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**FIELD TRIP REPORT: TIGRAY REGION (Southern Zone) and
AMHARA REGION (Welo and North Shewa Zones) 3 - 13 July
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SUMMARY

The purpose of the mission was to collect information on the 1995 *belg* harvest and to observe the general food situation, ongoing relief activities and Employment Generation Schemes. Despite the late onset and uneven distribution of the *belg* (short) rains, especially in the central and western highlands of Welo, the general outcome has been much better than 1994. But due to late sowing, some of the *belg* crops are still in the field and some harvest loss is expected with the starting of *kiremt* (long) rains.

Food distributions have been carried out by Relief and Rehabilitation Bureaux and Non-Governmental Organisations in food deficit areas mainly since the second quarter of the year. Despite the downscaling of the number of beneficiaries by the regional and national authorities, distributions have been taking place in a rather irregular manner due to supply shortages and the amount of food distributed has not covered the total needs.

Food for work or community work activities are ongoing in all zones, mainly concentrating on soil and water conservation, road construction and maintenance as well as repair works on schools and clinics. The ambitious aim of channeling 80% of the food aid through EGS/FFW started with the local and zonal authorities and representatives of line ministries rather unprepared. Lack of tools and limited budgets have contributed to reducing both the range of activities and their impact. Some zones such as Wag Hamra, North Welo and South Welo have opted for a general mobilisation of the population on community based works, whereas only the most needy people will benefit from food distributions. The number of beneficiaries or the monthly rations may vary depending on existing stocks and supplies.

Visited zones in Region 1 (Tigray) and the Amhara National Regional Government¹ face enormous land pressure due to increasing population density. Subsequently, land holdings decrease dramatically from one generation to the next, provoking progressive impoverishment of the rural population. Although a known phenomena, this is a crucial issue for the future development of the region and, therefore, special emphasis will be given to the subject in this report. Reforestation, which is another issue closely connected to this problem, will be considered hereafter in the light of disaster prevention.

¹ Post election change of Region 3 (Amhara) to "The Amhara National Regional Government"

SOUTHERN TIGRAY ZONE

With the 1994 *meher* (main) season harvest reaching 66% of the expected yield (amounting to 1,877,694 quintals from the expected 2,852,342 quintals), the population in need of food assistance in 1995 has been established at 195,000 people with quotas of 60%, 80%, 100% and again 60% respectively allotted for the four quarters of the year.

The *belg* harvest assessment conducted at the end of June 1995 in the seven *belg*-producing weredas of Southern Tigray revealed a rather good harvest, reaching 75% of expected yield and amounting to 187,328 quintals from the expected 249,630 quintals, despite the late onset of the rains.

For the third quarter of the year, the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP) is distributing food for 129,000 beneficiaries and the RRB for 66,000. As the *belg* harvest is expected to alleviate the food deficit in some Peasant Associations (PAs), part of this food aid will subsequently be reallocated. The local inhabitants who are able to work are currently participating in different EGS and food for work activities, in accordance with the new distribution policy. In addition, the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) is also carrying out free food distributions to 15,114 beneficiaries in three weredas (Negseged, Endamehone and Maychew).

According to the zonal Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau, there are also some 8,000-9,000 unemployed people in the zone, with 3,000 in Maychew town alone. Until now, no long term rehabilitation programme is planned yet.

Other than relief programmes, there are several rehabilitation and development activities ongoing in the zone: the RRB grants small credits to stimulate trade activities - this programme has assisted 400 people until now; Ethiopian Red Cross Society/International Federation of Red Cross Societies (ERCs/IFRC) implements an integrated rural development programme in three weredas; Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) runs clinic and water projects in Mehone wereda; and Sustainable Agricultural Rehabilitation in Tigray (SART) has a FFW programme, employing around 4,000 people for dam and road constructions and the maintenance of schools and clinics. On the other hand, there is also a new technical school opening in Maychew next school year, which is expected to host two to three hundred students.

Concerning health issues, there is a serious goiter problem in Negseget, affecting the majority of the population. The Bureau of Health has started iodine treatment.

WAG HAMRA ZONE

Previously long a neglected area, the newly created Wag Hamra zone faces many problems due to lack of adequate infrastructures and public services as well as prolonged drought. Ongoing road constructions, once completed, will provide all year access to Korem in the east (construction to be completed within one year), to Adwa in the north and to the Chinese road in the south (construction to end in three years). Despite last year's bad *meher* season, the number of food aid beneficiaries has been reduced by 55% from original zonal needs assessment figures to only 121,750 people

for a nine-month allocation, with monthly rations of 12.5 kilogrammes per capita. Until now the food supply has been insufficient and food shortage is widespread. The repositioning of food in the weredas before the start of the *kiremt* rains has been hampered by a shortage of supplies and lack of storage facilities. However, March to May migrations this year have been contained by the promise of food assistance.

At the zonal level, it has been decided to mobilise the entire population for communal works, but to distribute food only to the most needy. Food distributions have so far taken place for the months of May and June, with the RRB covering 75,883 beneficiaries. The RRB's distributions are complemented by the Ethiopian Relief Organisation (ERO) in Sekota and Gazgibla weredas, assisting 9,867 people and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) in Sekota, Gazgibla and Dehana weredas assisting 36,000 people. As a result, NGO food stocks are actually being replenished. The RRB has available only 500 tons of grain and hopes that promised supplies from Kombolcha warehouses would arrive in time, before the road becomes impassable. Since this visit, it has been confirmed by the RRC's Kombolcha central warehouse that 423 and 381 tons having been transported between 6 and 9 July to Zequala and Abergele (Agew) weredas respectively. Including the food stocks in Sekota and based on a 12.5 kilogrammes ration, the RRB will now be able to cover 52,160 beneficiaries for a period of two months, but leaving another 23,723 needy people without food supplies.

The 1995 *belg* rains have been very poor in the entire zone. Even though there is no *belg* crop production in the area, farmers depend on the light showers for pasture, land preparation and seeding of long cycle crops. Although all fields have been ploughed, virtually no long cycle crop has been observed in the fields. People have been hit hard by prolonged drought, losing most of their assets, and farmers have been observed ploughing with donkeys for lack of oxen. Accordingly, the evolving situation in the zone should be monitored closely, not only with regard to relief aid, but also in view of rehabilitation. Finally, special public work programmes would be needed to repair widespread environmental damages and simultaneously enable farmers regain their basic means of production.

In the light of advanced environmental degradation, the zonal Bureau of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection has established 24 nurseries and produced four million seedlings (mainly local varieties and Eucalyptus, Acacia melanoxylon) to be planted during the coming *meher* season. Likewise 5,000 hectares of arable land is protected through soil conservation programmes during 1994/95.

NORTH WELO ZONE

Following a relatively good *meher* harvest in the lowlands but unsatisfactory yields in the highlands of North Welo, six weredas of Delanta, Dawint, Meket, Gidan, Bugna and Walda have been earmarked for food assistance. These weredas account for a total of 237,875 beneficiaries. Until June, the RRB was providing assistance in the three weredas of Delanta, Dawint and Wadla, whereas EOC/JRP are distributing food aid in Meket, Bugna and Gedan (see Table 1), assisted by the RRB. During the third quarter of 1995, the RRB will only distribute 960 tons in Delanta and 367 tons Dawint weredas. Save the Children Fund (UK) will assist with distribution of 1,230 tons of

food aid in Wadla and 466.5 tons in Delanta weredas. In these areas, some migratory movements were observed during the first quarter of the year, before food assistance resumed. In view of the approaching *kiremt* rains, food was being prepositioned in the different weredas of North Welo at the end of June. Also, the population has been mobilized for communal works in the field of soil and water conservation, reforestation, maintenance of schools and clinics, but only the most needy are receiving food aid.

Five out of the nine weredas in North Welo are considered *belg*-dependent. Meket and Delanta have received very little rain and harvest is expected to be very low, whereas the lowlands of Habru, Goba Lafto and Kobo have had a better harvest as compared to the preceding two years, despite unseasonable heavy rains at the end of May. With 50,590 hectares sown, harvest was expected to reach 362,710 quintals, but a recent harvest assessment places the yield at an estimated 267,036 quintals, 74% of the expected amount. With some crops still in the green stage, additional damage might occur with the onset of the *kiremt* rains.

At the beginning of July an outbreak of small numbers of migratory locust was observed in the area. For the moment however, the situation has not been alarming despite the lack of an adequate amount of chemicals and transportation facilities and it was anticipated that the outbreak would be contained by the full onset of *kiremt* rains.

Livestock in the highland are suffering from lack of pasture, but according to the Bureau of Agriculture market prices have not fallen beyond the normal seasonal average. Veterinary clinics exist but services are minimal due to lack of staff. About twenty veterinary technicians are actually under training and will be assigned to the zone in the near future. FAO has also trained some peasants in remote weredas on veterinary care and supplied them with drugs against external and internal parasites.

Several road constructions and maintenance work programmes are underway such as the Alem Ketema-Sekota road (constructed by Africa Engineering, Berta, Sur), the Weldiya-Mekele and Weldiya-Bahir Dar road maintenance and repair (ABU), and several feeder roads, only partly implemented through labour intensive works (by SNV Netherlands and SOS Sahel). Furthermore, there are four river diversions projects ongoing at Golina (implemented by the Ethiopian Water Works Construction Authority), in Alewoha, Gotu and Mersa (implemented by the regional authorities), as well as spring developments at Lalibella and Kulmesk (constructed by EWWCA) and several service home, school, clinic and dwelling construction programmes.

SOUTH WELO ZONE

The 1995 *belg* rains were also late in South Welo, with moisture stress at flowering stage and heavy rains at harvesting time, especially in the central and western highlands. Despite existing unfavourable conditions, the average outcome of the 1995 *belg* season has been much better than during the two previous years. From a forecasted 89,773 hectares of cultivated land and an expected harvest of 878,372, 75,627 hectares was ploughed and 72,222 hectares was sown (in 1994 only 66,599 hectares was sown). The yield has therefore been much better at 549,070 quintals (the

yield in 1994 was 213,027 quintals). Some barley fields will only be harvested towards end of July and may be partially damaged by the *kiremt* rains.

With the exception of Tenta wereda where ERCS/IFRC are operating and Lege Ambo, Mekdela and Kelela weredas where SCF (UK) work, food distributions in a total of nine weredas of the central and western part of the zone started only in the second quarter of the year. These distributions are for a total of 379,165 beneficiaries. At the end of June, two additional weredas received a one-month round of distribution for 49,544 beneficiaries (Table 2). According to RRB Dessie, not much stress migration has been observed in South Welo, but local inhabitants are selling assets to purchase food. Also, the normal food pipelines have been reversed, with merchants now bringing food to the countryside and selling at high prices.

As it is already getting late to preposition food for the third quarter of the year, the rural communities have been asked to maintain the roads. Despite these measures, provision of food supplies to the central and western weredas would be difficult during the rainy season and with the start of rains, distribution points would have to be set up far from the beneficiary homesteads. (For example 30-50 kilometres from Legambo, Sayint & Kelela main towns). No precise indications has been given concerning the RRC allocations for the third quarter of the year. According to information gathered at the RRC central warehouse in Kombolcha, a total of 3,217.2 tons of food was transported to seven weredas (Table 3) between 24 June and 10 July, covering an average of one month ration. SCF (UK) is expected to cover the shortfall of July and provide full rations in August and September for Sayint, Wegedi and Debre Sina weredas.

If food distributions for the second quarter have been concentrated mainly in nine weredas, food assistance for the third quarter should be extended to others such as Ambassel, Dessie Zuria and Kalu, where part of the population will face acute food shortages.

South Welo also hosts 39,479 displaced persons from Assab and Eritrea, who have not received much food aid since February 1995. In June, a FFW programme was started for all the displaced, but due to lack of sufficient stocks only those stationed in Dessie, a total of 28,189 people, got their food rations. In order to avoid unnecessary stress and subsequent problems, and to allow a smooth continuation of the FFW programme, it would be of great interest to assure adequate food stocks for these beneficiaries

Livestock has been stressed due to lack of fodder. In addition, despite the existence of veterinary clinics in most weredas, animals suffer from various endemic diseases as a result of inadequate drug supplies.

OROMYIA ZONE

From a total of five weredas in the zone, four are *belg*-dependent. According to the zonal RRB in Kemise, this year's *belg* harvest has been very good and the general food situation is much better as compared to last year. The RRB is only operating in Bati wereda, where people who are largely dependent on their livestock face some

food shortages. A total of 32,322 people currently receive food through FFW activities. The ongoing programmes concentrate on soil and water conservation, tree planting, check dam construction, road maintenance and spring development. A first distribution of 4,848.3 quintals of sorghum has taken place in June for the above mentioned FFW participants. The programme is planned for three months until August, when a new assessment will determine eventual future needs.

NORTH SHEWA ZONE

North Shewa zone covers 30 rural weredas, out of which 19 are *belg*-dependent. According to the 1994 *meher* crop assessment, food deficiency has been recognised in four weredas of Lalo Midir, Mama Midir, Gera Midir and Gishe Rabel. The zonal RRB in Debre Birhan has reported that World Vision International (WVI) is operating in Gera Midir wereda, covering 30,150 people under FFW activities and 7,540 beneficiaries under free food distribution since May 1995. The RRB is assisting in the three remaining weredas of the zone, with a total of 19,254 people under FFW and 4,440 beneficiaries under free food distribution since June. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) was to operate jointly with the RRB in Gishe Rabel, but has so far failed to preposition food. As the roads will become impassable during the rainy season, the RRB has prepositioned part of the needed food.

In the four food deficient weredas which are *belg*-dependent, assistance was only planned until the *belg* harvest, but initial findings indicate the need to extend relief programmes until September. However, this will be based on the results of the harvest assessment carried out by National Early Warning Department of the RRC.²

A migratory locust outbreak has been reported from Shewa Robit. The Bureau of Agriculture has started control measures, but lacking adequate stocks of pesticides, has asked non-governmental organisations for assistance. It is believed that given adequate measures and the onset of normal *kiremt* rains, the pest will be controlled.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF RURAL IMPOVERISHMENT

Traveling across Welo and the Southern zone of Tigray, one can not ignore the prevalence of extreme land pressure as a result of over cultivation of not only all the arable land but also the unsuitable slopes of some highland escarpments. There is virtually no land left for any extension, and with a rural population growth rate of about 3%, cultivating units may be expected to double approximately every 20 years. As a consequence, farmers are confronted with progressively shrinking land holdings on which to meet production needs. This leads to an increased pressure which exceeds the production capacity of the land, and results in decreased soil fertility and other environmental damages not to mention effects on the general climatic conditions. Simultaneously, with the gradual depletion of farmers assets, means of production decline, rural impoverishment spreads and vulnerability increases. It is therefore not a lack of knowledge but the decreasing means of the farmers that conditions actual farming methods and low productivity.

² The assessment report of the National Early Warning Department of the RRC can be obtained from the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.

The vicious circle of reinforcing negative effects is now in full progress and hinders sustainable development efforts considerably. Consequently, it is of utmost importance to know the dynamics, linkages, interactions and implications of all effecting factors in order to understand the basic problems and priorities of the rural population, and to jointly elaborate and implement adequate policies and approaches capable of breaking this cycle and reversing its negative trends.

Agricultural production alone assures 53.8% (UNDP 1992/93 figures) of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Ethiopia and 84% of its productive sector. It employs around 88% of the total labour force and accounts for about 90% of export values. In other words, the major part of the national economy is produced by the farmers. According to the rapidly increasing population size and the given limitation of natural resources for agriculture use, this enormous task can no longer be born by the farmers alone and urgent measures have to be taken to alleviate the ever increasing pressures on rural population.

Intensification of agriculture, voluntary resettlements and other measures can only be a partial response to the magnitude of the existing problems, especially in respect to the increasing population size. If the primary agricultural sector can no longer absorb the growing labour force, the national economy has to diversify, thereby placing special emphasis on an industrial sector that accounts only for 10% of the GDP (UNDP 1992/93 figures). This long term priority aim is one that entails considerable efforts in many areas such as vocational training, and can not address the urgent needs of the short to mid-term period. It is then crucial to immediately find sustainable means of improving the current situation. The National Programme for Disaster Prevention Preparedness and Mitigation (NPDPM) foresees as one of its objectives the creation of development oriented relief safety nets through Employment Generation Schemes (EGS). The RRC has already adopted this objective in its 1995 programme, with the aim to channel 80% of food aid through EGS/FFW. Despite initial problems in planning and implementation, the lack of monetisation programmes in support of EGS, etc., considerable efforts are being made to achieve an ambitious aim.

Considering the extent of the current problems, additional efforts have to be made in order to prevent future disasters, create the necessary infrastructure for long term development and positively engage the existing human resources to build up a sound national economy. In this regard, the upgrading of labour intensive works as a national priority should be given a key position. Planned and ongoing road constructions alone, if implemented with a labour intensive and, where necessary, mixed approach, could already generate several thousands of job opportunities in every region without additional costs, while simultaneously reducing actual relief needs.

REFORESTATION IN THE LIGHT OF DISASTER PREVENTION

The progressive reduction of the natural vegetation in the mountainous parts of the northern regions leads to the gradual destruction of the productive potential in these areas, while causing increasing damage to the lower arable land. As a result, the region is increasingly subjected to recurrent drought and flooding. Though the problem has been known for many decades, little was achieved to reverse the negative trends.

Two major factors, the rapidly increasing needs of fuel and construction wood and fodder and disincentive land tenure policies, can be identified as main obstacles to successful reforestation campaigns. As these needs are foreseen to further increase, little can be done to counter their effect. On the other hand and taking into account the increasing awareness of farmers with regard to the environmental degradation, much could be achieved through the adoption of adequate land tenure policies. Being an issue of crucial importance and vast complexity, the subject exceeds the framework of this report and there will be only reference to and discussion of an interesting experience in South Welo zone.

The South Welo zonal Bureau of Agriculture initiated in 1993 a trial programme, dividing communal land into individual plots to be distributed to interested farmers for reforestation and pasture. A visit to one of the trial sites at Bulbulu/Bistima, Were Babu wereda, has given the following picture: The response of the farmers has been very positive and many of them have used the opportunity to establish their individual plantation. The coverage is not very dense due to lack of seedlings and the only tree species used is Eucalyptus. According to the representatives of the Bureau of Agriculture and the Bureau of Natural Resources Development and Environmental Protection at Bisitima, many more farmers would engage in reforestation activities if the land holding policy would grant them the usufruct.

These trials clearly state the interest of farmers in reforestation, as long as they directly profit from their inputs and products. Likewise, it shows the dependency of farmers on short term solutions. The daily fight for subsistence requires quick returns and therefore Eucalyptus is the ideal choice.

Without an in depth study one can still presume that a land tenure policy in favour of farmers interest could positively address the reforestation issue. On the other hand, communal land should be maintained as communal property and the usufruct on individual plots only given for suitable land, such as in areas where Eucalyptus can not cause further environmental damage. The remaining land, mainly steep slopes with shallow soils, would need a more careful and specific approach and could be covered by EGS/labour intensive works. Finally, a land tenure system clearly in favour of the rural communities could quickly help to improve the desolate state of forest cover, while substantially increasing the production of fodder and wood. In a long term, it would then improve general climatic conditions and reduce actual disaster proneness.