

ETHIOPIA: RELIEF AND REHABILITATION

08 May 1998

appeal no. 07/98

situation report no. 1

period covered: 11 March - 30 April 1998

Food security in parts of Ethiopia is deteriorating rapidly, with assessment reports painting an alarming picture of increasing drought conditions, malnutrition and disease affecting large groups of vulnerable people. Response to the International Federation's 11 March Appeal has been poor: without immediate cash and in-kind support from donors it may have to be revised radically.

The context

Food supplies in Ethiopia deteriorated due to the failure of both short "Belg" rains (March to May), and the main harvest rain ("Kiremt") in many areas during 1997. The government's Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) reported 4.2 million people as being in urgent need of food assistance, while another 1.6 million people required close monitoring. Based on these figures, the DPPC asked for 572,835 MT of food aid for Ethiopia in its emergency appeal, released on 28 November 1997.

In view of the ongoing chronic food shortages the International Federation launched an appeal on 11 March 1998, seeking CHF 9.7 million for a Federation/Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) programme to assist 102,000 people in South Tigray and Amhara, with food, health services and agricultural rehabilitation. The emergency assistance programme includes capacity building mechanisms to strengthen the ERCS' ability to respond to disasters.

Latest events

In South Tigray, continuous dry conditions since November 1997 have prompted people to begin migrating to find work and pasture for their animals. In one of the Federation's planned operational areas, Hintalo/Wadjirat, earth dams used for collecting water have dried up and the Tigray ERCS branch has been asked to bring in water tankers to serve the local population.

The poor nutritional condition of children in the north of the country has left some so weak that they face death from malaria, tuberculosis and diarrhoeal disease.

Over the past three months, the movement of fertiliser from the Aseb and Djibouti ports has been given priority over food aid, tying up much of Ethiopia's long-haul fleet. Over 100,000 MT of food is now sitting in Aseb port in unsatisfactory open storage. Donors have voiced their concern, and believe it will now be extremely difficult to pre-position food in remote areas before the Kiremt rains in early June.

This year's short rainy season, particularly in the central and southern highlands, started on time and was well above normal. However, rainfall soon slackened and most of the country received below normal precipitation from early March until mid-April. Some rain has been received during the second half of the month, but it is too early to say if the wilted crop will recover.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

On the basis of Appeal 07/98, the ERCS/Federation have developed a detailed operational plan, which has not yet been implemented due to a lack of support from Participating National Societies.

The Federation Secretariat, country delegation and ERCS have divided tasks and responsibilities, with the former attempting to secure cash contributions, while the country delegation and the National Society concentrate on acquiring assistance in kind — principally food — directly from donor missions in Ethiopia.

To date, major institutional donors (DPPC, WFP, CIDA, EU Food Security Unit, DFiD, USAID, Norwegian Embassy) have all been visited. These visits have established that possibilities of tapping into these sources are minimal as donors are involved in bilateral agreements with the DPPC which has only received 50% of the assistance it requested. The best avenues for support are the EU Food Security Unit and CIDA: the delegation and ERCS are drafting project proposals for support.

Now, two months after the launch of the Appeal 07/97, and with no food or cash in place, a serious dilemma exists. No major preparatory work at the Headquarters or relevant branches can be undertaken (hiring and training of staff, preparation of distribution sites and other logistical necessities), as this would incur cost and raise the expectations of local authorities and beneficiaries alike. Already, regional and zonal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness offices and beneficiaries are putting pressure on the ERCS to start distributions.

Outstanding needs

To date, no in kind assistance has been received. The total coverage of the appeal of CHF 191,800, representing 2%, means that a major revision of the appeal will be needed if the joint efforts of the partners concerned are not fruitful

No delegates for support of this intervention have yet been recruited, due to the slow response.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

UN Agencies

ERCS/Federation maintain close contact with WFP and FAO, especially in terms of sharing information on assessments in the affected regions. As mentioned, the Federation has explored WFP support for the food component of the operation. Although there are no major objections, the proposal would require an official approval of the DPPC, which is presently reluctant to disperse food from its still half-empty reserves.

Governments

As part of its overall resource mobilisation plan, the Federation has had discussions with CIDA, EU, USAID, NORAD, and SIDA on possible donations to the ERCS operation. However, it will be several weeks, well beyond the current emergency phase, before any assurances can be obtained.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. For more information, donors are invited to contact Atoussa Parsey, Desk Officer, on ++4122 7304335, email: parsey@ifrc.org, or Olivera Fatic, ++4122 7304471, email: fatic@ifrc.org

Conclusion

As the situation presented in the emergency appeal is becoming increasingly serious, particularly in the northern part of the country, ERCS cannot delay start up of the planned distribution programme any longer. High expectations have already been created and an immediate decision on the level of Red Cross involvement needs to be taken in order to provide an effective, timely response to vulnerable communities.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Fundraising and Reporting Department

Bekele Geleta
Director
Africa Department