

# ***ETHIOPIA: DROUGHT***

5 July 1999

## ***The Disaster***

Due to the failure of the *belg* (secondary) rains between March and May the food security situation has deteriorated in the northern Ethiopian highlands. This follows poor successive *meher* (primary) harvests in 1997 and 1998, which normally account for the majority of the country's grain production.

On 25 May the Government of Ethiopia issued a new consolidated appeal for people needing urgent food assistance. Excluding pastoralists and IDPs from the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict, the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission have identified 4 million people in need. The government is, therefore, seeking 284,367 MT of cereals for the period from June to December, which will cover the 1999 *meher* harvest. The WFP has just launched a new emergency appeal to cover the needs of 1.2 million of the most severely affected beneficiaries.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

In mid-May, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society (ERCS) and Federation conducted a field assessment in the South Wollo Zone of the eastern Amhara Region that had been particularly hard hit by the failure of the *belg* rains. The two areas of Ambassel and Kutaber were targeted, where 63 and 48 per cent of the population respectively had been affected according to earlier surveys, and 128,387 beneficiaries were identified as needing food aid.

The ERCS is in the process of finalising its Plan of Action for assistance to the affected population in these two areas. A nutritional supplement for the beneficiaries, beyond bulk food which will be provided by the Government through the Consolidated Appeal, is envisioned. A rehabilitative component, aimed at restoring productive capacity through the provision of seeds and farming assets, is also being examined. A strong branch presence in the zone's capital, Dessie, and a sub-branch in Ambassel itself, will be assets in the implementation of the forthcoming Plan of Action.

## ***Needs***

The ERCS is undertaking a further field assessment in the area of South Wollo with support from the Regional Relief Delegate seconded from Nair. The Federation Secretariat has been notified of the situation and it now seems likely that a preliminary appeal, or an appeal, will be issued as soon as sufficient information has been received from the field National Societies will be kept informed of the situation as it develops.

In the Emergency Appeal for 1999 the Federation and the ERCS identified Disaster Preparedness and Response as the main component of the needs for the Society in 1999. It was the anticipation of events such as this drought and other recurrent disasters in Ethiopia that led to this focus for the Federation support to the ERCS. The EA 99 has had a disappointing response so far of only 48 % of the needs of the DPR programme. We would like to emphasise the need to be pro-active rather than reactive in areas as

vulnerable as Ethiopia. We urge that, along with a positive response to this ERCS intervention, increased support be given to the preparedness programmes in the country.

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