

**UNITED NATIONS
EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA**

**Field Trip to Wolayita, North Omo
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Summary

1993/1994

Following the drought and main season (*Meher*) crop failure of 1993 and the subsequent emergency food distributions in North Omo in 1994, the 1994 short rains (*Belg*) were delayed four weeks, resulting in the failure of root crop production and the planting of only 14% of the total *Belg* area ploughed. *Meher* rains, though good to excessive, ended abruptly in August rather than the expected time in October, seriously reducing grain filling. Of the 319,800 North Omo population, 201,732 people were determined by the Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau in Awassa as being affected. It was established that this population would be requiring 27,784 tons of food assistance in the seven most affected weredas: Sodo Zuria, Bolosso, Kindo Koisha, Humbo, Offa, Damot Weyde and Damot Gale (Table 1).

1994/1995

Due to chronic food shortages, eating of immature *Ensete*, high and rising grain prices and the current failure of sweet potato, food security/nutritional surveys were undertaken by SCF/UK, Goal, CONCERN and SOS Sahel between September, 1994 and January 1995. The SCF/UK Nutritional Surveillance Programme, which was conducted from September 4 to November 9, 1994, reported that nutritional status of Bolosso Suri, Damota, Damot Gale, Damot Weyde and Kindo Koshia weredas had improved due to food assistance. Mean weight for length (WFL%) levels of 88-92% in the April 1994 survey had risen to a uniform 94% in the five weredas. In addition, 70% of the villages surveyed reported families eating 3 meals/day and only 24% were eating 2 meals/day. Caution was advised, however, that the shortfall in *Meher* production and the widespread shortage of food would necessitate increased intervention starting in January, 1995 and generalized relief efforts from February to June.

CONCERN, reported 20% of households in Damot Weyde had depleted supplies of food already in September with an additional 74% expected to exhaust their food by November 1994.

The SOS Sahel crop/livestock assessment in Kindo Koshia wereda was concluded in December 1994. From the 100 households surveyed, they found that more than 75% of farmers in Kindo Koisha had no household food supplies, 80-85% were eating only immature *enset* and root crops and 65% were eating only 1-2 meals/day. Maize, root crop, and Kocho (*Enset*) prices had gone up markedly, whereas livestock prices were steady to slightly higher.

Inter Aide France reported that admissions to their feeding center rose dramatically from 8 in December to 21 in January.

Goal, in another nutritional survey of Kindo Koshia completed in January 1995, reported marked deterioration in nutritional status since September, mostly in highland Peasant Associations (PAs). More than 50% of the under 5 years old were less than 90% WFL. In some PAs 15% of the children were less than or equal to 80% WFL.

There are regional restrictions on food commodities moving out of the area, hoping to increase supplies and decrease prices, but still prices are beyond the farmers' range. Local market maize and sorghum prices are Birr 140 per quintal, teff was sold as a cash crop and pulses range from Birr 275-315 per quintal. Affected households are coping by reducing to one meal per day, selling household goods and local handicrafts, eating "starvation" foods, working as low-cost laborers or begging.

A field trip was undertaken by the UN-EUE in early February to assess and report on current activities regarding the current food shortages in Wolayita area. Following a meeting in Addis Ababa between the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations on Tuesday, February 6, 1995, where relief food assistance was discussed, it was decided that distributions would commence by mid-February using stocks on-hand (Table 2). However, shortages of registration and distribution personnel as well as short-haul trucks and bad road conditions during the rainy season are anticipated, similar to last year, so delays can be expected. NGO, RRC and MoA activities for food/income generating projects to increase food security will be further studied and reported presently.

Current conditions and Crop Prospects in the Seven Weredas

In Sodo wereda, it was reported that only 15-20% of the households have food on hand whereas 10 of the 34 Peasant Associations have been severely affected by food shortages. The wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee met in January to design and submit work plans for food for work programmes on road construction and spring protection in 6 of the 18 food insecure kebeles. Also, it should be noted that the RRC has re-opened the coordination office in Sodo and sent a team from Addis to assist with food distributions.

Concern by the Ministry of Agriculture for unpaid fertilizer loans has resulted in a campaign to contact the remaining debtors in Wolayita. From the 5,422 quintals of DAP purchased on loan, 41% remains as an outstanding loan and should be paid before proceeding with the expected 7,000 quintal credit purchase for 1995.

In Offa wereda, the MoA and Inter Aide France reported that present food supplies in the better-off households could only last one month at best. The maize crop was largely consumed as fresh maize and the sorghum did not mature due to the early cessation of rains in the 1994 *Meher* season. Therefore, having exhausted cereal supplies, people are eating taro, cassava and tree leaves from '*aliko*a or *shifera*' (*Morinja spp*).

Humbo wereda, which is located 98% in the mid- to lowland areas, was severely affected by cereal shortage, sweet potato failure and lower prevalence of *Ensete*. Farmers are convinced that the climate has changed in this previously maize/pepper surplus producing area. Many of the oxen supplied through revolving funds (established by the NGO World Vision), died from *Trypanosomiasis* before farmers completed repayment. Concern was also expressed about the general weakness of the people, given the pending malaria season.

In Bolosso Sore, drought has resulted in wild animal damage, such as porcupine eating the few small sweet potatoes that are maturing and mole rats eating *Ensete* and banana plant roots. Redd Barna was carrying out a household food supply assessment the week of February 6 and expected to start distributions soon thereafter. A local flour mill operated by the Orthodox church was not in use at the time of the visit due to food shortages and food donations solicited recently were being given sparingly to the most needy.

The first *Belg* season rainfall occurred February 7 making the road slippery and preventing our travel to Bele (Kindo Koisha), although gravel was being applied to the roadbed.

Due to recurring crop failure and the consumption of immature root crops/*Ensete*, income generating activities and programmes to enhance food production need to be implemented in this area as soon as possible, in order to avert future food insecurity. With the paving of the road from Shashemane to Sodo almost completed, marketing of tree fruits and vegetables as well as cottage products may now be improved. Also, as fertilizer use is well accepted, increases in crop production should be forthcoming, assisted by improved extension training programmes implemented by Global 2000.

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