

## Field Trip Report: Welayita area - North Omo (31 August to 5 September 1997)

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### Current Situation

*Agricultural Sector:* The dry conditions before the late start of the *belg* rains hampered land preparation. With the exception of part of the eastern lowlands, the amount of *belg* rains would have been sufficient, but bad distribution and dry spells at critical moments (flowering stage of haricot beans & maize) resulted in an overall bad crop performance (see also table in annex).

The *kremt* rains started on time and were initially adequate. Thereafter, the *meher* season developed an unusual pattern with light showers, intermittent dry spells and localised hailstorms. During the mission no rain occurred, a situation which had reportedly persisted for two weeks. No wilting of plants had yet occurred, but there was considerable concern for late sown crops such as haricot beans and teff. In some areas teff and legumes could not be planted for lack of rain and in the highland areas, characterised by high land pressure, intercropping was hampered due to the delayed planting of maize. All in all, an unsatisfactory crop performance was observed, especially with regard to maize. Apart from the endemic occurrence of certain diseases, and with the exception of an army worm outbreak, which was contained by the joint effort of wereda offices and zonal department of agriculture, no major crop diseases or pest outbreaks have been registered. Livestock conditions are generally satisfactory, with no major epidemics reported.

The promotion of improved seeds and planting material has its own impact, especially under unfavorable conditions. If these improved varieties generally show exceptional performance under optimal conditions (e.g. on irrigated land, with extensive use of chemical fertilizers & agro-chemicals), they are not necessarily well adapted to the prevailing harsh conditions of rainfed agriculture. For example, some hybrid maize varieties, after a good initial performance, are suffering from weevil attack right on the field, not to talk of subsequent post-harvest losses. The improved varieties of sweet potato provided to farmers could not withstand the harsh conditions of the last dry season, characterised by a strong infestation of sweet potato butterfly, and have vanished. Local varieties have also suffered, but partially survived. The subsequent lack of an adequate amount of planting material has hampered the cultivation of sweet potato.

Fertiliser sales this year have been less important than in former years, due to the following reasons: First, prices have increased by 25% reaching 250 Birr per quintal (100 kg); second, the *kremt* rains have not been promising; and, thirdly, many farmers lacked the necessary cash to repay the last year's loans and were therefore not entitled to open a new line of credit.

*Human Conditions and Relief Activities:* As food production resumed by end of July, beginning of August, and relief food supplies continued, though at a reduced level (on

average, 48% coverage of North Omo's July/August needs), living conditions improved significantly. The provision of supplementary food of high protein content (Famex, Faffa, CSB) to malnourished children under the age of 5 years has contributed significantly to preventing nutritional status from declining.

All in all, despite the bad start and poor performance of this year's agricultural seasons, disaster prevention has worked well and it is hoped that recurrent rehabilitation needs (mainly caused by distress sales of productive assets) could be minimised despite the partial shortfall of relief supplies. This shows clearly that disaster prevention is only possible if relief inputs are timely and adequate, a fact which should receive proper attention, especially by the donor community, as food security prospects for the end of the year look very bleak all over the disaster prone areas of Ethiopia.

### **Future prospects**

A shortened cropping season, untimely planting, badly distributed *belg* and erratic *kremt* rains will result in reduced harvest and low cash earnings for 1997. An early cessation of the *kremt* rains would further decrease food production. While the extent of production shortfall cannot yet be clearly determined, the aforementioned facts give a clear indication of future prospects in terms of food security. Certainly, increased relief needs should be anticipated before the end of the current year.

The still insufficient amount of planting material will hamper the last cultivation of sweet potato in 1997, having a further negative impact on food availability during the stress period of 1998. It is therefore recommended to plan and preposition sufficient relief food for the coming months (tentatively from November 1997 until the *belg* harvest 1998).

**North Omo: Relief Food Supply July/August 1997 - Belg Performance & Relief Needs**

WEREDA	1997 Total Population*	Reg. Assessment May 1997		Relief Food Supply July/August 1997 in MT						Zonal Dep.of Agriculture/WDPPCs		DPPC EW July 1997 Report	
				DPPC		SCF UK		Redd Barna***		Belg Assessment		Belg Prod. & Food Prospect	
				Cereals	Suppl.	Cereals	Suppl.	Cereals	Suppl.	% Belg Failure	Belg Dependency	Assist. Need	Close Monit.
Bolosore	270,165	98,000	36%	-	37.5	1,020	40	1,783	100	55%	75%	40,000	-
Kindo Koisha	153,733	83,791	55%	-	43.9	1,490	20			50%	70%	36,500	-
Ofa	121,713	76,147	63%	-	23.0	835	10			10%	75%	6,800	-
Sodo Zuria	219,492	38,051	17%	-	18.0	450	5			-	-	-	-
Damot Gale	237,490	53,473	23%	-	25.0	150	5	1,000	100	-	-	10,000	-
Damot Weyde	163,530	41,582	25%	-	17.0	830	20			20-25%	75%	20,000	-
Humbo	105,604	63,006	60%	-	15.0	225	5			50-70%	75%	14,300	-
<b>Total Wolayita</b>	<b>1,271,727</b>	<b>454,050</b>	<b>36%</b>	-	<b>179.4</b>	<b>5,000</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>2,783</b>	<b>200</b>			<b>127,600</b>	-
Kucha	112,112	23,796	21%	280	25.0					55-65%	70%	21,200	-
Dita/Daramalo	119,542	30,000	25%	120	15.0					80-90%	58%	-	25,200
Kemba	108,917	45,535	42%	613	20.0					35-45%	60%	14,800	-
Bonke	119,590	15,000	13%	75	10.0					25-30%	60%	10,100	-
Boreda/Abaya	108,931	15,774	15%	150	17.0					35-50%	60%	-	38,200
Chencha	96,204	6,000	6%	60	-					-	-	-	-
Arba Minch Z.	167,789	5,000	3%	75	20.0					-	-	5,000	-
Loma/Bosa	101,507	14,423	14%	75	-					-	-	-	-
Mareka Geno**	95,927	609	1%	-	5.0					-	-	-	600
Esera Tocha**	101,260	9,811	10%	72	-					-	-	-	-
Konta**	57,173	3,793	7%	-	-					-	-	-	4,000
Melekoza	81,870	-	-	-	-					-	-	3,500	-
Mesketo	36,795	-	-	-	-					-	-	-	-
Gofa	181,448	24,984	14%	150	20.0					30-35%	65%	-	7,000
Zala/Ubamale	83,654	20,000	24%	105	15.0					-	-	18,400	-
<b>Total N-Omo</b>	<b>2,844,446</b>	<b>668,775</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>1,775</b>	<b>326.4</b>					<b>high - lowland</b>	<b>includes maize</b>	<b>200,600</b>	<b>75,000</b>

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

\*\* Displaced people, relief needs related to conflict, not to climatic hazards

\*\*\* Additional 817 MT for remaining weredas of Welayita, from which 390 MT already delivered to Sodo store