

UNITED NATIONS EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA
SITUATION REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 1994

OVERVIEW

Political developments

The newly appointed Electoral Board met with the ambassadors and UN and bi-lateral agency representatives of the Joint Task Force on 15 February. This was the first meeting the JTF has held with the Electoral Board, although meetings have been requested since November to discuss the proposed budget for the June elections and the financial and other assistance requested from the international community.

At the meeting, the budget could only be presented in outline as it has not yet been approved by the Council of Representatives. A summary of progress so far was given illustrated by a video presentation. UNDP has been asked to find the initial finance of \$570,000 to pay for urgently needed printing materials, on the assumption that bi-lateral donors will reimburse this amount. The JTF were informed the training programme for election staff and the public awareness campaign have fallen behind schedule. The Board stressed that it is determined to be impartial and members of the JTF said that the best way to prove this impartiality was for the media to be guaranteed equal and fair access and that every assistance be given to all political parties. Meetings of political parties, which the Board had called to discuss multi-party participation in the elections, had not been attended by any party, possibly because insufficient notice had been given. Mr. Joe Baxter, a UNDP consultants, will return to Ethiopia for a short visit to advise on the timetable for the remaining weeks before polling begins on the 5th June.

During a three day congress held in Dire Dawa from 10 to 12 February and attended by 900 people, a new political organisation was founded, the Ethiopian Somali Democratic League, or ESDL. Chaired by the Minister for External Economic Cooperation, Dr. Abdulmejid Hussein, the League has committed itself to the formation of a democratic Ethiopia and to strive for the democratic rights of Ethiopian Somalis and the peaceful resolution of problems in Region 5 (Somali). Later in the month, the ESDL sent a goodwill message to the Tigray People's Liberation Front on the 19th anniversary of its founding, pledging to stand alongside the TPLF and contribute its share to rebuilding the nation. In a public statement issued at about the same time, the Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) expressed support for the ESDL saying the new movement will help free Ethiopian Somalis from backwardness and improve their livelihood. There has been no confirmation that the ESDL intends to contest future elections in Region 5.

Development issues

At the beginning of the year the Urban Land-Lease Law was promulgated. This was discussed in some detail at the monthly Donor/Government Meeting chaired by the Minister of External Economic Cooperation on 7 February. At the meeting donor representatives stressed that, as it stands, the law is open to widely differing interpretations and could be a disincentive for investment in the country. Government spokesmen said that the detailed regulations for the law still had to be issued, but when they are announced they should clarify and answer many of the concerns expressed by donors.

A workshop was held in Awassa from 8 to 11 February to discuss the draft National Programme for Food Production, Food Security and Nutrition. The meeting was attended by representatives of UN agencies and NGOs. Although there was general consensus on the priorities for developing peasant agriculture through conservation, farming and community participation in land-use planning and extension, the challenge of translating these programmes into regional action plans still has to be accomplished. The National Programme is now being finalised for presentation to donors.

The National Programme for Human Resource Development and Utilization was approved by an inter-agency Programme Approval Committee on 14 February. The committee recommended that UNDP should contribute \$14.35 million to the programme over the next three years. This will be only a small proportion of the total external assistance requirement for the full programme.

During February a UN Capital Development Fund mission visited UNCDF projects in South Omo, Illubabor and North Gondar. The mission recommended that UNCDF should finance an integrated programme of road building, forestry and soil conservation in the Simien Mountains and a community development fund at the woreda (district) level in North Gondar worth \$12 million over the next three years.

UNDP has approved a one million dollar programme to provide emergency assistance to try to save the national parks and to establish a trust fund with the World Wide Fund for Nature which would aim to build up \$20 million of capital, sufficient to generate enough interest to help finance the management of the national parks.

On 24 February the Government announced that it was suspending or dismissing the top management of Ethiopian Airways. The Minister of Defense, who is Chairman of the Board, had previously made a public attack on the management accusing it of corruption and incompetence. The airline is to be re-structured, which is assumed to mean that there will be sweeping staff reductions.

Security

Security has continued to be good throughout most of the country except the South East where there have been a number of incidents in recent weeks, culminating in a clash between Government security forces and members of the Ogadeni National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the central Ogaden town of Warder on 23 February. More than 50 people are said to have been killed during the initial incident and in three days of skirmishes that followed. The fighting caused the entire population of the town to flee and seek shelter in the surrounding countryside. Two trucks of food, blankets and medicine were sent from Gode to the scene by the Region 5 Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau to meet the most immediate relief needs.

An armed gang which has committed at least four armed robberies on expatriate families since the beginning of the year, usually in the early hours of the morning, was caught by the Police in the middle of the month. The gang are now in custody awaiting trial. Some members of the gang, which consist of several ex-soldiers and officers, are alleged to have admitted to these robberies, but said that they had no alternative as they were unable to find work.

AGRICULTURE

Belg season prospects

With meteorologists predicting no substantial rain in Eastern, North Eastern and Northern Ethiopia until mid-March, a late start to the belg (secondary) season is anticipated. The timing of these rains has become increasingly erratic in recent decades. They are normally expected to fall between mid-February and mid-May, with some showers during January which facilitate land preparation and help revive pasture. This year has so far been exceptionally dry with no rain in January and only some very light showers in highland areas during February. While the outlook for early March remains very much the same, FAO expect normal rainfall throughout the North and North-East by mid-March.

While it is too early to make any conclusive statements, when the belg rains do come the relatively late start will almost certainly mean a later harvest for both the belg season crops and the long-cycle meher crops, which rely on the early rains for land preparation and sowing. With no indications that the late start to the belg rains will be compensated by an extension of the rains into May, FAO are currently predicting a belg crop below the 500,000 tons forecast by the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission in December.

Locust situation

Ground surveys by teams from the Ministry of Agriculture found no sign of Desert Locust activity in the Jijiga-Tug Wajale-Teferi

Ber and Lowomgae areas of Eastern Ethiopia. It is forecast that Ethiopia will likely remain free of any significant locust activity in the month of March. However, there have been signs of Desert Locust egg-laying as well as the presence of adults in the neighbouring countries of Somalia and Eritrea and migrations from these areas may occur. The FAO are therefore pressing for continued surveys and monitoring.

Agricultural rehabilitation activities

A team with representatives of UNICEF, FAO and RRC undertook a trip to the Borena Zone of Region 4 (Including Negelle and Moyale) to monitor the purchase of oxen for returnees who have recently arrived from the Banissa refugee camp in North-East Kenya. UNICEF had earlier contributed one million birr (about \$170,000) for the purchase of livestock as part of the larger returnee rehabilitation programme in the region. The team identified a number of problems and issues relating to the implementation of the project and has brought these to the attention of the authorities concerned. The team reached an understanding with the Rehabilitation Task Force on giving priority to female-headed households during the distribution of oxen. Vehicles allocated by UNICEF for the programme are to be delivered soon, while a credit scheme for the returnees will also be established.

FOOD AID AND LOGISTICS

Food needs for 1994

A rather unsatisfactory meher (main season) harvest in many parts of the north, south and east last year, mainly due to erratic rainfall, has been followed by an exceptionally prolonged and rainless dry season throughout the country. This has accentuated an already serious situation in many vulnerable parts of the country, especially the lowland pastoral areas of the South and South-East, where grazing and ground water resources, already affected by poor rains in October/November last year, have deteriorated further.

In parts of Tigray and North Wello, the needs assessments conducted late last year by both the UN and RRC are now thought to have been overly optimistic. The same appears to be true of parts of the Ogaden, where very little crop production followed poor rains in October/November, and in Borena where an already vulnerable population, still recovering from the drought and ethnic troubles of 1991/92, was similarly affected by the poor late rains. In East and West Hararghe, however, the food supply situation appears to have improved slightly and the relief needs are expected to be less than originally predicted.

During February a joint UN/RRC team travelled to Tigray and North Wello to conduct a re-assessment of relief food needs. The mission concluded that the effects of last year's poor rainfall have been more serious than originally thought and that food needs might

be greater than had been envisaged at the time of the RRC appeal in December. The Eastern and Southern Zones of Tigray are particularly hard hit by drought and there are already some reports of deaths due to malnutrition. The usual "coping strategies" employed by rural people appear to be of limited effectiveness this year, with household assets at low levels and opportunities for petty trade and waged labour very limited.

Distribution of food aid in the region has so far averted any serious manifestation of hunger, even though no more than 50% of target beneficiaries have so far received assistance due to lack of food stocks. With the relief food pipeline nearly empty, the joint UN/RRC mission has emphasised the importance of mobilizing stocks already in-country to keep relief operations in the north fully resourced. The RRC have already taken steps to send 5,000 tons from their stores in Nazereth; NGOs working in the region need to take similar action. While expediting shipment of pledges already made, donors should be aware that relief food requirements in the north may exceed original estimates and additional commitments may be required later in the year to meet any shortfalls.

A good belg season, even if late, will be crucial to the food security of belg-producing areas (such as North Omo, Wello, North Shewa and Southern Tigray) in the second half of the year. It would also limit livestock losses and raise the chances of a good meher harvest in October-December. It would not, however, solve the food supply problems of the meher-dependent majority of farmers for the current year. A poor belg season, on the other hand, could be disastrous, pushing already very vulnerable areas like Wolaita and Southern Tigray into an acute crisis and probably signalling a longer-term food problem for the country as a whole.

Pledges and food shipments

By the end of February notional pledges amounting to 757,245 tons had been recorded by WFP, including 441,725 tons ear-marked for relief/regular programmes. Though the response from the donors has been very encouraging, actual confirmed pledges remain low at 351,743 tons, a figure which includes 302,995 tons against emergency relief requirements.

Total deliveries to 1 March amount to 77,113 tons, including 33,612 tons of 1994 pledges. Apart from 9,324 tons under structural food assistance and 8,159 tons ear-marked for refugees, all the above have been for the relief/regular food aid programme. The very thin pipeline over the coming months is of increasing concern. For the period 1 March to 4 April, only 54,000 tons is scheduled to arrive at the ports. After this date WFP report there are no confirmed shipments, only tentative estimates of when consignments might arrive.

More worrying still are the very low in-country food aid stocks. As at 16 February, total stocks were estimated by WFP at 92,026 tons - enough for roughly two months of distributions only at the

rate required to meet the RRC's assessment of the population in need of immediate assistance. The situation is most critical in Tigray where food aid supplies are now almost exhausted.

Given the increasingly serious situation developing in some parts of the country it is imperative that donors confirm their remaining pledges as quickly as possible and arrange shipments to Ethiopia without delay. Donors are also being urged to make additional commitments to make up the current deficit under the Food Security Reserve and to meet greater than originally anticipated emergency relief needs.

Emergency Food Security Reserve

As of the end of February the EFSR stood at 55,393 tons. Loans totalling 27,730 tons remain outstanding, of which 16,079 tons are owned by the Ethiopian Grain Trading Enterprise (EGTE - formerly the Agricultural Marketing Corporation, or AMC), 6,320 tons by WFP and the remainder by various NGOs. Of the 140,000 tons requested under the 1994 appeal to build up the EFSR to its recommended capacity of 205,000 tons, a total of 33,228 tons has been committed through WFP. Of this, a 15,400 ton consignment from the Australian Government is expected to arrive before the end of March.

HEALTH, NUTRITION AND WATER

Acute diarrhoeal disease

Reports indicate the epidemic of acute diarrhoeal disease continues to worsen in Eastern parts of Ethiopia. Particularly bad is the situation in the town of Harar where local health authorities have so far treated more than 3,600 cases at a specially established isolation centre. The low level of the nearby Lake Alamaya means the town is still without a piped water supply and this is thought to be contributing to the spread of the disease. Cases continue to be reported from other towns in the region, including an outbreak in the central Ogaden town of Kebridehar. Treatment centres have been established at Alamaya, Kombolcha, Besidemo, Fedis, Hara and Jijiga. By the end of February, a small number of unconfirmed cases had also been reported in Addis Ababa.

Control measures are being hampered by a serious shortage of IV fluids and medicines in the affected areas. Production problems at the Addis Ababa pharmaceuticals factory have reduced output of IV fluids to no more than 5% of normal. UNICEF are attempting to boost production by trucking water to the factory and securing a supply of plastic bottles.

Though under pressure from a number of quarters, the Government have not yet confirmed officially that the epidemic in the east includes cases of Cholera. Meanwhile, it is feared the expected short rains will contribute to the insanitary conditions that

prevail in many urban centres and so lead to a rapid spread of the epidemic.

Yellow fever/meningococcal meningitis

Following reports of an outbreak of Yellow Fever in the Sudan, the Ministry of Health have taken action to warn people along the border areas of the danger. Active surveillance and the identification of at-risk groups for vaccination is currently the priority. So far, no cases have been confirmed in Ethiopia.

Sporadic cases of meningococcal meningitis have been reported by the MoH Department of Epidemiology during February from different regions. Though no major outbreaks have been reported, the dry weather has been conducive to the spread of the disease. Consequently, cerebro-spinal meningitis surveillance has been strengthened in all regions and any suspected cases are being followed-up by the Department of Epidemiology.

Rehabilitation of health facilities

As part of monitoring WHO-supported rehabilitation activities in Northern Ethiopia, a team consisting of an engineer and an administrative assistant from the WHO Country Support Team have visited a number of project sites in Gondar, Northern Shewa, Tigray and Wello. The mission discussed with local health authorities the required financial procedures for the rehabilitation of partially damaged health facilities being funded by WHO. The mission also assessed the progress of the project, identified any problems hindering implementation and introduced reporting formats.

Support for health services

Following an initial visit to Region 5 (Somali) in January, a needs assessment was mission despatched to the area on 26 February comprising officers of the Emergency Section, Water/Sanitation and Health Sections of UNICEF. The mission is part of a programme intended to assist the regional authorities in the formulation of a Plan of Action in the areas of health, water and nutrition.

At the end of February, a needs assessment team from UNICEF also visited Humera in Western Tigray (Region 1) where a study was made of the requirements of 42,121 returnees from the Sudan. UNICEF expects to assist these people through the provision of vital drugs, as well as in the implementation of a number of community water supply projects.

During February, WHO provided the National Tuberculosis Control Programme with laboratory equipment valued at \$14,967. WHO also provided the National Malaria Control Programme with additional medical supplies worth \$3,791.

Nutrition

A weaning food production project is currently being initiated by UNICEF in South Gondar as part of a wider emergency nutrition intervention programme in the region. The status of 51,000 children between the ages of 6 to 36 months is expected to be improved through, among other things, the provision of weaning food and the promotion of local self-sufficiency in the manufacture of such foods. As part of this programme, UNICEF has installed two grinding mills worth \$6,764 in two small houses constructed on a self-help basis by the local community working jointly with the South Gondar Municipality and the Regional Health Department.

Water and sanitation

The design of a UNICEF-supported water project in Region 12 (Gambella) is expected to be completed shortly. The project will ultimately benefit an estimated 25,000 persons, mostly displaced farmers. Officers from UNICEF's Water and Sanitation Section have also participated in missions to determine the needs of returnees in the Humera district of Region 1 (Tigray) and Region 5 (Somali) where a water supply project is to be formulated.

1994 UNICEF appeal

The UNICEF Emergency Appeal for 1994 is currently being finalised and will shortly be sent to the agency's headquarters for subsequent submission to donors. The appeal is based mainly on the RRC appeal launched on 13 December last year. Particular emphasises place on close collaboration with other UN agencies in the implementation of relief and rehabilitation programmes under the cross-mandate approach. Details of the UNICEF appeal will be included in the Situation Report for March.

REFUGEES AND RETURNEES

Sudanese refugees

The assisted population of Sudanese refugees reached 44,348 - an increase of 249 over the previous month. The breakdown by settlement is: Bonga 13,757; Fugnido 20,154; and Dimma 10,437. WFP has been requested to accelerate food deliveries as stocks were depleted in the West.

In a press statement, the Government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) reported that 900 Sudanese entered into Western Ethiopia during the month at a location near Begi, between Gambella and Assosa. Due to the inaccessibility of this area, ARRA sent 1.7 tons of relief supplies by helicopter. ARRA has not reported that this group is seeking asylum and no request for UNHCR assistance has been received. The UNHCR Protection Officer is following-up.

Somali refugees

ARRA and UNHCR have agreed that the actual population of the camps in Eastern Ethiopia ranges between 150,000 and 180,000. ARRA considers all of these as refugees from Somalia, whereas UNHCR assumes a considerable number are Ethiopian nationals.

Djiboutian refugees

A mission to Region 2 (Afar) investigated reported short-comings in the distribution of food supplied by WFP. Preliminary results indicate no significant malnutrition. Food will continue to be allocated for 10,000 persons. Options for improving water supplies in the refugee-impacted areas are being formulated.

Kenyan refugees

A mission has concluded that the Kenyan Adjurans who have sought asylum in Southern Ethiopia continue to consider it unsafe to return to Wajir, North-East Kenya, due to ethnic conflict. Their health and nutritional status was not found to be alarming. However, possible implementation of the Government's policy to stop free-food for the local population will require a review of distributions to this group which were previously included under cross-mandate allocations to the Moyale area. The Moyale Task Force estimates a total of 6,527 Kenyan refugees are resident at five locations.

Repatriation from Kenya

The Banissa refugee camp in North-East Kenya has been closed following the successful repatriation of 15,877 Ethiopian refugees. The remaining population of some 2,000 whose areas of origin in Ethiopia have not been agreed by the local administration, were assisted with a final food distribution and are expected to reintegrate spontaneously.

To improve the water supply to these returnees, UNHCR is requesting the regional water authorities in Borena (Region 4), who are implementing a UNICEF-funded project in the vicinity, to install and maintain the pumps in Chilanko, El Der and Dokisso.

Repatriation from Sudan

Repatriation of Ethiopians from the Sudan re-started on 23 February with a first convoy of 433 returnees from Um Rakuba to Humera. By 28 February, a total of 2,239 had crossed the border.

Repatriation from Djibouti

Of approximately 15,000 Ethiopians hoping to repatriate, a large number have indicated the Gursum and Babile areas in Eastern Hararghe as their destination. In view of the frequent ethnic clashes in this area, parts of which are disputed by Regions 4

(Oromo) and Region 5 (Somali), UNHCR Djibouti has been requested to identify the villages of origin claimed by the refugees so that these can be verified. Simultaneously, a survey of infrastructure critical for the re-integration of the returnees, particularly water resources, is being initiated.

Repatriation to Somalia

During February, a delegation from North-West Somalia visited the refugee camps in Eastern Ethiopia and held informal talks with Government officials in Addis Ababa. Although the time-frame and criteria for screening and re-registration of refugees were not resolved, the principle of repatriation was accepted by the delegation, subject to the following points: (a) provision of an adequate repatriation package; (b) security assurances in North-West Somalia; (c) de-mining of re-integration areas; (d) support for de-mobilization and disarmament; and (e) rehabilitation of social services in North-West Somalia.

In Addis Ababa, a steering committee comprising representatives of the Transitional Government, major donors and UNHCR was convened. A technical sub-committee is currently focusing on procedures for screening and re-registration.

During the month, 34 Somali refugees repatriated from the eastern camps to Bossaso and South-West Somalia.

Protection issues

ARRA, UNHCR and the Gambella regional government advised the Sudanese consular office in Gambella that visits to the refugee settlements in the area should only be made after prior consultation. Previous unauthorised visits had reportedly resulted in the "self-repatriation" of 45 Sudanese refugees on trucks hired by the Sudanese authorities. UNHCR is still investigating the matter, but preliminary enquiries suggest that the "self-repatriants" were people living in Gambella town and not from the refugee settlements.

Four Ethiopians who had been detained on 17 December 1993 upon arrival in Addis Ababa to attend a "Peace and Reconciliation Conference" were released on 18 February. One is of concern to UNHCR as a recognised refugee in France. The State Prosecutor's Office announced the cancellation of the charges filed against them. Among the seven originally detained, only one person remains in custody.

DISCLAIMER

The designations used above may refer to old regional or awraja names for the sake of familiarity. However, the designations employed and the presentation of material in this document do not

imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

UN Emergencies Unit,
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