

Field Trip Report to Welayita and North Omo (30 March - 03 April)

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Welayita

Background

The Welayita area, situated in the *ensete* (false banana) culture zone, is characterised by a wide crop diversity, including cereals, pulses, root crops, *ensete* and different cash crops like coffee, eucalyptus, etc. Farmers have developed well adapted cropping strategies to ensure optimal food security throughout the year and normally, at any season, at least part of the agricultural land is under cultivation. On the other hand, Welayita is known for its high population density and structural food deficit, even in good years.

Excessive rains in 1996 resulted in a lower harvest than initially expected and meant that household food stocks were already low. Normally, sweet potatoes, supplemented by haricot beans, cabbage and *kocho* (made from *ensete*), are the main subsistence food during the stress period from March/April to June, until the green maize is available for consumption. Even if the sporadic *sape* rains of November/December, essential for the development of sweet potatoes, had been partly satisfactory, the two months delay of the 1997 *belg* rains, combined with a widespread attack of sweet potato butterfly, seriously affected and partly destroyed the sweet potato crop and now many areas of Welayita are facing a severe food crisis.

Current Situation

The *belg* rains started during the third decade of March, after a delay of almost two months. Land preparation is ongoing and farmers are planting at higher elevations. However, as a result of the delay and the very poor sweet potato crop, Welayita shows a very clear but disastrous picture with almost all agricultural land bare of any crops, with the exception of perennial plants like *ensete* and coffee, some small lots of sweet potato and yam (mainly in the western part of Welayita, but which are not at a productive stage due to the delay of rains). Also, most of the *ensete* plants are immature and not ready for consumption. As a consequence, there are no food reserves in the fields and food stocks and cash from last years harvest are mostly depleted.

Signs of distress are becoming evident with people using immature *ensete* (without milk) for food, with increased sales of fire wood and charcoal and with children coming to urban areas in search of help. Although the nutritional status of children might still be somehow satisfactory (between 92-94% WFL for the lowlands according to preliminary results of SCF/UK survey and probably ~90% or slightly below for the highlands), the situation will rapidly deteriorate without an immediate and adequate relief response.

Food distributions for the most vulnerable population have started or will be starting in all weredas, partly from remaining stocks in the weredas and partly from newly arrived relief supplies. According to the regional DPP bureau, 1,700 M/T of food arrived in Welayita two weeks ago, while an additional 7,000 M/T is now being transported directly to the weredas of Welayita and surrounding areas. While the actual food supply is based on the appeal figures, it is expected that the federal DPPC may have to adjust relief inputs upwards according to the new and urgent situation developing in the area.

Attached to this report is a table indicating the increasing food needs according to the gradually deteriorating situation. It has to be mentioned that this year's estimates of affected people are not exaggerated and that the latest figures of the mid-March assessment, conducted by the zonal early warning committee, might even have to be amended in order to contain a possible disaster and to avoid recurrent rehabilitation needs.

If the rains prove to be consistent and well distributed, the situation will improve after two and a half to three months. In order to allow the harvesting of mature crops and the restoration of food security, relief assistance should cover a period of four to five months.

Additional Information: In Damot Weyde, Concern has a food stock of 2,600 M/T donated by the European Union (EU), which is allocated to an EGS emergency program, approved by the wereda DPP committee. According to Concern, the food can not be released, as authorisation from EU is still lacking.

North Omo

The delay of rains has naturally not only affected the Welayita area, but to a lesser extent, the remaining weredas of North Omo Zone and all but one wereda of the zone will need relief assistance.

The zonal DPP department is especially worried about the weredas of Kamba, Konta, Mareka Geno, Esera Tocha and Loma Bosa, which have no food stocks and will become inaccessible within a week as the rains progress.

**ESTIMATION OF PEOPLE IN NEED OF RELIEF ASSISTANCE 1997
NORTH OMO**

WEREDA	1997 Total Population*	DPPC 1997 Appeal (Dec.96)		Dec./Jan. Zonal DPPD Assessm.		Mid-March Zonal EWC Assessment	
Boloso Sore	270'165	26'000	10%	36'000	13%	98'000	36%
Kindo Koisha	153'733	19'000	12%	32'000	21%	82'668	54%
Ofa	121'713	12'000	10%	18'000	15%	66'147	54%
Sodo Zuria	219'492	15'000	7%	15'000	7%	38'051	17%
Damot Gale	237'490	19'000	8%	20'000	8%	69'000	29%
Damot Weyde	163'530	15'000	9%	20'000	12%	29'258	18%
Humbo	105'604	11'000	10%	18'000	17%	62'417	59%
Total Wolayita	1'271'727	117'000	9%	159'000	13%	445'541	35%
Gofa	181'448	-	-	8'000	4%	29'552	16%
Zala/Ubamale	83'654	8'000	10%	8'000	10%	17'383	21%
Boreda/Abaya	108'931	10'000	9%	10'000	9%	15'774	15%
Kucha	112'112	12'000	11%	16'000	14%	18'650	17%
Kemba	108'917	4'700	4%	25'000	23%	45'535	42%
Dita/Daramalo	119'542	-	-	9'000	8%	28'927	24%
Konta	57'173	-	-	-	-	3'793	7%
Loma/Bosa	101'507	-	-	-	-	22'790	23%
Esera Tocha	101'260	-	-	1'000	10%	13'853	14%
Mareka Geno	95'927	-	-	-	-	2'609	3%
Mesketo	36'795	-	-	-	-	383	1%
Melekoza	81'870	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bonke	119'590	-	-	10'000	8%	20'337	17%
Chencha	96'204	-	-	4'000	4%	10'025	10%
Arba Minch Z.	167'789	2'700	2%	-	-	10'266	6%
Total N-Omo	2'844'446	154'400	5%	250'000	9%	685'418	24%

* Based on 1994 census and readjusted by an annual growth rate of 3%

Based on the zonal early warning committee mid-March assessment results of affected people and a basic monthly ration of 15 kg per person, food requirements would amount to the following:

Area	Affected Population	Food Requirements in MT	
		for 1 month	for 4 months
Welayita	445,541	6,683.115	26,732.460
Other Weredas	239,877	3,598.155	14,392.620
Total North-Omo	685,418	10,281.270	41,125.080

In regard to the specific needs of children, especially those under five years, relief supplies should be complemented with high protein food.