

## POOR BELG SEASON IN WEST AND EAST HARARGHE JUNE 1997

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### **Introduction and Background**

As part of its regular monitoring activities, the Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia (UNDP-EUE) carried out a quick assessment in West and East Hararghe zones of Oromyia (Region 4) during the second dekad of June (16 - 21 June 1997), including also a brief visit to Shinile Zone of Somali Region (Region 5). The objective of the mission was to obtain general information on the overall situation in Hararghe, focusing particularly on the short *belg* season in an area where the food economy is mainly based on cereal production and livestock of secondary importance. In addition, cash crops like coffee and chat represent a significant economic input, resulting generally in a comparatively wealthy society: tin roofs cover many houses in Hararghe, delivering a shining testimony of the relative well-being of the inhabitants. Nevertheless, pockets of structural poverty and food insecurity continue to persist, mainly in those woredas which are not entirely located in the highlands, but which have sections at midland and lowland altitudes.

In order to get an update on the current situation the mission visited the Bureaux of Agriculture, the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureaux (DPPBs), the Shinile Administration at zonal level and woreda administrations in Doba Woreda (West Hararghe) and Gorogutu Woreda (East Hararghe). Moreover, in Asbe Teferi (Chiro), Dire Dawa and Harar the mission also contacted NGOs such as CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Hararghe Catholic Secretariat (HCS). Finally, in Harar the DPPB for Harar Region was visited as well.

In both West and East Hararghe zones the *belg* season accounts for about 5 % of the overall annual agricultural production (reflecting the national average), although in some woredas and areas the percentage might be higher. The *belg* rainy season usually takes place from the end of February to mid-May. The short season crops include barley, wheat, haricot beans and oats while the major *meher* (long) season crops are sorghum and maize, which together account for up to 80 % of the total grain production. Generally, the highlands have both *belg* and *meher* production, while the lowlands depend on *meher* only. Coffee and chat, as mentioned above, are Hararghe's important cash crops.

## West Hararghe

The start of the *belg* rains this year were delayed by three weeks in the entire zone. Moreover, according to the records of the DPPB and the Bureau of Agriculture in Asbe Teferi the amount and distribution were rather poor. In the highland areas agricultural production is assumed to be acceptable (due to delayed harvest no specific data on *belg* production is available yet), although in some pocket areas of the highlands (e.g. Tulo) waterlogging and landslides led to crop losses. The situation in the midland and lowland areas is clearly worse as the lack of rain hampered land preparation for the long cycle crops. In general in the highland areas this years *belg* season will certainly not be as favorable as in 1996.

The occurrence of armyworm was noted in all the ten woredas of the zone but the Bureau of Agriculture has the outbreak well under control, having sufficient supplies of pesticides to spray and using traditional control methods. As a major problem in this context, only the lack of adequate field vehicles was mentioned. In addition to armyworm, stalkborer has affected pocket areas in the lowlands of Doba, Kuni and Tulo.

For cash crops (coffee and chat) no problems were recorded so far, although it is too early in the year to exclude the possible later occurrence of Coffee Berry Disease (CBD).

While the *belg* season this year is very likely to be classified as “poor”, overall no serious emergency conditions were to be noted during the time of the survey, an impression which is also supported by CARE’s field observations. However, pockets of vulnerable areas persist where the situation is clearly aggravated by the *belg* failure, with the months of July and August representing a particularly critical period in terms of food security. Therefore a continuing relief assistance to people in need is imperative.

In its December 1996 appeal (as well as in the May 1997 update) the central DPPC established for West Hararghe 39,700 food aid beneficiaries, requiring a total of 3,573 MT of food assistance. These figures, however, were increased (with approval of the central DPPC) in June because, in addition to the previous five woredas (Darolubo, Boke, Mesella, Doba, Meisso), a sixth woreda, partly highland, partly lowland - Gubakoricha with 7,924 beneficiaries - was included in the list. There after a new population number of 47,673 requiring an amount of 4,450 MT relief food from July to December 1997 was established for West Hararghe Zone. According to the 1994 census, the zone had a total population of 1,268,916, living in 265,450 households. This means that out of the census figure 3.76 % of the population in the entire zone are currently identified as in need of relief assistance.

Looking at a longer perspective, the DPPB in Asbe Teferi anticipates that in 1998 the woredas of Chiro and Kuni might also need relief assistance.

### Serious problems in Doba Woreda

As a sample “problem-woreda” the mission visited Doba, which is located in the north-eastern corner of the zone, comprising altitudes from highlands over midlands down to lowlands, and has a population of 92,000 (census 1994). Access is difficult, but Doba town can be reached by 4WD vehicle: Three kilometers East of Hirna (on the Asbe Teferi - Dire Dawa main road) is a turn-off, from where a rough track winds up for seven kilometers to end in Doba town.

According to the woreda administration, the *belg* season in Doba accounts only for 3% of the overall food production. While there was clearly a shortage of rain in the lowlands (“too late and too little”), some higher areas had apparently suffered from waterlogging and landslides due to heavy precipitation. Cash crops in this woreda are of minor significance: only a modest production of coffee is taking place, while a little chat is produced for local consumption. As compared to other woredas, the population of Doba has little cash income and only very limited purchasing power to cope with food shortages created by unfavorable weather and crop production conditions.

According to the administration, of the 28 kebeles in Doba Woreda 16 kebeles are “affected to various extents by unfavorable conditions” while the remaining 12 kebeles were described as being “severely affected with no agricultural production at all”. Unfavorable conditions affecting the food security prevailed in this woreda last year when 14 kebeles in the lowlands were affected by armyworm while the other 14 kebeles in the midlands and highlands were, like this year, troubled by waterlogging and landslides.

In addition to these natural conditions affecting food production, the woreda suffers chronic man-made problems. Ethnic tensions between the Oromos, the native people of Doba, and the neighboring Somalis of the Issa clan have existed for “a long time”. As reported by the Doba administration, incidents of Somalis coming through Afdem (Shinile Zone, Somali Region), just at the northern boundary of Doba Woreda, happen “quite frequently”. The last incident took place one week prior to the missions visit when it was reported that unidentified Somalis, who might have come “as far away as from Djibouti or Somaliland”, again crossed into Doba again to loot cattle. Moreover, a number of women were raped and two girls abducted and not seen again. Due to ethnic conflict, an unspecified number of people seem to be internally displaced, having lived originally in the kebeles of Misra Chifrah, Oda Bultum and Ifadin. Equally, food insecurity is leading in some parts of the woreda to displacement. In one famine affected lowland kebele for instance (Belisuma), 22 families were displaced while among the remaining population eight malnourished children and 35 severely malnourished adults (“so weak that they cannot walk”) were registered. Reportedly 9 children had died of famine, woreda officials stated.

The official (at zonal and central level) approved amount of relief food for Doba woreda comprises 410.7 MT of grain for 3,356 beneficiaries (3.65% of the 1994 census). According to the woreda administration this number did not reflect the actual needy population, which was put at 36,170 people (almost 40% of the woreda population!). Apparently the woreda administration submitted a report on this

situation to the zonal authorities in Asbe Teferi, which were about to launch a DPPB assessment during the time of the missions visit.

### **East Hararghe**

The picture in East Hararghe was similar to West Hararghe, where production is based on roughly 70% crops and 30% on livestock. The *belg* rains also started three to four weeks late in East Hararghe and the distribution and amount were also poor. CARE, which is based in Dire Dawa and operational in four woredas (Bedeno, Kurfachale, Gerawa and Gola-Adena), reported that as of the second dekad of June *belg* crops of wheat and barley were just at flowering stage, whereas 80 % of the long-cycle *meher* crops of sorghum and maize had grown only to knee-high. In the remaining areas land preparation and *meher* planting had just started.

The poor *belg* season was also confirmed by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Dire Dawa, which is operational in soil and water conservation and employment generation schemes in five woredas of East Hararghe (Kombolcha, Fedis, Gorogutu and Meta) and in Dire Dawa and Harari Regions. As in West Hararghe, also in East Hararghe the vulnerable population groups are mostly to be found in the lowland areas where the lack of good rain has had its most severe impact. Both CARE and CRS pointed out that the next few weeks would be crucial for agricultural production: If rainfall patterns improve then the deficiencies in the *meher* crop development might be considerably alleviated. This also applies for Dire Dawa Administrative Region, which has 29 Peasant Associations (PA's) out of which 7 PA's are having problems with sorghum and maize cultivation due to the lack of rain.

Cash crops in East Hararghe, mainly chat and to a lesser extent coffee, seem not to be very much affected by the lack of rain. First of all, because chat is a rather drought resistant plant, and secondly because if any irrigation activities are taking place at all, than they are implemented to the benefit of chat.

As a result of a late start of the rains, the *belg* harvest in most areas of East Hararghe was just about to start at the end of June. The area planted in wheat and barley, the main *belg* crops, was also limited due to the late poor rains. Although no significant livestock losses have been reported, milk production has declined due to the shortage of fodder.

Armyworm has affected all 15 woredas of East Hararghe, although to different extents. Most affected seem to be lowland areas. According to the Bureau of Agriculture, 14,585 hectares of cropland (6,155 hectares of maize and 8,430 hectares of sorghum) and 25,538 hectares of grazing land had been infested. Through chemical and traditional methods the situation was brought under control although the Bureau pointed out that from the day of the visit (19 June) pesticide stocks would only last for one more week. Requests for more supplies had been forwarded to the Oromyia Department of Agriculture. As a major problem the Bureau mentioned its limited logistic capacity (*inter alia* lack of adequate field vehicles).

In general, this *belg* season was described as being the worst in the last three years. The Bureau named seven woredas where food security is apparently seriously affected: Kersa, Bedeno, Gola-Adena, Kurfachele, Jarso and - to an even more serious extent - Gorogutu and Melkabelo. In the latter two woredas poor food accessibility has apparently led to stress migration and internal displacement.

The central DPPC quoted in its December 1996 appeal for East Hararghe a number of 31,200 food aid beneficiaries in five woredas (Girawa, Bedeno, Gursum, Babile, Kombolcha) requiring an assistance of 2,341 MT. These figures were updated (including additional woreda of Kersa) in May to 35,100 people needing 2,634 MT food assistance for the current year. In early June, after further assessments of the East Hararghe DPPB, the number of beneficiaries was, with the approval of the central DPPC, increased again to 58,113 who would need between one month and four months of relief support. xxx of 2,010 MT (of which about one third was already transported to the woredas by the time of the visit while the rest was pending). New on the list are Melkabelo (15,018 beneficiaries), Gola-Adena (5,000 benef.), Gorogutu (6,855 benef.) and Kurfachele (6,500 benef.) bringing now the number of woredas needing food assistance to seven (while Kombolcha, Babile and Gursum have been taken off the list). Taking the 1994 census figure for East Hararghe (1,695,984 people), currently 3.43% of the population are identified as in need of food relief.

The DPPB pointed out that in the woredas requiring food assistance quite a number of areas - notably in Gorogutu and Melkabelo, from where cases of malnutrition and poor physical appearance of people are reported - suffer from structural deficits. This general condition was aggravated by the unfavorable weather patterns in the first half of this year. While it is too early to come up with an overall annual food production estimate, the numbers of people requiring food aid might increase. This assumption is also shared by NGOs such as CRS, which forecasts even the possibility of doubling the current numbers of beneficiaries.

#### Structural Deficits in Gorogutu Woreda

Among the woredas in need of food relief intervention Gorogutu was given first priority by the zonal DPPB. Therefore the mission included Gorogutu as a sample woreda in its field visit.

The woreda, located in the north-western corner of East Hararghe, has now due to out-migration an estimated population of 100,000 (1994 census: 105,719) in a total of 28 kebeles (26 PA's and 2 towns). The two towns, both located on the Asbe Teferi - Dire Dawa Highway, include Karamile, the woreda capital, and Boroda. As the woreda administration pointed out, in the highland areas and in most of the midland areas some difficulties were reported with late and poor rains having a negative impact on *belg* crops such as wheat and barley. Further reported were soil degradation, waterlogging and landslides in some areas between January and April and the occurrence of armyworm, which has now been brought under control. But 13 kebeles, located mainly in lowland areas and depending on *meher* production only (mainly maize and sorghum but also some sweet potatoes) are apparently suffering from "severe problems" having had no rain at all this year and with a bleak prospects

for long cycle crops since land preparation was hampered. This food insecurity aggravates the persistent problems of structural underdevelopment and poverty of the area which, in addition to food insecurity, lacks potable water and health care and few cash crops. Transport and communication are equally poor, as many of those areas are accessible only by foot or donkey.

The 6,855 beneficiaries officially approved for Gorogutu represent 6.86% of the population. However, woreda officials claim the percentage of people in need to be higher.

Accompanied by a Field Officer of the woreda's Bureau of Agriculture, the mission went to visit Yeka-Aman kebele (also referred to as Wacho), which ranges from midland to lowland and is located 9 kilometers north of Boroda. While the main village is situated just at the upper limit of the *Kolla* agroecological belt (at an altitude of 1800 meters), the kebele, having an estimated population of 4000 xxx, stretches further north into the very lowlands (*Berha*) adjacent to Shinile Zone of the Somali Region. Milk and sorghum are staple foods in most areas of the kebele but since the condition of livestock is poor due to the lack of adequate pasture, cattle are giving hardly any milk while the prospect for sorghum crops, as mentioned above, is bleak. Since "malnutrition is common", as the nurse from the local health post put it, some relief food (no records on amount available) was distributed in the first week of June. Apparently the 80 % food for work (rural road maintenance, terracing etc.) - 20 % free distribution (for elderly and children) ratio is being implemented without problems. The nurse quoted a number of 130 cases of malnutrition a month (marasmus, also the protein deficiency kwashiorkor), affecting mainly children.

At the time of the visit sorghum and maize in the fields around Yeka-Aman were just between ankle and half knee high, whereas at the same time a year ago the crops had reportedly reached already 110 to 120 centimeters. The village also cultivates some chat and coffee, mainly for local consumption. During the visit to a household where ten people live (parents, grandfather, seven children), no food stocks were found. Currently the family can afford only one meal a day (injera prepared from sorghum and barley), as the one family member present said (the others were out on food for work activities or collecting fire wood to sell in Boroda. The family has one oxen, one cow (ploughing animals), one calf - the cows milk production is significantly reduced. Key informants described this families situation as "typical" for this kebele.

"We are facing problems for many years", village elders said, "but this year is the worst". As a result, reportedly some people of the kebele migrated either to look for daily labour in neighboring Erer (Somali Region) or to settle further away in Bale (possibly as far as in Delo-Mena) seeking better land. This year so far 37 families have migrated from Yeka-Aman to the Bale area.

## **Harari**

In Harar, the mission also took the opportunity to visit the Harari Regional DPPB. While in 1996 the DPPB and NGOs together had distributed a total of 572 MT of relief food, the central DPPC had anticipated initially in its December 1996 appeal that this year only close monitoring was required focusing on 11,000 people. In the DPPC's May update these people were re-classified as beneficiaries, requiring a total of 990 MT for the current year. The figures were confirmed by the DPPB during the visit (19 June). Last years *meher* season was hampered by excess rainfall and water logging. This year leaf blight and armyworm are affecting the crops, although the armyworm infestation, which had occurred on 1000 hectares of maize and sorghum in Harari Regional State, has been put under control by the Bureau of Agriculture.

Interesting to note is a trend mentioned by the Hararghe Catholic Secretariat (HCS) of farmers in Harari and East Hararghe apparently reducing food crop production in order to have more land available for chat cultivation.

### **Shinile (Somali Region)**

The administration of Shinile Zone (Somali Region) resides in Dire Dawa. The reason is obvious as Shinile town, although nominally the capital of the zone, has no major infrastructure. Located on the Dire Dawa - Djibouti rail line about 11 kilometers north of Dire Dawa, Shinile used to be a trading town, though not to the same extent as Dire Dawa. Since trafficking of "contraband" was prohibited, the town lost momentum and gives now the impression of a sleepy village, where nomads pass through on their way to Dire Dawa.

The population of Shinile Zone is predominantly nomadic, covering with their herds every year large distances between Djibouti, "Somaliland" and the areas of Shinile Zone adjacent to the boundaries with Afar and Oromyia Regions. With the exception of the railway and a few rural roads, transportation facilities within the zone are inadequate, as one can experience driving on the pitiful track connecting Dire Dawa with Shinile. Education facilities in the zone are very basic (primary level) while health services are described as being poor (one health center in Erer, nearest major hospital in Dire Dawa). Water seems to be available in all districts (deep and shallow wells), but lack of pumps hamper irrigation efforts. Moreover, availability of clean, potable water is limited in most urban centers.

Three of the zone's seven woredas are undertaking agricultural activities, which overall represent only 15% of the zone's rural economy while the major part is based on pastoralist activities. These three woredas are Erer, Dembel and Shinile, where maize, sorghum, vegetables and fruits represent up to 40% of rural economy. Agricultural extension programmes, including irrigation schemes, input of seeds and fertilizers, are going on here and there, supported by NGOs such as Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The mission visited Berak, located some 10 kilometers northeast of Shinile where LWF reactivated, in December 1991, an irrigation project initiated earlier by UNHCR to help returnees from Djibouti. With a comprehensive spring development providing perennial water supply both for human consumption and irrigation, LWF is now enabling the community of Berak to run a nursery (mangoes, papayas, bananas, oranges, coffee, flowers, forest trees) as well as cultivating maize and sorghum fields and orange plantations. The project might serve as model of a

successful sedentarisation of a previously nomadic group. Some Somali speaking women living in Berak and working on the plantations, asked about their change of lifestyle: “We are very happy living permanently in one place. And we still have something from our old life left: we kept our animals.”

## **Conclusion**

Although both zones of Hararghe are relatively wealthy due to important cash crops such as coffee and chat, pocket areas remain (predominantly in the lowlands), where structural problems, currently aggravated by a poor *belg* season and generally unfavorable climatic conditions, create vulnerable groups. This year’s trend seems to be clear. The numbers of people needing food aid intervention (3.76 % of the population in West Hararghe, 3.43% in East Hararghe) have gradually increased. While the continuous efforts of Government agencies and NGOs to address structural problems deserve further support, the donor community should be encouraged to respond to appeals directed to ensure the food security of people in need.

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