



# Food aid is not development

**A system that intends to improve food security when done  
poorly, achieves the opposite**

Case studies from North and South Gondar

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*By Hugo Råmi, UN-Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia*

## 1 Introduction and background

Development in Ethiopia is a subject as diverse as the landscape of the country. What may work in one place may be a total failure in another. This report looks at different problems of different places in Gondar. Each woreda and each kebele has its specific problems. And each problem asks for specific solutions. One thing though all places have in common: With increasing population, the problems are mounting and the search for long-term solutions gets more and more difficult.

The North-eastern mountain ranges of Gondar are home to some of the last pockets of virgin forest and to the last niches that support indigenous wildlife in Northern Ethiopia. The extremely rare African Wild Ass lives here, as does the Leopard and the highly endangered Ethiopian wolf. But their days are numbered. The rugged highlands of both North and South Gondar are also home to some of the most inaccessible woredas in the country. Most of them are highly food



Pile of food aid in Janna Mora (Photo by Hugo Råmi, UN-EUE, May 2002)

insecure, with a large number of the population depending on food aid during many months of the year. While the food aid is delivered or – as we will see in this report – often is not, the number of people grows steadily, and with it food insecurity. Once fertile soils are depleted, overgrazed, eroded and washed away. Watersheds are deforested and green valleys burned down, left barren and cut open by deep gullies. The high plains are overpopulated with people and large herds of

livestock, and the pressure of uncontrolled population growth is driving the peasants ever higher into the mountains and ever deeper into the remaining strongholds of nature and wildlife. The last remnants of an entire ecosystem are disappearing and what replaces them are thousands of kilometres of stone bunds, built by unmotivated peasants through food aid, and infested with millions of rats that eat the often too meagre harvests (see box entitled 'Rats love stone bunds, farmers don't', p.7). Chronic food insecurity in most areas of Gondar is not a problem of drought but is man made. In response to this, food aid is used as a tool for development. Too often though it does not live up to its promise.

The purpose of the mission to North and South Gondar was to assess the food security situation in the Gondar Region before the onset of the *kiremt* rains which usually start by June and last until September, marking the Meher planting season. Many of the woredas in the two Zones of North and South Gondar survive only with food aid during this time of the year, when the last year's crops are consumed and the new ones are still growing. Some of the woredas actually produce enough food for only 4-5 months, theoretically depending on food aid since last February. This is not the only reason why special focus was given to the timeliness of food deliveries. Pre-positioning is essential in areas that are completely inaccessible by truck or even on foot, when rivers are swollen and roads are destroyed by torrential rains and buried by landslides during the rainy season. Findings



Empty grain stores in Belessa (Photo by Hugo Rami, UN-EUE, May 2002)

have been made that are not entirely new to the experts but nevertheless disturbing, because things seem not to change. Delays of food shipments are more the norm than the exception – this year shipments to all the woredas were at least two months late. And worse, some of the planned food allocations do not reach beneficiaries at all – partly due to these delays but also because of the opportunism of some of the involved actors. But if food aid does not arrive, coping mechanisms that are highly destructive come into action: Farmers are forced to deplete the environment even further, accelerating the pace of decreasing homemade food security and preparing the grounds for future disaster. Food aid that does not come in time or comes not at all has a negative impact on long-term food security!

The delay or lack of food shipments can have its positive aspects too: the population in the most vulnerable and unproductive areas is getting more open for change, in particular for permanent migration, which in effect may ease the pressure on the environment – provided of course that family planning is practised everywhere by everyone. Permanent migration though is only a valid option if the necessary resettlement program is in place and people do not end up as beggars in the streets of Addis Ababa and other urban centres of the country.

There are quite a number of programs and projects in the area trying to address the problem of food insecurity, most of them through the common mechanisms of Food For Work (FFW) and Employment Generation Schemes (EGS) and the traditional methods of soil and water

conservation through stone bunding and Eucalyptus plantations. Most of them do not deliver the envisioned results (Piguet & Rămi, 2002). But some projects offer new and alternative solutions that are noteworthy and discussed in this report.

## **2 Food Aid, that does not come, leads to more food insecurity!**

### **2.1 Onslaught on the forest in Adi Arkay and northern Beyeda**

By the beginning of June, all the warehouses were empty and the woreda officials feared that none of the promised cereal shipments would arrive. Rumours spread that the trading house that won the bidding for the cereal shipment to Adi Arkay woreda was not going to fulfil its commitment (see box “Opportunistic Traders Abuse Food Aid”, p.4). The money-minded decisions of the business people were affecting 33,900 beneficiaries from 15 kebeles that are drought affected and food insecure. The total food requirement lacking by June was 293.5 MT. Serious consequences are expected for the 10 eastern Adi Arkay kebeles and for all the beneficiaries of northern Beyeda in the Tekeze River Valley and the Simien Mountains. Northern Beyeda was to receive 105 MT before the rains started, but by June had got only 20 MT.

The distribution site for the mentioned problem areas is Fieloha in Tigray Region, up to five days walk from the settlements. During the rainy season swollen rivers make it impossible for the beneficiaries to pick up their rations. The results are hunger, malnutrition, sickness and the encroachment on natural resources for survival. By June the lack of food was already taking a heavy toll on the



Burnt forest near Adi Arkay (Photo by Hugo Rămi, UN-EJUE, May 2002)

environment – laying the grounds for future food insecurity. Along the road that leads from Debarq past the Simien Mountains National Park to Adi Arkay, vast tracts of indigenous forest are being cut down and cleared for the production of firewood and charcoal, which are sold openly along the road. EGS bunds within the area of the onslaught signal that the authorities have accepted the situation. Unfortunately, the fast disappearance of one of the last indigenous forests in Northern Ethiopia will not only have a negative impact on future food production, due to erosion, landslides and lack of water. It will also have dire consequences for the development of the still largely untapped tourism potential in the area around the Simien Mountains National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site. A dollar earning industry outside agriculture is destroyed before being properly developed.

### **2.2 42 trucks stuck for one month in Southern Beyeda and Janna Mora**

Last year’s harvest was insufficient and lasted only for 4-5 months, thus making food aid shipments vital for the survival of the population. Due to inaccessibility by truck, the southern part of Beyeda woreda receives food aid along the Debarq-Janna Mora road at Debelaras in Janna Mora woreda. This road has brought much progress to the area (see section 2.4 “The road to

## Opportunistic traders abuse food aid



Traders sell seeds on credit in Amba Giyorgis (Photo by Hugo Rami, UN-EUE, May 2002).

The EU agreed this year to finance the distribution of cereals (maize) for food aid on the local market, mainly in Gojam. The substantial infusion of cash into the market system was intended to help the national economy as a whole and in particular local cereal producers, who suffered from very low prices. It also wanted to make sure that the food, which was readily available on the local market, would arrive in time for pre-positioning in the most inaccessible woredas, before the rainy season. In June the rains make deliveries by road to these places practically impossible. The federal DPPC invited traders for bidding and issued tender-contracts for cereal deliveries to the following woredas: Janna Mora, Beyeda, Ibnat (North Gondar) and Lay Gayint and Simada (South Gondar). Unfortunately the exercise as intended failed to a large extent. The blame lies with the traders and their opportunistic behaviour. Instead of the fast and timely deliveries the DPPC had hoped for, traders delivered either too late or in the majority of cases not at all, putting their financial interest over the interest of the needy population. The DPPC at the regional and zonal level suspects the following: The traders bought the grains in Gojam at the very low price of 25-30 ETB per Quintal (=100kg) during the recent months of over supply. Instead of delivering the maize immediately, the traders then opted to sell the cereal again on the local market, where the prices in April and May had risen to up to 60 ETB per Quintal. Traders that default lose only a 10 percent deposit that they have to make when entering the contract, way below the profits that the traders could make with buying and selling on the local market. Many of the beneficiaries who have been working in EGS and FFW schemes since January were left empty handed until June and will probably end up hungry during the lean season! Trading companies that up to June 7 did not fulfil their commitments are: *Ambassel Trading House* (Muja, Semada woreda), *Nur Hussein Trading* (Ebnat woreda), *Zema Trade Industry* (Qualissa and Salamaya, Ebnat woreda, Wogeda and Adada, Semada woreda) *Burie Farmers Association* (Nefwas Mewcha, Lay Gayint woreda), *Hawas Agri Business* (Fieloha, Beyeda)

progress...”, p.5) but the beneficiaries from Beyeda still have to walk one to two days down and up the steep valley of the Muheha river to the distribution site. Although donkeys transport much of the load, many men and women habitually carry the heavy sacks on their shoulders. People without pack animals have to pay 50 percent of the grain load to the owners of donkeys for transport, which unfortunately deprives the most vulnerable of half of their food rations. Peasants dropping the cereals at their homes and then migrating in search for work to Humera and Tigray is a common phenomenon (see Guinand, 2001c).

Last year the rains made the road from Debark to Mekane Berhan in Janna Mora impassable and 42 trucks got stuck for a whole month at the ranger camp of the Simien Mountains National Park. This



made life even harder for the beneficiaries. The food recipients from Beyeda had to get their allocations at Chennek, which is an additional two days walk forth and back. The beneficiaries from Janna Mora in turn had to get their food rations further down the road at Debark, 100 km away and two days walk in each direction.

Debark itself had a storage problem for its own allocations, due to the late deliveries of food for Janna Mora which had to be stored in Debark warehouses. Most of the requirements for 33,900 beneficiaries in southern Beyeda and 66,000 beneficiaries in Janna Mora were delivered and distributed at the beginning of June, which is an improvement from last year. But the shipments came almost three months late, risking the same problem like the years



before. Late delivery of food aid to the distribution sites in Debelaras for Beyeda and Mekhane Berhan for Janna Mora is a recurring nuisance and needs to be addressed.

### **2.3 Cattle Smuggling**

Cattle and sheep are the most important source of income in the high regions above the grain-growing belt, and the sale of livestock is the most important coping mechanism during shortages of food (see Guinand, 2001c). Despite the decreased demand by the military in Tigray, which used to be a major buyer, livestock prices have been stable in the highlands over the last three years. According to the Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) in Mekane Berhan, most of the cattle and sheep are still herded to Tigray and many probably smuggled into Eritrea and Sudan, thus keeping up demand and prices. Indirect beneficiaries are the livestock owners in Janna Mora and Beyeda who can bridge the delays in food shipments with the sale of cattle and sheep.

### **2.4 The road to progress...**



Road to Janna Mora (Photo Hugo Råmi, UN-EUE, May 2002)

Mekane Berhan the main town of Janna Mora woreda is an excellent example for socio-economic progress that is brought about by the construction of a road. It was built less than three years ago by the Rural Road Authority and has made Janna Mora accessible for the first time in history by car and truck. Not only deliveries of food aid are made easier. The list of improvements within the last two years is impressive and reflects the economic impact of the new accessibility (see box “Better access, better life” on the following page).

#### **....brings Aids**

Unfortunately progress also has its price. The increase of business has attracted a growing number of destitute girls from the arid, denuded and malaria infested Janna Mora lowlands of the Tekeze River watershed. They prostitute themselves for a rate of between 3 ETB per short time and 10 ETB per night. Former Militias, which have been resettled in the town, said that they are suffering from HIV/AIDS. A sentinel study undertaken last year in the clinics of Bahir Dar, the regional capital reveals what the consequences can be. From all the pregnant women that visited the health care sites, 26 percent were HIV positive!

#### **...but not experience**

Another remarkable sign of newly found progress in Janna Mora are the ages of the leading government officials. Almost all of them including the woreda administrator are below 30 years old, constituting possibly the youngest woreda administration in the country. This can be a problem. All the seven staff of the new health centre, which was financed by the World Bank and built by the Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation and Development Fund (ESRDF), are below 25 and

were born in Janna Mora - the lack of know how and experience is obvious in the dirty and poorly managed institution. After building the road, building of capacity is important.

**...and leads to more destruction**



Farmers carving out fields in the Simien Mountains National Park, bottom left (Photo Hugo Rami, UN-EUE, May 2002)



and from Debarq to meant more human ment of the Simien st important tourist n the country. The thus cutting apart ed and endemic ibility also led to an human population eholds. According to the park management more than 11,000 people now live within the park and along its boundaries. Newly ploughed fields on former virgin land are witness to increased deforestation and illegal farming activity. The old fields in the lower areas are highly depleted and eroded and the opening up of new frontiers of fertile soil is very tempting for young, landless farmers. It is only a matter of time though until erosion, which has already created numerous gullies in the park, will have an irreparable effect on this extremely fragile biosphere. A rodent epidemic, which is the result of predator habitat destruction and the building of stone bunds, is already taking a heavy toll on the harvests in the area (see box next page).

In the high areas above the grain-growing belt large herds

**Better access, better life**

Before the construction of the road that connects Debarq with Janna Mora, only one NGO operated in the area, now seven do. Two new schools were constructed and the number of students has more than doubled from 4,000 to 10,000, resulting in an increase in the schooling rate from 13 to 22 percent. Teachers are now easier to find. They used to walk two days from Debarq. Now most of them live in the new housing development of about 50 iron-sheet covered buildings for government employees. The government service in general has become much more continuous and reliable and the number of public employees has increased from 200 to 300. The most recent novelty is a four-month old satellite telephone station for public use right beside the new administration building!



Even family planning is slowly starting - from zero to 6 percent of the targeted population within two years, according to the health officials.

The progress can be measured in nickels and dimes too: The taxes for civil servants increased from 90,242 ETB last year to 130,030 ETB this year (compiled) and the increase in sales taxes from traders is a hefty 50 percent. Almost all the business people UN-EUE spoke to felt an improvement in their businesses. The local tailor was all smiles, stating that the volume of his

of sheep and cattle are competing with the wildlife for grazing lands and destroying the thin herb and grass layer. Major problems for the park administration are also posed by the food distributions: Last year when 42 trucks got stuck in the park, the food handouts were made in Chennek, bringing thousands of hungry people from Beyeda and Janna Mora with their donkeys and horses inside the park, adding stress to the wildlife. The park management complains about delivery trucks driving at night, sometimes killing rare animals or driving them away with their noise.

The result of all this “development” is, that the new road that creates economic development leads to widespread ecological destruction as well, destroying the base of the

**Rats love stone bunds, farmers don't**

When one asks farmers in the highlands about the benefits of stone bunds, they get excited: “Rats! They hide between the stones, they eat our harvests and they multiply like crazy. The government must be insane,” a seventy year-old farmer shouted standing on his field in the Tekeze River watershed, two hours walk from Mekane Berhan. “People came and constructed stone bunds on my land without asking me. The government imposed them on us. Now they are infested with rodents and we cannot turn anymore with our oxen. The bunds did not help to increase our yield.” The old man used to own 10 ha of land. 14 years ago the government redistributed it to the landless and now he owns only 0.75 ha. Plot rotation stopped and land that formerly was left idle for one to two years to regenerate is now ploughed and planted year after year –of course the yields have decreased.

More than 20 years of stone bunding have led to an increase of the rodent population of epidemic proportions. Affected are all the Woyna Dega and Dega (mid- and highland) areas in North and South Gondar. In an area with newly erected stone bunds near Mekane Berhan, hordes of rats fled from our approaching car into the crevices of the structures that were originally designed to help the farmers. One of them claimed that the rats consume up to half of his harvest. But also to blame are the environmentally unsound practices of the farmers themselves. Due to deforestation and habitat destruction, almost no more predatory birds can be found. Wild dogs and another suspect - rat poison - decimated the Ethiopian wolf and fox, both of which are natural enemies of rodents.

Today, wherever you look along banded slopes, damage by cattle is widespread, walls are collapsing and nobody is repairing them. Farmers that see no benefits in bunds do not take care of them. For food aid connected with EGS, there is a lesson to be learned: Soil conservation that does not increase the fertility of the soil, does not work.

Pesticides combined with fertilizers, as some suggest, are no solution to the problem (see the failure of the agricultural extension package: Field trip to north and south Gondar, Pigué and Raemi, May 2002). But there might be a clean and cheap solution: vetiver grass. a biological rat deterrent. with many uses (s p. 14-15).



Habitat for millions of rodents



EGS- work on stone-bunds

agricultural based economy. More food insecurity may be the result in the long run. The new “food aid highway” also destroys the resources of eco-tourism, which is one of the few, if not the only dollar-earning industry in this part of Ethiopia and could be a long lasting source of income if managed in a sustainable way.

To solve the problem, steering committees have been created at woreda, zonal and regional level with the aim to resettle the people that now live inside the park. Farmers' reaction is mixed because the virgin soils of the park still guarantee high yields. Some of the park boundaries also need redemarkation because of disputes over land rights. Village conferences addressing these issues in three woredas (Beyeda, Janna Mora, Debark) have started.

For the road itself there are plans for rerouting, mainly in escarpment areas and in wildlife corridors. The realignment covers a stretch of 11,8 km and the cost is budgeted at 17 million ETB. But so far no money has been found.

### **2.5 Cattle high in demand, but not all of it**

**Debark**, the northernmost woreda of the highland plateau north of Gondar, reported no major problems this year. Food deliveries were several months late. But 100 MT carry-over stocks from last year could be distributed by the Organisation for Relief and Development in Amhara (ORDA) to the 28,000 beneficiaries of 16 kebeles. Originally the cereals were meant for Northern Beyeda (distribution site Fieloha) and Janna Mora but could not be shipped due to impassable roads as a result of bad weather and a delay in shipment in 2001. This resulted in hardship and stress particularly in the very remote areas of Northern Beyeda, which lacked food aid during the last lean season. In contrast, there was also an overlap last year of food aid in Debark between WFP and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC).



Emaciated cattle for sale in East Belessa (Photo H. Rami UN-EJE, May 2002)

oxen, which are sold to the urban centres for slaughter, fetched up to 2,500 ETB a piece. This new type of livestock business was initiated by the Austrian Development Cooperation, which has a very successful cattle-breeding program ongoing in North Gondar (see Box "Livestock: vast potential to be exploited" p.9).

Livestock prices are a reflection of the situation in Debark that is stable at the expense of the beneficiaries in Northern Beyeda. In May, prices for healthy cattle went up 10-15 percent. The main reason is increased demand - cattle are sold mainly to Fadaz in Tigray for a restocking program by TDA (Tigray Development Association). Rumour has it also here that large quantities of livestock are traded North across the border. Oxen for ploughing were highly wanted at the start of the planting season. They were mainly sold from farmer to farmer. Fattened



**Amba Giyorgis**, of Wegera woreda, a major cattle-trading centre stays in sharp contrast to Debarak and is proof of the diverse mechanisms that lead to an increase or decrease in cattle prices. Although only 80 km south of Debarak cattle prices here decreased during May by 10 percent or more. In Wegera, many of the cattle are moved from the medium high areas to the western lowlands for grazing after the beginning of the rains when fodder there is plentiful. This year the rains were delayed and the cattle could not be shifted. The animals lacked fodder, lost weight and became emaciated. In Kimfas Begela, a drought prone area, in the eastern part of Wegera, the situation was particularly serious and farmers found no buyers for their cattle even at low prices. Hay (cattle feed for ploughing oxen) was sold for the extremely high price of 10 ETB per bundle. There, as well as in the other parts of North Gondar, the prices of cereals increased by almost 30 percent during the past three months (wheat 130 ETB/100kg barley 135 ETB/100kg, white teff 160 ETB/100 kg) partly because food aid had not arrived by June and food became scarce.

### **2.6 Lack of seeds – Grain dealers taking advantage**

In all the woredas, a constant problem is the availability of seeds to poor farmers. In Debarak, CRS (Catholic Relief Services) is planning to distribute 20 MT of sorghum, maize and wheat to the poorest. Although seeds were in ample supply in local markets at the beginning of the planting season, poor farmers could hardly afford to buy. A major problem is also agricultural credits from previous seasons. Farmers who did not repay their debts receive no further credits from

### **Livestock: Vast potential to be exploited**

Ethiopia has a total livestock population of 32 million cattle, 13 million sheep, 10 million goats, 40 million horses and donkeys and 300 000 camel. These animals constitute a major income and in times of need an important source of money for subsistence farmers. A major problem, though, is the health and productivity of this vast resource. The government is in the process of building clinics even in remote areas, which improves the situation, but a problem remains the supply of medicines and a lack of know-how. The Integrated Livestock Development Project is a bilateral corporation funded by the Austrian government with projects in nine woredas in North Gondar. Its aim is to improve the health of the animals and increase their productivity. This has been achieved with remarkable success in the targeted area. 30 000 households are taking part in a program that includes education on animal husbandry, health, feeding and marketing. A crossbreeding program, the introduction of high yielding milk cows and production of animal fodder with developed forage seeds are main project components. The project maintains also a credit program with revolving funds that allows poor farmers to purchase livestock. Farmers that participated in the programme were able to increase milk production per cow to 10 litres a day which compares to only ½ litre from local cows fed by traditional grazing only. Milk processing cooperatives produce skimmed milk, cheese and butter, all of which create jobs and increase the income of participating households substantially. One good example is Lemlimitu, a small shop for dairy products in Debarak. The female owner started three years ago with a credit from a revolving fund (interest only 4 percent) and 2 crossbred cows that together produced 20 litres of milk. Now she owns 13 cows and sells a total of 150 litres at day for 2 ETB per litre. A portion of the milk she sells comes from surrounding farmers who sell their milk for 1.75 to the shop owner. One problem is the fasting season, which for 150 days/year does not allow orthodox Christian Ethiopians to consume animal products. Cheese and butter production helps to bridge this “lean” time for dairy producers because these products can be stored and sold after the fasting season.



Milk business kick-started by the Austrian Development Cooperation in Debarak (photo Hugo Rāmi, UN-EUE, May 2002)

ORDA and the Amhara Credit and Savings Association (ACSA). Lack of seeds is sometimes also a climatic problem. The local practice in Kimfas Begela is to sow sorghum during the dry season at the end of March and then wait for rain. Some rainfall in April caused the seeds to germinate, but this initial rainfall was followed by a dry spell that caused wilt and the plants died. Usually farmers would cope by re-sowing sorghum or teff. However, this year many could not buy seeds partly due to the depressed cattle market in their area. Like in other woredas of North and South Gondar, food rations did not arrive in time for the 35,500 Wegera beneficiaries, and in Kimfas Begela a number of school dropouts were reported, an indicator for food stress.

In Amba Giyorgis, grain dealers were taking advantage of the situation, selling seeds they bought in surplus producing areas on credit to farmers. Dealers who arrived with truckloads full of sorghum told us that farmers have to repay each 100/kg of seeds with 120/kg in harvested crop, amounting to 20 percent interest for four months, way above the rate of around 12 percent charged in commercial banks. Farmers in Amba Giyorgis transporting seeds on their donkeys confirmed this credit practice. They got credits from “rich people” at an interest of 20 percent for four months. Should their harvests fail, then their harvest will be split with the “rich” on a fifty-fifty basis for two consecutive years. The farmers also complained that they did not receive any cereals yet in exchange for EGS work.

## **2.7 Pilot project increases population growth**



**Dabat**, a relatively wealthy woreda bordering Debark in the south, is comprised of four urban and 25 rural kebeles, out of which nine with 8,900 beneficiaries are considered as food insecure. Temporary migration is a common coping mechanism here, and after the distribution of food, able-bodied male household members leave their homes in search for work, leaving elders, women and children behind. At the beginning of June, food rations were still not delivered and salaries for day labour were down to 3.5 ETB. Three eastern kebeles complained about serious food shortages. Two of them, Duramaia and Defie, were testing ground for a highly questionable EGS pilot program initiated by the BoA. The family size was the deciding parameter for the number of days one member of the family is allowed to work in the EGS scheme in exchange for food. A family of five is entitled to one worker, participating for 17 days per month during a period of four months, totalling 68 days. On top of that, each additional individual in a family entitles to five more working days for the four months, adding another 20 days. In other words:

Families of more than five received with every additional child disproportionately more food than families of five. This system, though well meant, rewards parents with more children and mocks efforts that are aimed at minimising family sizes.

## 2.8 Imminent crises

**East and West Belessa**, the two southernmost woredas of North Gondar, are the most arid, barren, drought prone and inhospitable woredas of the whole zone. Lack of water and fodder for animals is a constant problem in this desolate and deforested landscape. Torrential rains followed by drought destroyed most of the harvest last year and the number of beneficiaries more than doubled from 50,400 in 2001 to 107,351 this year. All of the kebeles are food insecure, producing just enough cereals, mainly sorghum, for 3 to 4 months, and almost the entire population is targeted by food aid. The distribution of food was scheduled to start by January and to last until October, but by June just one shipment had arrived (in April), which was enough for two months only. Random checks in the kebeles showed the following: The individual grain stores of the farmers were almost empty, the peasants were eating their seeds and the women complained that they were able to cook only one meal a day. Many people were sick. Of great concern are rampant eye diseases, leaving many people blind and adding to the population of beggars in the urban centres. Malaria is a main killer in the area towards the end of the rainy season and before the main harvest when people are weakest. Many people explained they would be forced to leave the area if food does not arrive soon.



Hundreds of school drop outs in Eastern Belessa (Photo by H. Rami, UN-EUE, May 2002)

The female teacher in a shanty type school building in Achikan kebele (population 4,000) reported a dropout of 110 out of 160 pupils within the last weeks of May alone. Migration of able-bodied family members usually starts at the beginning of the dry season until before Easter when they return to work their own fields. At the beginning of this year, though, people were informed that they would receive food aid (WFP via

DPPC and ORDA). This has delayed the normal migration until April, when

the first food shipment arrived, and created additional problems. The fieldwork in neighbouring woredas was almost completed and the chance to find work nearby became almost zero, forcing the migratory workforce to travel further away in search of jobs: Delays in food shipments can massively aggravate the food insecurity in certain areas!

Permanent migration now seems to be becoming an increasingly attractive option in Belessa, particularly for young men. A survey conducted by German Agro Action (GAA), which is active in the area with cash for work through the Food Security Unit, found that many families had already left permanently. A survey by the administration of Achika kebele showed that many people are willing to migrate for good. Many peasants, though, are still afraid of the

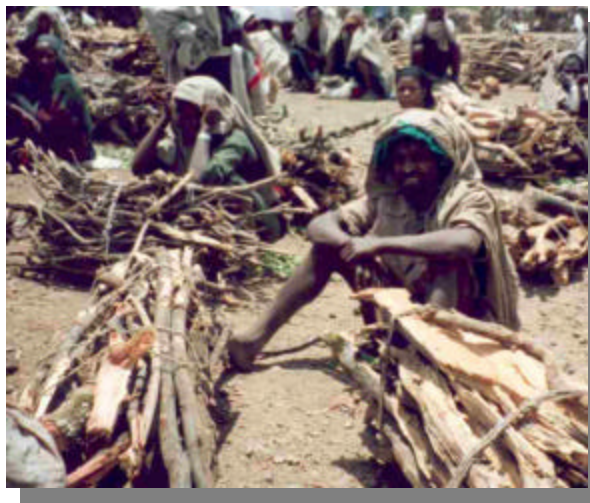


consequences. Some farmers reported that their sons, who left for Metamma and Humera, came back sick, got robbed or had to flee from conflicts.

## **2.9 Rock bottom prices and permanent migration**

**Ibnat**, the northernmost woreda of South Gondar Zone, has similar problems to those of its northern neighbour, Belessa. Drought is one of them: Nine to ten months every year are without rain. 27 kebeles with 67,000 beneficiaries were supposed to receive European Union (EU) financed food rations, good for three to nine months, depending on the degree of poverty. But until June, only 15 kebeles got supplies for one to two months. To cope with the food shortage, people in the lowlands started eating wild fruits and roots of wild plants. Very few areas are irrigated here and planted with cereals, potatoes, onion, sugar cane and some fruit trees. Although all the arable land of the woreda was ploughed by June and partly sowed with sorghum, no plants were visible. Seeds are a problem here and the EU wanted to distribute them through GAA in June. Many peasants had already flocked to Guhala, the main town of Ibnat in search for work or for some petty trade. Sliced eucalyptus poles sold at the market for the discount price of only 1-1.5 ETB. Housemaids received salaries of only 10 ETB per month plus food. And out of town salaries for day labour went down to as low as 1-2 ETB/day, all indicators of stress due to lack of food. Because of the shortage of fodder, big but skinny oxen were offered for only 800 ETB, and regular sized ones for just 500 ETB. But hardly anybody had the money to buy them. Petty traders reported that farmers' shoes made out of car tyres and spices for daily consumption, were a luxury now and difficult to sell. In remote towns like Qualissa, female family heads make a living by carrying water for 0.1 ETB per jar, earning less than one ETB a day. This is five to ten times less than what a prostitute in the same town earns a night.

The food stress in Ibnat is reflected in the health of the population. 60 percent of the children below three years of age, who were admitted to the clinic in Guhala, were below normal weight. Malaria is the number one disease, followed by pneumonia, internal, skin and eye diseases, diarrhoea and venereal disease. For HIV, no data is available yet. Only two percent of the women of reproductive age practise family planning –much too little to help ease the steady rise in food deficit in this area.



Firewood in Guhala market, Ibnat woreda (Photo by H. Rami, I.N.F.I.F. May 2002)

As in Belessa, permanent migration, aside from the usual migration for temporary labour, seems to be an only solution for large parts of the population. According to the woreda administrator in Guhala about 2,000 people migrated permanently last year, destination unknown. Improvements in infrastructure, mainly the building of roads, has made food deliveries and delivery of services by the line ministries easier, but only marginally increased the overall economic situation. Roads do



not automatically lead to accelerated progress like in Janna Mora (see section 2.4: “The road to progress...” p. 5-8), if the overall climatic and agro-ecological situation is unfavourable.

### **2.10 Resettlement program needed**

**Lay Gayint, Tay Gayint and Simada**, east of the South Gondar zonal capital Debre Tabor, are three extremely denuded and badly eroded woredas, all of them food insecure in all the kebeles, the beneficiaries totalling 156,200. Tay Gayint and Simada are only accessible through a rough and steep road, closed for trucks and cars during the rainy season. Delays in food deliveries mean additional stress and hardship for the population. Tay and Lay Gayint had some carry over food from last year, which was distributed, but no new shipments were received this year. Simada had received only the April allocation and individual reserves were running very low. Wages for daily labour already fell to as low as 2 ETB/day, many farmers were eating their seeds, and all the grain stores were empty at the beginning of June.

Selling and trading of eucalyptus is the main coping mechanism along the “Chinese road” that connects Gondar with Wello over impressive mountain ridges and highland plateaus. In more remote areas, people depend mainly on livestock sales. Cattle herders we met on the way to Nefwas Mewcha told us they could not find customers for their animals. In the moonlike and barren landscape full of gullies, there was practically no fodder left and the livestock was emaciated.



Too old to migrate: landless young men leave the old behind (Photo by H. Rami | UN-EUE May 2002)

All three woredas depend to a substantial degree on potatoes, which constitute a staple crop and are vital for the survival of large portions of the population during the rainy season. The plantations were delayed in their growth and suffered from weeklong stress due to lack of rain. Too much rain in contrast causes the late blight disease which last year destroyed up to 60 percent of the harvest in the region according to the project agronomist of the German Development Cooperation “Gesellschaft für technische

Zusammenarbeit” (GTZ). Should the same happen this year, a major crisis would be imminent in a few weeks if food aid does not arrive.

Lay and Tay Gayint already reported higher migration than normal from several kebeles due to the late deliveries of food aid. At the time of the UN-EUE mission’s visit there was no exact data available, but woreda officials are convinced that many peasants, mainly those from the lowland kebeles are about to leave, due to food shortages that have become chronic in nature, many of them possibly for good.

The unsolved problems of overpopulation, overgrazing, erosion, soil depletion and asset depletion slowly lead to a change of attitude in the population: As in Belessa, the idea of resettlement and permanent migration is becoming increasingly popular. In Lay Gayint about 500 people of eight kebeles were asking to be moved and be given land somewhere else. In Tay Gayint an average of 40 people per kebele wanted to leave, mainly young men, with the tendency apparently rising. According to the woreda chairman, these young males wanted plots in the area, but there is no land available. Around 400 people left the woreda last year and only a few came back due to conflicts with people in Welega and Metemma areas. The officials complained that there was no proper resettlement program in place yet and that they were waiting for news from the federal government. While the desire for resettlement is gaining momentum, necessary preparations should be made, so that people can move to places with better potential, thus easing the burden on their home places.

### **German experts green the Earth**

GTZ the German Development Cooperation pursues new and greener ways of agricultural development in Debre Tabor and six other woredas of South Gondar. Main focuses are the increase of cereal output through the introduction of new crops and farming tools, the rehabilitation of denuded lands and gullies with biological methods and the fight against the rodent plague with natural deterrents. This approach is cost effective and easily manageable and shows initial positive results among farmers.

**Triticale** (*Triticosecale witmack*) a drought tolerant crossbreed between wheat and rye from South Africa, has recently been released by the Ethiopian Seed Industry Agency after field trials were conducted by GTZ. The yield potential is stunning, judging by the trials under experimental conditions: 89 MT per hectare with fertilizer and a healthy 3-4 MT without input. This is at least threefold compared to only 1-2 MT for local wheat grown without inputs. Another advantage of Triticale is the fact that it is not a hybrid and hence it is self-pollinating and can repeatedly be used as seed stock without a reduction in output. This meher season 18 MT of Triticale seeds are being distributed among 600 farmers. They will receive 30 kilos each, intended for 1.2 hectares, and are obliged to return 40 kg to GTZ after the harvest. Last year GTZ wanted to buy the entire harvest back after first trials with farmers. But they preferred to sell the seeds in small quantities to their neighbours who were eager to get them after they saw the results in the fields. Based on their selling price, the computed market value of 100 kg of Triticale seeds was an incredible 450 ETB. GTZ expects that the price will fall to about 20 ETB/100kg below the price of wheat after the introduction phase. In Europe, Triticale is a feed cereal for cattle, but it has been well accepted in the local population. With its slightly sweet taste it can be used for Injira, bread, samosas etc. GTZ is now looking for a partner that will do the seed multiplication in the future.



**Tenkara Kend** is a new plough that has been developed by GTZ during the last three years. One of the major problems of Ethiopian agriculture is the so-called plough pan, a layer of earth as hard as concrete below the cultivated surface, that developed with centuries of ploughing with the local plough called maresha. Tenkara Kend (strong arm, named after the south African consultant who developed it) brakes this plough pan open during two to three years of use thus allowing roots to penetrate deeper in search for humidity and nutrients. Another advantage of the plough is increased absorption of rain by the soil. After field trials, GTZ expects a gross profit increase of 20 percent per annum for farmers using the new plough. This year at least 300 Tenkara Kend ploughs will be distributed on a credit basis. The buying price is approximately 300 ETB compared with only 40 ETB for the maresha. But this alone is made up by its five times longer lifespan and lower maintenance cost.



**Vetiver Grass** (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) a drought resistant plant that is able to tap water and nutrients up to six meters deep in the ground, is the natural answer to the rat infestation of thousands of kilometres of stone bunds. Vetiver is extremely hardy and a proven biological rat deterrent. With its extensive root network it also easily fixes soil bunds, the intelligent and cheap alternative to the stone bunds, which farmers dislike. Vetiver can be used as fodder, for thatching roofs and for tea ceremonies. Proof of the efficiency of vetiver grass is its

demand. Farmers sell seedlings to their neighbours and entire villages fight over it during distribution. Interestingly the establishment and maintenance cost of vetiver grass is far cheaper than any other soil and water conservation measure applied so far in Amhara Region.

**Bilophysical Gully Rehabilitation** with plants and wire mesh (“Gabionen”) check dams is another success story from the Germans with the green thumb. Commonly gullies are fixed with check dams built of loose stones that usually are carried away with strong rains. The German forestry experts instead rehabilitate the erosion channels with wire mesh baskets that act as silt traps. These physical structures are combined with fast growing trees and other plants that build a natural erosion control with their roots. All the trees chosen produce high nutrition fodder for livestock – New Zealand Poplar (*Euroamerican poplar*) imported from Lesotho, for example, is one of the main ingredients for a green gully. This species is a very good animal feed high in protein and can easily be multiplied by cuttings. Gullies rehabilitated this way act as natural water reservoirs feeding new springs and giving refuge to wildlife that helps keeping the rat population in check.

### 3 Conclusions and recommended actions

Food aid too often does not arrive in time and sometimes not at all. To make matters worse, many traders this year defaulted on their contracts, in particular in areas in North and South Gondar. This leads to the depletion of private assets (livestock) and the plunder of communal assets (forest, watersheds, grazing grounds, soils etc). Though well meant, food aid purchases on the local market have a negative long term effect for the beneficiaries and the communities as a whole, as long as there are no mechanisms in place that guarantee in-time deliveries.

On an individual level, food aid that is promised but does not arrive in time increases insecurity and stress on the beneficiaries who cannot plan coping strategies such as temporary migration and are forced to make their decisions dependent on the arrival of the food aid. As a consequence, farmers are often forced to eat their seed reserves, thus endangering future harvests and adding to the overall food insecurity. The problems of individual farmers are further aggravated by a lack of market for the need-driven sale of assets, which drives prices down and further accelerates the pace of impoverishment.

Problematic also is the linkage of food aid with development. Traditional EGS schemes like stone bunding do not necessarily increase production. Though aimed at long-term soil preservation, they have rather led to a decrease in harvest due to infestation with pests. As a result, farmers do not maintain these structures and get increasingly reluctant to adopt innovations that are aimed at change towards sustainability – efforts for development are hampered.

Many actors in the Government and among NGO and bilateral organisations complain about the complete lack of conditions for food aid receivers. A farmer may receive a food ration today and burn down the forest tomorrow, without any consequences regarding his right to receive aid.

Compounding these problems is the largely uncontrolled increase of the population. This adds further pressure on individuals and communities who in turn increase their pressure on the environment. Overall, food aid leads to an overexploitation of natural resources if no changes in policy are made. The result is increased dependency on food aid – all in all a downward spiral.

#### Recommendations:

- Traders that default on shipment contracts for food aid should be blacklisted. In addition, the deposit required for granting a contract should be increased. The deadline for deliveries should be set a few weeks before the expected onset of the rainy season thus leaving some time to react, should a trader default.
- Road infrastructure to the most inaccessible woredas should be improved, making the remote areas less dependent on pre-positioning of food aid. All-weather roads should help to guarantee the supply of food during the rainy season
- Encroachment on natural resources like forests and watersheds must be reduced if not stopped and the sale of charcoal and firewood must be better controlled. This needs, among many other measures, guaranteed and timely deliveries of food aid to beneficiaries that otherwise are forced to encroach on natural resources for coping with food shortages.
- Food aid should be linked to conditions that are aimed at preserving natural resources.



- Food aid should be somehow linked with family planning with the aim to reduce the overall dependency on food aid. Food aid that is not linked with family planning only increases the need for food aid.
- EGS that is aimed at soil conservation must be revised in order to increase the yield of the land and not to encourage pest infestations.
- Farmers that are adaptable to change and want to migrate should be allowed to do so as long as sufficient efforts are made to develop their home areas and resettlement schemes areas are adequately planned and resourced to ensure that the conditions that led to the migration are not replicated elsewhere.
- Integrated food security programs should not measure their success in the quantity of stone bunds built, but in the quality of results achieved. Green solutions with long lasting and multiple benefits should be given priority.

## 4 Annex

### **Abbreviations**

ACSA	Amhara Credit and Savings Association
BoA	Bureau of Agriculture
CRS	Catholic Relief Service
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)
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
ESRDF	Ethiopian Social and Rural Development Fund
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
EU	European Union
FFW	Food for Work
GAA	German Agro Action
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation)
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
ORDA	Organisation for Relief and Development Amhara
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

### **Glossary**

dega	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between 2500 to > 3400 m a.s.l.
kebele	Smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia
kolla	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between ~1400 to ~1800 m a.s.l.
woreda	Local administrative unit
weyna dega	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between ~1800 to ~2400 m a.s.l.

### DISCLAIMER

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**UN-EUE**  
**PO Box 60252**  
**Addis Ababa**

**Tel.: (251) (1) 51-37-25**  
**Fax: (251) (1) 51-12-92**  
**E-mail: un-eue@un.org**

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