



## **Towards integrated food security through subsidised employment and income generation activities:**

*aspects and realities of chronic food insecure areas along  
Tekeze River and in the Simien Mountains*

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### ***The remote areas of the Simien Mountains and the Tekeze River***

The Simien Mountains and the Tekeze River watershed are considered among the most remote areas in Ethiopia. The topography in parts of the area comprises a dissected plateau, the edges of which plunge dramatically into deep gorges with rivers flowing towards the eastern and northern lowlands, mainly into the Tekeze River. All woredas in these areas are included among the 47 woredas (out of 105 in Amhara Region) defined as 'chronic food insecure'. All food insecure woredas are situated in the east and north of Amhara Region, i.e. in the *belg* belt and its adjacent areas of both Gonder zones around the Tekeze River watershed and in the Simien Mountains.

#### *Objectives and methodology*

The mission's objective was to visit two remote areas difficult to access in the eastern parts of the Simien Mountains and in the Tekeze River lowlands and to obtain first hand information from farmers on the situation concerning general living conditions, agricultural and food security status. This report tries to compare the actual situation with what was encountered in two previous visits<sup>1</sup>. Secondary data collection included recent reports produced by inter-actors active in the visited areas in terms of relief, rehabilitation and development activities. Informal group and key informant interviews were conducted at regional, zonal, woreda and kebele level with relevant authorities, i.e. Government Administration offices, DPP (Disaster Prevention & Preparedness) offices, IFSP (Integrated Food Security Programme), WFP (World Food Programme) and ORDA (Organisation for Rehabilitation & Development in Amhara) representatives and intervening NGOs, as well as with individual farmers and other directly concerned or affected individuals. To get direct impressions on the ground and to enable the mission to judge and compare the situation in the surveyed areas, extended farm, village and area walks were undertaken in Jana Mora and Belessa woredas.

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<sup>1</sup> See the following articles published by the UN-EUE: Guinand, 1999b & Guinand and Ugas, 1999

### *General background*

The Simien Mountains include many peaks above 4000 m and Ethiopia's highest summit, Ras Dejen, above 4500 m. Temperatures in these extreme highlands regularly fall below freezing at night. In contrast, the climate in the Tekeze lowlands is hot. In both areas the land is mostly rocky and the soil of poor quality with low natural fertility. The sandy soils of the Tekeze River lowlands have therefore been long considered unsuitable for farming. Original settlers used the Tekeze River lowlands more for their livestock as pastureland than for agriculture. The area in general was neglected for many years and there were few if any development activities. The two major reasons for its neglect were its remoteness and the fact that the area was a TPLF (Tigrean People's Liberation Front) stronghold during the former socialist government.

Looking at the demography of the area, the population density today is well above the sustainability margin of the area's fragile ecological system. Increased population pressures, especially in the highland areas, put more and more pressure on available land and parts of the formerly rich surplus producing highlands have become food deficient areas. Many poor farm families were forced to leave the highlands and to open vulnerable areas such as escarpments and steep slopes for cultivation in and around the Tekeze river watershed, which eventually was the only place left to open new land for cultivation. In some of the Tekeze River lowland areas, people began to settle as long as forty years ago. Then there were only a few. But nowadays, the persistent search for cultivable croplands, for example on steep slopes, has resulted in massive deforestation, which in turn has led to significant soil erosion, decreasing soil fertility and even marginalisation and complete depletion of land.

The area is *meher* dependent. Farmers cultivate mainly barley and wheat in the highlands and sorghum and maize in the lowlands. Where small-scale irrigation is possible, some cash crops such as vegetables, coffee and even chat are grown. Nevertheless, the main means of living, both in the highlands surrounding the Simien Mountains and in the Tekeze lowlands, is livestock raising, herding and trading for cash and food.

For the last ten to twenty years, rains are said to have become erratic, with poor *kiremt* rain seasons becoming the norm rather than the exception. Erratic rainfall patterns and periodic rain shortages have become a fact of life for farmers in and around the Simien Mountains and the Tekeze River lowlands with long dry periods being followed by heavy rains and hail storms, which regularly damage crops. These heavy rains cause flooding and substantial erosion with the water run-off rate on the degraded surface high and water infiltration low. Nowadays less water flows from permanent springs and some of the seasonal springs provide water for only a short period or have dried up for good.

Nevertheless, with the new government in place since 1991, some basic development efforts are being undertaken also in remote woredas around the Simien Mountains and in part of the Tekeze River watershed. For the last five years since 1995, especially Ibbat and its neighbouring Belessa woreda in South and North Gonder respectively, have received considerable attention and benefited from road construction programs, terracing and small scale irrigation projects, mostly

carried out under food-for-work (FFW) development activities and employment generation schemes (EGS). In the remote highland woredas such as Jana Mora and Beyeda, basic infrastructure improvement started only very recently. Nevertheless, many farm families are gaining income and are receiving additional food and cash resources through these channels. But, apart from creating temporary employment opportunities for farm households, the sustainability of these measures is debatable.

### ***Basic infrastructure development under way; the case of all weather feeder roads***

Basic infrastructure and public utility services are the most important indicators for potential social and economic development. Road construction that makes remote areas accessible and access to water supplies for drinking and cultivation are regarded as the main infrastructure developments that are of relevance to promote development in the social and economic sectors. According to the Amhara Regional Administration, only 22% of the population in the Region has access to all weather roads and the regional road density index is below the national average.

#### *The impact of all weather feeder roads*

Since UN-EUE's (United Nation Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia) last visit to the area, more than one and a half-years ago, efforts are well under way to make basic infrastructure available in remote areas with so far limited accessibility. ORDA and the Rural Road Construction Authority (RRCA) have constructed so far about 330km of roads in Ibnat and Belessa woredas. Furthermore, the 100km feeder road connecting Debark with Mekane Birhan, Jana Mora woreda capital in the Simien Mountains, is soon being completed. The impact of road construction has been demonstrated for Ibnat and Belessa. An evaluation study initiated by German Agro Action (GAA) (Börgel et al., 1999) concluded that these roads not only provide access to the area, but also are increasing the radius of government line offices' extension services. Roads are promoting local market initiatives and they are the basis for a variety of additional basic infrastructure developments: Schools are being constructed (Mekane Birhan has now a primary and a secondary school), health facilities are being made available at woreda level, small-scale agricultural development projects are being initiated (river diversion and dam construction in Ibnat and Belessa), new local markets emerged in a number of places along roads, creating a variety of off-farm job opportunities, food aid can now be distributed nearer to affected populations.

This season (2000/2001), people from Jana Mora and Beyeda woredas will hopefully not have to travel again for days to pick up their food rations in Debark town. This was still the case for last season (2000). DPPB in Bahir Dar argued that neither food destined for EGS and FFW activities nor gracious relief food was available in time for pre-positioning. The warehouses of the Emergency Food Stock Reserve (EFSR) in Kombolcha and elsewhere in the country had reached a critical level in the beginning of 2000 due to delivery delays from international donors to restock the food reserve after major and unpredicted requirements in 1999 had almost emptied the stocks. Therefore, it was impossible to transport enough food to Chenneck, a distribution point in the Simien Mountain National Park, and to pre-position for the *kiremt* rainy season

months of July, August and September. Furthermore, Chenneck did not have the capacity to store food because there were no storage facilities and in the past, frequent frost used to damage food supplies kept in the open. During the rainy season, the road from Debark into the Simien Mountains does not yet allow 5 to 10ton trucks to operate, mainly because part of the road does not yet have an all gravel layer. Therefore, food destined for Jana Mora and Beyeda woredas was kept in Debark for distribution. This caused the usual problems when beneficiaries had to cover long distances to reach distribution sites: only a few people have the necessary transportation means, i.e. donkeys, to travel and pick up the food. They do business with their fellow beneficiaries who are paying part of their allocated relief food as transport fee. In Jana Mora the transport fee per family is 5 Birr or 15 kg of relief food per trip that is equivalent to a full one-month person ration. Many beneficiaries have still been selling their ration on the spot in Debark at dumping prices and only bringing back cash.

Now the necessary infrastructure is available for food pre-positioning. Mekane Birhan is accessible by road and four warehouses are ready to receive food (three in Mekane Birhan and one Rubb Hall at a place called Boahit, approximately 20 km before the woreda capital at the turn off of the track that leads to Beyeda woreda.

*Suspension bridge connects Beyeda woreda with Debark - Jana Mora road*

People from Beyeda woreda used to be cut off during the rainy season when the water of Mesheha River made crossing impossible. The World Food Programme (WFP) financed the construction of a 145-metre suspension bridge over Mesheha River that carries people and animals. A German consultant designed the bridge and the Selam Vocational Training Centre from Addis Ababa constructed it in April 2000. Plans are being discussed to connect Beyeda woreda with the Ethiopian road network. But the completion of this project is likely to take several years from now because the Mesheha River valley represents a major obstacle and challenge for road construction. For the time being, the Beyeda population has to be content with the suspension bridge.

*Limited road accessibility puts the Tsellemt woreda population at a disadvantage*

For the remote Tsellemt area of Adi Arkay woreda, the track that winds its way for about 200km through to Feyel Wuha in the Tekeze River, has not yet received any upgrading. This track is the only other connection, besides the Debark – Jana Mora road, with the remote backside eastern areas of the Simien Mountains. Lack of track improvement, late arrival of food supplies and the onset of the *kiremt* rains in 2000 forced the authorities to unload food supplies destined for Feyel Wuha, in several accessible sites such as Debark, Adi Arkay, May Tsebbre and Gonder. From some of these sites, due to the food's availability, part of it was diverted to other destinations and purposes and has to be repaid. Beneficiaries in the Tsellemt area were denied their food rations that were in fact EGS and FFW salary payments.

*Buy food grain locally to ensure timely assistance*

In Ibnat and Belessa woredas, the basic food supply situation was similar, with the difference that international NGOs such as CARE Ethiopia and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) were able to

buy food grain locally from state farms that could be supplied in time to the affected population. Furthermore, the road network is by far more adequate. Hence, storage facilities and distribution sites are in most cases nearer to the affected population compared to the rest of the chronic food insecure woredas around the Simien Mountains.

The aforementioned examples underline the fact that where basic infrastructure development is under way, in particular the construction of all weather feeder roads, other development activities are enhanced and more efficient and reliable supply of relief food is made possible. This in consequence eases the affected population's hardship and upgrades livelihoods in general.

### ***Integrated food security programme and its relief, rehabilitation and development activities; inter-actors with various capacities***

#### *Uneven geographical distribution of efforts*

An uneven geographical distribution of relief, rehabilitation and development efforts still prevails among the chronic food insecure woredas of Amhara Region. This remains unchanged since UN-EUE's last visits (see Guinand, 1999b; Guinand & Ugas, 1999). The main factors for this situation are remoteness and difficult accessibility on one hand and government intervention priorities on the other.

In those areas where the government has asked international donors to assist their efforts to implement activities under IFSP (Integrated Food Security Programme<sup>2</sup>), for example GAA for Ibnat and Belessa, GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) for Tebre Tabor and FHI (Food for the Hungry International) for Tach- and Lay-Gayint, people are relatively better-off in terms of relief and development assistance than for example in Beyeda woreda that lacks road access. Government institutions such as ORDA lack funding and capacity for intervention in areas that are not yet supported and covered by international inter-actors and therefore are not able to properly assist affected population segments towards improving their resource base, increasing their income and creating employment opportunities.

#### *Coordination and co-operation under the IFS programme*

Coordination and co-operation for IFSP activities among the important inter-actors experience a series of management and planning problems that lead to ad hoc decisions concerning target

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<sup>2</sup> IFSP is the first large investment programme of its kind in Ethiopia conceived under a food security strategy that the Government presented to the international donor community in December 1996. The IFS programme consists of a series of measures directed towards a total of 156 woredas defined as 'chronically food insecure' in four regions of Ethiopia; Amhara, Tigray, Oromia and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP). The Government estimated the costs of the programme (draft proposal 1999) at approximately 6 billion Birr (~ 820 million US \$) over a period of five years. For Amhara Region the overall objective of the IFS programme is to ensure food security within 5 to 7 years for a population of 2.5 million residing in 47 chronically food insecure woredas. The IFSP strategy for Ethiopia is supported by the World Bank, EU, USAID, DFID, CRDA, CIDA, WFP, CISP, and the governments of Italy and Germany.

areas, transport, storage, distribution and targeting of beneficiaries are the key causes for frequent frictions among the agencies at various intervention levels. A common incident is the hasty redirection of food from stocks earmarked for EGS or FFW activities in targeted woredas, towards sudden and unexpected relief requests elsewhere with the consequence that EGS and FFW employees do not get paid in time because the destined food is no longer available. This recently happened with food allocations to Fiyel Wuha for Tsellemt woreda. Part of this food was unloaded in DPPD warehouses in Gonder due to accessibility problems to Fiyel Wuha (see section above). When ethnic conflict broke out in the Wellega area that left well over 10,000 people displaced, DPPB in Bahir Dar decided to divert part of the Tsellemt woreda food allocations to assist these internally displaced people.

Apart from management and planning difficulties, clear lines of coordination and implementation responsibilities for concerned IFSP inter-actors are lacking. In principle, WFP supplies food requirements for relief, EGS and FFW activities to DPPC at Federal level and to ORDA for Amhara Region. In addition WFP carries out monitoring activities for their funded and supplied partner institutions. DPPC's responsibility is to supply and stock relief food as well as to organise transport through private local transport companies. ORDA's responsibilities are similar but are earmarked for EGS-activity-food. In addition, ORDA organises and carries out the EGS payments. WFP finances all these activities carried out by the various DPP offices and ORDA in Amhara Region. The IFSP office in Bahir Dar and its affiliates in the zones and the chronically food insecure woredas of Amhara Region, are supposed to coordinate all activities falling under the IFS programme and hence make sure there is no overlapping and duplication of efforts. Furthermore, IFSP is responsible for channelling international funding, mainly from the EU, to sector-based cash-for-work (CFW) activities under the respective line ministries and offices.

### ***Gradually increased beneficiaries and relief food requirements since 1992***

In Ibnat and Belessa, and most likely in some other of the 47 chronic food insecure woredas in Amhara Region, food distribution quantities have constantly risen since the first distributions took place after the end of the war in 1991. Whereas in 1992 a total of 5,000 MT was distributed for Ibnat and Belessa, the amount reached 20,000 MT in 1997 with a continuing upward trend. But, it is worth emphasising that the amount of food distributed in 1992 could by far not meet the population's needs. The amount of food distributed each year rose partly because the availability of food and distribution means, such as all-weather feeder roads and stocking facilities, were greatly enhanced and more needy people could be reached. In addition, every year more people living in food insecure areas are unable to feed themselves and thus become dependant on subsidised support mechanisms such as food aid and a variety of government employment schemes. With an average annual agricultural productivity growth of 0.7% it is impossible to keep up with an average annual population growth of more than 3%.

Ibnat and Belessa woredas represent two exceptional cases of chronic food shortage woredas where food requirements are generally met and beneficiaries get their food rations throughout the required period. When food deliveries from DPPC or ORDA are being delayed, GAA tries and

mostly succeeds to buy additional food grains from national state farm production or from local traders. Unfortunately, at present it does not seem possible to extend this pilot project into other similar food insecure areas. The immense requirements in terms of funding, food, logistics and monitoring can neither be made available nor can they be handled with capacities in place. This is particularly true for most chronic food insecure areas around the Simien Mountains where accessibility remains a major problem.

### ***Limited, unhealthy and ecologically harmful coping mechanisms***

In most chronically food insecure areas of Amhara Region, on-farm crop production contributes only up to a maximum of 50% of the annual food requirements of the population, even in good years. This is not very surprising with an average land holding size of approximately 1.5ha per household that is by far insufficient to produce substantial income by rain-fed agriculture. Furthermore, the soil productivity declines at a rate of up to 3% annually as a consequence of land degradation<sup>3</sup>. Under the current farming system, the population density that ranges between 60 and 80 persons per km<sup>2</sup> is well above the carrying capacity of the area's fragile ecosystem. All this is to say that today massive structural and agro-ecological deficits prevail in the chronically food insecure parts of Amhara Region and that, if anything shall turn for the better, drastic measures are required. Furthermore, from the few available and adopted coping mechanisms, quite a number are unhealthy and ecologically harmful.

#### *Traditional livestock trade*

People living in and around the Simien Mountains raise livestock for trade and cash. During the border conflict in the north, livestock trade experienced a substantial increase due to risen demand. In particular, goats were sent to various areas in Eastern and Western Tigray for selling (Guinand & Ugas, 1999). For the last two years market prices were favourable and the additional benefit gained made up for part of the hardship experienced in the area due to unfavourable weather conditions. Since the peace agreement between the two warring countries and the partial retreat of the armed forces from Tigray, livestock prices have dropped. Farmers around the Simien Mountains are complaining about the slow down in livestock trade and the dropped demand that is in fact just getting back to normal, i.e. what it used to be before the war.

Livestock conditions are satisfactory, apart from a cattle disease called 'lump skin' that spread in some lowlands and caused some animal deaths in Sameda woreda of South Gonder. Prolonged rains into October and November 2000 were favourable for pasture and water availability particularly in the highlands. For the lowlands of the Tekeze River watershed, in particular Belessa and Wegera, shortage of rain was already reported in November 2000.

#### *Cutting indigenous trees for firewood and for income generation*

Firewood sale is one of the traditional coping mechanisms in areas where encroachment of bush land and forests is still possible. It is practised in the Tekeze River lowlands and the escarpment

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<sup>3</sup> This information has been retrieved from an unpublished draft document 'Amhara Regional Food Security Plan', dated February 1998.

areas of the Simien Mountains. The cutting of trees for firewood, construction and economic purposes is causing gradual destruction of the last remaining bush land and forests<sup>4</sup>. People cut down any indigenous tree or bush and use it for firewood, unless the species offers additional and particularly advantageous uses such as food consumption or economic enhancement. Most of the tree species remaining in the Belessa lowlands are of some particular use for the population and all have a particular reason for not being cut down. Mostly the species' food component prevents people from cutting them down<sup>5</sup>. In addition, a very common lowland tree, *Boswellia papyrifera*, the frankincense tree, is a protected tree species that nobody is allowed to cut. Nevertheless, people tap the species and use or sell its resin, the 'incense', on local markets and to traders. As discussed in a previous report (Guinand, 1999b), the management for 'incense' collection is often done improperly. A number of tapped trees usually die after a couple of years of improper tapping management. To use this source of income in a sustainable and ecologically less harmful way, proper tapping techniques have to be taught to people and communities using this tree species as a source of income and as a coping mechanism in lowland areas.

#### *Unhealthy physical effects from 'Guaya' consumption*

*Lathyrus sativus*, 'Guaya' (in Amharigna), Grass Pea, Chick Pea, or 'Vetch' (in English) is a drought tolerant, high yielding nitrogen rich pulse with high-quality protein and carbohydrate concentrations. The seeds and the leaves are normally known as an animal feed. *L. sativus* is known as a famine food in chronic food shortage areas because of its very low water requirement. It is commonly consumed boiled or roasted and its flour is used to make bread. It may provide the entire diet in times of food shortage. It is usually mixed with other cereals like wheat, barley and rice. Consumed excessively, Grass Pea causes irreversible crippling effects, a disease known as *lathyrism*.

*L. sativus* is extensively cultivated in Wag Hamra, North and South Welo and North Gonder. The consumption of Grass Pea in parts of Amhara Region and the continuous increase of cases of human lathyrism, especially in the highlands above 2500m, have repeatedly been reported (see Guinand, 1999a; Getahun et al., 1999; Klingele, 1998; Ahrens, 1997a & 1998; Tekle-Haimanot, 1994). This attractive survival crop is increasingly consumed in drought prone areas. The disease occurring after excessive consumption affects particularly the poorest and most active population segment. Crop failures, harvest damages and also non-shock related massive structural deficits and overpopulation in parts of the central highlands in Amhara Region are boosting lathyrism and are crippling thousands of people, leaving nearly one in five victims a 'crawler', i.e. the victim has lost all ability to walk. But maybe soon poor people in famine struck areas such as in the central highlands of Ethiopia may not have to fear lathyrism from grass pea anymore. The International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Aleppo, Syria, succeeded in breeding virtually toxin free cultivars of *L. sativus*. The research took 15 years until it became

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<sup>4</sup> Natural forests cover less than 2% of Amahara Region. Bush land covers approximately 25% of the surface, part of which is heavily encroached and degraded former natural forestland.

<sup>5</sup> In the section below on indigenous food pants, some tree species and their food components are mentioned and described.



possible in the beginning of the year 2000 to produce strains of *L. sativus* offering the yield, taste, and environmental ruggedness of the original plant (Raloff, 2000).

#### *Wild-food plants*

Since research on wild-food plants carried out in 2000 by the UN-EUE, revealed the importance of such plants as a coping mechanism and part of people's survival strategy in times of food shortage (Guinand & Lemessa, 2000, 2001a, 2001b), field missions to chronic food insecure areas of the country also focus on wild-food availability and consumption.

Arba Zekuar kebele of Belessa woreda is among the most chronically food insecure. Situated approximately 60km north of Guhala woreda capital, the small village marks the end of the all weather gravel road. Further up north, the area's characteristic rugged, stony and rocky landscape becomes dissected with valleys opening towards the main Tekeze River valley that has prevented the Rural Road Authority to carry road construction further onwards. The semi-arid area is already at this time of the year (February/March) completely dry. Most tree species remain without leaves, there is no grass cover and very few evergreen plants can be spotted.

People of Arba Zekuar village had already run out of food by the time of our visit in mid-February, after only three and a half months since the harvest in October/November 2000. All grain stores in the village were empty. People are not particularly worried about this situation, however. Food distributions usually start in March for a period of seven to eight months. Arba Zekuar is part of the GAA, ORDA and WFP (through woreda administration) intervention area. The villagers confirmed that food is usually distributed on time. A major disadvantage is that they have to get to Hamusite, the nearest distribution centre, 45km away. With an all weather gravel road available all the way to Arba Zekuar, the UN-EUE mission could not see any logistic constraint for placing a Rubb Hall store directly in Arba Zekuar to benefit its surrounding lowland population.

A guided walk in and around the village revealed the importance people attach to wild-food plants, particularly trees during the dry season. Virtually all remaining three species in and surrounding the village are used as a food source. Four tree species with edible components, *Balanites* and *Zizifus* as well as two species locally referred to as '*Fachoka*' and '*Tawla Mucha*' were identified. When the *kiremt* rains start, people collect a number of wild 'vegetables' and 'weeds', of which '*Abash Gomen*', *Brassica carinata*, is the most important. *B. carinata* is an erect, much branched species of variable size and shape. The species is a very common leafy vegetable in Ethiopian cuisine and is found in almost all agro-ecological zones either wild or domesticated as a cash crop on irrigated fields.

Seeds and leaves of *B. carinata* are commonly traded on local markets. Therefore, the species is of economic value in certain areas. Seeds are consumed as a spice that is used with raw meat

similar to *Brassica nigra*<sup>6</sup>. A small tin of seeds has a market value of 3 Birr in Mekane Birhan, whereas a bundle of leaves (~ 20 pieces) usually goes for 25 to 50 cents depending on availability and demand. *B. carinata* grows all year in certain areas and is also enjoyed and used by many people in normal times. Therefore, the plant cannot be considered a typical famine food. Nevertheless, when other on-farm crops are in short supply, people will rely to a higher degree on this species for their daily dietary intake. In the surveyed areas, *B. carinata* is valued differently. In the highlands and the escarpment areas around Jana Mora, farmers grow the plant on irrigated fields as a cash crop. In the Tekeze River lowlands around Arba Zekuar in Belessa, the species is not grown on farm and is of no economic value. It grows wild and in cropped maize and sorghum fields where it is collected for home consumption only during the rainy season.

#### *Stress migration of able-bodied male family members*

Unlike during the two former visits to chronic food insecure areas in Amhara Region, unusual and significant stress migration of able-bodied male family members has neither been observed nor reported for the investigated places, i.e. Janamora, Beyeda, Debark, Ibnat and Belessa woredas. First, people seeking temporary employment in state farms will be leaving later in the year. Second, most of the visited areas still have some food stock available at this time of year with the exception of some villages in Belessa woreda. Food insecure areas are known for the stress migration phenomenon of able-bodied males. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether migration of employment seeking family members does really contribute up to 10% of a family's yearly food requirements as SCF/UK estimated in a food economy study done in 1998 for North Wollo (SCF/UK, 1998a). We question migratory labour as an alternative income generating activity in times of food shortage. Many people interviewed (mainly women and youngsters left behind) in the course of our field work within the last three years, stated that temporary out-migrants, though able to support themselves, are unlikely accumulating enough cash savings to send or bring back to their suffering families. Most of the time the only benefit a family gets from a migrated member is the fact that there is one mouth less to feed. Therefore, looking at labour migration from a family or household point of view and in terms of a positive contribution to the support of suffering family members left behind may not be considered a valuable coping mechanism at all.

#### *Government and international donor-subsidised, non-sustainable coping mechanisms*

In quite a number of chronic food insecure woredas of Amhara Region, a substantial part of the population only survives and is able to make a living thanks to outside humanitarian interventions. Some of these interventions are meant to become sustainable and are development-oriented, but most are unfortunately neither. In parts of Belessa, mainly in the lowland areas, and Beyeda woredas people are awaiting relief food distributions stating in March through September 2001. FFW, EGS and CFW activities that will be carried out in the first part of the year before the *kiremt* rains start, will bless many households with food and some cash. Unfortunately all these activities that have now been organised and carried out in Ethiopia for more than 20 years have proved non-sustainable at any stage due to a number of well-known factors of which misconception and inadequate management of such programmes and projects are among the most

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<sup>6</sup> For more details on these species please consult UN-EUE Wild-Food Web Site: [www.telecom.net.et/~undp-eue/faminefoodweb/index.htm](http://www.telecom.net.et/~undp-eue/faminefoodweb/index.htm)

important. Designed to relieve emergency and shock situations, the programmes were not meant to provide and implement sustainable components and facilities. Currently this attitude is being revised, but as a matter of fact, the reality encountered in the field remains unchanged. Unfortunately, all the problems and constraints encountered and described in my mission report dating June 1999 (Guinand, 1999b) remain basically unchanged. FFW projects such as small dam construction and irrigation, tree planting and terracing remain non-sustainable to date, and the problems faced by farmers in the agricultural sector such as inadequate development and extension services have not yet changed for the better<sup>7</sup>.

A new initiative that comes from the IFS programme and the Regional Administration, is cash-for-work (CFW) and it is now being implemented in a number of woredas. The cash-for-work idea has been described in a previous report on North Gonder (Guinand & Ugas, 1999, p.10). Main components comprise soil conservation, water supply, reforestation and road rehabilitation, construction and maintenance. Cash-for-work seems a viable and logical solution for remote areas such as the places visited where a cash trading system based on livestock is already in place. The main objective of the cash-for-work programme is to strengthen farmers' purchasing power by creating new alternative opportunities to earn cash and at the same time to improve basic infrastructure and to stabilise and rehabilitate the deteriorating agro-ecological environment.

Road construction that was recommended as a first priority for cash-for-work programmes, was mostly carried out by the Rural Road Construction Authority (RRCA), mainly because of the complex and difficult nature of the terrain that calls for professional manpower and heavy duty machinery. Nevertheless, in 2000 a number of CFW activities were carried out in Janamora woreda, i.e. reforestation, soil and water conservation and crop production activities for which approximately 500'000 Birr have been paid at a rate of 4Birr/worker/piece rate through the IFSP to the respective line offices. This basic payment of 4 Birr/worker/piece rate or /day is 1 Birr less than the usual daily remuneration on the labour market. By paying less it was hoped to avoid competition with the private sector and at the same time only attract poor households with no other alternative. But the pay rate has actually been revised and raised to 5 Birr/worker/piece rate because the recommended and required standards for the various CFW activities could not be met. For soil bends 70 man-days per soil bend that is approximately 1km of soil bend construction per day, is the standard required and expected. People attracted by the 4-Birr-rate did not meet this standard. They either might have been too lazy or too weak. Obviously, the low 4-Birr-rate did not attract able-bodied, healthy man power, but the weaker more needy segment of the population, which was also meant to be the main objective of the concept. When it turns out that the planned work rate is too high, the standards have to be adjusted to the manpower's capacity in order to justify the original approach and objective that was to attract the poorer households with no other alternative to gain income. Raising the wage rate by one Birr to the average market rate and by keeping the original but inappropriate working norm, changes the approach from its original social food security objective towards a production-oriented approach

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<sup>7</sup> For a further in-depth description and more details on these projects please refer to my field mission report issued in June 1999 (Guinand, 1999b, p.4-8).

that benefits a better-off target group within the local population while bypassing the poorest and most needy.

The IFS programme's main objective for Amhara Region is the creation of rehabilitation and development incentives and sustainable impact that in the view of the people in charge of the programme can only be achieved through capable, able-bodied and healthy manpower within the better-off community segments. It is proved and has become a fact that working with the poorest and destitute of the community is extremely difficult and risky because the chances of success in terms of sustainability and long lasting impact of implemented activities are minimal. The poorest and destitute are supposed to be included and benefiting from programmes and projects proposed for special vulnerable groups. Therein special support activities and drastic measures may be proposed such as voluntary migration and resettlement within Amhara Region.

### ***Conclusions and recommendations; new trends and developments***

#### *State-subsidised food and cash allocations for chronic food insecure areas*

In view of the manifold constraints people face in food insecure areas, there are not many viable opportunities to keep them off the food trap for the time being. Market opportunities will remain low and development potential particularly in the agricultural and the water sectors face serious structural constraints due to climatic, agro-ecological, bio-physical and environmental constraints and facts that can neither be improved nor resolved in the near future. Too many people and animals live in an ecologically fragile environment that cannot sustain, support or feed the present numbers. Markets are far away. Livestock, the only traded item besides indigenous wood and wild-food, is traded in Tigray. These markets are several days away. Water availability is very limited, particularly in the Tekeze River lowlands. River diversions and other small-scale water projects do not stand a chance of sustainability. For such projects, steady water flow is necessary, hence, in some areas springs dry up after three to four months and people have to walk far distances to fetch water.

Government officials and development specialists alike agreed that indeed integrated food security is very difficult to achieve in terms of sustainability in certain chronic food insecure areas. The only immediate option to keep these populations alive is to guarantee subsidised food and cash allocations for development activities through government with the help of the international donor community. In other words, the populations of these areas are kept busy and are able to survive through non-sustainable outside incentives. Obviously, this cannot be *the solution*. In the mid- and long run, more drastic measures including migration and resettlement of destitute parts of the population and consolidation of land, have to be considered and put into practice. One way or another, these suffering populations are going to find their own way and solutions to the problem. Out of experience, such home-grown solutions are not always recommended because they can solve but also create new problems elsewhere. The pull effect to urban centres and the rampant destitution, desolation and frustration of such populations create not only flocks of innocent urban beggars but give momentum to criminal activities and acts of violence.

#### *Advanced food allocations for EGS and FFW activities*

When talking about state-subsidised food and cash allocations for chronic food insecure areas, EGS and other food-for-work and cash-for-work activities in particular experience one major problem persists: Untimely allocations are more normal than exceptional. The reason is that requirements, food as well as cash, for EGS and FFW activities in general, are an integrated part of the annual National Emergency Appeal that is launched in January. Donor response always takes time and by the time requested supplies can be delivered to beneficiaries, four to five months have passed. Yet, deliveries and payments to the beneficiaries should take place when FFW activities are carried out in the slack period after harvest and before planting. That is normally between January and June for most of Northern Ethiopia. Deliveries being delayed, FFW participants cannot be paid, hence they do not get food in the period when the need is greatest. When supplies finally arrive in June, farmers get busy with ploughing and land preparation awaiting the rains.

Experienced relief and development specialists both from the Government and the international humanitarian community plead that requirements for EGS, FFW and cash-for-work activities should no longer be part of the National Emergency Appeal budget but should rather be integrated into the regular annual Ethiopian development budget and planning process that is launched in June each year. Then the time span between request and distribution would allow timely pre-positioning in all locations where such activities are being carried out. WFP is currently taking measures along these lines by pre-positioning 33,000 MT of food (approximately 1000 MT for each of the selected pilot woredas where EGS activities will be carried out) from their current emergency operations (EMOP) in 33 of the 47 chronic food insecure woredas of Amhara Region. In addition to the food donations, WFP makes at least 3,000 Birr available that shall be used as petty cash by the respective woreda administrations.

#### *Voluntary migration and resettlement in Amhara Region*

The IFSP office in Bahir Dar is preparing a proposal for a detailed study on the viability to implement a voluntary migration and resettlement programme for the Amhara Region. The discussion on voluntary migration and resettlement has been going on for some time and the UN-EUE discussed this issue in a number of previous reports (Guinand, 1999a & 1999b; Guinand & Ugas, 1999). There are always people emigrating from chronically food insecure areas, especially those who lost a good part of their valuable household assets and coping opportunities. Their hope is either to find a better future somewhere else or, and more likely, because they are left with no other option. These people usually turn up begging in woreda, zonal and regional capitals. Occasionally government authorities organise transport and ship them back to their places of origin. The Regional Government in Bahir Dar is aware of the problem and the fact that over the past years the number of people, who voluntarily migrated or were forced by unfavourable living conditions, has constantly been growing. The pressure on the government to address the problem further increased when resettlement seekers began to deliver petitions to the local authorities. The IFSP office in Bahir Dar identified already possible resettlement areas within Amhara Region. Metema, Tsegede-Armachicho and Dangila in the western part towards the Sudanese border, figure among other potential areas with low population density.

DISCLAIMER

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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## Annex

### ***Literature list of referred papers and previous UN-EUE South and North Gonder mission reports***

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## ***Abbreviations for NGOs and other organisations operating in South and North Gonder***

ACT	Action by Churches Together
CFW	Cash-for-work
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CISP	Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (International Committee for the Development of People)
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DPPB	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (mostly at Regional level)
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (Federal Government level)
DPPD	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Department (mostly at zonal level)
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
EFSR	Emergency Food Stock Reserve
EGS	Employment Generation Scheme
EMOP	Emergencies Operation (term used by WFP)
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
ERCS	Ethiopian Red Cross Society
EU	European Union
FHI	Food for the Hungry International
GAA	German Agro Action (Deutsche Welthungerhilfe)
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Development Cooperation)
ICARDA	International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
IFSP	Integrated Food Security Programme
JACH	Jerusalem Association Children's Homes
MoH	Ministry of Health
ORDA	Organisation for Relief and Development in Amhara
RHB	Regional Health Bureau
RRCA	Rural Road Construction Authority
SCF-UK	Save the Children Fund
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund (work in North Gonder)
UN-EUE	United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia
USAID	United States Aid for International Development
WABE	Ethiopian NGO working with Children in Nefas Mewcha, Tach- Gayint wereda
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation