

ETHIOPIA: DROUGHT

23 August 2000

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period covered: July-August 2000

With adequate and timely donor support, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) and International Federation drought relief and assistance operation continues to be effectively implemented. Distributions in South Wollo are being carried out efficiently, and a second distribution is soon to take place in North Borena. A recent survey carried out recently by the ERCS and Federation has served to underline the poor nutritional status in both locations, and the continued need for more effective targeting of food aid.

The context

Four consecutive years of poor rainfall in Ethiopia have led to drought conditions and minimal harvests. This has had a cumulative impact on households in both pastoral and agricultural communities, undermining coping strategies and leading to greater vulnerability to drought. Many households have been forced to sell their livestock and other assets and some have migrated from their land in search of income and food.

The International Federation issued a preliminary appeal on behalf of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society on 8 April and a revised appeal on 4 May. The revised appeal was for 10.3 million CHF for two operations, one in *South Wollo* to support 77,000 people and one in *North Borena* to support 50,000 people, with a combination of bulk and supplementary food and a range of agricultural, health and water inputs.

Latest events

The belg rains usually occur between February and May but were delayed on average by 6 to 12 weeks, arriving in April and proving to be erratic, unevenly distributed and inadequate. While the belg crop only provides 5% of the national output per year, in some woredas it is the most important source of food. The condition of the crops that were planted is generally quite poor and many areas report a total failure of the belg harvest while in others harvesting of these crops is expected to be delayed until

August or September. This delay has already disrupted the normal cropping pattern and could result in declines in the long cycle maher planting. However, predictions in the Drought Monitoring Centre in Nairobi point to an enhanced probability of normal rainfall during the maher season.

In livestock dependent areas, between 17 to 48% of livestock holdings have perished due to prolonged drought. Late rains in some parts of Borena have renewed pasture and water sources resulting in an improvement in the condition of livestock. However, there are concerns that these will not last until the next rainy season due in October and November.

Due to insufficient relief distributions between January and March and a continuing depletion of assets due to another failure of seasonal rains, the Ethiopian Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) has issued another appeal, raising the figure of beneficiaries by over 3 million to 10.2 million with a requirement for 707,619 MT of cereals from July to December. From the beginning of the year to the end of July, Ethiopia has received 832,232 MT of food aid, 84% of which (694,317 MT) was for the drought relief. In addition, local procurement by the Government of 94,079 MT has also been carried out. The original appeal was for a total requirement for the year of 898,936 MT, but this has now been revised up to 1,282,702 MT. While the overall food pipeline has improved considerably, WFP reports possible shortfalls at the end of the year.

While in general, the nutritional status is stable particularly in those areas where there has been continued and increased food assistance due to DPPC and other agencies' activities, there are several areas where the nutritional status has deteriorated sharply, particularly in Wolleita (North Omo), Shinile (Somali), and Meda Welabu (Bale). These areas are now receiving increased focus, and food is being transported and distributed to avert disaster. Monitoring of these areas and others is being carried out by the DPPC and emergency relief agencies including the Red Cross.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

South Wollo •

The ERCS procured locally another 970 MT of wheat for the second round of distributions and transported it to the warehouses and rubbhalls in Kutaber and Wuchali during late June and early July. Distributions of 12.5 kg. per person were carried out to 31,907 people in Kutaber woreda and 45,687 beneficiaries in Ambassel between the 6 and 19 of July. All beneficiaries have now been provided with ration cards. No supplementary food was provided for this distribution since the first distribution included two months' ration of Famix.

During July, 72 containers of wheat (a total 1,512 MT) donated by the Latter Day Saints Church through the American Red Cross were transported from Djibouti to South Wollo for the operation, and a further 140 MT of famix sourced through the German Red Cross from the local FAFFA factory was transported from Addis up to South Wollo. The third distribution which was carried out from 30 July to 10 August targeted the same number of beneficiaries in the two woredas as in the first and second distributions for the bulk food and, 9,572 in Kutaber and 13,706 in Ambassel of the most vulnerable with 3 kg of Famix per person per month. Some 14,930 people were provided with one month's rations, with 8,348 of those who lived furthest from the distribution points receiving two months ration. One more general bulk ration distribution will be carried out to the belg population of 77,594 before a switch is made to the employment generation schemes.

A draft plan of action has been drawn up for the cash-for-work intervention that the ERCS and Federation intends to start in September. A co-ordinator is currently being assigned to oversee the co-ordination and implementation of these schemes. Woreda and line Ministry authorities have already been informed concerning this intervention and are in the process of preparing plans.

The nutritional survey of the belg kebeles targeted by the operation carried out by a nutritionist consultant hired by the ERCS and Federation shows a surprisingly high level of global acute

malnutrition at 31.3% and acute malnutrition at 3.7% among under fives. Reasons for this high rate were attributed to the child feeding culture of the population and sharing of the supplementary food among the entire household. Given these factors increasing the ration may not be as effective as it should be. Therefore, plans for the branch to undertake nutritional and food diversification education are underway. The Federation intends to resource an extra 140 MT to increase the ration for this group from 3 to 4.5 Kg for the September to December period.

North Borena •

Distributions of 76.6 MT of wheat flour donated by the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to 6,128 beneficiaries and 5.9 MT of BP5 biscuits donated by the Spanish Red Cross to 1,315 children and mothers was carried out between June 21 and 24 in seven kebeles in Odo Shakisso. The distributions were disrupted to some extent by those not on the beneficiary list. In one village, the distribution had to be abandoned for security reasons and a small amount of food was left behind for the villagers to distribute among themselves.

An assessment team, including ERCS Head of Programmes, the Federation acting Head of Delegation, and an American Red Cross Regional Programme Delegate visited Odo Shakisso and Adola Wadera in North Borena and Wolleita in North Omo between July 9 and 13 with the objectives of designing a focus and outlining a plan of action for the ERCS and Federation intervention in North Borena and reallocating the American Red Cross and OFDA contribution of 800 MT of supplementary food.

In North Borena, the team found that the current crisis in food availability was having an increasingly marked impact on the nutritional status of the population. This year's late arrival of the belg rains, which began in mid-April and stopped in May, has caused the expected green maize crop to wither and seed prematurely. In addition, the area planted under belg crops has declined considerably mainly due to moisture stress, the weakened condition of draft animals, as well as the lack of seeds. While both woredas have received bulk ration (though no supplementary food) from the DPPC, this seemed to be inadequate for the needs of the population and those not on the beneficiary list also appeared to be malnourished. This is born out by the nutritional report carried out by the ERCS and Federation which found a rate of 18.6% global acute malnutrition and 1.7% severe acute malnutrition amongst under fives in Odo Shakiso.

A plan of action has now been drawn up to intervene in several of the worse off kebeles in Odo Shakiso and Adola Wadera woredas. Targeting of the food aid is of paramount importance in these two woredas, and the ERCS and Federation will liaise closely with DPPC, woreda administrations as well as community elders and the communities themselves to ensure that the food goes to those in most need. This intervention is to start in the week beginning 28 August and will target 20,544 with five months supply of wheat at 12.5 kg per person per month and 6,163 of the most vulnerable with five months supply of supplementary food at 4.5 kg. per person per month. 1,284 MT of the wheat is supplied by the Latter Day Saints Church through the American Red Cross, and a further 138.6 MT of UNIMIX is supplied through the British Red Cross.

The Spanish Red Cross has also expressed interest (on a bilateral basis) in assisting the ERCS in Odo Shakiso to address emergency and long term needs. This will be co-ordinated around the present operation which will allow the ERCS to deepen its knowledge of the area and communities' needs.

Wollaita and East Harerghe •

The ERCS and Federation are interested in assessing the need of widening the area of intervention given the extent of emergency requirements in other zones not covered by the Federation Appeal. The opportunity of doing this arose because of the need to reallocate the American Red Cross contribution of 800 MT of supplementary food originally assigned for South Wollo (covered by the German Red Cross) which was too large an amount for the operation in North Borena.

Wollaita had come under the spotlight after an Oxfam UK survey showed global malnutrition of 45% and 20% severe malnutrition in the Bolosso Suri woreda of Wolleita district. It was decided to focus on Ofa Woreda where the nutritional status was somewhat better but still of concern and where no other agencies are operating. The American Red Cross bilateral delegate will start the operation with ERCS at the beginning of September.

The ERCS is planning to carry out a one-off distribution during the last week of August to 6,600 beneficiaries in Gursum Woreda in East Harerghe, with 82.5 MT of wheat flour donated by the Iranian, Kuwaiti and the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates. In addition, a further 5.9 MT of high energy BP-5 biscuits donated by the Spanish Red Cross is to be distributed to children under 5 and pregnant women.

Outstanding needs

The funding situation has improved considerably since the last sitrep at the end of June. There is still a shortfall of 790,000 CHF for the completion of the basic operation and an additional 140 MT of supplementary food for the increased ration in South Wollo. The situation is dynamic, and the ERCS and Federation will be reviewing its programme in South Wollo and North Borena in the light of the nutritional report and ongoing operational assessments as well as keeping a very close eye on developments in other parts of the country. While capacity is strained at the moment, the ERCS and Federation does not regard this as a major impediment to further interventions in other geographical areas since extra staff and resources can be drafted into the relief department.

Given the need of some donors for more regular information on the operation, the official situation reports will be supplemented with monthly updates.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Ethiopian Red Cross Society enjoys excellent relations with Government while being totally independent. There is close co-operation between the ERCS, the Federation and the ICRC with regular meetings organized. The ERCS and Federation attend the regular UN/WFP co-ordinating meetings and other workshops and meetings held to share information and co-ordinate responses. While the world's media attention is no longer focused on the Ethiopian drought, coverage of the Red Cross operations still receive national media attention.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>