



SITUATION REPORT FOR ETHIOPIA February 1999

Consolidated UN report prepared by the Information Section of the UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia from information and reports provided by specialised UN agencies, media sources, the Ethiopian Government and NGOs.

Highlights

- ❑ Despite intense diplomatic efforts to reach a negotiated settlement, heavy fighting erupted on the common border between Ethiopia and Eritrea, resulting in the further movement of civilians away from the immediate conflict zone;
- ❑ The UN Country Team in Ethiopia finalizes the details of a multi-purpose, 1.3 million US dollar humanitarian programme designed to provide additional assistance to war-affected civilians in Tigray and Afar region;
- ❑ In the drought-affected lowland areas of southern and south-eastern Ethiopia, the lack of water sources and a collapse of livestock markets are identified as the issues of immediate concern;
- ❑ In late news, it is announced on March 7 that Saudi Arabia had lifted its ban on livestock imports from Eritrea, giving rise to hopes that the ban would also be lifted from other countries in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia and Somalia;
- ❑ After a delay of two to three weeks, the *belg* (short season) rains commence in south-western, southern and central parts of the country; rainfall in February, however, was generally well below normal;
- ❑ With operations at the port of Djibouti continuing to run smoothly, the Ethiopia customs authority announce 785,000 tons of import and export goods have been handled through the port in the past six months, a performance that has exceeded all expectations.

Ethiopia – Eritrea Dispute

General Developments

After a lull of seven months, February was marked by the outbreak of intense fighting on the disputed border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This was despite further last-minute diplomatic efforts by the Organisation of African Unity and the United Nations to secure the full agreement of the Eritrean government to the OAU framework agreement. With fears growing that the two countries would again go to war, in late January the UN Security Council adopted a new resolution (1226) backing the OAU-led peace process, which it called the "best hope for peace" and pressing the two sides to end the dispute. In the resolution, the 15-member Council also threw its support behind a mission to the Horn of Africa by UN special envoy Mohamed Sahnoun. With tensions rising along the border, the Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi warned on February 2 that warfare between the two countries could resume "any day" unless Eritrea indicated its full acceptance of the OAU proposals. Eritrea, on the other hand, was saying that Ethiopia's demand for a unilateral Eritrean withdrawal from the disputed territories had become the "stumbling block to any [peace] initiative."

It was against this backdrop that both sides confirmed the start of heavy ground fighting along the northern Badme-Shiraro front on February 6. According to the Ethiopian spokesperson, Eritrean forces launched the attack, but this was denied by Eritrea. On the international stage, this latest escalation was universally deplored. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called upon both Ethiopia and Eritrea to stop fighting immediately, saying, "The alternative, continued fighting, is completely unacceptable to the international community." Despite this and other similar calls for an end to the hostilities, the clashes continued for at least another two days with fighting spreading to the central front around Tsorona and Zelambesa.

After some days, an uneasy stand-off appeared to return to the border areas, although there were reports of frequent exchanges of artillery fire. During this lull, Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin told reporters that there was "no question" of a ceasefire unless Eritrea pulled back from the disputed Badme region. Meanwhile, following a briefing on the situation given by UN special envoy Mohamed Sahnoun the Security Council adopted a resolution (1227) condemning "the recourse to the use of force by Ethiopia and Eritrea" and demanding "an immediate halt to the hostilities, in particular the use of air strikes." The resolution also strongly urged the voluntary adoption of an end to all sales of arms and munitions to both countries.

With the lull in the fighting along the northern fronts, for the next week or so attention switched to the north-eastern border region around Bure, close to the Eritrean Red Sea port of Assab. Here, as in the north, Ethiopia employed its airforce to attack Eritrean military positions and other strategically important targets, including the airport north of Assab. According to media reports, no ground troops were involved in these incidents and the port city itself was not targeted.

Towards the end of the third week of February there was again a flurry of diplomatic activity as efforts were made to avert a further escalation of the violence. The United States issued a statement saying it deeply regretted the use of air power by Ethiopia in the conflict. The comments, however, were dismissed by the Ethiopian government as being "out of sync with... reality." At about the same time a delegation representing the European Union visited the two countries. Led by German Deputy Foreign Minister Ludger Volmer, the group met with officials at the OAU and senior members of the Ethiopian government before travelling on to Asmara. The EU said the delegates would "support the OAU mediation and discuss the strategy to implement OAU framework agreement" as well as press for a halt in fighting. However, following their discussions in Asmara, the team told reporters they were unable to secure an agreement for an immediate ceasefire. The OAU also attempted to send a mediation committee to Asmara comprising the ambassadors to the OAU from Burkina Faso, Djibouti and Zimbabwe. The committee was tasked with seeking an "end to the war, commitment to the peace process as embodied in the OAU peace proposals (and a) response to the clarifications." The departure of the team, however, was postponed when Asmara objected to the presence of the Djiboutian emissary and then in the light of the fighting that subsequently erupted on the Badme front.

February 23 saw the beginning of what the Ethiopian government later termed "Operation Sunset". According to the official media, early that morning, Ethiopian troops supported by heavy artillery, tanks, helicopter gunships and jet aircraft launched a major offensive against Eritrean fixed positions along the Badme front. The fighting raged for several days and appears to have been exceptionally violent with heavy casualties suffered on both sides. Throughout the fighting both sides maintained a virtual news blackout, issuing only the occasional official statement. After four days, a statement broadcast in Asmara conceded that Eritrea had lost ground on the Badme front.

On February 27, in a letter to the President of the UN Security Council, Eritrean President Isaias Afewerki noted that his country had been seeking clarifications about the OAU peace framework, but while the clarifications were being sought Ethiopia had violated the framework agreement: "The Ethiopian government now occupies by force Eritrean sovereign territory," the letter said. "Nonetheless, the government of Eritrea accepts the OAU framework agreement to pave the way for an expedited demarcation." Following informal consultations, the Security Council later issued a statement that welcomed Eritrea's acceptance of the OAU framework and called for an immediate halt to all hostilities so that the agreement could be implemented without delay.

The following day, Ethiopia declared that, "A total victory for Ethiopian Defense Forces was achieved on Friday February 26, 1999 in the military counter offensive named Operation Sunset," adding that Eritrea had suffered "a monumental and humiliating defeat." While Ethiopia celebrated its victory, Eritrean government officials said they were awaiting a response from Addis Ababa regarding the UN Security Council's call for an immediate ceasefire. While relative calm had descended upon the border areas during the first days of March, in its public statements, Ethiopia remained sceptical of Eritrea's acceptance of the OAU proposals. In a statement issued on March 6, Ethiopia accused the leadership in Asmara of only attempting to buy time to reorganise its forces. "They continue to occupy the Zalambesa-Aiga region, the Bada-Bure region and Egala region (near Tsorona)... the Eritrean government has shown no sign of withdrawing its army from these territories, as it is required to do by the OAU," the statement said, adding that these areas should be liberated.

Humanitarian Developments

Throughout the course of the recent fighting very little information emerged regarding the humanitarian situation along the border. This was partly due to limitations on travel to the affected areas, which significantly reduced the flow of first-hand reports, but it was also felt that the precautionary evacuations organised earlier by the regional authorities had been effective in minimising the impact of the fighting on the civilian population.

These evacuations began as early as October last year but with the rise in tensions between the two countries and the expectation of further hostilities, the immediate period leading up to the outbreak of fighting in early February was marked by an accelerated movement away from the border, both spontaneous and organised. The town of Adigrat, some 35 kilometers from the front lines at Zelembesa, appears to have been a case in point. With a population already swollen by up to 40,000 people displaced by the fighting last year, many people (20,000 according to reports from REST) chose to leave and seek safety further south after the outskirts of the town came under artillery bombardment early in February. While many have sought shelter with family and friends in nearby towns such as Wukro and Idigahamus, some have gone as far south as Mekele. Though not on the same scale, other towns close to the border zone have experienced similar movements.

Evacuations have also taken place in the Afar region, near the border area adjacent to the Eritrean port city of Assab. In mid-January it was reported that the remaining civilian population at Bure and the village of Daba had been safely evacuated to the roadside hamlet of Su'ula, the site of a recently drilled borehole, some 15 kilometers south of Manda. All together, it was estimated that about 5,500 people had been moved, including many Afar tribes people who were encouraged to travel with their animals. A further 10,000 nomads were thought to be in the contested border area but permitted to stay as they were largely located away from the main road.

With the additional movements, officials privately indicated the number of civilians displaced by the conflict may have risen to around 350,000 by the end of February, with the potential for this number to rise further if the fighting should continue. However, a more precise assessment of the current humanitarian situation together with estimates of the number of people requiring additional assistance will remain pending, subject to more detailed information becoming available from the regional and federal government authorities and agreement on access to the affected areas and communities.

In other news, the UN Country Team has received a contribution of approximately US \$1.3 million from the Netherlands government to be used in the provision of relief assistance to war-affected civilians in Afar and Tigray regions. The funds will allow the expansion and accelerated implementation of an inter-agency programme of assistance that covers health and nutrition, education, water and environmental sanitation, reproductive health, and the special protection needs of women and children. This comprehensive multi-sectoral programme was developed last year under the overall leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator and pools the resources and expertise of a number of UN agencies including: UNICEF, WHO, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNDP and WFP. The approach emphasises the adoption of a common framework governing the principles of engagement, assessment of needs, implementation modalities and resource mobilisation.

As part of the UN Country Team humanitarian programme, WFP have recently received headquarters approval for a new emergency operation aimed at providing nine months of basic and supplementary food rations to some 272,000 displaced people in Tigray region. Reflecting the special circumstances characterising this emergency, the UN will be placing particular importance on the monitoring and reporting aspects of its programmes, for which the full cooperation and support of the federal and regional government authorities will be sought.

General Events and Developments

Ethiopia to get ADB and other assistance: The African Development Bank (ADB) is to provide US \$255 million in long-term loans and grants to Ethiopia for development projects in agriculture, transport and public utilities. An agreement on the loans and grants was signed in Addis Ababa on January 22 by the Ethiopian Vice-Minister for Economic Development and Cooperation, Mulatu Teshome, and A.D. Metegha, country department director for East Africa of the ADB. Later in February, a grant agreement worth up to US \$2.2

million was signed between the government of Ethiopia and Finland. The grant will be used to partially undertake phase two of the rural water supply and environmental programme in Amhara state. According to an agreement signed between the two governments last year, Finland has earmarked a total of US \$16.7 million for the execution of Finnish-supported projects in Ethiopia during the period 1998-2000. Meanwhile, Italy has also finalised a grant agreement that will provide Ethiopia with US \$240 million for various programmes over the next three years. The money will pay for road construction, food security, health, education and other programmes in rural areas beginning this year. The agreement was reached during a visit to Ethiopia by an Italian team led by Guido Larcher, the head of the Sub-Sahara Africa Development Department in Italy's Foreign Ministry.

Power rationing to be introduced: The Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation announced that it would be reducing power output by 34 percent for one month commencing at the end of February. The rationing was necessary to allow essential maintenance at the Fincha hydroelectric power plant in central Ethiopia. Investors, manufacturers and business people protested the timing of the decision saying that the season was an important production period. The power cuts were expected to be implemented on a rotation basis, with a frequency of 2 to 3 times a week and the cuts extending from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

UNDP Associate Administrator visits: The newly appointed UNDP Associate Administrator, Zepherin Diabre, paid a 3 day official visit to Ethiopia starting January 28. Ethiopia was selected to be amongst the first countries he visits to get acquainted with UNDP activities. The associate administrator told reporters that UNDP has earmarked US \$120 million in support of development projects in Ethiopia over the next five years. Zepherin was previously with the government of Burkina Faso, where he served as Minister of Economy, Finance and Planning and as Minister of Trade, Industry and Mines.

Sudan - Ethiopia trade talks: Sudan and Ethiopia have held trade talks after years of strained relations between the two countries. Ethiopian Trade and Industry Minister Kassahun Ayele and Sudan's Foreign Trade Minister Osman al-Hadi Ibrahim met mid-February to discuss reactivating a 1993 trade protocol and expanding it to include border trade and reduced customs duties.

UNFPA announces 4th Country Programme: The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has earmarked US \$30 million for the execution of the Fourth National Population Programme that will run for the next five years. 80 percent of this amount will be set aside for the various regional states. The new programme is aimed at supporting reproductive health care, education and communication services. The programme will also fund the local manufacture of contraceptive pills and facilitate the free distribution of the pills to low-income parents.

Anti-measles campaign planned: The Ministry of Health has announced plans for the launching of a national vaccination campaign against measles later this year. A pilot immunization programme conducted three months ago in Addis Ababa, Jimma, Awassa, Mekele, Bahir Dar, Dessie, Nazereth, Dire Dawa and Harar towns produced encouraging results according to health officials. Preparations are now underway to immunize some three million children between September this year and August next year. Measles is recognised as one of the six major child killer diseases in Ethiopia.

Economy in good shape - minister: Finance Minister Sufian Ahmed has reported that the country's economy is in good shape with a budget surplus recorded over the last six months. The federal government's revenue projection for the current fiscal year is Birr 8.65 billion (Birr 7.65 = US \$ 1) of which Birr 4.099 billion has been collected over the last six months. The amount collected is above target and some 15 percent above that collected in the same period last year. The country's economy is presently projected to grow by around ten percent this year, while inflation will remain low at 2-3 percent. Currently foreign aid in the form of various loans forms 37.1 percent of Ethiopia's 1998-99 budget while 22.1 percent has been in the form of grant aid. From the central budget, 87.1 percent has been allocated to the 5 main economic development activities: Road construction, transport and communications, agricultural development, education and energy. 63.8 percent alone is going into road construction and communications.

Special report – crisis looms in the Somali region

Alongside with southern and northern parts of Somalia, the Somali National Regional State in eastern Ethiopia is also currently facing the regular long dry season (*jillal*), a period which usually extends from December through April. While this presents an otherwise normal, recurrent weather pattern, the effects of this year's dry season appear to be unusually severe. After the two previous rainy seasons – the main *gu* rains (May/June) and the secondary *deyr* rains (October/November) – provided much below average precipitation, the availability of surface water (traditionally collected in cisterns, *birkas*) has been significantly reduced while pasture conditions are much worse than is normal for the time of year.

Throughout February, a number of meetings were held focusing on the situation in Somali region and bringing DPPC, UN agencies, NGOs and donors together. In one of the first of these meetings the UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (EUE) agreed to serve as a focal agency to gather and disseminate current reports and background information. A list of distributed documents and background papers available can be obtained from EUE.

The synopsis below, based on information compiled by WFP, summarises recent developments.

UN agencies and NGOs operating in the area

The UN agencies involved in the Ethiopian Somali Region include UNHCR (care and maintenance programmes for refugees, repatriation programme and Quick Impact Projects), UNICEF (primarily water programmes), WFP (refugee feeding and emergency relief) and UNDP-EUE (advocacy and a proposed water point inventory with UNHCR), WHO (trans-border health interventions) and UNDP (trans-border integrated development programme). The main NGOs operating in the region include:

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| ▪ Jigjiga Zone | SCF-UK, CARE, Missionaries of Charity, OXFAM, MSF-B, ICRC |
| ▪ Fik Zone | Ogaden Welfare Society (OWS) |
| ▪ Degehabour Zone | MSF-B, Hope for the Horn |
| ▪ Korahe Zone | OWS, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) |
| ▪ Gode Zone | OWS, ICRC |
| ▪ Warder Zone | OWS, ACF |
| ▪ Afder Zone | SCF-US, Pastoral Concern Association in Ethiopia (PCAE) |
| ▪ Liben Zone | SCF-US, PCAE |

General points of agreement on the current situation

Based on information available from the regional government, UN agencies, and NGOs having a permanent field presence in the region, a consensus on the following points regarding the drought in the Somali Region has emerged:

- Drought conditions are normal during the current long dry season (*jillal*).
- Due to the failure of the two previous rainy seasons (*gu* and *deyr*), the current dry season is more severe than normal.
- The main problem appears to be a lack of water.
- People are migrating in search of water for both human and animal consumption.
- The overall situation has been greatly aggravated by the ban on livestock imports to the Gulf States, mainly Saudi Arabia.
- Over the last thirty years there has been a profound change in pastoral-cultural patterns, with shift from camels and shoats to cattle. The latter require more frequent watering and can cover only relatively short distances between water places and grazing areas.
- Livestock (particularly cattle) are in a weakened, but not yet seriously poor condition.
- There is no (or only an extremely limited) market for livestock, resulting in poor terms of trade (low livestock prices but high cereal prices).
- The population in the region is under stress – to various degrees, depending on the area.
- Based on the nutritional surveys undertaken, not all zones in the region are experiencing a nutritional emergency. As is normal, those at most risk are children under five and the elderly.

- The capacity of the regional government is weak; lack of personnel and vehicles means that monitoring of relief interventions will be difficult for them. Security concerns further hamper field activities in certain areas.
- If the forthcoming main rainy season (April/June but in some areas starting as early as March) fails there will be a widespread emergency situation in the region.
- Structural problems in the region need to be addressed in the context of longer-term development rather than just repeated emergency interventions.

Rainfall situation

Many zones in the region have experienced two consecutive seasons of less than average rainfall. Meteorological data and satellite imagery show that cumulative rainfall for the March - May 1998 season was 21% to 75% less than average in virtually all areas of Korahe and Gode zones and the majority of Warder, Afder and Fik zones. Conversely, cumulative rainfall was similar to average (+/- 20%) or 21% to 50% above average in Degehabour, Jigjiga and Liben zones. Comparable data for the September to November 1998 season shows significantly large areas of Korahe, Gode and Afder zones and the eastern part of Warder again having received 21% to 50% less rain compared to the long-term average.

Based on the above information the Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) unit of WFP prepared a composite map highlighting those areas having received less than average rainfall for the last two consecutive seasons and where rainfall for the last rainy season was significantly below average. The composite map, which is available from WFP, indicates that Gode, Kebri Dahar, Afder and Warder are such areas. WFP is also in the process of compiling and mapping various rainfall, nutritional and general vulnerability data.

Nutritional Situation and nutritional monitoring

Médecins sans Frontières - Belgium (MSF-B), Save the Children UK and Save the Children Federation US have all undertaken nutritional surveys in various localities over the last three months but as the methodologies have differed comparison between these surveys is difficult. However, the surveys indicate that many areas of the Somali Region need close monitoring during this current dry spell. In this connection MSF-B have been taking middle upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements in selected sentinel sites in Jigjiga zone and will continue taking these measurements every two to four weeks. Should data indicate a deteriorating situation a survey using the more rigorous weight for length (WFL) method will be undertaken. The sentinel system will remain in place for as long as necessary. Action contre la Faim (ACF) will start nutritional surveys with two teams in early March in Korahe and Warder zones. The teams will likely do WFL measurements, but will train local staff to undertake MUAC. Finally, ICRC plans to assign a health delegate in May to undertake nutritional surveys in villages around Gode and to train local assistants.

Water Sector

Water is generally viewed as the most critical issue at the moment and interventions currently proposed for the water sector include:

- The European Union has indicated a willingness to look into the possibility of funding measures to develop the water sector, provided the DPPC issues an appeal indicating specific requirements.
- UNICEF has indicated it would, if necessary, divert current water development programmes to emergency water interventions linked to development.
- UNHCR has been distributing water (27,000 litres daily) to local communities between the refugee camps of Rabasso and Daror. Moreover, with the UN Emergencies Unit, UNHCR has indicated its support for a proposed inventory of water sources in drought prone areas, to be undertaken jointly with the regional water bureau.
- The Dutch organisation, NOVIB, has hired tanker trucks to deliver water to the Gashamo area.

- Hope for the Horn, a local NGO, obtained, with the support of the British and Japanese embassies, some equipment to rehabilitate 65 earthen dams and funding is being requested from other donors to purchase additional equipment.
- ICRC will be resuming its interventions in the Gode area, rehabilitating boreholes and developing a catchment system for diverting water from the Shebelle River to a 50,000 litre capacity reservoir.
- The German NGO Komitee Cap Anamur have indicated their interest supporting the development of water resources in the Gashaamo area.
- The Somali regional government has so far deployed eight trucks for water-tankering in four areas of the region.

Food Sector

In late February, the Federal DPPC issued its annual early warning system report for pastoral areas which indicated the number of people affected by the current drought was between 800,000 and 1.4 million. In order to meet the very substantial food requirements for even the minimum affected population the DPPC had, as of mid-February, mobilised 6,900 tons of cereals and 52 tons of supplementary food for the Somali Region. In addition, WFP is prepared to contribute some 18,780 tons of food aid to the pastoral areas, including Borena and Bale of Oromyia region. Of this total, 8,000 tons have been earmarked for the Somali region.

Other issues of concern

The weak capacity of the region with regards to personnel, equipment and vehicles combined with poor infrastructure continues to be of concern to donors, UN agencies and NGOs alike. Additional work is needed to find ways and means to effectively build capacity within the region to both plan and to implement programs.

Given the recurring nature of drought in the Somali Region, another area of particular concern is the need for effective contingency planning and early warning based on a knowledge of water resources, traditional migration routes, grazing patterns, weather and rainfall, and seasonal variations in nutritional status. In this context, ACF has submitted a funding proposal to the European Union for a two year programme, starting in September 1999, to undertake general early warning in Somali Region. The proposal includes monitoring human health and nutrition, animal condition and health, and the water situation.

Finally, it is clear that emergency interventions, while necessary during the present drought situation, are not the solution to the region's myriad problems and it is time to move beyond repeated emergency interventions to longer-term development initiatives, particularly in the water sector. Many donors have indicated their willingness to finance and support such development initiatives but given the fragile ecology of the area careful planning is essential.

Future assessments

The Federal DPPC has agreed to delegate assessment of needs in the region to NGOs working there. To assist the NGOs in carrying out their on-going assessment of the situation, a simple rapid assessment format and methodology will be developed. Also, as noted above, certain NGOs in the area have already started, or are about to start, sentinel nutritional surveys.

Late addition – Livestock import ban lifted from Eritrea

On March 7, it was announced that the Saudi government had lifted its ban on the import of livestock from Eritrea. Saudi traders said they were informed about the lifting of the ban in a circular from the chamber of commerce in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia banned livestock imports in February last year from Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Kenya because of fears that an outbreak of Rift Valley Fever could spread. The ban hit the economy in Somaliland and the Somali speaking areas of Ethiopia particularly badly. Last

year, Saudi Arabia said some 700,000 sheep and over 20,000 cattle and camels were slaughtered at the end of the Haj for the two million pilgrims performing the ritual.

The partial lifting of the import ban came shortly after FAO and WHO issued a joint statement saying that the risk of infection with the Rift Valley Fever virus, for both humans and animals, was reduced to minimal proportions in the countries of the Horn of Africa. The statement, issued on March 5, said Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia are now "in a better than normal situation with regard to Rift Valley Fever".

Agriculture and weather

Dry, clear weather persisted over much of Ethiopia for the first two dekads of the month, during which time unusually low night temperatures, sometimes below freezing, were recorded in some high plateau areas. Over the third dekad, somewhat cloudier weather moved into southern and south-western districts from the south, bringing scattered light rain showers to parts of Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, the Southern Peoples' Region and parts of western Oromiya. This pattern has persisted through to the beginning of March, when the seasonal shift of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone gradually brought the moist, more humid conditions normally associated with the start of the *belg* season (short rains). The latter part of February, therefore, saw scattered rainfall extending from the south-west of the country reaching pocket areas of Borena and the northern Somali region and the eastern escarpment of Welo. In comparison with the long-term average, however, the month was unusually dry with only a relatively small area of southern Benishangul-Gumuz receiving normal to above normal rainfall.

With the first dekad of March, the cloudy weather became more extensive bringing scattered showers and some isolated heavier storms to much of the south, west and north of the country. Though still not well established, moist weather also extended to the south-eastern lowlands bringing some much needed relief to what has been an unusually intense and long dry season. Scattered showers reported from Jijiga and Kebridehar and heavier storms in Dire Dawa during this period.

While the *belg* rains seem to be 2-3 weeks later than normal, once established the rains appear to have been generally satisfactory, although only the south-west of the country appears to have received normal or above normal rainfall for the season so far. In predicting a favourably wet March, the National Meteorological Services Agency, however, anticipate a withdrawal of the rains in April before returning to a more seasonal pattern in May. If born out, this could create difficult conditions for both short-cycle plantings of *belg* maize and sorghum as well as disrupt land preparation and plantings for the main season, long-cycle crops.

Food aid and logistics

Food aid pledges and shipments

The UN World Food Programme report that as of the beginning of March no pledges had been confirmed against the 1999 food aid requirement. Meanwhile, it was noted that drought conditions were emerging in the south and south-east of the country, while the late start to the short rains could have a negative impact on food security in *belg*-dependant areas of central and southern Ethiopia. Given the uncertainty, it is important that donors confirm pledges early so that loans from the Emergency Food Security Reserve can be secured to meet any emerging needs.

A recently approved WFP emergency operation (EMOP 6080) will provide 45,350 metric tons of relief food assistance for 272,000 Ethiopians internally displaced by the border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The total WFP cost of the operation is US \$24.3 million. To fully resource the operation, urgent donor contributions are requested. The new initiative is in response to the government's request for emergency food assistance issued at the end of 1998. The WFP emergency operation will assist people displaced by the conflict and ease the burden on host communities and host families who themselves experience food insecurity. The operation is to last for nine months.

Port operations

According to the Ethiopian customs authority, just over 785,000 tons of import and export goods have been handled through the port of Djibouti in the past six months. The imported goods, all bound for Ethiopia, included food aid, commercial food commodities, salt, fertilisers and vehicles, while the goods exported mainly comprised agricultural products such as oil seeds, molasses and coffee. 87 percent of the goods handled, or some 686,000 tons, were for import. According to the Authority, the volume handled exceeds by over 500,000 tons the Ethiopian goods handled by the three ports of Massawa, Assab and Djibouti together during the same period last year. During the same six month period, 561 million litres of petroleum products destined for Ethiopia were also handled by the port.

The long-awaited first trail shipment of food aid through the Somaliland port of Berbera arrived on February 26. The shipment comprises 15,000 tons of wheat consigned to the Ethiopian Food Security Reserve under a grant from the European Union. The shipment will be cleared and transported by a consortium of Somaliland companies through to the EFSR warehouses in Dire Dawa. Clearance procedures and delivery to final destination are expected to take about two weeks.

Logistics

Generally, operations out of Djibouti port have been running smoothly with no major bottlenecks reported. However, some consignees receiving their shipments through direct delivery have faced delays in discharging vessels due to a reported shortage of trucks. With a recent hike in transport rates, this apparent shortage of trucks appears to have been partly due to the unwillingness of transporters to have trucks stand idle in Djibouti awaiting the arrival of shipments. Operators now only make their trucks available when vessels have arrived, leading to delays in mobilisation. Meanwhile, with in excess of 2,400 trucks registered for the Djibouti corridor, the Ministry of Transport remains sceptical regarding claims of any shortage of trucking capacity.

The delayed arrival of several shipments of fertiliser and food aid has decreased the immediate pressure on port facilities, and there is hope that much of the backlog of food aid and fertiliser (approximately 30,000 tons and 25,000 tons respectively at the end of February) in the port can be cleared and transported.

During February, the WFP Food Aid Transport System (FATS) entered a period of expansion as additional trucks were taken on in anticipation of the arrival of a number of shipments of refugee food aid. By the beginning of March, more than 200 trucks were operating under the FATS system and in the ten day period to February 28, WFP report that a total of 9,227 tons was transported with an average daily despatch of 838 tons. With more trucks reporting for work, the despatch rate is showing an upward trend. WFP also continue to use the railway from Djibouti to Dire Dawa. Transportation of 4,000 tons of wheat for the Somali refugee programme was due to commence on March 1. Table I below provides a summary of the average food aid despatch rates from the port of Djibouti for the last eight months.

Table I: Average Daily Despatch Figures - Food Aid Only (Metric Tons)

MONTH	ROAD	RAIL	TOTAL
August	1,440	10	1,450
September	711	0	711
October	1,440	0	1,440
November	1,008	0	1,008
December	2,768	127	2,895
January	1,411	112	1,523
February	1,099	39	1,138

Source: WFP

A request from the National Import and Export Coordination Committee to use Adaytu on the main Djibouti-Addis Ababa road (a few kilometers short of the Mille junction), as a transit point for food aid, fertiliser and other cargo coming into the country has been the source of concern to many transporters. It was felt that

the imposition of this arrangement would result in significantly higher transport costs and delayed deliveries to the end destinations. WFP have requested a waiver from the authorities for the month of March for trucks operating under the FATS system while others appear to be simply ignoring the instruction.

Emergency Food Security Reserve

With the receipt of a number of recent repayments and expectations that this year's programme of local purchases will soon come on-stream, the status of the EFSR is considered more healthy than it has been for more than a year. Current physical stocks are at around 130,000 tons. With various incoming shipments expected in the coming weeks, the reserve could be approaching 200,000 tons by the end of April, although borrowings for the drought emergency in the south-east and for displaced people in the north could reduce this figure somewhat.

With the expansion in physical stock holdings, the next challenge for the Reserve may be in securing sufficient warehouse capacity. While additional warehouses are being constructed for the EFSR at various locations around the country, as a stop-gap measure stores may be rented from the Ethiopian Grain Trading Enterprise as has been the practice in previous years.

Refugees and returnees

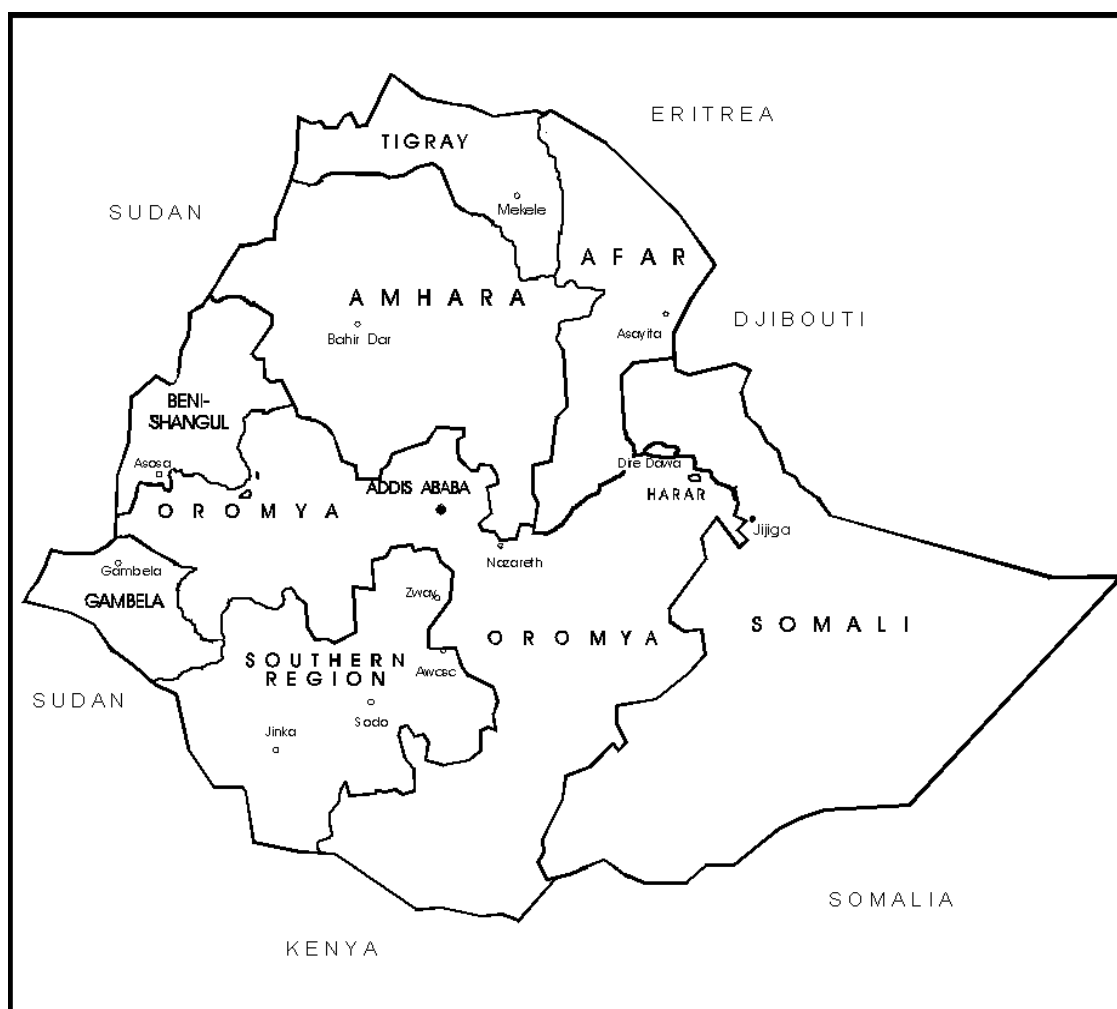
While noted the resumption of the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees to "Somaliland" was still pending, no significant developments were reported by UNHCR for the month of February.

On February 21, the president of Benishangul-Gumuz region inaugurated various camp facilities in the Shirkole refugee settlement. The facilities included primary school, health centre, staff residences and 27 shallow wells. The programme was funded by UNHCR with the construction of the facilities undertaken by the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs, while the shallow wells were partially financed by MSF-Holland. The total cost of the improvements was about Birr 4 million (approximately US \$525,000). The Shirkole refugee settlement is located about 46 kilometers north of Assosa and hosts some 14,400 South Sudanese refugees. The camp has grown steadily since March 1997 after the re-location of over 5,000 Sudanese refugees from the border Kunche reception area, near Kurmuk.

Refugee Statistics (as of 1 February 1999)

<u>West</u> (Sudanese)		<u>East</u> (Somalis)		<u>South-east</u> (Somalis)	
Bonga	12,595	Hartisheik (A & B)	31,432	Dolo Odo	5,000
Fugnido	24,710	Aisha	15,290	Dolo Bay	1,200
Dimma	7,252	Kebribeyah	11,621	Suftu	1,800
		Teferiber	30,435	Sub-total	8,000
Shirkole	14,391	Derwenaji	27,006		
Sub-total	58,948	Camaboker	28,590	<u>North-east</u> (Djiboutians)	
		Rabasso	16,814	Afar Region	3,000
<u>South</u> (Kenyans)		Daror	33,985		
Moyale/Dokisso	4,501	Sub-total	195,173	<u>Addis Ababa</u>	
				Urban refugees	507
		GRAND TOTAL	270,129		

Administrative Map of Ethiopia



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.

SOURCES:

UNDP-EUE field reports; CARE; Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC); European Union; FAO; FEWS; National Meteorological Services Agency (NMSA); Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA); SCF (UK); UNICEF; UNHCR; WHO. Also media sources: The Ethiopian Herald; AFP; Walta Information Centre; ENA.

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