

FIELD MISSION TO WOLAYITA

20-25 April 1997

Briefing Notes

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Following reports of severe food shortage in Wollayita and an initial assessment mission in early April, a follow up visit was made by UNDP/EUE from 20 to 25 April 1997. The following main findings were obtained from the Regional DPPB, NGOs operating in the area and the administrative councils and Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees in each of the six weredas visited

Due to the partial failure of the 1996 harvest and the late start of the 1997 belg rains, Wolayita is currently facing a critical food shortage. According to the Regional DPPB top priority areas were reported to be Bolosso Sore, Kindo Koisha, Damot Weide, Kucha, Damot Gale, Humbo Ofa and Kemba. The delay of the 1997 belg rainfall resulted in late planting mostly in the highland area.

Since the rains started, there has been at least one five-day dry spell. In addition, the coverage of the rains cannot be considered satisfactory both in distribution and amount. It is too soon to tell what the effect will be on the newly planted belg crops.

Due to the current situation in Wolayita two separate food security assessments were conducted at the zonal and regional level in all weredas of North Omo. Following its assessment the Zonal DPPD initially reported a total of 685,418 people in need of food assistance. The DPPB assessment reported approximately 200,000 in need. Following consultations between the region and zone, a compromise figure was finally reached of 423,258 people in need of assistance between the months of April and August.

In March, it was reported that 4148 MT and limited supplies of supplementary food were delivered to the ten most affected weredas of North Omo. This amount was part of the planned distribution, based on the December Appeal figure of 154,400 affected people. According to the information obtained in the visited 5 weredas of Wolayita and Kucha wereda, North Omo, 3303 MT of food was distributed to a total of 43,079 beneficiaries in March.

According to the information obtained from the Regional DPPB the center has accepted the beneficiary figure 423,258 in 19 weredas of North Omo, amounting to 6348 MT of grain and 212 MT of supplementary food for one month. At the last Dollo task force meeting held on

the 28th April 1997, DPPC indicated that food was dispatched for April to North Omo according to this figure. Furthermore it was reported that the central DPPC currently has very minimal food stocks in their warehouses.

Some of the NGOs operating in the area expressed to the regional DPPB, their willingness to assist. The DPPB reportedly told the NGOs to wait for a formal request for assistance. All of the wereda DPP Committees visited reported experiencing severe logistical constraints in recruiting private transporters to transport the allocated food from the wereda warehouses to the affected kebelles. Some of the NGOs who still have some short haul transport capacity are lending trucks to minimize the logistical problem. The Logistics and Transport Coordination Department of the central DPPC has echoed the call for four wheel drive vehicles to assist in the transport operation, as there are insufficient vehicles in the private market in Soddo.

Wereda DPP Committees also complained that because they are not receiving enough food to provide to the needy, they are forced to split the total number of people in need in half, and to distribute rations on an alternating basis. Beneficiaries therefore are receiving full rations only once every two months.

Reports indicate that the food shortage is increasing in severity. The latest report from SCF-UK's Nutritional Surveillance Programme indicates a general decline in nutritional status. Mean weight for length figures have dropped from the January figures of 93.0% and 94.5% to 91.7% and 92.2% in the East and West Highlands, respectively). Cereal prices have jumped by 20-25% in the past month.

Currently, a team of Regional DPPB experts are in the field to monitor the changing situation concerning the most vulnerable groups of people who are in need of food assistance in all weredas in the Zone. They are expected to formulate new beneficiary figures as the situation dictates.

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