late start of the season would not adversely affect planting and even if the rains fully start by mid-February farmers would be able to adequately continue agricultural activities.

Cereal prices in the wereda markets visited in South Welo zone are higher in comparison to prices this time last year. For instance, it was reported that a quintal of teff, which was sold for Birr 216 last year, is now sold for Birr 288.

Animal health is generally satisfactory and no major diseases were reported during the visit. However, the number of children infected with measles was reported to be a major problem and increasing cause for concern (according to the report of the Wereda Council from the total student population of 9,114 about 680 had stopped attending school as a result of the sickness.) Nonetheless, vaccine availability is good and no shortages have been reported.

Woreilu Wereda

From the 29 kebeles in the wereda 11 are reported to be *belg* dependent. In these weredas a total area of 5,117 hectares has been planned for this year's *belg* production. According to the wereda Department of Agriculture, land preparation has been completed and farmers are currently waiting the start of the rains for planting. The *belg* rains in the wereda usually begin in January; however, a slight delay in the start of the season will not immediately affect planting prospects and farmers normally have no cause for concern before the end of February.

As learnt from the experts in the wereda Department of Agriculture, market cereal prices have not decreased as expected in the period immediately following harvest, and have remained stable at their pre-harvest level.

The health situation in the wereda was reported to be generally good, although a shortage of medicinal supplies has been reported for some time.

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Table 1. Population in Need of Food Assistance in 1997(Based on the 1996/97 zonal *meher* post-harvest crop assessment)

Wereda	Affected Population					
	Highly Affected		Moderately Affected		Total Affected	
	Family head	Population (5 persons/ Family)	Family head	Population (5 persons/ Family)	Family head	Population (5 persons/ Family)
Tenta	2196	10980	940	4700	3136	15680
Mekedela	2489	12445	1067	5335	3556	17780
Legambo	1208	6040	517	2585	1725	8625
Woreilu	5600	28000	2400	12000	8000	40000
Kelala	2634	13170	1129	5645	3763	18815
Wegedi	2240	11200	960	4800	3200	16000
Debresina	2240	11200	960	4800	3200	16000
Sayent	2598	12990	1114	5570	3712	18560
Worebabo	3259	16295	1397	6985	4656	23280
Kalu	4447	22235	1906	9530	6353	31765
Dessie Zuria	1420	7100	609	3045	2029	10145
Kutaber	1632	8160	700	3500	2332	11660
Ambasel	3825	19125	1639	8195	5464	27320
Total	35788	178940	15338	76690	51126	255630

Table 2. Weredas and Populations Planned for Assistance and the Amount of Food Requirement

(Based on the a comparison of 1996 zonal DPPB and central DPPC *meher* pre-harvest crop assessment figures)

Wereda	Population in Need of Food Assistance		Amount of Food Allocated (in Quintals)
	Approved by Zone	Approved by Regional and Central DPPC	
Worebabo	23280	23300	21800
Sayent	11110	10100	9680
Mekedela	11640	10200	8370
Tenta	10175	10100	9620
Ambasel	20435	16300	15500
Woreilu	28745	38500	36950
Debresina	10525	9900	10070
Wegedi	10545	10000	9690
Kelala	16985	16400	16770
Kalu	31765	37000	35340
Kutaber	8090	-	-
Total :-	183295	181800	173790