

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## ERITREA: DROUGHT

21 December 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

### In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 1/2004) is being issued based details from a Federation assessment that recommends for the launching of an international Emergency Appeal.

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### The Situation

The prolonged drought in Eritrea has seriously affected agricultural and livestock production, threatening the lives of 1.9 million people. The Red Cross Society of Eritrea<sup>1</sup> has responded to recurrent drought through emergency appeals in 2002 (no. 33/2002) and 2004 (no. 04/2004). The latter Emergency Appeal was completed 3 November 2004. However, poor harvest and a generally bleak outlook for most of the area prompted the Red Cross to reconsider its plans to end their operation in November and so an assessment team was mobilised to review the humanitarian situation, evaluate the operations and propose humanitarian and developmental interventions. The main assessment was carried out in Zoba Anseba and the report is available on request. Meanwhile, in November, a number of relief agencies under the UN umbrella have jointly appealed for nearly USD 157.2 million to fund humanitarian activities in Eritrea in 2005, saying the country had continued to endure the aftermath of war, five years after the 1998 to 2000 border conflict with Ethiopia.

The Eritrean Relief and Refugee commission (ERREC) indicates that their current food stocks - 69,457 MT at end of October - would meet normal rations for 1.9 million beneficiaries but only until the end of December 2004.

<sup>1</sup> Red Cross Society of Eritrea – <http://www.ifrc.org/where/country/check.asp?countryid=188>

## **Eritrea: Drought; Information Bulletin no. 1/2004**

Crop production has plummeted, reaching its lowest level in 2004. Grain prices in the markets are rising, though widespread food distribution has a moderating effect. For example, in Hashishai, sorghum and millet prices rose from around ERN 15 per 4 kg to ERN 30 per 4 kg after the closure of the Red Cross of Eritrea food distribution in 2004.<sup>2</sup> Many farmers told Red Cross staff that their crops died before reaching maturity; the remaining stalks were used as animal fodder. The last reasonable harvest was, depending on area, 1998 or 2000. Household visits confirm that family granaries have not been filled since 1998 or 2000.

Livestock has also been affected as poor rainfall has led to depletion of pasture. People's reluctance to sell animals puts further stress on the environment. When, finally, the animals are sold they are generally in poor condition and their owners' desperation reduces their bargaining power. Thus goat and sheep prices have steadily deteriorated. Livestock mobility has declined. The closure of the borders with Ethiopia and Sudan and the mining of large parts of the border region have severely restricted livestock movements.

The price of pack-animals (camels and donkeys), on the other hand, has been relatively stable, and has risen in some places. In the Keren market, prices of camels and donkeys rose by about 50% over the last year, whilst prices of goats declined by 25%. This reflects the importance of camels and donkeys in collecting water and firewood, two of the most important, and time-consuming, activities of the rural population. Thus the rural community is faced with the reduction of production to a level far below that necessary for subsistence, increasing market prices for grain and decreasing market prices of animals.

Problems are compounded by the direct cost of war (loss of life and personal possessions, injury) and the indirect cost of war (deployment of much of the productive workforce in national service).

This has had a terrible impact on the welfare of the population. Insufficient quality and quantity of water and poor diets have affected the health of children and adults. Nutritional surveys carried out by the Ministry of Health indicate global malnutrition rates of 18.4% (12 cases of oedema) and chronic malnutrition rates of 42.5%. Female energy deficiency is high.

Diarrhoea and Acute Respiratory Infection are the main illnesses reported at the health facilities. Diarrhoea can be mainly ascribed to the poor quality and quantity of water, rather than sanitation practises.

People, very often women and children, spend an inordinate amount of time collecting water. This is tiring, reduces the time spent on other activities, and cuts school attendance. The time and distance involved means that the quantity of water collected is reduced to a minimum. This affects hygiene and many other practises.

People in the rural areas suffer both immediate and long-term problems. Livelihoods are, almost certainly changing irreversibly. Lack of water for agriculture and domestic use constitutes the single biggest problem.

### **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

Following a request by the Red Cross Society of Eritrea, the Federation deployed a team to assist the national society in assessing the emergency drought relief operation. The 12-day assessment was conducted 7-17 December 2004 by a team comprising an external consultant team leader, a water and sanitation specialist from the Norwegian Red Cross, an agriculture and water resources specialist from the Swedish Red Cross, the Health and HIV/AIDS programme officer from the Nairobi Regional Delegation, and staff and of the Red Cross Society of Eritrea who have been involved in implementing the operation.

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<sup>2</sup> ERN = Eritrean Nafka, approximately ERN 13.50 per USD 1.00

The objectives of the assessment were as follows:

1. Make an overview of the humanitarian situation in the country, identifying the most severely affected areas and most vulnerable groups, utilising the food and crop assessment mission report and support planned by other humanitarian organisations and note gaps in the likely assistance.
2. Assess the present humanitarian situation, in particular the food and water situation, after the recent emergency response carried out by Red Cross of Eritrea/Federation in Zoba Anseba using the new needs assessment guidelines.
3. Evaluate what has been achieved to date under the emergency appeal and note lessons learned.
4. Advise Red Cross of Eritrea regarding the most appropriate humanitarian interventions for 2005 based on capacity and recommend additional support required. If appropriate prepare an emergency appeal document including implementation plan and budget.
5. Advise Red Cross of Eritrea regarding the further development of their food security strategy, noting what long term activities have been achieved to date, reviewing other agencies intervention strategies, possible donor funding available and recommend future food security interventions.

Some the major effects of the drought described as the worst in living memory include poor crop yields below subsistence levels leading to dependence on external assistance, increasing market prices for grain, and depletion of pasture leading to deterioration of livestock conditions.

Sale of livestock constitutes the main source of income but most households interviewed reported having lost half of their goats since the start of the current drought; the poor livestock conditions have also decreased their market price. Other coping mechanisms include the collection and sale of firewood, an activity that is gradually leading to deforestation and thereby posing the threat of escalating soil erosion and deterioration of agricultural land. It also contributes to the depletion of ground-water resources through increased run-off. Others include the manufacture and sale of grass mats; reduction in number and diversity of meals; rearing of chickens; and casual labour which is very rare.

These coping strategies are however not sufficient to cover people's needs while some, like sale of livestock and firewood, have obvious implications for livelihoods in both the short- and the long-term.

Lack of water underlies most of the problems faced in Zoba Anseba. Over recent years, seasonal rains have been insufficient to restore the level of groundwater resulting in a steady drop in the water table. Sources are now drying earlier than in previous years and yields have reduced drastically.

The few sources of water are severely contaminated and are shared by both animals and human. Where sources have been protected, the design, construction and maintenance of structures is insufficient. Furthermore, access to these few functioning water points is difficult; people have to travel long distances and at times have to pay for the water.

## **Recommendation of the assessment**

In order to address the immediate and longer term needs the assessment team recommends the following:

### **Immediate Needs**

For the immediate needs an emergency appeal be launched for a target population of 55,000 beneficiaries in Hagaz sub-Zoba. (This is the same group as that targeted during the emergency programmes of 2003 and 2004), through the following interventions:

1. A monthly food distribution to 55,000 people, starting as soon as possible.
2. A one-off seed distribution to 10,000 households in April/May 2005.
3. Water-trucking services in specific cases of emergency.

**Longer-term Needs**

For the longer term needs the assessment team proposed a multi-pronged approach to the problem of water supply and health that would include a number of aspects.

1. Training on livelihood adjustment based on the existing "coaching" system undertaken by the Red Cross of Eritrea.
2. Improvement of water systems requiring assessment of village needs and design and implementation of technical solutions.
3. Promotion of fuel-efficient stoves.

*All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's 2005 Annual Appeal for Eritrea no. 05AA001 - [http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf\\_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA001.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?annual05/05AA001.pdf)*

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