

## Field Trip Report to North Omo Zone Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State

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### Summary

A short field trip to North Omo zone in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State was conducted by the UNDP Emergencies Unit from 13 - 18 January 1997. The purpose of the trip was to assess post-harvest household food security as well as human and livestock health conditions. During the visit the Regional Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (RDPPB) in Awassa, the North Omo DPPD, the agriculture and health offices in Konso special wereda as well as three weredas in Welayita area of North Omo were visited to obtain general information and meet with the concerned local officials on the current situation in these areas.

According to the Regional DPPB, the lowlands of North Omo have registered a better harvest this year, with the exception of Kindo Koisha, Boloso Sore and Offa weredas which have experienced some shortfalls. In the highland areas, unusually excessive and prolonged rainfall, water logging, and hailstorms combined with animal disease and landslides in parts of Welayita, have somewhat adversely affected the expected crop production. However, since the availability and utilization of agricultural inputs was much higher in 1996 in comparison to previous years, the overall crop production has been reported to be generally good.

The regional authorities seem to be in agreement with the 1997 beneficiary figures stipulated in the DPPC's December appeal and no counter-proposals have so far been made to change these figures. At the zonal level, however, assessments conducted in late November 1996 show 294,000 people in need of assistance; this figure is about 90% above the beneficiary number stated in the DPPC appeal for the North Omo zone, and implies an increase of almost 200% in food aid requirements (see attachment).

In Konso special wereda the first sorghum harvest, locally known as *katana*, is reported to have been very positive. The second harvest, known as *hageya*, which is normally harvested in August, was reportedly poor as the result of a shortage of rainfall in the months of June and July 1996. Furthermore, frost and Quelea Quelea attacks on the short cycle sorghum in June have decreased the expected production of the year.

In the visited three weredas of Kindo Koisha, Boloso Sore and Offa in Welayita area, the *meher* season crop production of teff, which is the main cash crop, was reported to have been better than in 1995. Also, the rainfall pattern in 1996 proved fairly consistent and was favorable for the growth of sweet potato, which usually bridges the critical period between March to May in terms of food security; only a small scale infestation of the sweet potato butterfly was reported in the visited weredas. Although teff generally performed well, a shortfall was recorded on the *belg* season maize production in all the highland weredas of these weredas which are mainly *belg* dependent, with maize as their main staple food crop.

It should be noted that allocated food aid supplies had not been repositioned at the time of the field visit in the zone. This is an issue of major concern as the 1997 *belg* season is approaching and many of the visited weredas, where food aid requirements should have been met as early as the beginning of January 1997, will soon become inaccessible after the rains begin.

No livestock diseases were reported during the field visit and pasture availability is good, although not extensive and may soon exhaust as grazing land in comparison to livestock population was reported to be limited in area and not sufficient to meet medium term requirements.

Given the fact that the field visit was conducted at post-harvest time, increased cereal supplies in the market, especially in the areas covered under the government extension programme, have greatly contributed to a reduction of prices.

### **Konso Special Wereda**

The special wereda consists of 30 kebeles in two agro-ecological zones (mid-highland and lowland). The lowland areas, which cover about 70% of the wereda, harvest only once and no root crops are produced; harvesting takes place twice in the mid-highland areas. The mid-highland areas also have inter-cropping systems and produce root crops.

According to information obtained during the field visit, the wereda is mainly *belg*-dependent and the planting and harvesting time for the first round of short cycle sorghum production (locally called *katana*), takes place between February and May, whilst the second crop, *hageya*, is harvested in August.

According to the local officials, the first 1996 harvest was reported to be fairly good except in the south and south-eastern lowlands of the wereda, which were affected by an outbreak of Quela Quela in June 1996. Seven mid-highland kebeles in the south-western part of the wereda were reportedly damaged by frost, and the second harvest (August) in these areas was said to have been poor, due to the absence of light showers which normally occur in June.

The wereda health office has reported 23 meningitis cases, resulting in four deaths in three kebeles of the north-eastern mid-highlands of the wereda from 30 December 1996. During our visit it was reported that a medical crew had been sent to the area to assess the extent of the epidemic and to undertake necessary treatment measures to assist the victims. However, a serious shortage of manpower, medical supplies and transportation was mentioned to be the major constraints faced by the medics.

The Evangelical Church, Mekane Yesus is currently operating in all 30 kebeles of the wereda. According to the project manager, the church has signed a five year project agreement with the Regional DPPB to construct a dam along Yanda river for the irrigation of initially about 1000 hectares. Funding for this project has been obtained from the NGO Bread for the World and the Norwegian Church Aid Ethiopia (NCA). The activities of the project are expected to start in the next two months, as soon as funds have been secured. In addition to dam construction, the project also has afforestation and road construction components.

## **North Omo Zonal DPP**

As mentioned by the zonal DPP Early Warning Unit, the lowland areas of North Omo have had a better harvest than the highlands, with the exception of Kindo Koisha, Boloso Sore, Damot Gale and Offa weredas.

The *meher* crop assessment conducted by the zonal Early Warning Unit in collaboration with the wereda agricultural officials (November - December 1996) covered 16 weredas of the total 22 in the zone. The assessment results of a beneficiary figure of 294,000 for 1997 and total food requirement of 27,145 tons are 90% above the figures presented in the 1996 DPPC appeal, which covered only 12 weredas in the zone. However, the zonal officials are in the process of sending a request to the central DPPC for allocations to be made for an additional 139,600 people identified by the zone.

No major developments were reported regarding animal health and no epidemics currently exist. However, trypanosomiasis problems in the lowland areas remain as usual. Some outbreaks of malaria have also been reported, but are currently under control.

Grain prices in most weredas have declined in comparison to the same time last year.

## **Kindo Koisha Council**

As with the *belg* season, performance of the 1996 *meher* crops was generally poor in Kindo Koisha wereda, and the food deficit is expected to be higher than usual.

According to the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee's recently issued final crop assessment report covering both *belg* and *meher* seasons, intensive rainfall at the onset of the seasons was followed by a shortage of rains during the flowering and seed filling stages have been the major factors affecting the maize crop production; pest infestation of sweet potato butterfly has also affected the staple sweet potato crops. The report furthermore indicates that about 60% of the household in the wereda may face food shortages for five to seven months, starting January.

The market availability for purchases, however, remains good and cereal availability has reportedly increased as a result of the good harvest in neighbouring areas covered by the government extension programme.

No major health problems were reported in Kindo Koisha, although both malaria (affecting humans) and trypanosomiasis (affecting livestock) continue to be problems faced by the local authorities.

## **Boloso Sore - Radda Barna**

According to Radda Barna, the wereda depends more on the *belg* season, producing maize as the staple food of the wereda. However, the 1996 *belg* harvest was mentioned to be poor as the result of excessive rainfall at the flowering and seed filling stages. Teff, which is harvested during the main *meher* season and is considered a cash crop, was said to have produced a better yield in comparison to the *belg* season. Also, the Coffee Berry Disease (CBD) affecting coffee plantations, and infestations of the sweet potato butterfly, were prominent among factors contributing to poor crop performance. In general, it was reported by the agency that the 1996 crop production was less than that of the year before. However, currently cereal prices have declined in the market due to increased supply from neighboring

areas. For instance maize, which was sold for Birr 100 this time last year, is now being sold for Birr 60.

### **Offa Agriculture Office**

The wereda is known to be *belg*-dependent; however the 1996 *belg* maize production was reported to have been less than anticipated, with a 10% performance drop in comparison to 1995.

Teff, the main cash crop of the wereda, was reported to have yielded a fairly good harvest. The proceeds from the sale of teff crops are usually used for the purchase of fertilizer and payment of government tax. This may prove to be difficult this year as grain prices have generally declined in comparison with last year, with teff prices decreasing from Birr 160 to Birr 110.

According to a recent assessment conducted by the wereda in collaboration with the zonal Early Warning Unit, of the total population, 30 to 40% will be vulnerable to food shortages in 1997, the majority of whom are expected to be from the lowland parts of the wereda.

Shortage of grazing land, trypanosomiasis on livestock and malaria were also reported, as was the shortage of medicine to counter animal and human diseases.

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