

UNITED NATIONS
EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA

Situation Report
North Omo and Wolayita
Ovrview of Emergency Operations

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Ojectives

Following close monitoring of the food situation and relief operations in North Omo and Wolayita over the past three months, a post-emergency field trip was carried out to obtain information on the recent emergency operations of different governmental and non-governmental agencies and future plans for emergency prevention and long term structural resolutions.

1.2. Wolayita: summary of the socioeconomic context

Wolayita is located within the *enset* culture zone; its main staple crops other than cereals (predominantly maize) include *enset* and different root crops such as sweet potatoe, taro, cassava and yam. General climatic conditions in the area, together with soil fertility, crop diversity and well adapted cropping strategies of farmers, allow a higher food production per surface unit than in many other parts of the country.

Despite these positive aspects, Wolayita agriculture, as a means of subsistance, is reaching its limits due to high population density (average 250/km²) and, consequently, small farm holdings (average 0.5 ha per household). Food security is also easily threatened by slight changes in climate and pest outbreaks. Being almost exclusively dependant on agriculture (about 90% of the inhabitants are farmers), the area is becoming increasingly vulnerable as population growth and land fragmentation continues while alternative means of subsistance remain undeveloped.

II. Progress of 1993/94 agricultural seasons

A poor 1993 *Meher* season due to inadequate rainfall followed by a long dry season without the usual light showers resulted in major food shortages in North Omo and especially Wolayita in the first quarter of 1994. Whereas areas covered by relief agencies with their well established programmes did not face severe problems due to quick provision of relief assistance, in areas which did not benefit from early warning mechanisms of the RRC and NGOs, acute food shortages occurred and food supplies could not be mobilized on time. With the late start of the *Belg* rains, land preparation and planting were delayed, extending the need for emergency operations by approximately two months.

With the beginning of the maize harvest in August, the food situation gradually improved and it was possible to end major relief activities by mid-September. Free food distributions will only continue in certain pocket areas which were especially affected by drought, hailstorm damage and other natural calamities, whereas a shift to food for work activities is planned in other areas.

III. POST-EMERGENCY SITUATION

A crop assessment conducted at the regional level by the Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau (RRB) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) confirmed that other than in a few pocket areas, the crop situation in North Omo and Wolayita is expected to be satisfactory. Therefore, distributing agencies have agreed to stop free food distributions in favor of food for work activities. The duration, starting time and type of activity still need to be decided.

In view of experience gained during the recent emergency, a disaster prevention and preparedness committee comprised of representatives of different line ministries was established at the zonal level. Also, several warehouses for storing Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR) supplies are to be constructed, and food positioned to assist particularly disaster prone weredas.

Since mid-September, NGOs operating in the area have stopped free food distribution and will resume regular development activities after conducting crop assessments and nutritional surveys in their respective project areas.

During the field trip, several NGOs operating in North Omo were contacted in order to obtain information on their conclusions on the emergency situation and prospects for future activities. The following is an outline of these activities:

CONCERN

Concern has been operating in the area since the 1984/85 drought. After the recent emergency, the organization resumed integrated development activities of mainly water and soil conservation, reforestation, spring catchments and road construction. Future projects will be implemented along the same lines over a period of three years. In order to prevent future emergencies, CONCERN plans to organize, in coordination with other agencies operating in the area, an early warning system.

SOS Sahel

Over the past four years, SOS Sahel has been operating in 21 Peasant Associations (PAs) of Kindo Koisha. Currently, its programme is based on development activities on water and soil conservation, reforestation, seed distribution and road construction etc., which are carried out through cash for work projects. For these activities, SOS Sahel has formed committees at PA level, elected by members of each community. The main activity of these committees is to screen the community and identify vulnerable farmers that could participate in the labour intensive programme. Also, according to SOS Sahel, the committees plan to conduct a survey on the occurrence of *trypanosomiasis* in the lowlands of Kindo Koisha wereda together with FARM AFRICA. At the present time, SOS Sahel is more interested

in concentrating on labour intensive programmes if adequate funding is available.

Centre Internationale de Developement et Reserche (CIDR)

This organisation is based in Gofa, Sawla, and operates in the three weredas of Zala, Ubamale and Gofa with a total of 28 PAs. CIDR assists the PAs mainly through cereal banks. The different activities are organised by a committee elected by the local inhabitants of the three weredas. Food distribution in the weredas was carried out on credit base during the recent emergency. CIDR has a future plan to form a sales and purchase unit within this committee, to take the responsibility of managing the cereal banks.

World Vision International (WVI)

World Vision is operating in 15 PAs in Western Abaya wereda. During the past emergency situation, the organisation distributed 1,400 tons of cereals and 46.6 tons of oil to 40,000 beneficiaries. With the prospects of a good incoming harvest, free food distribution has been replaced by regular development programmes. The activities of WVI in this area mainly deal with agriculture, health, seedling and water management. The organisation also plans to encourage the community to develop fisheries in order to enable them to cope with food shortages.

WORLD VISION DAMOTA II is a project operating in Damot Weyde wereda. Their development programme deals with agriculture, health and rural infrastructure. They have also started off-farm activities such as weaving. According to the area development manager, a seven-year project agreement has been signed between WVI and the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) to continue the development activities in the area.

IV. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

As outlined in section III of this report, governmental and non-governmental agencies working in the zone as well as the regional administrations have been deeply concerned about the recent state of emergency in the area and are eager to find means of preventing future calamities. A concerted effort to set up a coordinated emergency prevention network combining early warning, pre-positioned food stocks and intensive labour programmes is urgently needed and will certainly help ease the situation for the short and mid-terms.

Nevertheless, the basic structural problems of the area will persist and even worsen, unless alternative means of subsistence can be developed in the future. The general opinion of concerned agencies in this regard remains vague, and mainly stresses the "need" for cultural changes, use of birth control, improvement of the "archaic" farm practices and re-settlement.

As culture is a basic value inherent to any society, changes generally occur through slow processes and not through outside pressure. It would therefore be an illusion to base development issues on the necessity of cultural changes.

Until now, birth control campaigns have not shown any significant results in societies characterised by a weak economy and will not

have much impact on population growth unless the economic situation of the people improves.

Even though certain improvements are achievable in agriculture, they will still not have a significant impact in solving the basic problems of the area. Also re-settlement, a sensitive issue given past experiences, can only be a partial solution to existing population problems and exclusively depends on the decision of the target groups.

It becomes clear that a situation with such complexity can only be positively addressed by a careful, multi-disciplinary, long term development approach, based on respect for cultural priorities and given the involvement of the population. Special regard should be given to the understanding of basic problems, their effect on society, existing coping strategies as well as to being informed of existing resources and potentials within the area. Based on these findings, basic development aims can be identified and adequate development plans elaborated and implemented.

4.1. Actions to be taken on a short term base:

First priority should be given to emergency prevention in order to prevent future calamities, human stress and disruption of development efforts. To this end, the coordinated effort of all governmental and non-governmental agencies in the field of early warning, prepositioning of food reserves, development of labour intensive programmes, together with improved capacity and mobility of the RRC and related institutions, will undoubtedly lead to an efficient emergency prevention network.

4.2. Actions to be taken on a mid-term base:

In the mid-term, labour intensive public work programmes will be increasingly essential as a complementary means of subsistence for vulnerable groups. Being an important means of building and improving infrastructure, labour intensive public work programmes should respect quality standards in order to contribute efficiently to the long term development of the area. This applies especially to food for work activities, where the work quality is often very low. In order to guarantee necessary quality standards, an adequate number of technical staff will be needed. The remuneration policy on cash for work or food for work programmes should be determined according to the needs of the communities.

The highlands are densely populated and intensely cultivated, but there are still unutilized resources to be found in the lowlands. It is essential to make a careful inventory of these resources and to study the potential and limitations in regard to their possible future use. In areas suitable for agriculture and, therefore, suitable for settlement, priority should be given to the establishment of basic infrastructure and public services in order to make them viable and reasonably attractive for eventual future settlers. In areas conducive to livestock rearing, the possibilities of *trypanosomiasis* eradication, introduction of resistant breeds or game ranching should be considered.

The North Omo zone includes lake Abaya and lake Chamo, where fisheries still maintain a development potential and there are possibilities for employment generation in this field. The use and sale of storable fish at a low price could also help improve the

nutritional status in a protein deficient area such as Wolayita. It would prove useful to have a precise indication of the production capacity and marketing possibilities in the area, including different processing schemes (dried, smoked, canned fish, by-products, etc.) based on which appropriate projects could be elaborated and implemented.

4.3. Actions to be taken on a long-term base:

In discussing long-term development issues, one can no longer concentrate exclusively on the primary sector, which, despite a possible increase in production, no longer has the capacity to absorb the still increasing population in a sustainable manner. It is therefore, time to initiate simultaneous development of the secondary sector by promoting professional training, small to medium manufacture enterprises and facilitating credit schemes.

In this regard, the promotion of human resources should have first priority and professional training should be offered at various levels such as through technical and professional schools and apprenticeships. This will enable the younger generation to find alternative ways of subsistence and contribute actively to the economic development of the region and the country as a whole, instead of being forced to lead a marginal livelihood on the edge of dependancy.

Workshops open to professionals from various technical fields at diploma level at the Arba Minch Water Technology Institute are headed towards the above mentioned direction. Other than this facility, at the present time there is only one teacher training institute in North Omo; no other institutions exist in the region except at university level.

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