

GREATER HORN OF AFRICA: SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY

5 May, 2000

BACKGROUND

The distinct possibility of famine once again looms over extensive parts of the Greater Horn of Africa (GHOA). Adverse weather and a general decline in coping strategies due to socio-economic and political causes has put an estimated 16 million persons at danger, and in need of emergency assistance.

The gradual increase in total cereal production in the GHOA during 1991 - 1996 period has since declined considerably mainly due to adverse weather. Similarly, per capita cereal production has declined since 1996. Consequently, to meet consumption needs, the sub-region's total cereal imports have been growing.

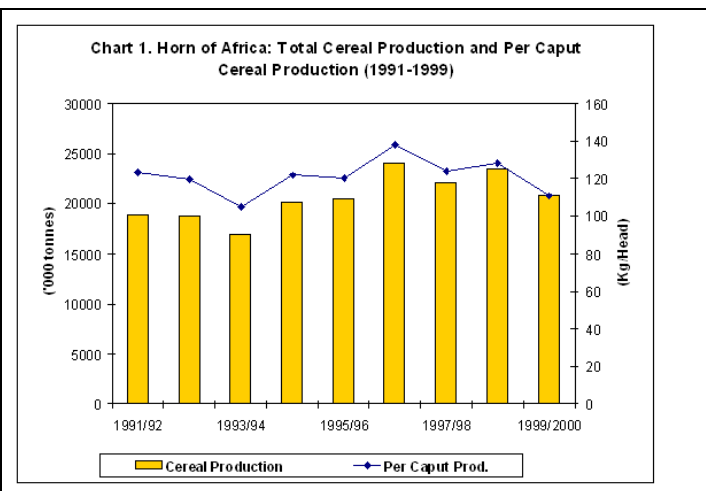


Fig 1 Source: FAO Global Information

For example in 1999/2000 the import requirement of cereals stands at a record high of over 6 million MTs, almost double the actual import level of 1989/1999 and more than **30% above that of 1984 and 1985, a major drought and famine year.**

This situation is being aggravated by the sharp decline of community coping strategies and an increased level of socio-economic and political vulnerabilities. For example, during the 1970s and 1980s most people could easily resist 2 to 3 successive crop failures, before reaching starvation levels. Now and in most countries community resistance in the chronic food deficit pockets is limited to one season crop failure.

Food shortages are particularly grave in the pastoral areas of Eastern and Southern Ethiopia where deaths from starvation are increasingly being reported. The food situation is also very serious in pastoral areas of northern and north-eastern Kenya, west-central areas of Somalia bordering Ethiopia, and some parts of Eritrea and Djibouti. In the GHOA as a whole, about 16 million people are in dire need, with over half of them in Ethiopia. In addition, as the main

cropping season approaches, prospects for recovery are poor as rains so far have been late, draught animals have been lost or severely weakened, and most farm families have desperately consumed seeds to cope with the situation. There are mounting fears that, if the rains expected in the coming few months fail again, the situation could become worse than the devastating famine of 1984 and 1985.

In addition to supporting the Country Delegation (CD) in Ethiopia, the Federation's Regional Delegation Nairobi (RDN) is actively engaged with National Societies CDs in Kenya, Somali, Eritrea and Djibouti in order to assess the situation and launch co-ordinated appeals. In addition to the revised appeal for Ethiopia launched on 4 May, 2000, appeals for Kenya, Eritrea and Djibouti may be launched over the coming weeks.

The operations in response to the drought in the GHOA are closely co-ordinated with and between the Federation, respective National Societies in the region, and the ICRC, and are planned together with the Government, UN, and NGO assistance programmes.

KENYA •

Kenya is the second worst affected country, after Ethiopia. The current drought induced food insecurity has affected the population in pastoral, agro-pastoral and marginal agricultural areas in the northern and north-eastern parts of the country. An estimated 1.7 million people are in need of food assistance. The food situation is particularly critical in four arid pastoral districts: Turkana, Marsabit, Moyale and Mandera.

Recurrent periods of drought during the last ten years have caused widespread degradation of grazing land and depletion of water sources. This situation has put the livestock in an extremely poor condition, and some experts assume that as much as 80% of the livestock in the worst hit areas are at risk of death within the next three months if the long rain season fails (March to June).

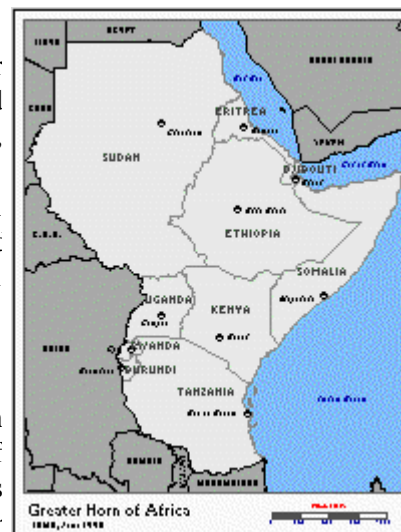


Figure 2 Source: USAID- Famine Early Warning System

The drought affected agricultural areas have suffered two consecutive crop failures since mid 1998. The prospect for sufficient rainfall during this long rainy season is not encouraging.

A multi-agency (from the Office of the President; Ministry of Agriculture; WFP; USAID/FEWS; OXFAM-GB; and UNICEF) rapid food assessment was carried out in September 1999 in 18 of the hardest drought affected districts. Based on the results of this assessment, the Government of Kenya (GoK) launched an appeal for local and international assistance, in December 1999. The appeal seeks USD 60.8 million to meet the needs in these 18 districts.

WFP responded quickly to the Government of Kenya (GoK) appeal, and an emergency operation was approved at the end of January 2000. The scope of the operation is to provide food for 2.7 million people: 1.7 million in general distribution; and one million as a school feeding programme. During the February to June 2000 period, the WFP Emergency Operation (EMOP) will require 75,000 MTs of cereals, pulses and vegetable oil valued at USD 43.4 millions. Donors responded positively to the GoK appeal, and have so far made commitments to deliver food worth USD 36.8 million, which accounts for 85% of the food requirements for

the operation. Currently, WFP is supplying food to the four pastoral districts mentioned above, and will soon expand the food aid to seven agro-pastoral and marginal agricultural districts: West Pokot, Baringo, Samburu, Machokos, Makueni, Mwingi and Kitui.

The WFP approached the Red Cross and Red Crescent to take the lead in the food aid operation in Machakos district as of May, 2000. A formal request from the Office of the President to the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) is expected this week.

Out of the 18 affected districts, the GoK is carrying out food distribution (maize) in 11 districts. Between July 1999 and February, 2000, the GoK has distributed food amounting to 57,984 MT at a value of USD 7.9 millions.

The provisions for the ongoing WFP intervention are based on the assumption that the current long rainy season (March - June) will be of the same quality as the previous year. This long rainy season is already 1-2 months late and the prospect for sufficient rainfall is not encouraging. WFP has made update contingency plans for increasing food supply and distribution in case the rains fail. However, with the current weather situation, it is most likely that WFP's medium or worst case scenario will occur with as many as 3.4 million people in need of food aid.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Actions and Capacities

- Upon request from the KRCS, a joint Federation and KRCS rapid assessment took place between 17 to 23 April, upon which a preliminary appeal will be launched. A further 3 week comprehensive assessment will be conducted to determine capacities, needs and longer term action;
- mitigation and developmental programmes (updating of the preliminary appeal);
- The Kenya Programme Coordinator and the RDN are negotiating an MoU with the KRCS as an operational framework which will specify roles and responsibilities of the Federation and the National Society and which takes into account the present capacities;
- The KRCS has limited operational capacity at the HQ, but effective branches, especially in Wajir and Machakos districts. In this regard, it is imperative that the Federation post a relief administrator at the district level to provide technical support to the local branches and to interface with the KRCS and the Federation's office in Nairobi.

ERITREA •

The food situation is very tight for nearly 600,000 people affected by the war with Ethiopia and prevailing drought along the coastal areas. In good years, Eritrea depends mainly on imports and food aid to meet its domestic needs. The 1998 and 1999 harvest was poor throughout the country. Five Zobas (provinces) in particular are badly hit and at major risk of starvation: Northern Red Sea; Anseba; Southern Red Sea; Gash Baraka; and Debub. The situation in Eritrea confirms the overall fragility (high level of vulnerability) and weakened coping strategies (low level of capacities) to a degree that a one season crop failure can lead to serious food insecurity. The basic underlying causes for this high level of vulnerability are:

- 30 years of conflict which deprived most communities from modest or modern farming, necessitating a reliance on a subsistence farming economy. During this period, as much as 90% of the population were exposed to famine and were dependent on relief assistance for their day to day livelihood;
- after independence and by the time the economy began to develop from 1991 to 1997, the Ethiopian - Eritrean conflict began in 1998 with devastating socio-economic losses.

The Eritrea Relief and Refugee Commission (ERREC) led an interagency needs assessment during the fourth quarter of 1999 (including the UN, the Red Cross Society of Eritrea and

other NGOs). The assessment indicated that there are about 366,000 drought affected and about 483,000 war affected people. Consequently, the ERREC launched an appeal amounting to USD 96 million for assisting both the drought and the war affected people for six and twelve months respectively.

In January 2000, the UN Country Team (a multi-organisation team including UN agencies represented in Asmara) appealed for USD 42.7 million (62,800 MTs of food) to assist some 372,000 war affected and about 211,000 drought affected people. Total pledges by the end of March amounted to 30,000 MTs.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Actions and Capacities

- A Disaster Preparedness and Relief Officer from the Red Crescent Society of Eritrea (RCSE), together with the Federation Representative, conducted a verification mission in the drought affected areas of Northern Red Sea during March. April is the harvest season, and the harvest results were not yet available). Some of the visited areas expect as little as 30 - 50% of the normal production, while others expect nothing. The RCSE and Federation will continue to monitor the situation closely with the ERREC and WFP, the major planning and coordination bodies in Eritrea.

SOMALIA •

According to the FAO, the food supply situation in Southern Somalia is deteriorating rapidly, despite the favourable Deyr harvest in February 2000. Nearly 650,000 people are facing severe food shortages with households in Bakool, Gedo, Bay and Hiran Regions being the worst affected. Large numbers of people have started moving to other areas, both within the country and across the border to Ethiopia, in search of water and food. With a bleak forecast for the main Gu rainy season which account for about three quarters of annual crop production, the situation is very alarming. These parts of the country, to a great extent, are also experiencing insecurity due to clan and factional fighting. Because any food movement is a target, the ICRC is taking the lead in providing food assistance in some areas.

In the north-west (Somaliland) and north-east (Puntland), despite relatively stable livestock and food supply conditions, a high influx of pastoralists from neighbouring Ethiopia is rapidly depleting pastures and water supplies and is a cause for serious concern. An estimated 200,000 people in these areas are also facing food and water shortages in many regions.

Harvesting of the 1999 and 2000 secondary Dyer cereal crop, normally accounting for some 25% of annual cereal production, is complete, while planting for 2000-2001 main season crops is about to start. Total cereal production from the 1999-2000 Deyr season is estimated at 108,000 MTs, 53% above the post war (1993 - 1998) average. However, the output of the main 1999 Gu season cereal crops, harvested until last September, was estimated by an FAO/WFP mission at 135,683 MTs, about 32% below the post war average due to poor rains, pests and displacement of farmers.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Actions

- On 12 April a joint Federation, ICRC and Somali Red Cross meeting was convened in Nairobi to assess the situation and discuss possible interventions. At that time, the Somali delegation and the National Society ascertained that the situation was not alarming even in the north-east and the north-west. However, the meeting agreed that the Somalia 2000 Appeal should be reinforced and updated to allow for any new or emerging circumstances, in particular within the Disaster Preparedness, health, and water sectors. The Head of Delegation has undertaken a mission to Somalia, and feedback is expected by next week.

DJIBOUTI •

The agriculture sector in Djibouti accounts for less than 3% of the gross domestic product. The population is mostly urban and is concentrated in the capital. Agricultural production is marginal and most food is imported. The economy of the country is dominated by its trade activity, based on a port and airport infrastructure.

A severe drought since last May has put more than 100,000 people, or one-sixth of the country's population, at risk of starvation.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Actions

- The RDN has been in regular contact with the National Society to determine if there is a need for Red Cross/Red Crescent intervention. A Federation mission will be conducted this week to assess, jointly with the National Society, the emergency situation, the response so far, and possible Red Cross and Red Crescent roles;
- The National Society has limited capacity, and if there is any need for intervention, then the Federation will need to maintain a presence in order to support the National Society in assuming emergency activities.

CONCLUSION

The situation throughout the GHOA has reached an alarming stage. The Federation's Regional Delegation in Nairobi is actively working with the National Societies of the region to identify and plan appropriate short and long-term responses to food insecurity. Donors are advised to anticipate further information as it becomes available, and are requested to prepare technical, cash, and in-kind support for the forthcoming appeals if and when launched.

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