

**UNITED NATIONS  
EMERGENCIES UNIT FOR ETHIOPIA**

**Field Trip to Region 3 (South Gonder,  
North Welo, South Welo and Oromyia zones)  
and Region 1 (Southern zone)**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The field trip was undertaken primarily in order to obtain information about starting or ongoing food distributions in the drought-affected weredas of South Gonder, North and South Welo zones, as well as to get a picture of how the Food-for-Work (FFW) or Employment Generating Schemes (EGS) are implemented. It was also to follow-up the progress of the rains in the *Belg* growing areas.

As informed by the regional RRB in Bahir Dar during the previous visit, a green-light was given to all NGOs involved in food distributions at the beginning of April to commence with their assistance. It was assumed that food provisions from the previous poor harvest were now used up. All food aid has to be linked with FFW or EGS activities. There is a broad variety of how this is implemented. Due to lack of necessary inputs like logistics, equipment and skilled supervisors there are only few places where the local administration, the implementing bodies (line ministries or NGOs) and the participants are pleased about the progress of the activities. However, it is emphasized that no food is in practice distributed freely. In North Welo zone, where food was distributed freely due to the prevailing conditions in March, the able-bodied beneficiaries were apparently involved in communal work beforehand, or they have to do it later on.

Regarding the progress of the *Belg* rains a different picture emerges according to the geographical location. As noted on earlier field trips, the onset of the *Belg* rains was satisfactory to good in the eastern lowland parts of the Southern zone of Region 1, North Welo zone and - except for Bati wereda - in all weredas of Oromyia zone. The highland areas of North Welo, South Welo and North Shewa zones received some rains only after the middle of March and the outcome of the *Belg* harvest in these areas is expected to be as poor or worse than that of one year ago. Although the MoA was urging the farmers not to cultivate anymore after this late period and to use the seeds for the *Kiremt* rains, considerable areas were nevertheless planted.

## **2. SOUTH GONDER ZONE**

## **2.1. Relief Activities**

Simada, Tach Gayint, Lay Gayint, Ibnat and Libo Kemkem are currently the five weredas in South Gonder zone, where food assistance is required.

Food for the Hungry International (FHI) is covering Simada (54,607 benef.) and Tach Gayint (30,000 benef.) weredas, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) Lay Gayint (55,270 benef.) and Libo Kemkem (8,300 benef.) and the Ethiopian Relief Organization (ERO) Ibnat wereda (50,000 benef.).

FHI has started the first round of distributions in Simada and Tach Gayint weredas, but the distributions had to be suspended before the election week-end (May 7).

ERO has started the distributions in Ibnat wereda at the beginning of April. The FFW activities are implemented and according to the ERO representative in Bahir Dar the operation is going on smoothly.

EOC is ready to commence distributions in Lay Gayint wereda. The wereda administration retained the list of beneficiaries until after the elections. For the first round carry-over stock from 1994 will be used. One third of the beneficiaries will receive the rations in the satellite distribution point of Zagotch (61 km north-west of Nefas Mewcha). Employment Generating Schemes (EGS) will be implemented by the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee along with the line ministries. Although the food pipeline for the following distributions is unclear, the local EOC relief coordinator hopes that food can be pre-positioned in Zagotch before the start of the *Kiremt* rainy season. Otherwise the food rations have to be fetched in Nefas Mewcha, which would include for the beneficiaries long walks (two to three days) as well as dangerous river crossings. The same situation applies for part of the beneficiaries of Tach Gayint and Simada weredas.

EOC still has some carry-over stock from 1994 in Ibnat wereda. Since the food is on the spot EOC wants to distribute it there. ERO is opposing the plan. The matter is still pending with the regional RRB.

## **2.2. Visit to Simada wereda**

Simada wereda is located south of the Chinese road between Debre Tabor and Nefas Mewcha. The wereda main town of Wegeda can be reached from the Chinese road on a rough dry weather road (53 km).

The wereda is comprised of 44 kebeles (incl. town). Ten percent of the area are highland, 30 percent mid-highland and 60 percent lowland. The administration estimates the total population at 218,000 of which 133,000 (35 kebeles) are considered in need of food assistance.

The zonal Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee has - after the latest assessment - accepted food assistance for 54,600 beneficiaries. EGS are planned for 12 kebeles.

FHI is the distributing agency and is maintaining three distribution points in the wereda (Wegeda, Mewcha Robit and Sede). All three distribution points are inaccessible for vehicles during the *Kiremt* rainy season.

The bad harvest last year resulted from early withdrawal of the *Kiremt* rains, various plant pests, damage through hail storms and frost in the highland areas.

Although no records of migration figures were available the problem is of great concern to the wereda administrator. He mentioned three types of migration that are taking place:

- 1) Traditional migration: Heads of families, who are moving to the bigger towns of Gonder, Gojam or the southern parts of the country for daily labour,
- 2) Stress migration: Entire families who have sold all their belongings and move to the nearest main towns in order to beg for food
- 3) Heads of families who leave for the south-western part of Ethiopia in search for a future place to live. Once they have found a suitable place, they will return to take the rest of the family and any belongings left and leave their homestead for good.

The wereda administration is worried, particularly regarding the third category, and is convinced that with appropriate development measures the conditions could be improved. The relief and related FFW activities of FHI are highly appreciated, but the wereda is expecting developing activities, that will get the population out of the chronic food dependency.

### **3. NORTH WELO ZONE**

Through early intervention with the zonal RRB's carry-over stock from 1994 and additional food allocated by the regional RRB to the highland weredas conditions have improved somewhat. For the time being the expected large-scale stress migration movements did not occur.

The eastern lowland weredas of Kobo, Gubalafto and Habro are in acceptable condition. No food assistance is required in these weredas.

The zonal administration and RRB are urged to start implementing the EGS, but the necessary inputs like various equipment and skilled supervisors are not available.

Once again the zonal RRB representative was pointing out that his staff and as well the line ministries are not able to fulfill their tasks because of lack of logistics. As an example he mentioned the assessment teams who have to travel to the weredas with public and private transport. Everybody familiar with the geographical setting of the zone will agree that a minimum of logistical means have to be available.

#### **3.1. Relief Activities**

In order to defuse the precarious conditions occurring in the highland weredas of Bugna, Gidan, Meket, Dawnt, Wadla and Delanta, the regional RRB has allocated 2,600 MT of relief food for immediate distribution. EOC has started the distributions in Bugna, Gidan and Meket weredas.

The regional RRB has allocated the following food quantities for the highland weredas:

Bugna:	1,890	quintals
Delanta:	696	"
Dawnt:	6,620	"
Gidan:	3,138	"
Meket:	3,752	"
Wadla:	10,336	"

The allocation per wereda was done by the regional RRB which was criticized by the zonal RRB representative. It is totally unclear to him how the regional RRB came up with an allocation of only 696 quintals for the badly affected Delanta wereda. On the other hand he was informed by the RRC Combolcha warehouse, that CONCERN had agreed to supply Delanta wereda with a one-time allocation of 10,000 quintals.

### **3.2. Visit to Meket wereda**

Meket wereda is located in the western part of North Welo zone. The wereda main town of Filakit is on the Chinese road and except for the eastern lowland weredas it is the only wereda capital with an all year link to the zonal capital Weldyia. The wereda is comprised of 41 kebeles (32 kebeles lowland, 9 kebeles highland). The total population is estimated to be around 270,000 with 70,000 inhabitants living in the highland, the rest in the mid-highland and lowland. The wereda administration considers 205,000 persons as in need of food assistance. The zonal early warning committee came up with a figure of 100,000 affected persons after their latest assessment carried out in February. The regional RRB has accepted the number of 71,600 persons to be assisted in 1995.

The reason given for the unfavourable conditions are poor harvests during three consecutive years caused by insufficient rainfall, hailstorms and frost in the highlands.

At the time of the visit RRB as well as EOC were distributing food rations in Filakit. In order to spread the food to as many beneficiaries as possible, the wereda administration decided to distribute half-rations only.

Migration is taking place. No records of the actual number of people moving away is kept. However, it is mostly the head of families who are moving to the lowland towns of Kobo, Weldyia and Mersa for daily labour. The administrator was unable to comment on how much is related to stress migration or to traditional migration.

### **3.3. Displaced populations**

Whereas the zonal RRB and the administration were mostly paying attention to defuse the precarious conditions in the highlands at the beginning of this year, the zonal RRB representative was addressing another burning issue, which should not be forgotten: the rehabilitation of the thousands of displaced, who mainly stay around the eastern main towns of Kobo, Weldiya and Mersa. This category includes ex-servicemen, de-settlers, returnees from Sudan and elsewhere as well as mostly women and children expelled from Eritrea/Assab. The problem is becoming chronic and except for irregular food hand-outs for the most needy ones, there is no budget for rehabilitating these groups. The issue has been brought repeatedly to the attention of the regional RRB and administration in Bahir Dar, without reply so far.

At the end of April the zonal RRB was informed by the regional government of the arrival of 300 families of returnees from Sudan destined for Weldiya. With already all the resources concentrated of the drought victims, the zonal RRB is not in a position to help the newcomers with the necessary assistance.

#### **4. SOUTH WELO ZONE**

After the middle of March 1995 the *Belg* rains were finally starting in the central parts of South Welo zone. Although there was a minimal amount of rainfall, the farmers were nevertheless sowing mostly barley seed. Warnings by the extension agents of the MoA that it may already be too late for a good *Belg* harvest went unheard. There is a fear that the maturing state of the crops may coincide with the onset of the *Kiremt* rains. As farther north, there is a belief among the farmers that late *Belg* rains would be followed by late *Kiremt* rains, so they are taking the chance.

Relief distributions are ongoing or starting in the worst affected weredas. Like in North Welo zone, the situation compared to last year is reversed. The eastern weredas, which were mostly affected at the beginning of 1994, are better off this year and the problems shifted to the highland areas in Central and Western South Welo zone. Everybody from RRB to the wereda administrations insists that the food distributions are going along with FFW activities or EGS according to the new policy. Practically however each wereda seems to have its own idea of how FFW or EGS should be carried out and there seems to be no systematical approach behind it.

##### **4.1. Relief Activities**

RRB, SCF/UK and ERCS/IFRC are transporting and distributing food aid in the weredas of Mekdela, Wegedi, Debre Sina (SCF/UK and RRB), Legeambo (SCF/UK), Tenta (ERCS/IFRC and RRB), Legehida (RRB). The RRB is receiving food from the RRC central store in Nazareth. The zonal RRB representative could not yet specify the total amount to be received from central RRC, but deliveries were already on the way (Wegedi). The RRB is filling the gap which is not covered by NGOs. It is crucial for all above-mentioned weredas to bring in the food before the onset of the *Kiremt* rainy season since afterwards the roads will be inaccessible until the end of September.

## 4.2. Visit to Sayint wereda

Sayint is among the most remote and difficult accessible weredas of South Welo zone. Adjibar, the wereda town is 185 km from Dessie (a seven-hour bone-breaking trip with a 4WD vehicle). The first 140 km follow the Dessie -Mekane Selam road, the remaining 45 km are currently being improved under a labour intensive rural road project financed by the government.

The wereda is comprised of 63 kebeles(10 highland, 15 lowland, 38 mid-highland). The 10 highland kebeles are *Belg* dependent. The wereda has, according to the latest wereda census, 213,572 inhabitants. Half of the population is in need of food assistance. The zonal RRB accepted a figure of 51,000. SCF/UK is providing two-months rations to 51,000 beneficiaries. Nine kebeles have already received the rations.

For the time being no FFW activities are in progress, however, the able-bodied food aid recipients are expected to be involved in community activities. No specific plans were mentioned.

The poor conditions in the wereda are due to the complete failure of the *Belg* harvest during two consecutive years. Last year's *Meher* season was poor too. The *Kiremt* rainy season started off with above-normal rainfall which caused flooding. Hail and early withdrawal of the rains were additionally reducing the *Meher* crop production.

Migration is taking place, but no record is kept. It is mostly the heads of families who move to Dessie or Addis Abeba for daily labour. The wereda administration has no indication of how much is related to stress or traditional migration.

No NGOs are active in the wereda. SIDA was surveying the area recently, but the wereda administrator was not aware of the nature of the survey.

Besides tackling the current food crisis, the wereda administration is trying to get assistance in the field of development. It is clearly acknowledged that the food deliveries of SCF/UK is helping to save lives, but development assistance is needed urgently to get the wereda out of its isolation and dependency. Water, communication, transport and health are mentioned to have first priority.

## 4.3. Visit to Wegedi wereda

Wegedi is another wereda comparable with Sayint's conditions. It is equally remote, south of the Dessie - Mekane Selam road.

Until last year Wegedi was part of Debre Sina wereda. 13 kebeles were added from Kelala wereda. The wereda has 57 kebeles with 145,500 inhabitants. The entire wereda is in the mid-highlands. *Belg* crops are not of importance.

According to the wereda Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee, 86,315 persons are drought-affected. The zonal RRB accepted a figure of 40,595 beneficiaries. SCF/UK is providing two-months rations for 40,000 beneficiaries.

Additional food aid is arriving from the central RRC store in Nazareth. The food provided by the RRC is not sufficient to cover all the beneficiaries registered by the wereda. During distributions in Wegedi town, also non-registered people show up, demanding food aid. In order to solve the problem the wereda administrator suggested that non-registered beneficiaries should also receive food on an ad-hoc basis. His idea was turned down by the SCF/UK monitor and the RRB coordinator. They urged the administration to register properly any further people and request more food assistance from the zonal RRB in Dessie.

As in the neighboring weredas, migration is taking place. The wereda administration is trying to set up a system throughout the wereda in order to register migration movements. There is still in-migration of de-settlers. At the beginning of May 105 persons who returned from Wellega reported at the wereda administration asking for food assistance.

No NGO is present in the wereda. As in Sayint wereda, priority for development activities should be given to communication, transport, water and health. Water availability is not the problem, but it is contaminated and causes diseases. Four water points were constructed by OXFAM some years ago, but are out of use.

## **5. OROMYIA ZONE**

The Oromyia zone is definitely better off compared to the situation one year ago but parts of Bati wereda are in bad condition and immediate food assistance is required. The remaining weredas are in satisfactory condition.

SCF/USA, which was bringing in food for their development activities in Senbete wereda, was urged by the zonal administration in Kemise to refrain from distributing food since the people have sufficient means to feed themselves.

The Cheffa plain (between Kemise and Karakore) which was used last year as a grazing ground for cattle owners from near and far, is now practically empty. This is another indication that the conditions in the area are good.

## **6. SOUTHERN ZONE (REGION 1)**

A visit was carried out to the *Belg* dependent lowland weredas of Alamata, Chercher and Mehoni. At the time of the visit (May 5 - 7) regular heavy rains were observed in the Alamata/Korem area. Alamata wereda seems to be well off this year.

Chercher wereda, already farther away from the escarpment, is in less favourable conditions. 65 percent of the planned cultivation area was covered with sorghum, but the agricultural wereda officials fear that insufficient rainfall will cause important yield losses.

The conditions in Mehoni wereda are mixed. The *Belg* rains had a very slow onset. The teff sown after the first rains started to wilt. The fields were ploughed again and

after the rains continued the farmers are cultivating sorghum now. The teff sown later is currently in good condition.