

CRITICAL FOOD SHORTAGE AND NUTRITIONAL SITUATION IN PARTS OF DAWURO ZONE OF SNNPR (SOUTHERN NATIONS, NATIONALITIES AND PEOPLES' REGION)

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1 Introduction and background

In Genna Boossa Woreda¹, which is one of the five woredas of the Dawuro Zone in SNNP Region the UN OCHA-EUE rapid assessment mission discovered a critical food shortage and nutritional situation. The situation is critical in the ten kebeles of the woreda located in the Omo River Valley bordering the Omo-Sheleko Woreda of the Kambaata-Tambaaro Zone on the other side of the River. These worst affected kebeles include *Angela-Dubbe, Zaabba-Dilba, Daachi-Denaba, Gerada-Intela, Derada-Bachira, Dasha-Aja, Samra-Minata, Buri, Halani-Ayishi and Seri-Bella*.

2 Mission findings

2.1 Severe food shortage and far away distribution sites

There is a problem of severe food shortage in Genna Boossa Woreda. The community is suffering from malnutrition and the condition of mothers and children has worsened in particular. But as no nutritional survey has been conducted up to date, the exact magnitude remains unknown. The UN OCHA-EUE expert sent to assess the situation is not a health and nutrition expert and therefore has been unable to estimate the severity. The present situation comes as a result of repeated drought conditions in the area since 2000 and the absence of a



Drying haricot bean plants due to moisture stress in Zaabba-Dilba kebele, Genna Boossa (Photo by Wolde-Selassie Abbute, OCHA-EUE, May 2003)

¹ Due to the severity of the situation, zonal authorities present during the visit and observation in two of the affected kebeles (*Angella-Dubbe & Zaabba-Dilba*) were: *Chief Administrator, Zonal Council; Head, Zone Rural Development Coordination Main Department; Head, Zone Finance & Economic Development Coordination Department; and Head, Zone Disaster Prevention & Preparedness Desk.*

monitoring and reporting system in place together with basic health facilities that do not have the capacity to deal with epidemic levels of disease. People have exhausted their survival strategies and coping mechanisms and hence find themselves in a critical stage. Most families are now depending on wild foods (e.g. wild taro – locally called *sesa* and other wild food species) to survive. Due to the absence of monitoring mechanisms, no interventions have been programmed for these areas. The remoteness, the inaccessibility and marginality of the area further contributed to the magnitude of the problem that continued to worsen and began claiming lives. People started to suffer in 2000 when harvest losses were estimated to be around 70% and when farmers also lost important numbers of livestock due to a foot-and-mouth disease epidemic. A one-time relief food support was distributed in 2000 but no close monitoring has been conducted since then. The community has faced similar problems in 2001 that also continued in 2002.

The local woreda and zonal authorities admitted their lack of clear awareness about the scale and severity of the problem. They were informed by the representatives of the peasant farmers who voiced their grievances during the “Small Holder Farmers’ Conference” convened in the respective woredas in December 2002. However, the problem seems rather structural than shock and disaster related, claiming lives as its cumulative adverse effect. The Zonal Administration realized the severity of the problem and reported the situation early this year to the regional authorities in Awassa. But there was neither a reaction nor an action from the Regional Government. Therefore, the Zonal Administration decided on a temporary measure diverting 56,000 ETB from the annual zonal budget to buy relief food and distributed this as a one-time ration of maize and beans in March 2003. Since March, the federal DPPC has sent relief food for Dawuro Zone. However due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of the area, the food has been distributed in Gessa located along the Sodo-Chida main road in the nearby Looma Woreda. Some beneficiaries were as far as 70 kilometers away from the distribution site and hence unable to walk such a long distance because they are either old or too weak. Those who were capable of walking the distance, made transport arrangements with farmers owning donkeys in the highlands for a share of 1/3 of the relief ration. In other words, out of the 12.5 kg ration, at least 4 kg has been deducted and paid to the donkey owners. As a result, both the scale of the problem and the number of people affected by food shortage are reported to have further increased.

The Genna Boossa Woreda Administration managed to open a dry weather feeder road of 17 km linking Gessa with Genna, a location in Genna-Boossa Woreda, relatively closer to the beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the trucks loaded with relief supplies refused to use the road because they were fearful of becoming stuck or damaging the trucks. By the time of the UN OCHA-EUE visit, these trucks loaded with relief food were parked in Gessa along the main road. The drivers were refusing to deliver the relief food to Genna.



Lorry loaded with relief supplies parked at Gessa, Looma (Photo by Wolde-Selassie Abbute, OCHA-EUE, May 2003)

2.2 Drying field crops

Both farmers and development agents reported the presence of good rain at a time of ploughing. However, after sowing the rainfall became erratic and the area experienced the last rainfall on 23rd April, 2003, more than one month ago. As a result maize, haricot bean, and taro in the fields were drying up at the time of the visit. Apart from indicating the severity of the present drought situation, it also shows the gravity of the problem in the future with the prospect of a renewed crop failure.



Drying maize plants due to moisture stress in Zaabba-Dilba kebele, Genna Boossa (Photo by Wolde-Selassie Abbute, OCHA-EUE, May 2003)

2.3 Water shortage

Severe shortage of water was reported and observed both for humans and the few remaining livestock. Most springs have dried up. Water from the few remaining springs is reduced to the minimum with very long queues at water points. The local militia now implements strict rationing of water. Weakened women are trekking long distances to fetch water. Some are even forced to go down the valley to fetch water from Omo River.

2.4 Malaria epidemic

As reported by the junior clinical nurse of the rural clinic at Zaabba-Dilba Kebele (serving seven of the affected Kebeles), there is a malaria epidemic outbreak that has been triggered by the weak nutritional status of the population. The nurse noted two deaths just the day before the UN OCHA-EUE visit, an 11-year-old boy died just before the mission's arrival and a 25 year old died just the day before. Many deaths are reported in the villages and the communities who have no financial means to afford to visit the clinic. Mass malaria treatment was provided but it did not bring the expected relief since the population was too weak to resist the malaria. Moreover, there is permanent shortage of medicine in the clinic. The nurse reported that the malaria epidemic is out of control. He noted that significant nutritional and health interventions are needed for most of the population in the affected kebeles of Genna Boossa Woreda.

2.5 Unknown but severe cattle disease

Genna Boossa is frequently affected and hit by livestock diseases and epidemics apart from its location in a tsetse belt, which makes tripanosomniasis endemic. For instance, there was a foot-and-mouth² epidemic in the area in the 2000, and hence the farmers lost

² Based on information from Action Aid (*Waka*) and zonal authorities.

many cattle, goats and sheep. The present cattle disease outbreak started in mid May. The symptoms are bloody excreta and continuous fluid dropping from the mouth and nose of the affected cattle. Since the outbreak, within one week, 18 cattle died in one kebele alone. The affected animal usually dies within 2-3 days of contracting symptom. However, expert verification is needed.

2.6 Remote and inaccessible by road

Most of the worst affected kebeles are completely inaccessible by road and are located deep down the gorge of the Omo River valley. The severity of the situation is worse as the inaccessibility increases further down the valley.



Steep, remote and still inaccessible by road are the affected areas of Genna Boossa Woreda near Omo River in Dawuro Zone of SNNPR (Photo by Wolde-Selassie Abbute, OCHA-EUE, May 2003)

3 Conclusions and recommendations

Considering the prevailing critical emergency situation in the area, allocation of additional relief supplies as well as providing quick access through the construction of feeder roads to reach the worst affected areas are the major priorities. Supplementary feeding and investigating nutritional status of children is needed in order to decide whether therapeutic feeding is required. Pre-positioning of relief food and the supply of basic medicine is important to be carried out before the main rains start. The main rains that everybody expects and which now are delayed are being characterized by one affected farmer as *“the rains that weep after killing us!”*

DISCLAIMER

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Annex

Abbreviations

DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (mostly at Regional level)
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (mostly at zonal level)
NGO	Non-Governmental-Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities & Peoples' Region Organisation
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia