



Targeting problems cause malnutrition

Shortage of seeds leads to next crisis

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1 Introduction and background



Insufficient rains during the Belg and Meher seasons in 2002 severely affected crop production in most of the weredas in the Rift valley of SNNPR. In many places the drought caused a substantial and often almost total loss of harvest. As a result, a large portion of the population of the almost 500 kilometers-long stretch of land south of Addis Ababa all the way down to Konso special wereda is dependent on food aid and therefore extremely vulnerable to unforeseen mishaps or shortcomings in the planning or implementation of relief operations.

The unpredictable climate and other unforeseeable circumstances related to agriculture, sometimes result in mistakes during the pre harvest assessment, which was the base for last year's food aid appeal and beneficiary numbers. (In SNNPR, 1,114,652 are receiving assistance, 471,780 are under close monitoring). Though almost unavoidable, misjudgement in the early evaluation of needy people can lead to serious consequences, when segments of the population are left out during time of distribution.

Problems with the implementation of relief operations at the local level, mainly the targeting of beneficiaries, are a well-known phenomenon as well. Small children, who are the weakest members of a drought-affected population, are usually the first to show signs of stress and to suffer. Malnutrition among children is a prime indicator for food deficiency in a given area.

Malnourished child in Soddo, Welayta zone, (Photo by WVI, February 2003)

While the relief operations in all drought affected zones south of Addis have been well under way since last fall, reports came in about an increase of malnutrition cases in pocket areas of SNNPR. As a main objective, the UN-EUE mission therefore looked at the humanitarian situation in all the places with reported or suspected problems in Sidama, Silti, Guraghe, Wolayta and Gamugofa zones as well as Alaba and Konso special weredas. In general, the relief operations managed by the DPPC in conjunction with WFP and by NGO's working in

the region can be described as adequate and the humanitarian situation as satisfactory in most of the region.

But there are exceptions. The UN-EUE mission discovered serious and worrisome cases of targeting problems at local level, which led to extensive suffering and malnutrition mainly in Silti and the eastern weredas of Guraghe. In some parts of Wela yta zone, a miscalculation during the pre harvest assessment led to famine-like problems which are only partly resolved. Steadily growing numbers of malnutrition cases are observed in Konso, where supplementary food is lacking. Pockets of malnutrition are found in all the zones we visited and things are likely to get worse with the number of beneficiaries increasing over the next couple of months until the next potential harvest can be brought in.

Unfortunately, the likelihood of a good and sufficient future harvest is diminishing by the day partly due to lacking communication and misunderstandings of concerned agencies. The main problem is seeds (chapter 3). Since almost all the weredas in the visited zones are dependent to substantial degrees on Belg production, focus of the mission was the availability of agricultural inputs for the belg season that starts by the beginning of March. The findings are disturbing. Practically in all the kebeles, where beneficiaries are found, serious shortages of planting materials are a fact. While the Belg rains are setting in, many destitute farmers have nothing else to plant but maize and wheat, which is handed out as relief food. The problem of seed shortage, if not immediately solved, will lead to marginal harvests in many places and to a certain prolonged dependency on food aid, even if the climatic conditions during this coming Belg season are favourable.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are neither god-given nor the result of drought alone. One of the main factors for the continuing food crises in the country is the rapid and unhindered population growth as will be shown in the case of Konso Special Wereda (chapter 2.8). If Ethiopia wants to become less dependent on foreign food aid, all appropriate means should be explored to stop the ongoing population explosion.

2 Pockets of malnutrition and lack of water

Following is a list of all the weredas in the different zones where UN-EUE has received reports of malnutrition and witnessed the problems on the ground. With some exceptions, the majority of cases of food deficiency is found in the lowlands. They are often combined with a lack of water and related health problems. As mentioned in chapter 1, major problems were witnessed in Silti and Guraghe zones, where targeting of beneficiaries was ridden with difficulties. This led to a delay in food distributions and subsequently malnutrition. The



Lining up for scarce water, Alaba special wereda (Photo by H. Rami, UN-EUE, February 2003)

regional DPPC as well as the NGO's that are active in the area complain about a lack of supplementary food for the whole region. In Konso special wereda, this, combined with local feeding practices for young children, has purportedly led to a non-quantified number of deaths.

2.1 Sidama: lack of water, food aid

Out of 10 weredas of Sidama zone, five normally can cope to a certain degree with the sale of coffee during times of crisis. But depressed coffee prices and the drought have reduced such coping possibilities significantly. According to the zonal DPPD, the amount of cereal-rations delivered was fluctuating and did not match requirements. No complete figures were available, but the Bureau of Health reported increasing cases of malnutrition. In response, the zonal DPPD has requested supplementary food from the region for 50,000 children. The agency has trained one person in each wereda to monitor malnutrition and report it back to headquarters.

2.1.1 Awassa Zuria wereda,

Many Kebeles suffer from food shortages. DPPB and the Bureau of Health recorded 2,300 cases of Marasmus in the midland (*woyna dega*) and 1,700 in the lowland (*kola*) as well as 1,000 cases of Kwashiorkor in the mid- and 2000 cases in the lowland.

The UN-EUE mission witnessed obvious cases of malnutrition in Allamura kebele at a registration site for beneficiaries. According to local officials, many people even from far away kebeles came to register for food aid and supplementary food.

2.1.2 Boricha wereda

Marasmus (1,500 cases midlands, 2,511- lowlands) and Kwashiorkor (482 midlands, 1,232 - lowlands) were registered at the zonal DPPD. 60,000 people suffer from serious water shortages. The geological formations of the rift valley pose great problems in the search for ground water. Two boreholes, which were sunk by the Catholic Relief -Service (CRS) to a depth of 300 meters, did not yield any water. People have to drink water from Blate river and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is tankering water with 7 trucks. So far no outbreaks of diseases have been reported, but the health situation needs close monitoring.

2.1.3 Dale, Bensa, Aleta Wondo weredas

Dale, the biggest wereda in the zone, has similar water problems to those of Boricha. Affected are 47,000 people, who are forced to consume water from lake Abbaya, which is salty. Two boreholes drilled by the Church of Christ yielded no water. Bensa and Aleta Wondo weredas reported six child deaths, which are said to be related to malnutrition.

2.2 Alaba Special Wereda: Malnutrition increasing

Alaba has had almost no rains since one year and lost 95% of its maize harvest. As a result, a serious shortage of seeds makes planting in the coming belg season for many farmers almost impossible (see chapter 3. Seed crises). The wereda has been receiving food aid since last June for 67,670 beneficiaries in 67 kebeles. The paediatrician in the local clinic in Kulito reported increasing cases of malnutrition. Out of 90 children, who arrived in a one-week time span, 20-30

had signs of Kwashiokor and Marasmus. The poor man had no weighing scale and therefore could not substantiate his findings. The NGO Mercy, which is active in Guraghe and Silti, was planning to distribute supplementary foods within the next couple of days.

The whole wereda suffers from serious water problems. Females from 10 surrounding kebeles have to walk four to five hours from their villages to fetch water at the water points in Kulito town. Cattle have to travel 2-3 days for watering in the Blate River.

2.3 Hadiya zone: supplementary food and seeds from development funds

In Badewacho wereda of Hadiya zone World Vision International (WVI) was forced to redirect development funds for the purchase of 620 Quintals of supplementary food for needy children. Global Acute Malnutrition was at 7% in September and a new survey is being made this March. Money from WVI's development budget will also be used for the purchase of seeds if no commitments are made by donors. The wereda council has identified more than 5300 households that need seed support. The shortage of supplementary food and seeds poses long-term problems if development funds have to be used to patch holes in the relief-response to the current crises.

2.4 Welayta: pocket areas of famine despite good Sapie rains

Good Sapie rains in December brought some relief in the Welayta midlands. Cattle there are in good condition and in many places opportunistic maize planting by farmers was undertaken. In the midlands root crops, mostly sweet potato, as well as maize showed good vegetative growth, thanks to some early belg rains, and harvests can be expected by May if the weather conditions are favourable. Households can cope to a certain degree with the



Food distribution in Welayta zone (photo by WVI, February 2003)

consumption of carbohydrate rich false Banana, *Enset*, which is in good condition now and an important staple food for many farmers in the area (*Shank and Ertiro, 1996*).

Due to the failure of rains last year, however, the situation in the zone is still critical and pockets with serious problems remain despite the ongoing food distribution. Welayta was self-sufficient only for two years in the last 10 years.

2.4.1 Damot Weyde wereda

In November, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) stood at 6.2% in Damot Weyde wereda, which has 15 badly drought-affected kebeles. But according to the NGO Concern, which is active in Bedessa, this figure probably has increased substantially in the meantime. A new survey will be made by the NGO this March. Should the figure surpass 10%, which is to be expected, Concern will start to target children with supplementary food. The NGO trained 25 community managers and children below five are screened on a weekly base.

In the clinic, which is run by the NGO in Bedessa, already an increasing number of malnourished children are admitted. They receive supplementary food. Many children also suffer from bloated stomachs. Concern suspects waterborne diseases. Severe water problems for people and livestock are reported in the wereda lowlands and people have to drink water out of the Blate and Cherka Rivers.

Interestingly the majority of malnutrition cases so far comes from the midlands (*woyna dega*) which are less affected by the drought than the lowland areas and quite green at the moment thanks to extensive Sapie rains in December and some early Belg rains. One of the major reasons for malnutrition in the midlands is the family size, which on average is much larger than in the lowlands. Most affected are families with several children under five.



Supplementary feeding in the Concern-clinic in Bedessa (Photo by H.Rämi, UN-EUE, Februarv 2003)

The whole wereda counts 25,000 households of which 25% receive food aid. Due to growing numbers of needy people, the criteria for the right to receive aid is now being watered down in the lowlands according to Concern experts. People who have no assets but are in good health don't receive food aid. In other words, people have to become ill before they receive assistance. This should not continue.

In the lowlands there is also a serious problem with cattle feed, which reduces the possibilities to cope with food shortages by selling livestock. The animals are emaciated and there is almost no more market for them. The price of

oxen fell to 450 ETB compared to 700-800 ETB last year.

2.4.2 Soddo Zuria

Due to an apparent misjudgement during the pre-harvest assessment, the whole wereda of Soddo Zuria has a serious food shortage. Distribution of relief food was only planned by March and in some kebeles, food aid had to be acquired from neighbouring weredas, which had allocations since January.

Out of 34 kebeles, 15 are affected, 3 of them seriously: Gurum Ladissa, Gurum Koyesha and Humbo Larena have reported numerous and serious cases of malnutrition. Some children have died. Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) was 10.3 % in December for the whole zone (assessment by WVI) and is likely to have increased in the meantime according to WVI, which maintained that almost half the children in the wereda showed signs of malnutrition.

At the beginning of February, DPPC distributed 500 Quintals of supplementary food and since 12th January WVI has been distributing Fafa to 13,000 children and cereals to their parents. The situation is slowly improving, but the problem is not solved yet. According to the NGO, 300-500 children per kebele need supplementary food, all in all a total of about 30,000 children for the whole of Welayta. Based on this figure, there is still a serious shortage of supplementary food in the zone and WVI predicts that the situation will get worse if no additional supplies come in.

Normally, 4.5 kg of Fafa a month are handed out per malnourished child per month. Family sizes are large with often up to three children under five. The supplementary food, which is meant for one child, is often shared among several members of a family, sometimes even with hungry parents. This aggravates the problem of lacking supplementary food.

The UN-EUE mission visited Gurum Ladissa, one of the most affected kebeles. There, serious cases of malnutrition were witnessed. One father reported that his youngest child died just two days before. Kebele officials confirmed this. To address this, additional supplementary food should be delivered immediately to the Welayta area so that the situation will not deteriorate.



Hungry family in Gurum Ladissa, Welayta zone
(Photo by H.Rämi, UN-EUE, February 2003)

The purchase and distribution of Fafa by WVI so far consumes 50% of the annual development budget of the NGO in Soddo Zuria (350,000 ETB for 2003) and there is a possibility that the whole amount will have to be redirected into relief. This, of course, will have a negative impact on development efforts in the area.

2.4.3 Humbo wereda, Welayta

Humbo, which is dependent on Meher crops, recorded a total failure of harvests last year in the lowlands and an 80% loss in the midlands (maize, sorghum, haricot beans, sweet potatoes). Cereals are being distributed on a regular bases by WVI since November, but parents complain about a lack of food for their children and ask for supplements. During the month of March, ICRC is distributing cereals together with seeds for planting.

WVI will continue with the distributions for 53,000 beneficiaries until May, but according to the NGO, the intervention must be continued until August at least. WVI is presently undertaking a nutritional survey and may redirect development funds into relief, if necessary.

2.5 Gamogofa: Polygamy and a growing trend of malnutrition

Gamogofa zone covers all agro-ecological zones and has very good agricultural potential mainly in central mid- and highlands, which boast many perennial springs and creeks. Unfortunately, most of them remain untapped for irrigation. This makes the zone dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Last year, both the Belg and Meher rains were insufficient, and 210,000 beneficiaries need relief.

According to the zonal DPPD pre-harvest assessment, beneficiary estimates were too low and the harvest was smaller than expected.

Numbers of farmers looking for work in Arba Minch town and the nearby state-run cotton plantations were increasing and the salaries for day labour were very low at 35 ETB/day. Fortunately, good and prolonged rains during December improved pasture for livestock, which is one of the mainstays, particularly in the western lowlands among semi-nomadic pastoralists.

Major problems are posed by the supply of seeds. Despite the fact that the zone kept 1.2 Million ETB in the bank, which were dedicated for the purchase of seeds last year, the concerned zonal agencies were afraid to use the funds (see chapter 3, Seed crisis).

2.5.1 Mirab Abaya wereda, Gamogofa:

Over the last two years, the food security situation has been worsening continuously. This is indicated by a steady increase in the rate of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), which is monitored by WVI on a six-month basis: In November 2001, GAM was 2.9%, in May 2002 4.5% and in Sept 2002 it stood at 7.2%.

Until November, cereals were distributed by DPPC and since December by WVI. The current beneficiaries number stands at 40,000, roughly 50% of the population. In January, WVI supplied 4,270 children with supplementary food. This number was increased in February to 14,000 and the supply should last until June. According to WVI, the cases of Marasmus and Kwashiorkor are decreasing and the situation has improved.

One of the main problems in the wereda is the cultural practise of polygamy, which is believed to be one reason for the rapid population growth. According to wereda statistics, ten years ago the population of Mirab Abaya was 63,000 people now it stands at 84,000, an increase of more than 30%.

2.5.2 Kemba and Selam Ber weredas

The UN-EUE mission visited Kemba wereda and Murka of Selam Ber wereda in the western lowlands. Thanks to good Sapie rains in December, livestock, which constitutes a major source of income, is in good condition. No major problems were reported with food distribution. But the clinic in Kemba reported increasing numbers of malnutrition cases among children that were admitted because of malaria, diarrhoea and pneumonia. Unlike in previous years, no supplementary foods were available and malnourished children are sent home. Diarrhoea among children is a main problem in the area. The reason is dirty drinking water. Requests for the upgrade and maintenance of an existing water supply system made by local health officials have not been answered by the wereda and zonal administration until now.

2.6 Silti zone: severe targeting problems, malnutrition

2.6.1 Lanfaro, Dalocha weredas

The UN-EUE mission observed serious and numerous cases of malnutrition, Kwashiorkor and Marasmus, in Lanfaro and Dalocha weredas. The problem quite possibly lies with the targeting of

beneficiaries. In Lanfaro and Dalocha, wereda officials selected the beneficiaries reportedly without consultations at the grassroots level. Kebele people and kebele officials complained about widespread favouritism. According to kebele officials, whole kebeles were left out and surpassed during the evaluations. They spoke of grave injustices and complained that those in charge of selecting the beneficiaries targeted their own relatives and friends and not primarily the really needy. A zonal DPPC official confirmed these targeting problems.

Due to the irregularities, all the beneficiary lists were cancelled and the whole process of selecting beneficiaries had to be repeated. The UN-EUE mission witnessed one such retargeting exercise in Wotambo Kebele, where new beneficiary lists were established. Hundreds of people gathered with their malnourished children as proof of their plight. The irregularities delayed food distribution for weeks. At present the NGO Mercy, which is based in Butajira, is distributing supplementary food and the situation is gradually improving.

According to the zonal bureau of Health, part of the problem during targeting was that non-medical personnel made the original surveys. The new assessments are conducted with medical staff. According to the zone 37'000 children aged below five years in four weredas (Lanfaro, Dalocha, Sankura, Silti) are affected and urgently need supplementary food.

2.7 Guraghe zone: irregularities, delays and malnutrition

2.7.1 Mesken, Marako weredas,

Serious cases of malnutrition were witnessed also in Mesken and Marako weredas. Like in Dalocha, the problem resulted from irregularities during the selection of beneficiaries. But here kebele officials made the selection. Like in Dalocha the selection committees are reported to have favoured their family members and the whole selection process had to be repeated, this time by wereda officials. The irregularities were confirmed by the DPPC official in Koshe.

Due to the irregularities, distribution of cereals was delayed by more than a month and according to local people, cereals were kept in the warehouse in Koshe for six weeks without being distributed. During our visit, approximately 1500 bags were still waiting in the Koshe warehouse for distribution.

In the town centre, the UN-EUE mission witnessed



Mother and malnourished son waiting for supplementary food and cereals (Photo WVI, February 2003)

the attempt of a distribution of maize donated by the European Union. Beneficiaries complained that they were waiting at the site for three days and still had not received anything. The DPPC official blamed this on problems with the beneficiaries list.

Local people accused the officials in charge of widespread irregularities. Truckloads of food aid bags were reported to have been taken out of the warehouse and carted around by trucks to unknown destinations. USAID bags were reportedly unloaded in a shop in Enseno town in Marako wereda. Some USAID wheat bags were piled in the office of the Rural Development Bureau instead of the warehouse, ostensibly for lack of space in the warehouse.

The NGO Mercy is now distributing supplementary food in the kebeles and the situation is gradually improving.

Already two months ago, the NGO warned the concerned bodies in the weredas that a crisis was imminent. But, due to a dispute over who would distribute and the delays posed by the problems with the beneficiaries list, the NGO could not go on with its programme as planned. Local officials insisted on handling the entire relief operation. This was not acceptable to the NGO. After lengthy consultations, Mercy is now handling the distribution of supplementary food with the consent of the local officials.

The NGO also encountered serious problems during the actual food distribution process. In one case, the NGO representatives were intimidated by kebele officials, who, it appears, conveniently carried guns. The NGO was thus obliged to distribute supplementary food to overage children who did not need it and were not entitled to it. In most cases, the beneficiary lists as explained above did not represent the real needy and during the distribution, a re-screening of beneficiaries at the site was and still is necessary. In one case, disappointed people who were on the official beneficiary list, tried to loot the truck and the operation had to be terminated.

The blame for delayed food distributions and resulting cases of malnutrition lies solely on the local officials and not on WFP as had been claimed before by some quarters. The federal DPPC has dispatched a special mission to help control and supervise food distribution in order to improve the situation in Silti and Guraghe zones.

2.8 Konso special wereda: overpopulation produces malnutrition, deaths

The shipment of relief food and its distribution were reported to be normal but malnutrition is chronic in Konso, a wereda that has received aid for 29 years on an almost permanent basis. In February, each day around 3-4 malnourished children were sent home by the Nutrition Rehabilitation Unit in the Clinic, which is operated by the NGO Mekane Yesus in Konso. The Unit ran out of supplementary food and new supplies were not available for the time being. Some children were reported to have died in the clinic.

Usually admitted are children, which are below 75% of normal weight and height. During “normal” times, an average of 15 underweight children are treated in the clinic. This number had increased to 45 before the food supplies went out. Villagers reported that children sent home

died. Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) was 10.7% in December and is likely to have increased since then according to the experts.

Urgently needed are F100 milk and Fafa, as well as medicines for the treatment of malaria and skin diseases that are on the rise. Mekane Yesus has asked Norwegian Church Aid, which has helped before, for assistance. Very urgent is also the dissemination of family planning methods. In only 20 years, the population in Konso has increased from 60,000 to 250,000! (See box food for thought next page).

One major problem is that most mothers marry very young and have several children in a row. This was not the case in previous times according to Konso elders, which complain about a breakdown in cultural ethics among the young generation.



Marasmic Konso child in the custody of its elder brother (Photo H. Rami, UN-EUE February 2003)

Partly responsible for increasing malnutrition is the behaviour of Konso mothers in combination with the depletion of resources. When mothers gather water and firewood, according to culture they leave their youngest child at home in the custody of their older children or relatives. But unlike before, when Konso land was densely forested, mothers now have to travel very far to accomplish their daily household chores and their offspring is left without access to

breast milk for a long time. At home, the babysitters feed the children with food for adults, a liquid fermented cereals called “Chaka”. The alcoholic

drink is the main staple for Konso people but unsuitable as a food for small children. It contributes to the increase of Kwashiokor and Marasmus in the area according to medical staff in Konso.

Unlike in other parts of Ethiopia, Konso farmers don't use traction animals for ploughing their fields of maize, sorghum, beans and cotton. They instead till the soil by hand usually in groups of plot owners, which help each other out until all the fields are prepared. In a way, Konso people had long ago adopted by themselves agricultural practises, which are nowadays promoted by donor communities through Employment Generating Schemes (EGS) and Food For Work (FFW)!

Instead of free grazing their animals, they keep and feed them in their compounds. This enables the Konso people to collect and use manure for their compost pits, which are part of every household. Konso people were experts in the construction of terraces long before EGS and FFW promoted them. A close knit social network and a high level of



Konso elders drinking „Chaka“ (Photo H. Rami, UN-EUE, February 2003)



Food For Thought

During a sit together under the thatched grass roof of a traditional meeting room, elders, women and young people from Gube kebele explained their problem. Much of it has to do with rapid population growth. 20 years ago, the entire population of Konso was approximately 60,000. Now, the wereda counts 74,000 beneficiaries and sixty thousand people that need close monitoring. The total population has grown to more than 250,000! Even in a good year the given land area can no longer sustain the entire population with the present agricultural technology that is available to the Konso-people.

One elder said: "When I was young, our kebele had only nine families, now we count 90 households and we all live from relief food. In previous times we also had droughts. People were so hungry they were eating the skins they were sleeping on. Many of us died and then we started all over again. In the old days, our women had a child only every three years. They knew what to do. Now they get pregnant very young against our will."

A youngster replied: "Why should we make no children, when we don't know how long we survive. We need to have children before we die."

A woman said: "Our bodies get weak because of so many children and we women die young. We want less children, but there is no family planning programme in our village."

"Another man, aged 45, remembered: "When I was a child all the land around here was covered with forests. What is the center of Konso town now was the hideout of the bandits. There were wild animals everywhere, even lions and leopards. All of them were killed and also the forest is gone. Our women suffer a lot, they have to walk very far now to fetch water and firewood. We try to reforest the area. But during the night people who have nothing left, go and steel the trees and sell the wood in the market."

cooperation characterises their communities and has enabled them in the past to get over repeated droughts and food crises. But in recent years their ability to cope with natural calamities has been reduced dramatically. Reason for this is exponential population growth and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources that went with it. All this proves that food aid, even in combination with development efforts through EGS and FFW, only helps to solve the problems of Ethiopia if it is combined with a very strong and aggressive family planning policy.

3 Seed-Crisis

Seeds for the starting belg season are a problem everywhere in the region and need to be distributed urgently! There is a new food crisis in the making if drought affected farmers who have eaten all their seeds receive no planting material in time.

Requests for free seeds and/or additional credit facilities for the purchase of inputs were forwarded weeks before by most weredas to the zones to the regional Bureau of Agriculture (BoA) and further to the Rural Development Bureau, both in Awassa. Total input assistance required is 21 Million ETB for the whole region. The Rural Development Bureau has prepared an emergency contingency plan for seeds, veterinary assistance and human health totalling 36,6 Million ETB. This plan was submitted to the federal government in December but as of February 11 no response had been received according to officials in Awassa.

According to the experts, time for action was running out fast and the BoA complained that it was too late already for timely planting.

3.1 Funds for seeds frozen in bank accounts

Part of the seed crisis is confusion and uncertainty on what to do with funds that are actually at the disposal of the zones. A major problem seems to be a lack of communication from the centre to the periphery.

During the last meher season, the region received 7.2 Million ETB from USAID for the purchase of seeds. Unfortunately this money was released too late in the season and most of the zones used



Farmer ploughing his field in Gamogofa (Photo by H. Rami, UN-EUE, February 2003)

only part of it. Feedback to the region suggests that less than half of the money was spent. It now lies in bank accounts in the zones but many of the concerned officials don't dare touch it to buy seeds for the belg season 2003. The zonal Bureau of Agriculture of Gamogofa in Arba Minch, for example, spent only about 500,000 ETB out of 1,7 Million ETB that were allocated for seed purchases last Meher season. The zonal DPPD reportedly has sent an urgent request to

the region for the release of these funds for the purchase and handout of seeds for this year's belg planting. But no reply was received and the concerned

body in Arba Minch was afraid to go ahead with any seed procurement without approval from the superior body. Listening to zonal officials, this problem seems to be widespread.

3.1.1 Aftershocks of the agricultural extension package

Affected by the lack of seeds are hundreds of thousands of farmers, who lost their harvests last year and are now on the beneficiary lists. Many, if not most, of them have outstanding credits from previous loans acquired through the agricultural extension package. As a rule, these farmers cannot avail themselves of any new credits for inputs and their mechanisms to cope with a lack of seed are very limited (Rami 2002, Raymakers 2002). Some individuals told us that they are going to borrow seeds from wealthier neighbours or from relatives in areas that were not so hard hit by the drought. But borrowing of seeds often comes at a high price. In many cases, farmers have to give half of their future harvest to the seed lender.

In the hard-hit lowland areas, maize and sorghum are the main crops. High yielding hybrid maize seeds cost 600 ETB a Quintal, a price destitute farmers can't afford. Their only alternative is the procurement of so-called "local" seeds at the local markets. But according to agricultural experts at zonal and wereda level, these "local" seeds are virtually all cross-pollinated or third or fourth generation hybrids, an after-effect of the agricultural extension package which was disseminated across the country during the last years. The original hardy and drought resistant seeds, which were adapted to local climatic conditions, have all but vanished. This has dire consequences.

Experts and farmers alike confirm that the so-called “local” seeds take up to six months to mature, a period which is mostly too long in drought prone areas. Hybrid maize brings a green harvest already after three months and usually fully matures after about four months. Diluted, cross-pollinated and third and fourth generation hybrid seeds also are known to show a dramatic reduction in yield.

The only solution to the problem is the free handout to destitute farmers of improved seeds and/or imported pure non-hybrid seeds as well as the free handout of other necessary farming inputs. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), World Vision International (WVI), Catholic Relief Service (CRS), Mercy, SOS Sahel, Irish Development, Norwegian Church Aid, Concern and other organisations in the region are presently distributing free seeds or are contemplating on doing so. But their capacity is short of the actual needs.

As an example, Sidama zone alone counts 50,000 households that are in need of planting material with a total requirement (maize, sorghum, haricot bean, potatoes) of close to 21,000 Quintals. The ICRC promised to supply 16,700 and CRS 5000 households. If no other sources can be tapped, the shortfall for Sidama alone concerns almost 30,000 households.

All of Sidama’s 50,000 households in need of seeds carry with them unpaid debts from the agricultural extension package. Sidama has an outstanding debt load of 13 Million ETB.

Unfortunately, the current free distribution of seeds can have a negative impact on development efforts. Many of the NGO funds that are now used for seed procurement come from budgets that were intended for long-term development.

The Belg rains in many areas of the region have already set in and the lack of seeds needs immediate attention by all parties concerned!

“A man without seeds is a dead man”

A farmer in Murka kebele in the western lowlands of Gamogofa says what it means to have no seeds: “All of us farmers keep our seeds under the roof in our tukuls (huts). The smoke from the fire protects them from pests. Our people have a saying that a man without seeds under his roof, is a dead man. Many people in my village have eaten their seeds. The poorest among us have no animals, which they can sell and even for the others the improved seeds are too expensive. So many of us plant the maize that we receive as relief food. But we know that these seeds will never produce enough for our families to survive in the future.”

4 Conclusions and recommendations

While the relief operations in the stretch of severely drought-affected areas south of Addis are well under way and mostly adequate, pockets of malnutrition remain in a number of weredas in all the zones visited. Affected are mostly children under five in large families. In order to reduce the cases of malnutrition and avoid deaths, the supply of supplementary food must be stepped up rapidly to these areas.

In the case of Silti and Guraghe, which have encountered serious problems with targeting which consequently led to delays of relief operations, it was recommended that a monitoring and inspection mission be dispatched in order to speed up, supervise and control the relief efforts. The federal DPPC reacted quickly to the problem and dispatched a special mission to the area comprising of DPPC and UN-EUE experts.

A major concern in all the areas visited is the availability of seeds and other agricultural inputs. It seems that part of the problem is communication from the centre to the periphery where zonal officials are hesitant to use available funds. Therefore, communication in general should be improved on all levels and directives coming from the concerned head offices in Addis Abeba should be relayed more clearly and quickly to zonal and wereda levels and forwarded all the way down without delay. Zonal Bureaus of Agriculture seem to be unaware that funds, which were allocated but have not been used for last year's seed purchases, are at their disposal. Information clarifying this matter needs to be relayed immediately to the zones.

Since any new actions concerning the procurement of planting material will most likely come too late for this Belg season, it is strongly urged that the concerned bodies start planning and communicating at a much earlier time for the coming Meher season. Funds and planting material should be allocated and made ready several months before the kiremt rains are actually setting in.

A major problem concerning the availability of seeds and other agricultural inputs are old credits, which cannot be repaid by many farmers and prohibit them from receiving new ones for the purchase of agricultural inputs. Ways and means should be found to solve the credit-crisis without further putting strain on the peasants. It is recommended that for the time being farmers who have exhausted all their credit options, will be provided agricultural inputs for free. For the future, the subsidy of farming inputs may be considered.

It can only be emphasised over and over again that one reason for the current food shortage in the country is the increase of population as is shown clearly in the case of Konso special wereda. The dissemination of family planning methods, possibly linked with relief operations, must be stepped up. Family planning education should be pursued more aggressively and it might be worth contemplating how far a system of reward and punishment could help implement family planning strategies.

DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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Annex

Abbreviations

CRS	Catholic Relief Service
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (Regional level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (Zonal level)
ETB	Ethiopian Birr
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNMEE	United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea
USAID	United States Aid for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

Glossary

dega	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between 2500 to > 3400 m a.s.l.
kebele	Smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia
kolla	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between ~1400 to ~1800 m a.s.l.
woreda	Local administrative unit
woyna dega	Expression for one of the altitudinal agroecological belts in Ethiopia. In Tigray between ~1800 to ~2400 m a.s.l.

Glossary of important meteorological and seasonal terms used for Ethiopian highland areas

Meteorological Drought Defined

Drought is a period of insufficient water initiated by reduced precipitation. The impacts of drought on crops and society are critical but not easily quantified. The result is that "drought" does not have a universal definition. "Meteorological drought" is defined as a sustained period of deficient precipitation with a low frequency of occurrence. While crops may be damaged by lack of precipitation and high temperatures in just a few days, such short periods are not considered to be meteorological droughts. A three-month period is defined by the American Meteorological Society to be the shortest period that can be defined as a drought. (Source: *The American Meteorological Society*)

Ethiopia's 'Keremt' or 'Meher' Rains Defined

Since Ethiopia and Eritrea are in the tropics, physical conditions and variations in altitude have resulted in a great diversity of climate, soil, and vegetation. Rainfall is seasonal, varying in amount, space, and time. There is a long and heavy summer rain, normally called the big rain or *keremt*, which falls from June-September. It is followed by the *baga* hot, dry period from October through February (see below for definition). In some areas there are short and moderate spring rains in March and April known as the little rains or *belg*. These rainy periods correspond to Ethiopia's primary and secondary agricultural seasons, known as the *meher* and *belg*. (Source: *FEWS*)

Ethiopia's 'Belg' Rains Defined

In spring, a strong cyclonic centre develops over Ethiopia and Sudan. Winds from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean highs are drawn towards this centre and blow across central and southern Ethiopia. These moist, easterly and south-easterly winds produce the main rain in south-eastern Ethiopia and the little spring rains to the east central part of the north-western highlands. The little rains of the highlands are known as *belg* rains, referring to the second most important sowing season of the region. (Source: FEWS)

Ethiopia's 'Baga' Season Defined

Since Ethiopia is in the tropics, physical conditions and variations in altitude have resulted in a great diversity of climate, soil, and vegetation. Rainfall is seasonal, varying in amount, space, and time. There is a long and heavy summer rain, normally called the big rain or *keremt*, which falls from June-September. It is followed by the *baga* hot, dry period from October through February. In some areas there are short and moderate spring rains in March and April known as the little rains or *belg*. These rainy periods correspond to Ethiopia's primary and secondary agricultural seasons, known as the *meher* and *belg*. (Source: FEWS)

Literature list of referred papers and previous UN-EUE mission reports to SNNPR

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