

Field Trip Report to Welayita and North Omo (29 January - 2 February)

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SUMMARY

A short mission to Welayita and North Omo was carried out in order to observe the food situation and future food prospects in the area. With generally good agricultural seasons in 1995 (*belg*, *kiremt* and *zape* rains), the actual food prospects are better than that of last year. Nevertheless, pocket areas mainly in the lowlands and dry mid-highlands experienced adverse climatic conditions and will face food shortages during the coming five to six months.

Overall food security

The endemic structural food deficit, its progressive trend over the last years due to ever increasing land pressure and the depletion of productive assets, has resulted in a population that is highly vulnerable. This, combined with adverse climatic conditions, epidemics in humans and animals and pest outbreaks, will leave thousands of households with potential food shortages for several months a year, even after a good agricultural year and despite existing coping strategies. A single good year is not sufficient to reverse these negative trends, especially in an area where the agricultural potential is nearly exhausted. As a consequence, there is a persistent need for relief and rehabilitation measures to avoid emergencies, further impoverishment of the rural population and a subsequent increase in vulnerability.

In the light of the aforementioned situation, the CDPP 1996 appeal figures on the North Omo population in need of food assistance might be too optimistic. The results of the ongoing post-harvest assessment carried out jointly by the regional bureaux of Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and Agriculture (results expected within three weeks), as well as different wereda based assessments (e.g. Ofa: MSF Holland, Damot Weyde: Concern/Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee) should give an accurate picture of the actual needs and might lead to a readjustment of beneficiary numbers. At the present time, however, it is too early to obtain accurate figures on future food aid requirements, as existing estimations on populations in need of food assistance are contradictory and sometimes too high (see Table 2).

According to the Regional Bureau of DPP, the 1995 agricultural year was better than the previous five to six years. Nevertheless, there is a food deficit in all the seven weredas that are in the Welayita area (with relief to start in February/March), as well as in Kucha, Mirab Abaya, Arba Minch Zuria and Konso weredas. Konso faced adverse climatic conditions for the whole of 1995, resulting in failed *belg* and *meher* harvest and 94,059 people will need food assistance for about nine months. Until now 600 tons of wheat and farm implements have been delivered.

With the stress period approaching, there is an urgent need to pre-position adequate relief resources in the main problem areas before the onset of the 1996 *belg* rains. According to the Zonal Bureau of DPP, only limited food stocks were maintained by the North Omo zonal authorities in five weredas and Arba Minch zuria as of end of December 1995 (see Table 1).

The CDPP has stocked 10,000 tons of grain in Sodo and 2,900 tons in Awasa. The Sodo stock will serve North Omo and adjacent zones, but definite allocations are still pending.

Preparatory measures for relief interventions such as post-harvest assessments, EGS planning, prepositioning of relief food and monitoring missions have been rather late in taking place, causing some concern regarding the timeliness and effectivity of relief operations.

Employment Generation Schemes and related activities

North Omo zone recently translated the EGS section of the *General Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management* into Amharic and dispatched copies to all weredas by the end of January. The zonal Bureau of DPP is now expecting EGS project proposals from relevant weredas. At the time of the field visit, only Kindo Koisha had submitted its proposal document. In addition to specifying the kind of activities that need to take place, the amount of work required, the number of workers, person days and food requirements, this proposal includes a list of the additional inputs that are needed for EGS implementation such as tools, materials, cash inputs, etc. The wereda expects these non-food inputs to be covered by the CDPP.

The Regional Bureau of DPP, in collaboration with relevant line departments and NGOs, intends to implement pilot EGS in six weredas of North Omo and Gurage zones respectively, but detailed information is not yet available as to what modalities are to be used.

NGOs in different weredas implement regular labour intensive food for work programmes that may be upscaled during relief times to absorb a larger workforce.

According to WFP, soil conservation, pond construction and terracing activities are undertaken in three zones of Hadiya, Kembata and North Omo in the Southern Nations, Nationalities Peoples' Regional State. These activities, which are ongoing under the 2488 food for work programme, are part of the WFP project for the chronically food insecure areas of Ethiopia, and are implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture through Local Level Participatory Planning (LLPP). The overall development goal of the project is to improve the economic status of farmers in the project areas and thereby contribute to achieving self-sufficiency. Ultimately, this would mean increasing agricultural productivity by reducing soil erosion, increasing fuelwood and timber production, providing water for irrigation and village supplies, constructing rural roads and improving livestock management

Structural problems

Development activities carried out through NGOs, donor agencies and relevant line departments are generally concentrated at the wereda level in agricultural and related works, rural infrastructure development, public services and other similar activities, providing valuable assistance to the rural population. Nevertheless, the impact and sustainability of efforts so far undertaken has been permanently hampered by existing structural problems. These problems can not be solved within the primary sector alone, as population density and subsequent land pressure will no longer allow any significant improvement in agricultural production.

In order to tackle the steadily increasing structural problems, innovative efforts should be undertaken to create substantial long term employment opportunities in the secondary and service sectors. Also, taking into account the magnitude and urgency of the problem, adequate and quick response should be deployed at the regional level with national and international backing.

VISITED AGENCIES AND WEREDAS

Regional Bureau for DPP - Awasa

The Regional Bureau for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness was visited and discussion were held with the bureau head about the general situation of North Omo in 1995 in comparison to 1994. The 1995 agricultural season was reported to have been the best in five years in most of the weredas of the zone, except few pocket areas in the eastern and western lowlands of the former Welayita awraja. However, in Konso special wereda the situation was reported to be severe as a result of two failed cropping seasons (short cycle *belg* and long cycle *meher* productions). Following that, 600 tons of grain and some hand tools have been dispatched to the special wereda by the regional bureau, to be used in FFW/ EGS activities.

In North Omo zone, Kucha, Mirab Abaya and Arba Minch Zuria are considered to be stress areas. Regarding Employment Generation Schemes (EGS), the head of the Bureau of CDPP mentioned that a pilot project is expected to be carried out in collaboration with NGOs and concerned line departments in three weredas of the former Welayita Awraja (out of six weredas in North Omo zone) and in six weredas of Gurage zone.

In the western part of the region, in Keficho, Shekicho, Bench, Magi and most part of Hadiya zone, it was reported that unusual pre-*belg* rainfalls may have caused post-harvest damage. However, the extent of the damage was not yet determined at the time of the field visit. A team from the region was in the field to conduct a *meher* post-harvest assessment and the extent of damage. The result of this mission and the team's report is expected by the third week of February.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has allocated ETB 20 million for Area Based Integrated Development programmes to be implemented in three weredas of SPNNRS (Konso, Kindo Koisha and Boloso Sore) over a two year period. These programmes will be coordinated by the Regional Bureau for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness in collaboration with NGOs and concerned line departments. The project document for ABID has been prepared and sent to the concerned bureau and activities are expected to start soon.

Regarding relief food stocks, it was mentioned that 2,900 tons and 10,000 tons respectively have been prepositioned in Awasa and Sodo, to be utilised in FFW/EGS projects.

Regional Rural Road Authority

The Authority recently received road construction equipment from the Regional Bureau of Agriculture. The equipment was initially donated to the Regional Bureau of Agriculture by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for the repair of roads leading to the newly organised service cooperatives in North and South Omo, Shekicho, Bench and Magi zones. According to the head of the Rural Road Construction and Maintenance Department of the Road Authority, the machinery has been assigned to the ongoing Wagifo-Boreda road rehabilitation programme (24 km) in North Omo. Furthermore, it was reported that two road construction projects currently ongoing in Sidama zone and two in Gurage zone are using labour intensive approaches. The projects are all carried out through government capital budgetary allocations.

Zonal Bureau for DPP - Arba Minch

According to the new structure, the number of weredas in the zone has been reduced from 28 to 22. This brings the total number of weredas to 24, including the two special weredas of Konso and Derashe.

Although crop assessment was not yet finalised at the time of the field visit, it was reported that the situation was better in comparison to last year. The head of the Bureau of DPP reported that all the weredas in the zone had been requested to prepare their EGS projects and send them to the zone. However, so far only two weredas had sent the requested project documents for the activities to be done. These prepared EGS project documents include the number of beneficiaries participating in the work, the type of work to be done and the amount of food required for payment. According to the assessment results obtained by the zonal Early Warning Committee, from the 14 most affected weredas of North Omo, a total of 1,021,289 people would be affected by food shortages (see Table 2).

Branch Office of the CDPP - Sodo Zuria

With the exception of the lowland areas, the 1995 rainfall distribution was reported to have been good in the highlands and mid-highlands. Accordingly, food shortages are mainly expected in some pocket areas of the lowlands in the coming two months. All weredas have been instructed to prepare relevant EGS projects. So far, however, only one wereda has submitted its project proposal. According to the document, EGS projects will commence in March 1996 after the completion of the crop assessment, which is currently carried out by the Regional Bureau of Agriculture and the Bureau of DPP. The head of the DPP Bureau mentioned that in addition to the 10,000 tons currently stored in Sodo by CDPP, there is a total of about 1,200 tons of grain stocked in three weredas, Damot Gale, Offa and Kindo Koisha.

Visted weredas in the area

Damot Gale

The 1995 cropping season was reported to be better than the previous year. However according to the available information food shortage are anticipated by the wereda chairman in all three agroecological zones as a result of poor rains and soil fertility. As mentioned by the chairman of the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee, 7,325 households from 11 kebeles in the lowlands, 16,348 households from 39 kebeles in the mid-highlands and 2,834 household from 4 kebeles in the highlands have been targeted for participation in FFW/ EGS projects.

Damote Weide

According to CONCERN, 1995 was a better year than 1994 due to the generally good climatic conditions, but food shortages are expected in several pocket areas of the lowlands and dry mid-lands.

CONCERN has established an emergency food planning committee with the main objective of conducting regular monthly crop assessments and quarterly nutritional surveillance. Subsequent to requests for food assistance by several peasant associations, the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee, in collaboration with CONCERN, has now initiated an assessment throughout the wereda. The plan is to prepare EGS projects according to identified areas in need and the number of people affected by food shortage.

Boloso Sore

According to the wereda Council and Redd Barna, the general situation in the wereda is better in comparison to the previous year. However, information from the lowland areas indicates that they are under stress as a result of erratic rainfalls and, in some pocket areas, due to hail storms. According to the nutritional survey conducted in early December 1995 by Redd Barna in their catchment area of 16 PAs, the situation is reported to be good. The chairman of the Council reports that EGS projects have been planned and proposals sent to the zone early in September 1995, after conducting a preparatory assessment. It has been proposed to start activities in the 30 kebeles not covered by Redd Barna. However, as no response has been made by the zone in this regard, the council has started by distributing 400 tons of grain to the lowland farmers in order to facilitate timely land preparation for the coming *belg* season.

Kindo Koisha

The wereda Council has confirmed that the overall situation of the wereda is better than it was at the same time last year. Animal diseases such as Anthrax and Blackleg were reported in the wereda towards the end of December 1995, but were controlled after the death of 37 animals.

At the time of the visit, the wereda Early Warning Committee was planning to conduct a food needs assessment in the whole wereda.

The improved situation in the wereda was also mentioned by SOS Sahel. However, the mission was informed that there are some pocket areas in which food shortage could be anticipated. To see the overall situation of the wereda, a crop and livestock assessment is planned to be conducted in their project area. SOS Sahel, one of the few NGOs previously concentrating on cash for work schemes in Kindo Koisha, has recently changed its remuneration policy, moving from cash for work payments to food for work as a result of high cereal prices in the market and in order to harmonise the mode of payment within the wereda. According to SOS Sahel, 3,000 to 4,000 people are currently participating in their road construction programme through food for work schemes.

Humbo

The wereda is considered to be *meher*-dependent. The onset of last year's rainfall was reported to have been on time but rains stopped at the flowering stage of the crops in the mid- and lowland areas. In comparison with last year, the head of the Bureau of Agriculture indicated that the situation is much worse than the previous year, especially in the lowland part of the wereda, and about 20,014 households are mainly expected to face food shortages from February to June 1996.

Blackleg outbreaks on livestock were reported from some kebeles adjacent to Sidama zone in the eastern part of the wereda. Veterinary experts from Sidama zone, in collaboration with the wereda experts, have been sent to the place to assess the extent of the outbreak and to conduct necessary control measures.

Kucha

Kucha is a mainly *belg*-dependent wereda. It was reported that the 1995 *belg* rains stopped at flowering stage resulting in a highly reduced yield. Sweet potatoes were also affected by sweet potato butterfly. However, data regarding the extent of the damage was not available during the mission. According to the wereda council and an expert from the wereda Bureau of Agriculture, about 27,000 households would be affected by food shortages from February to July 1996.

Ofa

According to Interaide France, during the 1995 agricultural season, the actual situation in the eastern part of the wereda was much better in comparison to previous years. It was mentioned that at the same time last year the community was forced to resort to famine foods such as Taro and Cassava.

MSF Holland, which had been operating in the area for six month last year, and which just carried out a food and nutritional survey in the area, considers the 1995 agricultural year to have been normal due to the good *meher* rains, with no major animal and/or crop pests or diseases reported. However, from the total of 381 households surveyed, 55% of them have already consumed their cereal and legume stocks. Hence, it was reported that the nutritional status will probably deteriorate rapidly in the coming five months.

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TABLE 2

ESTIMATIONS ON POPULATION IN NEED OF FOOD ASSISTANCE

WEREDA	Estimated Population** 1996	Centre/Zone Assessment November		Zonal EW Committee Ass. Dec.-Jan.		CDPP 1996 Appeal	
Boloso Sore	322,320	101,042	31 %	53,011	17 %	40,000	12 %
Kindo Koisha	161,430	79,500	49 %	158,668	98 %	20,000	12 %
Ofa	130,520	64,025	49 %	107,040	82 %	30,000	23 %
Sodo Zuria	253,700	16,860	7 %	16,814	7 %	*10,000	0-4 %
Damot Gale	248,410	78,040	31 %	203,066	82 %	15,000	6 %
Damot Weyde	187,230	48,720	26 %	87,289	47 %	*20,000	5-11 %
Humbo	120,090	74,410	62 %	105,028	88 %	15,000	13 %
Gofa	176,670	66,717	38 %	53,988	31 %	10,000	6 %
Zala/Ubamale	124,380	52,718	42 %	14,684	12 %	*10,000	4-8 %
Mirab Abaya/Boreda	120,500	56,009	47 %	63,027	52 %	8,000	7 %
Kucha	109,910	47,841	44 %	63,223	58 %	*30,000	6-27 %
Kemba	113,730	39,714	35 %	10,713	9 %	*10,000	4-9 %
Total Appeal						218,000	8-11%
Daramalo/Dita	151,130	9,000	6 %	38,352	25 %	-	-
Loma & Genobosa	130,425	15,000	12 %	46,386	36 %	-	-
Total ZEWC				1,021,289	44%		
Bonke	127,110	3,000	2 %	-	-	-	-
Chencha	117,155	1,500	1 %	-	-	-	-
Total C/Z	2,594,710	754,096	29 %				

Source: Sodo Zuria DPP and Arba Minch zonal DPP

* Takes into account total number of affected population, whereas percentage figures differentiates between population in need of food assistance and those in need of close monitoring.

** Based on 1994 figures adjusted from the 1984 census and readjusted by an annual growth rate of 3%.