

UNITED NATIONS
EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA

SITUATION REPORT FOR MARCH 1995

OVERVIEW

Political Developments

Preparations for national elections in May are underway, with the collection of endorsement signatures and registration of candidates continuing throughout the country. So far, 26 political organisations have indicated their readiness to participate in the national and regional elections.

The Central High Court resumed hearings of the cases of former Derg officials on 7 March, after a break of close to three months. These hearings are intended to provide the former officials with an opportunity to contest the charges levelled against them by the Office of the Special Prosecutor. Presentation of defense arguments is underway by counselling representatives.

Symposium on Famine in Ethiopia

A joint conference organised by the Inter-Africa Group - an NGO networking organisation, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and the UN Economic Commission for Africa, was held in Addis Ababa 15-17 March. This conference was attended by senior representatives of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, donors, Non-Governmental Organisations, the United Nations and other members of the international community.

The objective of this symposium was to provide a forum to discuss issues relating to famine in Ethiopia, relief and rehabilitation measures taken, the best ways of approaching emergency situations and the means of attaining sustainable food security in Ethiopia. Discussions of the panellists and experts attending the workshop focused on three themes: famine on the ground, perspectives on the role of the international community and the lessons learnt.

Commemoration events concluded

The one month of events planned to commemorate the famine of 1984-85 came to an end with a ceremony attended by the government and international community. Certain activities will however continue at the regional level in the coming months as part of the efforts underlining the commemoration. The main objective of the events carried out at the decentralised level will be familiarise the Ethiopian rural population with the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management and its directives.

AGRICULTURE

Progress of the Belg season

Reports by the National Meteorological Services Agency (NMSA) indicate that in the first dekad of March rainfall was mostly concentrated over the northeastern and southeastern parts of the country. Although coverage had improved by the second dekad of the month, a significant decrease in rainfall amount was observed in most parts of Belg producing areas. During the early part of the third dekad, lowland areas of North Shewa and South Welo received favourable rainfall while the highland areas only experienced scattered showers. No rainfall activity was observed in most parts of the Belg-dependant areas of Northern Ethiopia at the end of the month.

Crop situation

In general, since the start of the Belg season, rainfall in most parts of the major Belg-producing areas of Ethiopia, other than the highland areas of the north, has been adequate to support agricultural activities. Conditions in areas which have experienced rains have facilitated farmers in the sowing of crops and land preparation has been reported in some of these areas. Sowing of maize crops in southern Ethiopia has already commenced. However in the major Belg-producing areas of North Shewa, North and South Welo, the erratic rainfall pattern has adversely effected land preparation and sowing of crops and farmers are cautious in using their limited supplies of seed to plant.

Locust situation

Following the early detection and rapid assessments of locust activities in the region, preparatory measures were started to counter the possible surge of locusts into Ethiopia. Swarms detected in areas of Eastern Hararghe, Dire Dawa and Jijiga during February have been controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture using available supplies of pesticide.

According to FAO, no locust activity was observed in the country during March. The Crop Protection Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Desert Locust Control Operation for Eastern Africa (DLCO-EA) continue to regularly monitor the situation with resources deployed to carry out widespread aerial and ground surveys.

Fertiliser situation

During the month of March, from the 230,000 tons of fertiliser to be procured through AISCO for 1995, approximately 50 percent was discharged at Assab and moved to the transit warehouses of AISCO. As of 19 March, a total of 52,769 tons was dispatched to marketing centres for distribution to farmers.

Farmers in Ethiopia are repaying fertiliser credit obtained in 1994 to the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and the Development Bank of Ethiopia. This will help them in obtaining credit for the 1995 planting seasons.

REGIONAL UPDATE

The situation in Wolayita (North Omo zone of SEPAR) and in South Welo zone (Region 3) has been assessed as critical by several NGOs who have conducted nutritional surveys in the area. Areas of North Welo are now also considered to be very vulnerable. SCF's nutritional survey results for all these areas indicate an alarming drop in nutritional status accompanied by very high cereal prices but stable livestock prices. This is an unusual pattern in Welo at this time of the year. Grain prices have also increased in North Shewa and parts of SEPAR, particularly in Kindo Koisha, Bolosso Sore and Offa weredas of North Omo zone. Relief operations are underway in South Welo and Wolayita and will be initiated in North Welo.

The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission in Addis Ababa and the Relief and Rehabilitation Bureau in North Omo have recently taken measures to organise a coordination office in Sodo (North Omo) to monitor ongoing operations in the area. This office has been provided with technical manpower but still lacks adequate logistical support and vehicles.

The Coordination Office in Sodo, together with the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees in North Omo have completed screening of the most affected weredas of Wolayita. Accordingly, food distributions (through Employment Generation Schemes as well as some free distributions) were initiated in the targeted weredas by the RRC and several NGOs, complemented by supplementary feeding programmes.

In Region 3, although the rains had a satisfactory start in the lowlands and the highland areas of the eastern escarpment, the main Belg-dependant areas of North Shewa and South Welo zones remained dry for most of the month. Some parts of South Welo have already reported small scale migration. In these areas, even if the Belg provides sufficient rainfall into April, cultivation time for Belg crops may have been lost.

There is limited food distribution ongoing in other parts of the country. The continued provision of supplies to the most seriously affected areas critically depends on the resourcing of food aid allocated to emergency operations. The major NGOs are operating in areas which have been targeted as food deficient and seem to have little flexibility. The RRC has no 1995 relief pledges and has limited carry over stocks.

The Emergency Food Security Reserve is rapidly reaching its minimum level of 50,000 tons below which it cannot provide additional loans except under the authority of the EFSR Board.

Employment Generation Schemes

Relief food distributions through Employment Generation Schemes are based on selection by Wereda Disaster Committees, with the assistance of NGOs, of the population in need of food assistance. The Wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees are

currently designing EGS schemes on which the entire able-bodied population of recipient communities are expected to work. The implementation of this programme allows food distributions to take place without delay and community participation in the EGS to follow when feasible.

Food for work programmes have already been started according to the directives provided by the Wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committees. The implementation of these schemes however greatly depends on the availability of tools and other inputs required for rehabilitation activities.

FOOD AID AND LOGISTICS

Food aid status

As at the end of March 1995, from the total import requirements of 1,032,000 tons for 1995, the notional pledge level has improved only slightly to 607,298 tons with a breakdown of 302,425 tons for relief/regular programmes and 304,873 tons for programme aid. In addition to cereals and pulsed there are now 20,591 tons of pledges in oil. The majority of these notional pledges are firm.

The WFP emergency programme (EMOP), over which some concern has been expressed, is expected to be approved by WFP Headquarters shortly. Meanwhile resources have been released from the EFSR for continuation of relief operations.

So far, deliveries in 1995 have been 56,296 tons of food aid from the Government of the United States. As a result of the expected pattern of few shipments early in the year, non-governmental organisations and the RRC are borrowing from the Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR) to maintain deliveries.

WFP has recently improved its pipeline of deliveries for both wheat and oil with significant shipments due in May. This improvement will take some pressure off the EFSR and allow WFP to repay loans it has taken from other agencies.

Logistics

Port activity for food aid has remained very low throughout the month, creating cargo problems for all long haul transporters. This situation is expected to change at the beginning of May.

Relief Food Outlets (RFOs)

The RRC is issuing an appeal as part of its overall capacity building programme, for 1,200 Relief Food Outlets (RFOs) of around 300 tons capacity each. This would allow more efficient prepositioning and management of food stocks in the normally food deficit areas. A proposal to link the RFOs with a coupon system for the release of food has been postponed.

HEALTH, NUTRITION AND WATER

Epidemics

There have been reports of the sporadic resurgence of meningitis in different parts of Ethiopia. In Goffa wereda (North Omo zone), UNICEF have reported several incidences of the disease and a lack of medical drugs and vaccines to counter its spread. WHO have reported no emergency epidemic diseases during the month.

Rehabilitation of health facilities

During the reporting month of March, a joint field trip was carried out by WHO and the Ministry of Health to monitor the progress of WHO-supported emergency programmes in northern Ethiopia. The purpose of this visit was to review the progress in repair of partially damaged health facilities; identify completed health facilities and the status of equipment; and to obtain reports on each health facility.

The mission reports that substantial progress in the maintenance of facilities has been made with an average completion rate of 95 percent. The Shire Health Centre in Region 1 (Tigray) has been completed and already functioning. The majority of health care facilities in Region 3 (Amhara) are also operational, with the exception of the health centre in Dessie and the hospital in Debre Berhan. All facilities have been provided with essential medical equipment.

Support to health services

In March, UNICEF emergency activities centred on conducting microplanning workshops on Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) and Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI), both of which are planned to meet UNICEF's Mid-Decade Goals (MDGs). Other activities undertaken by UNICEF include the monitoring of emergency projects and the provision of emergency relief supplies and medical equipment to different parts of the country.

A team of UNICEF emergency officers visited North Omo zone (SEPAR) in mid-March, to assess and report on the food shortages in the areas and to monitor UNICEF-assisted emergency nutrition projects. Findings from this visit indicate that with the exception of Humbo wereda, the nutritional status in Kindo Koisha, Offa, Damot Gale, Zalla, Wuba Male and Kucha weredas, where supplementary feeding was started in January, there is still a high level of malnutrition among the 10,000 children, pregnant and lactating women participating in the programme. UNICEF plan to continue the feeding programme, extending it to cover 9 weredas, including Genna Boss and Loma, for the coming six months. Furthermore, UNICEF emergency teams will continue to monitor the progress in these weredas on a regular basis.

REFUGEES AND RETURNEES

Sudanese refugees

The assisted population reached 53,262 with the following

breakdown: Fugnido 26,165; Bonga 15,326 and Dimma 11,771. Despite concerns that the recent takeover of the town of Nassir in South Sudan by Government troops would lead to an increased influx into Ethiopia, the number of registered new arrivals actually decreased from 427 in February to 338 in March. A team of field officers from UNHCR sub-office in Gambella, the Administration for Refugee/Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and the regional authorities visited the border points on 28 March to assess the situation on the ground.

Somali refugees

The assisted population in the camps of eastern Ethiopia remained 262,458 as ARRA did not list any new arrivals. However, a further influx was expected following the outbreak of fighting in Burao, northwest Somalia, between Egal forces and opposition militia. Heavy casualties were reported, and the evacuation of the city may result in significant numbers of civilians, particularly Garhajis, crossing the border to the eastern Ethiopian camps.

In the camps, the critical water situation was relieved by the onset of the rainy season. ARRA was authorised to increase their UNHCR-funded health and nutrition staff, both to provide basic health services to new arrivals and to takeover the supplementary and therapeutic feeding activities previously implemented by the Save the Children Fund (UK).

Kenyan refugees

WFP has agreed to deliver food for the estimated 8,270 Kenyans to the ARRA warehouse in Moyale. The Degodians near Moyale town will collect their rations there. ARRA will transport and distribute rations to the Ajurans near Dokisso.

Djiboutian refugees

A mission including the UNHCR Education Officer and the Health and Nutrition Assistant visited the Djiboutian refugees along the Assab road in Region 2 (Afar). The mission concluded that the existing health care facilities and technical staff assigned to the refugee-affected areas of Assaita, Dichaotto, Dubti, Elidar and Manda were adequately equipped and able to meet the basic needs of the current refugee population. Several recommendations were made to support the educational activities initiated by the refugees themselves.

REPATRIATION

Repatriation from Djibouti

The second phase of the repatriation operation from Djibouti was completed on 20 March, enabling the closure of the Aour Aoussa camp in Djibouti. Since the beginning of the operation in September 1994, some 16,881 Ethiopians have repatriated from Djibouti primarily to Babile, Fik, Gursum and Jijiga.

The third phase of the operation, during which a further 15,000 Ethiopians may repatriate, will begin as soon as the go-ahead is received from the Ethiopian government.

Repatriation from Kenya

The airlift of 49 returnees from Mombasa to Dire Dawa, plus 154 from Dadaab to Jijiga, brought the total repatriated by air since February 1995 to 417. An overland convoy of 441 returnees arrived in Moyale on 22 March, and a second convoy of 266 on 31 March, bringing the total number of returnees since February to 1,124.

Individual repatriation

During the reporting month, three individual cases, each with one person, repatriated from Kenya, the Sudan and the United States of America.

Repatriation from Sudan

Registration began in Port Sudan on 19 March and by the end of the month some 2,713 Ethiopian refugees had registered to return. Representatives of the Ethiopian Non-Governmental Organisations, the Ethiopian Relief Organisation (ERO) and the Oromo Self-Help Organisation (OSHO) participated in the information campaign for registration. The first movement by train from Port Sudan to a transit centre near Showak is scheduled for 9 April.

Preparations at the Ethiopian transit centre at Quaja near Humera, and the dispersal centres at Gonder and Inde Selassie continued on schedule. Pre-positioning of non-food items was completed. Convoys will be able to proceed to Ethiopia as soon as the ARRA and NGO staff are in place and the Ethiopian regional authorities give the go-ahead.

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 of the UN concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of its frontiers or boundaries.

Information in this report has been provided by specialised UN agencies. Reference is made to any other source of information as necessary.

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