



ANREAS HATTINGER/Austrian Red Cross

## The last few drops of muddy water

**EAST HARARGE ZONE, OROMIYA REGION:** Two of the four water catchment sites with earthen dam walls in the area have gone totally dry. At the third pond, a woman hovers ankle deep in the mud trying to scoop up water with a *kile* made from a gourd.

There isn't much left but in the end she's filled her yellow jerry can, approximately 20 litres. The water is thick with mud and it's almost inconceivable that this can ever be considered drinking water for human consumption.

"I will boil the water when I get home," she says. "Earlier, we used to have chlorine tablets to purify the water but there are no more tablets available."

Boiling the water will not clean it unless she's able to filter it between at least three clay pots over a period of days. Besides, boiling 20 litres of water will take approximately one kilo of firewood, of which there doesn't seem to be much around.

The land is almost totally flat as far as the eye can see. There is some shrubbery here and there and the occasional acacia tree. Thorny branches have been woven together to protect the pond from animals; this is for humans only.

"The coping mechanisms here are truly amazing," says Andreas Hattinger, the FACT team's water & sanitation expert from the Austrian Red Cross. "These people are used to getting by with whatever is available. In that sense, there is nothing we can teach them. But we can still provide assistance in the form of materials, tools and equipment."

The woman was sitting by the side of the road, resting before the two-hour walk back to her village, as the team took off to inspect the next and final water catchment site in the area.

There was more water there and more people, scooping up equally muddy water, competing with each other and the animals surrounding the pond. Among the villagers was a man of about 40 who had come with his wife and their seven children to find drinking water. He said he had sold all of his livestock and had come to the pond to find "something to eat and drink".

After this, he said, there was nothing for his family – no water, no food, no work.

"I must migrate to another area," he said. "I hope we can find something there."

### A turn for the worse

Once again, Ethiopia is facing a serious food crisis. Ethiopian Red Cross assessment teams and the Federation's FACT mission (Nov-Dec '09) to four areas found hundreds of thousands of people who are in urgent need of food support. Predictions for the coming spring harvest indicate a low yield, coming on the heels of failed rains in 2009. The Federation and the ERCS have identified 330,621 beneficiaries for 12 months, starting in the coming weeks.

# Targeting 250,000 of the most vulnerable

The Ethiopian Red Cross, supported by the International Federation, aims to support up to 250 thousand people in fourteen districts with food aid, as well as providing recovery support in additional two districts.

The support will mainly be in the form of food assistance, provision of seeds, fertilizer and water & sanitation. An emergency appeal for a total of CHF 30,579,088 (USD 28.7m or EUR 20.8m) has been issued by the Federation on behalf of the ERCS.

The targeted districts were selected following a series of thorough assessments undertaken by the ERCS, the Federation's FACT team and others from the end of November into mid-December 2009. Further assessments will be undertaken in coming weeks to monitor the deteriorating situation in the country and prepare for any eventuality.

**Oromiya Region:** In *East Hararge Zone*, the ERCS will target 106.842 people in six districts. The proposed support includes food rations, maintenance of wells and water catchment ponds, seeds, agricultural tools and fertilizer for work. Additionally, ERCS plans to construct a set number of latrines in each district and promote health and good hygiene.

In the districts of Shalla and Siraro in *Arsi Zone*, the targeted population numbers 84,055. Again, this will involve food provision, seeds, fertilizer (for work), water catchment schemes and potentially the trucking of potable water into certain areas.

**Amhara Region:** In the North Wollo Zone, the ERCS is targeting a total of 64.435 people in one district. This calls for distribution of food, seeds, fertilizer and the maintenance of shallow wells and water catchment ponds.

**Tigray Region:** In the Atsbi Wombera district, the ERCS will provide recovery support to 6,500 households with a population of 32,298. This will involve provision of seeds, fruit tree seedlings, agricultural tools, rehabilitation of water points and fertilizer. Tigray has a history of fruit growing, both for nutritional supplement and marketing but in recent years, adverse weather conditions and increasing poverty have reduced this activity. Another innovative input will be the provision of beehives for the production of honey to approximately 10% of the households

In all instances, fertilizer will be provided in exchange for work, mostly related to the rehabilitation of water ponds and the construction of new ones. Fertilizer, which up to now has only been available to farmers from the relevant government agency, will be set at for 0.75 hectares – 0,5 ha for cereals and 0.25 for pulses. The total population of the selected districts is over two million people.

**Recovery projects** in Moyale and Negele districts in Oromiya and Somali Regions, and in Welayita in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, SNNP). These are essentially to follow up drought-related food security operations in Welayita and Moyale/Negele (2008-2009).

The initial response was food aid to the worst affected populations in the areas, as well as some support to early recovery through the provision of seeds and seedlings for the agricultural communities in Welayita. In the predominantly pastoralist districts of Moyale and Negele, the recovery centres on livelihood support and the rehabilitation of water sources. Neither area has yet recovered; both are yet again in risk of acute food insecurity.



Federation/ANDREI NEACSU

## The vicious cycle

About 16% of the population in Ethiopia live on less than 1 dollar per day (2008). Only 65% of rural households in Ethiopia consume the World Health Organization's minimum standard of food per day (2,100 kilocalories), with 42% of children under 5 years old being underweight.

Most poor families (75%) share their sleeping quarters with livestock, and 40% of children sleep on the floor, where nighttime temperatures average 5°C in the cold season.

The average family size is six or seven, living in a 30-square-meter mud and thatch hut, with less than a hectare of land to cultivate. The low productivity of agriculture leads to inadequate incomes for farmers, hunger, malnutrition and disease. These highly vulnerable farmers have a hard time working the land and the productivity drops further.

But overall, people's health in the cities is better than in the rural areas. Birth rates, infant mortality rates, and death rates are lower in the city than in rural areas owing to better access to education and hospitals. Life expectancy is higher at 53, compared to 48 in rural areas.

Despite poor sanitation being a chronic problem, access to improved water sources is also greater in the cities, 81% compared to 11% in rural areas.



ANREAS HATTINGER/Austrian Red Cross

# No point in plowing the fields

**WEST ARSI ZONE, OROMIYA REGION:** Nearly half of the crops failed and the rains continue to be erratic, at best. The population of Siraro district, nearly two hundred thousand, are facing hard times. 96% of them base their livelihoods on tilling the land. In the neighbouring Shalla district, the story is the same.

The *belgh* (spring) rains came late this year (2009) and only lasted for a few days instead of the usual two months, ruining the *belgh* harvest which normally produces around 20% of the annual crops. There were no seeds to plant for the *meher* (autumn) rains which in a normal year secure up to 80% of the annual grain consumption. The nutritional status is deteriorating rapidly. There is acute water shortage across the district with outbreaks of malaria and AWD. The health services cannot cope.

## Two pieces of bread

A widow with three small children is preparing lunch for her family in a traditional hut. The meal consists of two pieces of bread and a clump of green leaves she had gathered in the bush. They're not greens normally eaten in these parts: when there is nothing to eat, the resourceful resort to gathering leaves and roots wherever they may be found.

The widow said her government-provided grain ration, which was supposed to last for a month, had only lasted two weeks. While waiting for the next ration, she was eking out a living for herself and her children with whatever came her way. Her neighbours are in the same situation and have not much to share.

But while there is an acute water shortage in the area (half of households have no access to potable water), there is plenty of water in the river bordering the next region, a 45-minute walk away. The river, however, has traditionally sustained the lives of people on the other side who feared that an influx of people and livestock would cut the feet from under them. Conflict arose briefly, costing no lives. But the distance means that the drop-out rate from the local school has risen dramatically: the children are the ones to fetch water.

## 60% drop-out rate

"The government in this area is unable to provide any school feeding, which is common in rural areas," says Johan Köhler, the FACT team's recovery expert from the Swedish Red Cross.

"This is contributing to the growing drop-out rate, which is between 33% and 60%. The trouble is that if students don't pass their end-of-year exams, they'll have to start over, so the drop-out could be permanent," he says.

There could be more permanence in the making. The FACT team found that up to 40% of households had been abandoned by people seeking shelter and assistance from relatives and friends.

And the future looks bleak – farmers have neither seeds nor fertilizer for the coming season. With no government assistance in sight, the team estimated that nearly 200,000 people in the region were in immediate need for emergency food and water.

## Rising tensions

Farther down on the lowland, in the Shalla district (population 160 thousand), the situation is much the same. And tensions are growing. There is a lot of shouting and arguing among the nearly 100 people gathered at a water catchment pond. The arguments are over who gets how much water and who is next in line.

"You can only have one can of water. Do not take two or the rest of us will have no water," shouts one man from the village of Mitu Binsho, waving his stick in the air. His 20-litres will have to sustain him and his family of six for two days. He doesn't need much water for his animals any more, he's already lost seven out of nine.

What little individual households can grow barely pays for their drinking water. Fourteen out of every fifteen bushels of grain goes to pay for water. The only available option is to walk three hours to the water pond, hoping there is still some water left.

## The impact of climate change

# Poverty is the main obstacle to adapting

A recent study\* indicates that more than a third of rural Ethiopian households in the Nile River Basin have not made any adjustments to their farming practices in the face of global warming. The study showed that the Afar, Somali, Oromiya and Tigray regions were more vulnerable than other large regions, which had greater access to technology and markets, larger irrigation potential and higher literacy rates. These are the regions now facing massive difficulties related to persistent droughts.

Research suggests that the climate change threat in Africa is greater than many parts of the world. On average the continent is 0.5°C warmer than it was 100 years ago, in some parts even more. And the changes will not just be limited to a rise in average temperature. Droughts and floods are compounding the continent with increasing severity and frequency.

In 2007 Ethiopia ranked no. 171 out of 182 on the UNDP's Human Development Index (2009 HDI report). Like many other countries in the Horn and Eastern Africa, Ethiopia has been hit by severe weather conditions in recent years, first by a series of drought and then by floods. Some of the worst floods occurred in 2006, displacing almost 200,000 people and forcing them into camps which are a breeding ground for infections, including HIV/AIDS. It is believed that the severity and frequency of these types of disaster will increase.

Dr. Abebe Tadege, Head of Meteorological Research and Studies Department at the National Meteorological Office in Addis Ababa, says: "There have been signs of climate change in Ethiopia since 2000, and even before. Tropical Africa is a hotspot for precipitation changes."

The consequences of droughts and floods has serious implications for the economy and food security since rain-fed agriculture accounts for half the country's gross domestic product (GDP), 60% of exports such as coffee, and 80% of all employment.

Poverty is a major obstacle for farmers in Ethiopia to adapt to climate change, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told a national climate conference in Addis Ababa in early 2009.

"The poor do not have the necessary technology and resources, in terms of money and so on, to be able to change and adapt. The injustice of the whole issue of global warming and climate change lies in the fact that those who have contributed nothing to its genesis will suffer the most from its consequences because they have the least capacity to adapt to these changes," PM Zenawi said, adding:

"However unjust it might be we have to adapt or die. We can only succeed to adapt to climate change if we fight poverty effectively and generate the resources needed for the purpose. Climate change is thus an additional reason why sustained and fast economic growth is a matter of life and death for our country."

In 1950 Ethiopia's population was 18.5 million, in 2009 estimated to be over 82 million and projected to reach 173 million by 2050.



Federator/ONIAR VALDIMARSSON

## No rain, no food

Food shortages and malnutrition have been a chronic problem in Ethiopia for decades for a relatively simple basic reason: the economy revolves around agriculture, which in turn relies on rainfall which is erratic – and even more so in recent years. Millions of Ethiopians, therefore, rely on food aid from the international community. Agriculture accounts for almost half of GDP, 60% of exports, and 80% of total employment.

Various efforts have been made to find sustainable solutions to the food shortages. In 2004 the government began a programme to move more than two million people away from the arid highlands of the east in an attempt to provide a lasting solution to food shortages. This followed severe droughts in 2002 which led to a 3.3% decline in GDP in the following year. After a decent harvest in 2008, the situation has again taken a turn for the worse.

The spring rains in 2009 were poor and further deteriorated the already precarious food security situation. Humanitarian assessments indicate that the number of people in need of emergency food supplies rose from 4.9 million in January to 5.3 million in May and then to 6.2 million in the last quarter.

The situation was further compounded by shortage of emergency resources, forcing the Government and humanitarian partners to reduce ration sizes of food items. In addition, port congestion in Djibouti and limited trucking capacity resulted in delays both in in-country arrival of food as well as distribution.

The autumn (*meher*) rains came late in 2009, if at all, causing further concern for the food security situation during the first half of 2010.

Surveys conducted throughout the year indicated a serious nutritional situation. Out of the 6.2 million people estimated to require emergency food assistance towards the end of 2009, an estimated 78,058 children under five were expected to require treatment for Severe Acute Malnutrition (1.5 per cent of the population).

\*<http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/dp/ifpridp00806.asp>

## North Wollo

# The empty breadbasket

North Wollo in the Amhara region, north of Addis Ababa, used to be Ethiopia's breadbasket, producing an abundance of crops that was shipped across the country. In 1974 the area was hit by a severe drought which killed half of its livestock and quarter of a million people. North Wollo has never fully recovered. Agricultural production has been consistently low, while the population has grown exponentially to 1.7m. The Ethiopia/Eritrea conflict was a further costly drain on already limited resources. Migration out of the area towards Addis Ababa and other major cities has been constant. In short, there is too little land (national average land holdings are approximately one ha per farmer, in the highlands only 0,7 ha) for too many people scraping by on subsistence farming.

## Two days of rain

Now, only three out of 13 districts in North Wollo had good autumn rains. In some districts it rained for two days instead of 2-3 months. The rivers running through the zone have also slowed down – some to a trickle. The harvests have failed, one after the other.

"Wherever we went, the fields were empty. Assessments show that some districts have lost up to 80% of their crops, others at least 50%. One old man said that he had not seen anything like this for many years," says Kassahun Habte Mariam, the ERCS's food security officer, who lead the FACT team in the zone. "This year is like some of the worst in our recent history."

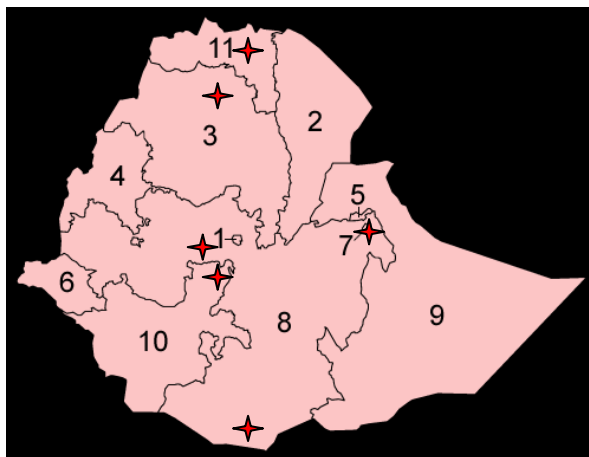
## Migration

So far, however, both people and animals look healthy. Last year's harvest was exceptionally good. Malnutrition in children does not register above what could be considered normal, there have been no outbreaks of diseases and school feeding continues in some areas. But now farmers' stocks are depleted. As 2010 rolls around (2002 according to the Ethiopian calendar), there will be no food in North Wollo. The young and able bodied are taking no chances – over the last year or so at least 2,500 young Wolloans have headed for Saudi Arabia, looking for work.

## They need food!

In the markets of Kobo District, food prices are on the rise and livestock prices falling. "This shows that farmers are increasingly bringing their animals to market, trying to generate cash to feed their families. The average price for cattle has dropped by two thirds since last year," says Kassahun Habte Mariam.

The government tries to help those in the dire straits, providing food rations in the lowland areas where people have lost all. In many cases, the support is in the form of 50 birr (US\$4) per person per month. For a family of five, that comes to 20 dollars a month. "You cannot get anything for 250 birr," says Kassahun. "They need food!"



The nine regions and two chartered cities of Ethiopia: 1. Addis Ababa, 2. Afar, 3. Amhara, 4. Benishangul-Gumuz, 5. Dire Dawa, 6. Gambela, 7. Harari, 8. Oromiya, 9. Somali Region, 10. Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, 11. Tigray. Proposed operational areas marked with a red star.

## Recovery support essential

While food security operations in the southernmost parts of Ethiopia in 2008-2009 provided essential assistance to the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities, neither area has fully recovered. Both are yet again in risk of acute food insecurity.

It has become abundantly clear that the needs for further recovery assistance are great. The district, where people are relying on their livestock for their livelihoods, faces a constantly deteriorating situation where the pasture lands cannot sustain the cattle herds. With the nationwide failure of the autumn rains, both the pasture lands in Moyale and the crops in Welayita, one of Ethiopia's most densely populated districts, are insufficient to support the populations.

The ERCS, supported by the Federation, propose to provide further livelihood recovery support these districts. By improving water access, diversifying and protecting livelihoods, communities are supported in recovering to a situation in which they can support themselves. In the pastoralist areas, this will involve provision of motorized mills, rehabilitation of water catchment sites, training of community animal health workers and provision of veterinary starter kits

Support in agro-pastoralist areas will focus on the rehabilitation of water points, provision of seeds and agricultural tools and beehives to selected households.

In the SNNP Region there will be a small scale construction of water catchment and cistern facilities as well as provision of beehives to selected households.

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