

Field Trip to Amhara and Tigray Regions: 15 May - 1 June 1996

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1. Introduction

During this field trip to the two regions rainfall was observed not only in the *belg* growing areas (North Shewa, Oromiya, South Welo, North Welo and Southern zone of Tigray) but also in the remaining zones of Amhara and Tigray regions. At the time of the visit excessive rains were becoming an issue of concern in the *belg* growing areas as it is feared they may hamper the *belg* harvest in some parts. This year's *belg* season has also been characterized by an unusual occurrence of hailstorms, which locally damage crops. The remaining non-*belg* areas also received good rains favourable for farmers to begin land preparation. Water availability for human and animal consumption is currently satisfactory.

Rains outside the *belg*-growing areas are critical where relief food has to be prepositioned before the *kiremt* rainy season, namely in Western Tigray (Dima wereda), Wag Hamra zone, North Gonder zone (Adis Selam wereda), South Gonder (parts of Lay Gayint and Simada weredas), North Welo zone (Bugna and Delanta weredas) and South Welo zone (all weredas west of Dessie). Relief agencies operating in these zones fear that the necessary food items cannot be transported to the most inaccessible parts of these areas (which are also the most vulnerable) before the onset of the *kiremt* rainy season.

2. Amhara Region

2.1. General situation

Following the slow start of the *belg* rainy season, in some areas only after mid-March, and interrupted rainfall (two to three weeks) at the beginning of the season, above normal rainfall has prevailed in the Amhara Region. Unusual heavy hailstorms have been reported by all the zones producing *belg* crops. The continuation of the *belg* rains into June, however, may hamper the harvest of maturing barley and teff crops. Water-logging is also hindering the sowing of long-cycle crops (sorghum and maize).

Starting in April, relief food distributions are ongoing in all drought-affected areas. The situation has so far remained stable, and stress migration, which occurred at the beginning of the year in Wag Hamra, North Welo and North Gonder zones, was considerably reduced by emergency distributions in the worst affected areas (Wag Hamra zone, Adis Selam wereda in North Gonder zone and Bugna wereda in North Welo zone). At the time of the field trip no unusual migration movements were reported.

2.2. North Shewa zone

In the northern weredas of North Shewa zone the *belg* rains started late and stopped completely for a period of two weeks. Rains resumed only in April with a more or less regular pattern. Although the zonal early warning team will carry out an assessment in the month of June, it is already known that the hectareage cultivated with *belg* crops will be less than that of the previous year.

2.3. South Welo zone

Although late, the distribution of the *belg* rains seems to be more favourable than in the previous years. Rains have been reported through to the western part of the zone. In the highland areas of Ambassel and Tenta weredas, hailstorms damaged the maturing barley crops; however, the extent of the damage has not been assessed yet.

Food distributions have started in the worst affected areas, which remain the same as last year (the majority located in the highlands west of Dessie). The conditions in Debre Sina and Kalu wereda are critical and the zonal DPP bureau has requested food allocations for 13,000 beneficiaries in each of the two weredas. The central DPPC and the regional DPP Bureau have so far not responded to the zonal request. Especially in Debre Sina wereda, food deficits for parts of the population had already been identified as early as the end of 1995.

According to the zonal Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) the continuing rainfall is creating problems not only for the *belg* harvest but also for *meher* land preparation. Appearance of armyworms was reported in Kalu wereda, but no details on the extent of infestation could be given at the time of the visit (30 May, 1996).

2.4. North Welo zone

The pattern of the *belg* season in North Welo zone is similar to that in the Southern zone of Tigray. The lowland areas in the eastern part of the zone received unusual early rains at the beginning of January, followed by a six-week period with no rainfall. The rains resumed with irregular distribution at the end of March, reaching above-normal quantities in May. Some hailstorms were also reported in Habro and Gubalafto weredas during this time.

After the first interruption of the rains, part of the areas cultivated in January had to be reploughed and prolonged rains may result in damage to the teff and barley harvests. Also, in the lowland areas torrential rains have caused water-logging in fields prepared for sewing of long-cycle crops (sorghum and maize). The usual planting season for these crops being in May, a delay in planting may result in growth difficulties for the *meher* crops.

Armyworm infestations were reported in Kobo wereda and a spraying campaign was started during the last week of May.

Emergency food distributions carried out in January for kebeles in Bugna wereda (south of Wag Hamra zone) have somewhat alleviated the situation in this affected area. Food distributions for all the other vulnerable areas resumed in April.

2.5. North Gonder zone

North Gonder zone recently received good rains, unexpected at this time of the year. These rains, although welcomed for land preparation, have a negative impact on relief food transports to the remote areas in the Simien mountains and Belessa wereda.

The food distributions in January for Adis Selam wereda have reduced migration and displacement for the time being. However, if food assistance cannot be continued the situation may deteriorate again with the onset of the *kiremt* (main) rainy season. 1995 post-harvest assessments showed that the wereda is more affected than expected. The zonal DPP bureau has requested food assistance for 34,500 beneficiaries, which is more than double the figure in the March 1996 appeal for food-aid assistance (15,000).

In the remaining drought-affected areas the Ethiopian Relief Organization (ERO) is carrying out food distributions in Belessa wereda, whereas the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) has been assisting in Janamora wereda since April. DPPC is covering Beyeda, Wegera and Adis Selam weredas.

2.6. South Gonder zone

South Gonder zone also received rainfall unusual for this time of the year. At the time of the field visit some feeder roads were already inaccessible in Simada and Lay Gayint weredas. Operating relief agencies remain the same as 1995: ERO is covering Ibnat wereda, Food for the Hungry International (FHI) covers Simada and Tach Gayint weredas and EOC is working in Lay Gayint wereda. FHI have so far planned distributions in May, June and July, and EOC are planning for six months. Due to the restructuring of wereda boundaries, several drought-affected kebeles from neighbouring weredas were incorporated into Farta wereda, changing the population in need of food assistance from 9,000 to 15,000.

3. Tigray Region

3.1. General situation

In the Southern zone, although the *belg* rains started with a delay of three to four weeks and with irregular distribution, there was almost too much rain during the month of May. The remaining zones of the region have received good intermediary rains which are important for land preparation, pasture and water availability for human and livestock consumption. At the time of the visit the Pest Control Department of the regional Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) was on alert for possible armyworm infestations.

Due to shortage of food stocks, relief food distributions could not be carried out as planned at the beginning of the year. Despite this delay in planned distributions, no significant deterioration of the nutritional status of the population was observed and migration movements have remained below the level of previous years.

At the time of the visit all implementing agencies (the Relief Society of Tigray - REST, the Joint Relief Partnership - JRP, World Vision International - WVI, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society - ERCS and the regional Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau - DPPB) had started food distributions in the affected areas.

According to the regional DPP Early Warning Department the following numbers of beneficiaries are in need of food assistance:

Zone	Total number of beneficiaries	Assistance for 12 months	Assistance for 9 months	Food requirements in MT
Southern zone	132,600	46,944	85,656	20,130.8
Eastern zone	280,800	198,416	82,384	47,332.7
Central zone	293,900	178,791	115,109	48,169.0
Western zone	26,000	20,000	6,000	4,460.0
Mekelle	18,000	18,000	-----	3,285.0
Total	751,300	462,151	289,149	123,377.5

(Source: Early Warning Department, Regional DPP Bureau, Mekelle)

The number of beneficiaries has not increased following the 1995 post-harvest assessment. However, a higher number of beneficiaries need food assistance for 12 months, and the regional DPP Bureau has requested the central DPPC to approve an additional allocation of 23,500 tons, which brings the total food requirements for the region to 123,377.5 tons.

A major concern to all visited zones is the handling of the issue of displaced populations. Continued food distributions are no longer considered a solution for this category of beneficiaries. The rehabilitation of this group has been discussed, but lack of funds, and so far not much interest on the side of NGOs, has resulted in limited concrete results.

3.2. Southern zone

The condition in the seven *belg*-producing weredas varies from wereda to wereda. Due to scarce rains in February and March many hectares had to be reploughed. The zonal early warning committee expects a *belg* crop yield reduction of approximately 25 percent. However, *belg* crop assessments to be carried out at the beginning of June will provide more precise information.

Although, Mehoni and Wefla weredas expect better conditions this year, *belg* crop production in the remaining lowland weredas may be lower than last year. Chercher wereda has only received minimal rainfall, and of the initial 1,144 hectares prepared and sewn 1,040 hectares had to be reploughed for cultivation of long-cycle crops (sorghum).

3.3. Eastern zone

The Eastern zone has reported food shortages in all weredas. In this zone the regional DPP Bureau provided food to the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) for the first round of distributions. However, good rainfall during April has given farmers hope for slightly better conditions compared to last year.

3.4. Central zone

In the Central zone the most affected areas remain the weredas in the former Adwa and Tembien awrajas. As in the Eastern zone, regular rainfall over the past two months have created favourable conditions and water availability is good for human and animal consumption as well as for land preparation for the *meher* season, which is well under-way.

3.5. Western zone

Conditions are good in the Western zone. Dima wereda is currently the only area of concern. This wereda, located south of the Tekeze at the foothills of the Simien mountains, has experienced four to five consecutive seasons of poor rainfall, resulting in food shortages affecting about 26,000 persons. Food distributions in this areas are carried out by the regional DPP Bureau, and, since the wereda is difficult to access, food has to be prepositioned before the onset of the *kiremt* rains. Short haul trucks have difficulties in reaching the wereda due to unusual rainfall in this area.

4. Conclusion

Since the *belg* harvest assessments will only take place at the beginning of June, precise information regarding the outcome of the *belg* crop production was not available at the time of the visit. However, various issues raised by the zonal BoA touch on the difficulties of adjusting cropping patterns in *belg* producing areas to the respective growing periods (*belg* and *kiremt* seasons).

An issue repeatedly raised by zonal authorities is the rehabilitation of displaced groups. These groups are normally found in urban areas, and comprise mainly of women and children leaving Eritrea after the change of government in 1991. A small number of displaced have been rehabilitated, whereas the remaining receive food assistance on an irregular basis. According to the zonal DPP bureaux, international and indigenous NGOs show great reluctance in assisting to solve this issue.

Various zonal DPP bureaux once again mentioned the lack of field vehicles necessary for efficient monitoring and early warning tasks requested by the regional and central DPP offices.

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