

Field Trip Report to Welayita and North Omo (2 - 6 April)

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Introduction

With the beginning of the stress period in the Welayita area and North Omo zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS), a short mission was carried out to review the general food situation and estimate the extent of seasonal food shortages in these areas. The mission also tried to obtain relevant information on planned and ongoing employment generation schemes and related activities.

General situation

The short (*belg*) rains, although starting with a delay of two to three weeks, have so far been good. Some areas, especially parts of Damot Gale and Boloso Sore weredas, have suffered from heavy hailstorms that have devastated crops and homes. Practically all arable land has been cultivated and most of fields in the high and mid-highlands had been planted at the time of the mission. Furthermore, it was reported that the area cultivated for the 1996 *belg* in North Omo has increased by 10% in comparison to 1995, bringing the average area cultivated per household of six persons to 0.6 ha for North Omo and 0.52 ha for Welayita. No major crop pests have been reported so far and the overall crop stand is good.

Special attention should be given to armyworm infestations this year, given the cyclical tendency of outbreaks. According to the zonal Bureau of Agriculture, a first outbreak has been observed around Darashe special wereda. The zonal MoA has some pesticide in stock to start control measures within the zone. However, it lacks sprayers and transportation to successfully carry out control operations.

Livestock is generally in good condition. Still, according to a veterinary report covering the period from November 95 to February 96, 170 deaths were registered in the zone mainly due to Blackleg (100 death, 14,960 vaccinated) and epidemic lung disease (59 death, 20,000 treated).

With a generally good agricultural season in 1995, the stress period in 1996 has been somewhat shortened, extending from April to June/July. The actual nutritional status is good but will deteriorate if adequate measures are not taken. This year's food deficit is mainly structural and will affect to some extent approximately 20% to 30% of the Welayita population. It would be important to keep relief resources as high as needed to avoid recurrent rehabilitation needs, which regularly annihilate development efforts. In this regard it is good to notice that the revised relief assistance requirements show an increment of nearly 40% over to the 1996 appeal figures (see EWS report: 1996 Food Supply Situation, March 96). Together with inputs from NGOs, however, the 1996 food deficit can be expected to be covered.

Planned and ongoing relief activities

Food supply

According to the zonal department of DPP, problems of food shortage exist in some kebeles of the six weredas of Welayita (except Sodo Zuria). Until now food distributions have only taken place for special emergencies, whereas regular relief activities are expected to start in April.

Transport of relief food from the CDPP stock in Sodo (sorghum) has started. A total of 13,000 quintals of food is being transported to Kindo Koisha, Boloso Sore, Damot Gale and Kamba weredas, organised by the central CDPP. The late positioning of food during the *belg* rains implies transportation problems in areas with difficult road access. This problem is not helped by the zonal department of DPP's lack of adequate transportation means and a limited budget that hampers the optimal use of existing vehicles.

Employment Generation Schemes and related activities

To facilitate the implementation of the new policy, the zonal department of DPP, sometimes in collaboration with relevant NGOs, has organised workshops on policy awareness, distributed documents on policy issues (EGS, early warning) and given specific advice for the collection of accurate early warning data and the preparation of EGS project documents for relevant Wereda staff. Despite these efforts, EGS planning at the wereda level has been delayed due to various problems, many of which were highlighted by the CDPP capacity assessment study of late 1995. So far the zone has received EGS proposals from ten weredas and activities are scheduled to start in April after selection of the target groups. Specific problems due to limited food supplies, lack of funds, tools, etc can still be expected during implementation of planned EGS. As already outlined in the last report, relief activities are somewhat delayed and it is fortunate that the overall food situation is better than expected, with the stress period only starting in April.

NGOs

The NGO CONCERN, operating in Damot Weyde, is combining early warning data, nutritional surveys, market surveys, climate and crop observations to determine the relief situation in the wereda. Contrary to general expectations, the actual food situation is good with no significant food problems reported despite the failed 1995 maize harvest in the midlands and part of the lowlands. This positive situation has been confirmed by stable markets and is mainly due to the good performance of support crops such as sweet potatoes and haricot beans that benefited from good *zape* rains. The food shortage period is expected to start in mid-April and last until July. EGS activities were started at end of March and currently employ 2,630 workers. With the beginning of the stress period the number of workers is expected to increase.

SOS Sahel has been implementing labour intensive work schemes in Kindo Koisha for the last several years. In 1996 they have started EGS activities in March, employing 1,706 workers in road and check dam constructions. During the stress period they intend to increase the programme, employing up to 4,000 workers for a four month period. In addition, 2,000 vulnerable households unable to participate in EGS have been receiving free food since the beginning of March.

According to their Addis Ababa headquarters, the aim of SOS Sahel's labour intensive work schemes is to cover relief requirements but also rehabilitation needs and to activate the local economy through an influx of cash. Lately they were forced to switch from cash for work to food for work payments as donors were no longer willing to provide assistance other than in the form of food (this corrects the statement made in our last report). As the population prefers cash payments and in order to meet the development objectives of SOS Sahel, the agency is trying to secure the necessary funds to return to cash for work. Being one of the few NGOs successfully using cash for work, it is hoped that this initiative will obtain necessary support from the donor community.

Redd Barna, working in Boloso Sore, is mainly channelling its relief support through the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee. According to a nutritional survey carried out in their project area, the nutritional status is satisfactory, with only few Peasant Associations showing declining nutritional status. The general food and market situation in the wereda is also reported to be good, but structural problems are expected to affect up to 20% of the population. Food is repositioned in the wereda and the wereda DPPC is preparing plans for implementing EGS. During

the last phase of its programme Redd Barna intends to work with the DPPC on capacity building issues.

According to World Vision, in Damota 1 area of Humbo wereda, the 1995 agricultural year was quite good except in four PAs in the lowlands. Although the general situation has been reported better than former years, structural deficit remain a problem. During 1996 World Vision plans to employ 1,000 to 2,000 people through their regular food for work programmes. Relief food has been distributed for a two weeks period to 5,000 households through EGS and free food distributions to buffer farmers food stocks. Additional relief activities will be carried out according to needs. Depending on the severity of arising food shortages, the WV food stocks might not suffice to cover the overall relief needs as their 1996 grain stocks are lower than in previous years and carry over stocks are mainly composed of supplementary food like lentils and beans.

A big step towards improved collaboration and co-ordination between Wereda administration, line departments and NGOs has been made with the active participation of NGOs in the Wereda DPPCs. It will help to improve mutual understanding.

Area Based Integrated Development

The UNDP funded Area Based Integrated Development Programme to be implemented in three weredas of SNNPR (Bolosso Sore, Kindo Koisha, Konso) has not yet started its activities. The regional bureau of DPP has submitted the first quarter budget proposal but budget allocations have not yet taken place. According to the regional Bureau for DPP there are still some open questions about the proposed institutional framework which the regional authorities would like to clarify.

Specific issues

Hail storms and floods

In March, severe hail storms occurred in the weredas of Damot Gale and Bolosso Sore and minor flooding was reported from Damot Weyde.

In Damot Gale the hailstorms were of such a magnitude that they destroyed not only an estimated 625 hectares of crop land but also 266 roofs. Affected farmers were provided with tents and plastic sheets by the CDPP and with seeds by Redd Barna (1,956 households).

In Bolosso Sore, several hail storms occurred in March affecting eight PAs, of which two have registered severe damage. The wereda DPPC has already distributed seeds provided by Redd Barna to 4,205 households (five PAs). Some flooding has also been reported in the midlands of Damot Weyde, causing some minor damage.

Dalbo-Bedesa-Dimto road

Road constructions have already been monitored in a former report for their missed chance to generate employment in a densely populated area characterised by endemic underemployment. But roads have also damaging effects on the environment, especially if the drainage system is not well taken care of. These devastating effects can be observed a little everywhere, but are most visible along new road tracks.

The Dalbo-Bedesa-Dimto road, under construction by the Lalibela Engineering and Construction Enterprise, is a typical example of a badly managed drainage system. Observations made at the end of January on the applied road drainage system were confirmed at the beginning April after only a short period of rain. The necessary specifications concerning cross sections and the maximum admissible length of ditches have not been respected, endangering the road track itself. Furthermore the drained

water is simply directed into fields and foot paths, causing extensive damage to fertile land and even houses. During our visit, officials of the Damot Weyde Agricultural Office, alarmed by concerned farmers, were measuring the extent of the damage caused by the drainage system.

Sufficient labour-based techniques, including physical structures, bio-engineering, etc are known to efficiently address these problems. These works are an integral part of road construction and have to be carefully taken into account by the implementing company. As the road is still under construction, it is hoped that necessary measures are taken in due time before further and irremediable damage occurs.

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