

30 November 1999

# ***ETHIOPIA: DROUGHT***

*appeal no. 15/99*

*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 15 August - 15 November*

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*With the operation entering the last phase of the planned 6-month programme, generous donor support has enabled timely procurement and distribution of the food assistance to the intended beneficiaries. For the remaining two month period, the impact of the seasonal rains on the next harvest period will be more closely assessed, and the programme may be adjusted accordingly.*

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## ***The context***

Following the total failure of the years *belg* (secondary) rains which usually fall from mid-May to mid-June in the northern Ethiopian highlands, the food security situation of the most vulnerable deteriorated dramatically. This followed post-harvest losses during the 1998 *meher* (primary) season. For those farmers solely dependent on the *belg* season, the situation had reached critical proportions. The Federation responded by launching an Appeal to provide food assistance for the South Wollo Zone. The significant impact of the drought has been assessed in other parts of the country. According to the Ethiopian government, the country is facing its highest level of need since 1994.

## ***Latest events***

Although the *meher* rains began on time in June, harvest shortfalls are predicted as the rain continued until the end of October creating unsuitable conditions for crop maturation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that only short cycle crops, which have a lower yield, were planted in most areas as the failed *belg* rain, and loss of plough animals, delayed soil preparation. In contrast to evidence of an improving trend in the Amhara Zone as a whole, authorities and Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) branch personnel in South Wollo envisage little significant improvement for the *belg* farmers after this year's *meher* harvest.

The standard, annual, pre-harvest crop assessment has just been completed by a joint government/UN team, and results are being tallied. Using this data, the Ethiopian Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (DPPC) will issue its standard annual Emergency Appeal for food assistance. Local authorities assert that the teff, wheat and legume vegetables, which have shallow root systems, are rotting; corn and sorghum crops appear to be withstanding the waterlogged soil conditions.

Although the DPPC in Dessie town, the administrative centre of South Wollo, reported an anticipated 50% crop loss, the authorities in Ambassel *woreda* reported 804 out of 7,469 hectares (or 11%), totally destroyed. The projected losses are likely to increase.

The purchasing power of beneficiaries, contrary to the reported broader regional trends, are declining. Authorities noted that food aid had stabilised the grain market until late-September. From that point, vendors began to speculate against the feared *meher* shortfall, and grain prices have again risen in Dessie, while the price of animals has gone down. This contrasts to reports in Ambassel *woreda* where grain prices have fallen slightly. Local authorities there note that the grain is coming in from the north, putting Ambassel closer to the source than Dessie and that farmers are so cash poor at present that vendors have been forced to reduce prices or bear the additional cost of transport over 90 kilometres of rough road to Dessie.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

### **Food Distribution w**

ERCS distributions of supplemental food, comprising famix and CSB (a Catholic Relief Service donation), have been completed to all beneficiaries for the planned October ration period. The final two-month ration for the November-December period will take place in the early weeks of December. During the reporting period, two distributions took place in Ambassel and Kutaber: one cycle was completed on the 26th of August, and the second was completed on October 22. Each beneficiary received 2 kgs in July and 3kgs (as was projected in the first Situation Report), for August-October. The table below reflects the updated stock and distribution status:

ITEM	Appeal Target Distribution	Opening stock	Rec'd period MT	Distrib. in period MT		Total distrib.	Stock close	Benef. reached
	for Ambassel & Kutaber (MT)			Ambassel	Kutaber			
Fafa/famix								
Aug	483	360	0	58.2	76.3	134.5	225.48	34,778
Oct	483	225.48	20	148.5	91.5	240	5.5	40,106
Chick pea seeds								
Aug	64	0	43	26.7	16.3	43	0	3,440
Barley seeds	210	0	0					
Wheat seeds	90	0	0					

### **Beneficiary Identification w**

During the recent mission of the Regional Relief delegate, beneficiaries confirmed being well informed of the food supplement planned for distribution to vulnerable persons, primarily pregnant and lactating women, children under five years of age, elderly (over 60), or handicapped persons.

### **Seed Distribution w**

During the August distribution, chick pea seeds were distributed to 3,440 mixed cultivating *meher/belg* households in both *woredas*. Due to the increase in seed price, a smaller quantity than had originally been foreseen was procured. Each beneficiary farmer received 12.5 kgs of seeds (rather than the intended 20 kgs), which enabled the cultivation of 62% of the average family landholding. At the same time, the FAO distributed teff and wheat seeds to some of the *belg/meher* farmers, on a loan basis. However, local authorities in Ambassel recently reported that the wheat seed was found to have a 49% germination rate, in spite of certification to the contrary, and the teff seed was contaminated by a high percentage of foreign, non-vegetable matter. The DPPB in the *woreda* was forced to undertake a

campaign, following the distribution, advising farmers not to sow the seed but to use it for home consumption. They note that on the strength of that, they are not hopeful for subsequent, effective seed assistance. Neither *woreda* officials nor the DPPC representative in Dessie were aware of plans to distribute seed to *belg* farmers.

The Ministry of Agriculture representative in Ambassel has recommended that only wheat seed be distributed to *belg* farmers in December, in contrast to the Appeal proposal of wheat and barley seed. Barley seed is not distributed at a National level, which leaves only the option of procurement at the *woreda* or small-holder level. After discussion with the ERCS relief officer, this suggestion has been provisionally accepted and will not have significant budgetary consequences.

## ***Outstanding needs***

Depending on the outcome of the *meher* harvest, additional food needs may be identified.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

Save the Children U.K. reports that they plan to continue to distribute bulk food to the *belg* farmers, through the DPPB, by a food for work scheme until June 2000 when the *belg* harvest is expected. In January, the National DPPC will launch their annual Emergency Appeal, based on the *meher* harvest results, after which the matter of continued beneficiary requirements will be clearer.

The Regional DPPC had co-ordinated the distribution of FAO seeds to *meher* farmers on a loan basis. At the time of the ERCS chick-pea distribution they suggested that the ERCS should distribute in a parallel scheme. After discussion, this proposal was rejected. During a recent mission to Dessie town in South Wollo, the regional relief delegate held discussions with the DPPC concerning the method of distribution of assistance, and this accepted and endorsed by the DPPC authorities.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

In the coming two month period the impact of the lengthy *meher* rains will be assessed at a national level and figures regarding crop damage released. Discussions will then take place in consultation with NGOs, UN agencies and the DPPC to establish beneficiary needs. It is hoped that the timely wheat seed distribution and provision of the final FAFA supplement will allow the *belg* farmers in Ambassel and Kutaber sufficient means to produce a successful harvest in June, 2000. Furthermore, the *meher* harvest, while less than expected, may yet be sufficient to stabilise the rising grain prices in the Dessie area and improve the terms of trade for the targeted *belg* farmers.

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