

SUDAN: DROUGHT

30 June 1997

appeal no. 17/96

situation report no. 5

period covered: 5 April 1997 to 15 June 1997

Due to restrictions of the tendering process for the local purchase of grain to provide food aid to 160,000 Beja nomads could not start as scheduled. In January armed conflict broke out between Government and opposition forces along the Ethiopian and Eritrean borders resulting in Gedaref, Kassala and Red Sea Hills states being declared war zones. No major food assistance was given to the Beja, except for Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) supplementary feeding of 7,500 vulnerable people at six feeding centres -- now closed pending further donation of food from WFP. Oxfam has also provided supplementary feeding to vulnerable groups in its feeding centres and camps for the displaced.

The context

The Red Sea Hills region of the north-eastern Sudan is susceptible to chronic drought. Years of relief food assistance have affected the traditional coping mechanisms of its agro-pastoralist population and created a level of dependency on external aid. The current deterioration of food security in Red Sea Hills became evident in March 1996, when the price of sorghum began to rise sharply and the SRCS early warning system identified a rapid decline in the population's nutritional status.

A Government/NGO assessment in the early summer of 1996 confirmed that the rising prices of grain, the imbalance of trade and the delayed summer rains were affecting nutritional status. Following a Federation/SRCS assessment in late September/ early October, an appeal was launched for CHF 3,902,000 to assist 160,000 vulnerable people with rations of oil, pulses and cereals for three months. The SRCS/Federation assessment team, and an Oxfam team which carried out a parallel assessment, estimated some 240,000 out of the total population of 355,000 to be in immediate need of assistance. It was agreed that Oxfam would assist 84,500 people in neighbouring areas (rural Port Sudan and north Tokar), while SRCS/Federation would cover needs of the remaining 155,500.

Latest events

In mid-April an SRCS/Federation survey was carried out in all four areas designated for the relief operation. The teams reported that the expected widespread famine had not yet occurred, but the threat of starvation was still present and the overall situation was deteriorating. Nutritional data taken during this survey supported these observations.

The incursion by the SPLA/NDA guerrillas into Tokar province seems to have been repelled by the Government forces. International news agencies indicate that tension is again rising along the Sudanese/Eritrean border with troop movements observed by both sides, but this has not - so far - threatened the relief operation.

As large numbers of beneficiaries live in areas still considered war zones, access to Oxfam distribution points is restricted. Oxfam hopes to have clearance if the situation eases, and have, as a result, arranged their distribution to cater for Tokar later in their plans. The revised starting date for this area is 15 July. Should any long term delay occur, it may have consequences on the SRCS/Federation operation, as the distribution of food may spark further population movement as these areas border Federation distribution points in Haya and Derudeb .

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The tendering process for the purchase of 2,000 MT of sorghum was successfully completed, and the contract signed with the winning bidder in early June. This allowed the continuation of tendering for the transportation of foodstuffs.

Transportation of sorghum began on 12 June from Gedaref, Sudan's primary production area, to the main distribution centres for the operation in the Red Sea State. The last shipment from Gedaref was made on 21 June.

The transfer of palm oil and kidney beans from Port Sudan to Sinkat also started. The food planned for distribution in the first month of the operation was in place by 24 June.

The operation started on 26 June in Halaib province, and will start on 1 July in Sinkat. The time-frame is not optimal, with Halaib temperatures getting close to 50°C and 95% humidity. SRCS Port Sudan Branch has recruited the necessary national staff and volunteers, and job descriptions have been elaborated. Federation delegates have conducted training of local staff and volunteers. Two new relief delegates are en route to Port Sudan to assist with distribution and monitoring.

According to local authorities in Red Sea Hills, the situation of the Beja has worsened, and a crisis meeting was held with humanitarian organisations on 19 June. There is growing pressure on SRCS to increase its efforts, but a request to include the urban population of Red Sea Hills in the distribution had to be turned down due to lack of food and resources.

Outstanding needs

Additional funds are needed to cover the costs for this operation, as well as extra food supplies.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The proposed population and nutritional survey that was to be carried out by Oxfam, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, has been postponed. Oxfam has now agreed with the Ministry's proposal to undertake the nutritional survey after the distribution, most likely in mid-July. SRCS/Federation/American Red Cross may add a nutritionist to the survey team.

UNHCR reports that in recent weeks up to 1,000 families have moved from Tokar province to the Port Sudan area. UNHCR and WFP to carry out an assessment of the situation in Tokar province at the end of June.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Despite unforeseen obstacles, SRCS/Federation are now finally in a position to begin this much needed intervention. This has been made possible thanks to the ongoing support of donors and partners. However, the Federation still needs funds to cover costs related to this operation in order to successfully complete its stated objectives. For more information, contact Atoussa K. Parsey, Desk Officer, at (41.22) 73.04.335.

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