

FIELD TRIP REPORT TO THE FORMER WOLAYITA AWRAJA IN NORTH OMO

20-25 April 1997

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Background

From 20-25 April 1997, a UNDP/EUE field mission was undertaken to five weredas in Wolayita and one other wereda in North Omo zone. The purpose of this mission was to investigate reports of widespread food shortages in many parts of North Omo, particularly Wolayita, and to follow up on actions taken by the Government and NGOs working in the area.

Most of North Omo Zone, particularly the former Wolayita Awraja, is considered to be a disaster prone and structurally food deficit area. Food security is threatened from time to time due to climatic irregularities, poor soil fertility, pest infestation, high population density and low landholding capacity. As the result of this, the crop production even in a normal year does not fulfill the annual food requirements of the community. According to the concerned line departments in Soddo, production in a normal year satisfies the food need of the community only for 6 months. Also, the lowland part of the area is reported to be highly infested by malaria and trypanosomiasis. Furthermore, as the result of excessive *belg* rains and pest infestation (sweet potato butterfly) in 1996, partial failure of the harvest was reported. The loss of the sweet potato crop, which is one of the main staples to fill the food gap during the stress period (March to June) has resulted in current widespread food insecurity in many parts of Wolayita.

Current situation and the central DPPC response

The 1997 *belg* rains started in Wolayita during the third dekad of March after a delay of almost two months. Also according to the information, the late onset of the rains had a negative effect on the planting of the maize crop. Even after the rains started there was at least one five-day dry spell. In addition the coverage of the rains can not be considered satisfactory both in distribution and amount. It is too soon to tell what the effect will be on the late planted crops.

The latest report from the SCF (UK)'s Nutritional Surveillance Programme (April 1997) 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.

Due to the current situation in Wolayita two separate food security assessments were conducted in 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 DPBB 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. (See attachment)

In March it was reported that 4148 MT and limited supplies of supplementary food were delivered to the 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 five weredas of Wolayita and Kucha wereda in 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 centre has accepted the beneficiary figure of 423,258 in need of assistance 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 latest 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 locally to transport the allocated food from the wereda warehouses to the affected kebelles. This is due to the fact that there are not sufficient private transporters operating in the Soddo area. Some of the NGOs who still have some short haul transport capacity are lending trucks to minimize the logistical problems. 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.

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 Nutritional Surveillance Programme indicates a general decline in nutritional status. Mean weight for length figures are 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.

It should be noted that there is a standing agreement between state farms in the country and the seven Wolayita wereda councils to recruit agricultural labourers in response to the request which comes from the state farms during the peak labour season. However according to informal information sources who have assessed labour migration to the state farms, the number of workers from Wolayita has dropped this year. During our visit information could not be obtained from the weredas about the reduction. The team would like to suggest a further special study to be undertaken in the future concerning labour migration to the state farms.

Visited weredas and amount of food distributed

Kindo Koisha

According to the October food needs assessment conducted by the zonal and wereda DPPC, a total of 15,456 households were registered to be assisted. Based on the information obtained from the wereda DPPC chairman, out of the above figure a total of 10,246 households were mentioned to be assisted through Free Food Distribution (FFD), whilst the remaining balance were reported to be covered under Food For Work (FFW) distribution. A single round of free food distribution was conducted only for 5302 households from the total amount of food 390 MT delivered during March by the center. Furthermore 2,457 tins of high energy biscuits were distributed as supplementary food along with the dry ration. However, no information was available about further delivery of food for the remaining people who need food and for those who have registered to be covered under FFW.

The wereda council reported that logistical assistance has been received from SOS Sahel and InterAide France to transport the allocated food by the center from the wereda warehouse to the affected kebelles. Such assistance was highly appreciated by the local officials.

Bolosso Sore

The main crop in the wereda is reported to be enset, with maize and other root crops like sweet potato, taro and yam also composing important parts of the local diet. Furthermore cash crops like coffee and ginger are produced by many farmers in the wereda. However, as we learnt from the wereda administration, the above mentioned crops were highly damaged by the excessive rainfall of 1996 and pest infestations such as sweet potato butterfly and CBD on coffee plants. Additionally, the enset crop has not yet fully recovered from the major drought of 1994. Ginger was reported to be less in demand, thus fetching a low price in the market, since the discontinuation of bartering trade with Kenya some years back.

Based on the October assessment conducted by zonal and wereda experts, a total of 88,000 people have been registered for food assistance in the wereda. Since February a total amount 828 MT of food has been distributed and 51,821 people have received a first round distribution as a one month ration. From the above figure, 6517 were reported to be lactating mothers. According to the council chairman, food distribution will continue up to July 1997 depending on available resources.

Humbo

According to the wereda assessment conducted in February, a total of 118,000 people were registered for food assistance up to August 1997. We were informed by the wereda chairman that from the above figure 16,528 people received a first round distribution from the 455 MT delivered by the center. During our discussion a major transportation problem was mentioned to deliver food from the wereda warehouse to the affected kebelles.

However, according to a recent assessment conducted by World Vision International, which is operating in 25 kebelles, and the wereda Agriculture Office, the total population who need food assistance is estimated to be 60,000 -70,000, mainly from the mid- and highland area. According to the assessment team's observations the lowland part is relatively better off this year than the are the mid- and highlands. Due to this, WVI has decided to operate more in the higher altitudes to alleviate the food shortage problem. Furthermore the NGO is distributing faffa for children under 5 in all 25 kebelles of its operational area.

Damot Weide

Based on a wereda DPPC and CONCERN joint assessment conducted in February, out of the wereda's 190,000 total population, 75,276 people were reported to be highly affected by food insecurity, most of whom reside in the mid- and highland areas. Out of these affected people, 53,135 were being assisted through EGS, while the remaining 22,141 were to be assisted through free food distribution. Available resources were expected from the central DPPC. However, as it was reported

by the wereda administration, the amount of food which has been delivered to the wereda prior to our visit was said to be only 251 MT of wheat, which was distributed for 12,606 beneficiaries as a first round distribution for a one month ration. Future distribution will depend on the availability of resources requested from the centre.

CONCERN has reached an agreement with the European Union to distribute 2600 MT of food which had been stored in the CONCERN warehouse to be distributed for 2000 settlers along the Blate river through FFW.

Ofa

The wereda council reported that a total of 81,600 people were registered in all 25 kebelles for food assistance. From the above figure, 51,425 people are expected to be assisted through Food For Work, whilst the remaining 30,175 have been registered to be assisted through free food distribution. So far, a total of 14,622 people received a first round distribution through free food and 26,592 were assisted through Food For Work with food delivered by the centre. During our discussion with the council it was reported that the wereda DPPC was loaned the use of one truck from InterAide France to transport the allocated food from the wereda to the kebelles.

Kucha

As a result of the assessment conducted by region, zone and wereda experts in March 1997, a total of 18,000 people, mostly from the lowland areas, were reported to be in need of food assistance for the next five months starting in April. Accordingly, 7,600 people have been registered for participation in Food For Work schemes and 10,400 for free food distribution. Furthermore, a total of 360 MT of food and 432 bags of faffa have been distributed partially for those registered for free food distribution. Information about further distributions is reported to be dependent on the availability

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