

MONTHLY SITUATION REPORT FOR ETHIOPIA FEBRUARY 1996

Prepared by the Information Section of the UNDP/EUE from information provided by UN agencies and NGOs

OVERVIEW

Relief needs and operations

Although the food security situation in most grain producing areas of Ethiopia remains stable, traditionally vulnerable and food insecure areas will require close monitoring and, in some cases, immediate relief food distributions. Several Non-Governmental Organisations operating in North Welo, North Gonder, South Gonder and Wag Hamra zones of the Amhara Region have raised concerns of a likely decline in the nutritional status of the population in areas that did not benefit from a good 1995 *meher* crop, especially Lasta and Wag Hamra, and certain other pocket locations in the north-eastern highlands.

Similarly, the situation in the Welayita area of the Southern Peoples Nations, Nationalities Regional State (SPNNRS) remains precarious, with a decline in the nutritional status of vulnerable groups in the lowlands expected during the approaching lean season. This is the period after the main season crops have been consumed and before the 1996 *belg* harvest becomes available around June. According to NGOs operating in these areas, the mean weight for length for children may in the next few months fall below the critical 90% cut-off point, thus signalling a need for immediate food aid interventions. Food shortages have also been reported in the Central and Eastern zones of Tigray, Borena and East and West Hararghe zones of Oromiya Region.

The Commission for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and NGOs are already distributing relief food in the most affected areas of North Welo, Wag Hamra and Welayita. CARE Ethiopia is prepositioning food for relief distributions in Borena. However, to provide a realistic picture of the food security situation as it evolves in 1996, joint and frequent monitoring by the Government, donors, NGOs and the UN will need to take place in the coming months, and relief allocations may have to be reviewed in the most needy regions.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Ethio-Sudan relations

Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan remain strained. According to the Ethiopian local press, Sudan has admitted to the presence in its territory of one of the three terrorists involved in the June 1995 attempt on the life of the Egyptian President. Although Sudan has so far refused requests by the Ethiopian Government and the Organisation of African Unity to hand over the three suspects to Ethiopia, warrants have been issued by the Sudanese Prosecutor General for their arrest. A statement issued by the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 12 February, however, suggests an unwillingness on the part of the Sudanese Government to cooperate with Ethiopia in resolving the matter.

DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Disaster Prevention and Preparedness

A two day workshop was organised by the Commission for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness on 14-15 February to review implementation of the Government's National Programme on Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation. The objective of the meeting, which was attended by Government representatives from Tigray, Amhara, SPNNRS and Gambella Regions, was to orient the regions regarding the process of implementing area-based integrated programmes in target regions.

AGRICULTURE

Weather and agricultural conditions

The short rainy season, the *belg*, is highly variable but normally falls between February and May. It has three major impacts on food production and food security in different regions. First, *belg* crop production accounts for about 6% of the annual cereal harvest, but in some areas (such as Bale and parts of North Shewa) it may account for more than half the year's production. Second, the *belg* rains are also important for land preparation for the main season in the *meher* producing regions of the country. Thirdly, rain at the *belg* time contributes to the replenishment of surface water supplies in pastoral areas.

According to the National Meteorological Services Agency (NMSA), the onset of the 1996 *belg* season has been late, and predictions indicate that there will be no substantial rain in eastern, north-eastern and northern Ethiopia until the second *dekad* of 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. If the late start to the rains is not compensated by an extension of the rains well into May, the subsequent crop to be harvested between June and August will most probably be below initial forecasts.

On the other hand, a good *belg*, even if late, will be crucial to the food security of the areas such as North Omo, Welo, North Shewa and Southern Tigray in the second half of the year. It would also limit livestock losses and increase the chance of a good *meher* harvest at the end of the year. A poor *belg* season, however, would push already very vulnerable areas like Southern Tigray, Wag Hamra, North and South Welo (Amhara Region) and Welayita (SPNNRS) into an acute crisis, signalling increased relief requirements for those areas.

Concern has been raised by NGOs regarding the implications of a failure of the *belg* rains and whether food supplies would be sufficient to meet arising needs. A preliminary food availability assessment done by WFP suggests that adequate national stocks would be available to meet needs in case of a 50% *belg* failure, taking into consideration the positive build-up expected during 1996. The availability of these stocks for distribution in critical areas will need further review following the completion of the CDPP's Distribution Plan and with the progress of the *belg*. Meanwhile, field assessments are underway to monitor those areas that are most vulnerable in the event of a failure. Discussions are also to be held regarding joint Government, UN and NGO early warning missions.

Desert locust

Ethiopia is expected to remain free of any significant locust activity in the month of March. However, favourable conditions have been reported in the Red Sea coastal areas for the winter breeding of locust, and there have been signs of Desert Locust egg-laying in the neighbouring countries of Sudan, Eritrea and Yemen. If not effectively controlled, migrations from these areas may occur in coming months when the winds change in April and May.

The breeding areas of eastern Ethiopia are green at present due to unseasonal early rainfall during December - January and will be a prime site for breeding and spread of any possible infestation that may occur in the coming months. Given the presently favourable conditions, the Desert Locust Control Organisation of Eastern Africa (DLCO/EA) has mobilised resources to survey and monitor susceptible areas in Tigray, Amhara, Afar and Somali Regions.

Fertiliser situation

According to FAO, as at the end of February fertiliser pledges for the 1996 cropping seasons stands at 358,900 tons with the following breakdown: International Development Association (World Bank) 50,000 tons; Netherlands 30,000 tons; Germany 50,000 tons, Japan 24,900 tons; Sweden 22,000 tons; Italy 32,000 tons; European Union 50,000 tons; and the National Bank of Ethiopia 100,000 tons. Of the 50,000 tons of fertiliser pledged by IDA, 20,000 tons of DAP has arrived in Assab during the reporting period and has been transported inland (handled by Ethiopian Amalgamated). The remaining 25,000 tons is scheduled to arrive in early March (handled by AISCO). The German pledge of 50,000 tons is scheduled to arrive between March and April, whereas from the total Government pledge of 100,000 tons, a total 50,000 tons or 50% of the pledged amount arrived the third week of February, and will be handled by AISCO.

Fertiliser shipments were initially somewhat slow in arriving (January - February approximately 70,000 tons), and with the delay in setting the subsidy price there was concern that stocks would not be sufficient for the current *belg* season. Recent reports, however, indicate that supplies are now reaching the farmers for the current season, and scheduled shipments (approximately 195,000 between March and May) will be able to meet the main season requirements.

The fertiliser subsidy for 1996 has now been set at 50 birr per quintal. This brings the retail price of fertiliser to 200 birr per quintal for DAP and 190 birr per quintal for UREA. Reports indicate that there is a plan for a phased withdrawal of this subsidy by the end of 1997. International fertiliser costs have also sharply risen in comparison to the last two years. Current prices stand at \$300 per ton (CIF Assab), as opposed to \$194 per ton in 1994.

Ethiopian Amalgamated has reported that its fertiliser bagging machines in Assab are operational and ready for use.

REGIONAL UPDATE

Field monitoring at the present time is becoming an all important issue, especially in terms of helping the aid community respond to evolving needs and filter available field information for programming relief interventions. The following briefly outlines the findings of several UN and NGO missions¹ in the past month:

Tigray Region

¹ Missions carried out by the UNDP Emergencies Unit Field Officers and also WFP, CARE Ethiopia and MSF Holland monitoring teams.

Although the 1995 *meher* crop production in Tigray was higher than previous years, food shortages have been reported in a number of weredas in the Eastern zone, pockets in the Central zone and Southern zone and also areas near the Simien mountains, which have had consecutive low harvests.

In the central zone, the most vulnerable weredas currently experiencing food shortages are situated in the eastern and south-eastern parts. Here, a late start and early cessation of the 1995 main season rains resulted in a 20% production shortfall. Striga (a parasitic weed) infestation on sorghum has also been a factor negatively affecting crop production.

Short and erratic rains during the 1995 *meher* season, overpopulation and poor soil conditions have left parts of the Eastern zone with food shortages. According to the early warning unit of the regional Bureau for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, the 1995 *meher* production in the zone was lower than the previous year, leaving a large number of households with increased needs and limited purchasing power.

In the Southern zone, the traditional *belg* growing lowland weredas are reported to be in good condition at the present time. The highland weredas of the zone, however, are facing food shortages in those areas where the *belg* rains are used for land preparation for the main *meher* season.

Amhara Region

In Amhara Region, the overall crop production has been higher than previous years. However, main season production in the known food deficit areas of Wag Hamra zone, highland weredas of North and South Welo zones, eastern parts of North and South Gonder and several weredas of North Shewa has been lower than initial predictions. The northern highlands of the region which are the main areas of concern, are already showing signs of food deficit. In some mainly *meher* dependent zones food distributions have been started to stop stress migration from taking place.

Adi Arkai (previously Adis Selam) wereda in North Gonder zone has been an area of specific concern during February. Reports by the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee resulted in several assessment missions to the area. According to information obtained by a joint WFP/EUE team, a total of 10,540 people from this wereda have migrated to Southern Tigray in order to obtain better access to relief distributions. Subsequent to these movements, the regional Bureau for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness has allocated a total of 563 tons in Fiyelwuha (a town in Southern Tigray) for distribution to a displaced population of 1,000. As it is the time of land preparation in Adi Arkai, the provision of food stocks for this needy population should be an incentive for them to return to their homes in preparation for the coming season.

In Wag Hamra zone, which primarily is a *meher*-dependent area, the 1995 main (*kiremt*) rains were late in starting and ended too early. This, combined with a severe infestation of Welo bush cricket, resulted in massive crop failure and subsequent food shortages. While field visits indicate that the situation was indeed serious in January 1996, timely relief interventions have helped alleviate the situation. Therefore, provided sufficient food aid is provided on a regular basis through until September, and given the 1996 *kiremt* rains are satisfactory, the situation in the zone should generally improve.

Oromiya Region

A recent food security assessment carried out by CARE Ethiopia in their operating areas of Arero, Teltele and Yabelo weredas in Borena zone indicates a production shortfall of between 10-20% for cereals and approximately 80% for pulses. In addition, Arero wereda has reported

a high prevalence of livestock disease and mortality, resulting in the displacement of nomadic pastoralist from the area. A high level of malnutrition has also been recorded among children of the displaced population due to a severe shortage of food supplies. Immediate relief food assistance has been recommended in these weredas for a period of three to six months.

North Omo zone (SPNNRS)

The situation in the Welayita area of North Omo zone has been continuously monitored in the past two months by both the UN and NGOs. Overall, crop production has been good in the highlands and mid-highlands due to regular rainfall distribution in 1995. However, pocket areas of Boloso Sore, Kindo Koisha, Humbo and Damot Weide weredas, especially the lowlands, have been experiencing some food shortages.

The results of a food and nutrition survey conducted by Medecines sans Frontieres - Holland in Ofa wereda of North Omo zone show an acute malnutrition rate of 16.8% among children. Furthermore, MSF have indicated the likelihood of the rapid deterioration of the nutritional status in the wereda in the coming months, and have recommended that dry supplementary feeding programmes be undertaken.

FOOD AID AND LOGISTICS

Food aid status

As at 27 February, pledges against a total 1996 relief/regular food aid requirement of 135,000 tons so far amount to 120,408 tons, leaving a pledging shortfall of 14,592 tons. Pledges against the 100,000 tons requirement for the Emergency Food Security Reserve amount to 85,750 tons. In addition, the Japanese Government has pledged 650,000,000 yen (\$6.76 million) for the importation of some 13,000 tons of wheat to Ethiopia in 1996 as programme food aid. According to WFP, port deliveries so far amount to 13,767 tons.

If all theoretically available food sources are combined, the in-country stocks of food in Ethiopia are currently at a comfortable level (330,000 tons). The EFSR has a physical stock of 112,000 tons of grain (excluding outstanding pledges and loans), and after the European Union completes its local purchase programme of 75,000 tons of grain within the next two or three months, EFSR warehouses are expected to rise to 187,000 tons. Combined in-country relief and regular stocks of the CDPP and NGOs amount to some 89,000 tons. In addition, CDPP has in stock about 60,000 tons of 1995 Title III grain for monetization.

It is anticipated that the EFSR's storage capacity will be extended to its limit of 307,000 tons after the completion of the EU local purchase. Despite this positive forecast, however, it has to still be taken into consideration that loans from the EFSR stocks will normally have to be guaranteed by donor pledges.

CDPP's distribution plan

The CDPP's 1996 Distribution Plan of Action is currently being worked out based on plans submitted by RRBs and NGOs. The presentation of this plan is expected shortly. However, the current planning phase is not expected to interrupt distributions in those areas which will require immediate attention.

1996 local purchase programme

On February 16, the European Union issued tenders in three main crop producing regions of Ethiopia (Amhara, Oromiya and SPNNRS) for the purchase of 75,000 tons of grain for the EFSR. In addition, Euronaid is tendering for some 35,000 tons of sorghum in Tigray. Initial

results of the EU tender in Oromiya, Amhara and Tigray indicate sufficient availability of grain to cover the intended purchase. The EU has indicated that prices so far offered for grade II maize and wheat are within the range expected. However, the tendering process has only just been finalised, and no local purchases have been made as results are being reviewed in Brussels.

Market prices for the current season

Prices of cereals have remained stable during the past month or two. Before and immediately after the *meher* harvest maize prices plummeted in the main production areas to as low as 30-40 birr per quintal. In an attempt to support producer prices, however, the Government has instructed the Ethiopian Grain Trade Enterprise to pay a minimum of 70 birr per quintal for maize purchased from farmers. Following its implementation, maize prices stabilised at between 70-85 birr per quintal (\$ 110-134 per ton), whereas wheat is selling between 130-170 birr per quintal depending on location and quality.

Food aid to refugees and returnees

With the start of the new phase of repatriation from Sudan, Ethiopian refugees are returning in increasing numbers (see repatriation section of this report). WFP reports that food rations have been pre-positioned for about 14,000 returnees over the last two months. However, with between 750 and 1,000 persons returning to Ethiopia every three days in convoys organised by UNHCR, it is expected that the numbers of people requiring reintegration packages will increase. Such a prospect will emphasise the need to strengthen an already weak refugee pipeline.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Epidemics

Measles: As a result of interrupted immunisation programmes, a high prevalence of measles has been reported in the Weib area of Borena zone (Oromiya Region). A moderate outbreak of measles was also noted in Jigjiga town (Somali Region) in early February. According to MSF Belgium, this outbreak has been successfully controlled through vaccination campaigns undertaken by the zonal Bureau of Health.

Typhoid: There have been unconfirmed reports of an outbreak of typhoid in Addis Ababa. Although several cases were admitted during the month of February, no official data has been released by the Ministry of Health as yet.

Malaria: WHO have reported no emergency epidemic of malaria during the month. However, training programmes are ongoing in case of a resurgence of the disease in malaria-prone areas.

HIV/AIDS: Many HIV positive cases are regularly reported; however, official figures refer only to those cases that have been hospitalised. These are estimated by WHO to be approximately 5% of the actual numbers affected. HIV units established in the different regions of the country have been preparing modular training programmes set to commence by the third week of February.

Nutrition

Reports of various levels of malnutrition in pocket areas of the country have been followed by monitoring and assessment missions carried out by UN and NGOs. Subsequent to these surveys assistance has been provided in Tigray, South Welo zone (Amhara Region), Welayita

and South Omo zone (SPNNRS), East and West Hararghe and Borena zones (Oromiya Region) through supplementary feeding programmes of UNICEF and NGOs.

WATER AND SANITATION

Field monitoring of UNICEF-supported projects in the Somali and Harar Regions in February has provided the following information:

Gode water programme

The Gode water project is jointly implemented by the Swiss Disaster Relief and UNICEF with the objective of providing the inhabitants of Gode town with a reliable and safe water supply. Construction work on this project began in mid-February, slightly later than initially envisaged as transportation of equipment was delayed due to security problems on the road from Jigjiga to Gode town. Trucks on this road move in convoys escorted by military forces. Activities so far completed include site clearing, ground work preparation and excavation work, and transport of the first shipment of supplies for construction. In support of the programme, SDR has established a work site equipped with office facilities and has positioned staff to monitor project implementation.

Jigjiga and Hurso water supply projects

A project agreement was recently signed between UNICEF and the regional water department of the Somali Region for construction of water supply systems for the Jigjiga Hospital and Hurso town in the Ethiopian Somali Region. Following the signing of the project agreement, preparatory measures are underway for immediate implementation.

Harar water supply

Following agreements between UNICEF, SDR and the Water Department of Harar, a hydrological and technical survey was recently carried out regarding the supply of water to Harar town and its surroundings. The results of the study have been positively received by the regional authorities, who will most likely use the study document both as a reference tool for programme planning and also for raising funds to implement the project.

It is envisaged that funds obtained this way will be allocated for the construction of ground water dams and the upgrading of existing water supply systems in the region, both of which are included in the 1996/97 Harar Development Plan. In support of the commitment by the regional authorities to develop the regional water supply system, UNICEF is including the rehabilitation of hand dug wells and the protection and development of spring resources in its 1996/97 Wereda Integrated Basic Services (WIBS) programme. Also, further to the recommendation of the study, a pilot project to develop rain water roof catchments in Harar will be undertaken with the support of SDR.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Over the past months much emphasis has been placed on the completion of ongoing projects that would directly and indirectly assist decision-makers both in Ethiopia and in the IGADD sub-region in the development of relief infrastructure, expansion of coordination and collaboration mechanisms and the better management of relief programmes. Two such projects initiated in Ethiopia are:

Ethiopia NGO data base

A data base of NGO projects and assistance, started in May 1995 by the Commission for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness with technical assistance from UNICEF, has now been completed. The computerised output of the project is available in a draft form and will be distributed after minor amendments. The data base focuses on the following major topics: NGO profile; project reports; food distribution reports; sectoral project activities; audit reports; areas of operation; and selective reports.

UN data base on IGADD sub-region

Undertaken by the UNDP-EUE at the request of the UN inter-agency Steering Committee on IGADD, the data base of UN activities and assistance in the sub-region focuses on basic project profiles; project activities and geographic regions; project aggregation according to IGADD priority sectors; and aggregation according to UNDP development sectors.

The data base was completed in January and by early February distributed to UN agencies in the Horn of Africa, the IGADD Secretariat, officials at UN headquarters and interested donors and NGOs. A run-time version of this data base is available from the EUE upon request.

REFUGEES AND RETURNEES

Refugee situation in brief

Sudanese refugees: Although the anticipated influx of new refugees due to dry season fighting in southern Sudan has not taken place (only about 300 arrived in January), the situation remains changeable, and contingency plans for any sudden influx are being developed by the Government, UNHCR, WFP and several NGOs. In this regard, a team travelled to Humera and Metema areas on the Ethiopian/Sudanese border on 1 March to carry out technical assessments and review the existing health, water, food, infrastructure and logistics capacities in case of such a new refugee influx.

Djiboutian refugees: Internal consultations are taking place with the Government regarding the situation of the Djiboutian refugees in the Ethiopian Afar Region. Following requests by the regional authorities for the registration of the existing refugee caseload, discussions are now being held to develop a new strategy vis-a-vis this population

Somali refugees: While no increase was reported in the total of 275,189 Somalis in the eastern refugee camps, the number of Sudanese refugees assisted in the three settlements in western Ethiopia reached 63,175 with the following breakdown: Bonga 16,564; Fugnido 35,635 and Dimma 10,976.

Voluntary repatriation

Preparations continued for the final mass voluntary repatriation of Ethiopians from Djibouti, Kenya and Yemen, while the major activity of UNHCR Ethiopia focussed on the ongoing repatriation from the Sudan. Except for a ten-day break from 16-26 February for the post-Ramadan Islamic holidays, convoys from Sudan to Ethiopia continued every four days. This brought the total number of Ethiopians repatriated in organized convoys since 15 December 1995 to some 17,262. Of these, 10,280 returned to Amhara National Regional State, 6,089 to Tigray National Regional State and 893 to other regions of Ethiopia.

Thus, despite continuing tensions between the two countries, the humanitarian corridor between Sudan and Ethiopia remained open. The prospects for March, however, were clouded by two issues. The first is the discontinuity of registration in the Sudan. The registration of Ethiopians for voluntary repatriation, which resumed on 30 November 1995, was discontinued after 23 December. Despite repeated requests by UNHCR and the Ethiopian government, it did not resume until 24 February. Then, after two days of registration in Khartoum, it was discontinued

again. Although some registration is reported to be continuing in the refugee camps in eastern Sudan, this may not be sufficient to sustain convoys through March without interruption.

The second concern is funding. With the approval by the High Commissioner of a loan of US\$ 2,500,000 from UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation Fund, the operation was able to continue through February despite the poor response of donors to the special appeal launched in September 1995. Without additional funding for March, however, the operation will not be able to continue. Following a meeting with potential donors in Addis Ababa at the end of January, a few have contributed small amounts or expressed interest in supporting the repatriation. This donor response is not sufficient, however, to sustain the operation. If additional funds are not made available in early March, this smooth running and highly successful voluntary repatriation of Ethiopians from the Sudan will come to a halt.

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4 March, 1995

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