



ICRC

UPDATE

Geneva, 24 April 2003

ETHIOPIA

Over 700,000 people affected by drought and conflict receive urgently needed aid

Executive summary

- As a result of failed rains over the past two years, at the end of 2002 Ethiopia was again facing the spectre of famine. The Ethiopian government and the United Nations estimated that food production in 2002 was 20% lower than the national average of the past five years, and crop failure was as high as 90% in the worst hit areas. The ICRC's own surveys in August, October and November 2002, which focused on farming families living in areas affected by drought and armed violence, confirmed the dire situation. The shared fear was that, without the timely provision of food and seeds, in 2003 Ethiopia could face a famine potentially worse than that of 1984, which killed nearly one million people.
- In response, the ICRC, in cooperation with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, launched a preventive emergency action, providing food and seeds for over 700,000 people suffering the effects of both drought and insecurity. Beginning in October, some 9,000 tonnes of food have been delivered to over 100,000 semi-nomadic farmers - dependent mainly on livestock - in Afar and the neighbouring Shinile zone of the Somali National Regional State (SNRS) where tribal clashes had escalated because of the scarcity of water and pastureland. Some 5,000 families who grow crops also received seeds. In February, the ICRC began distributions of food and seeds to some 600,000 beneficiaries in Erob in Tigray, Eastern and Western Hararghe in Oromia and Sidama and Wolayita in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS). In these areas, some 1,600 tonnes of high-quality seeds for planting ahead of the first rains in April have been delivered, as well as some 13,100 tonnes of food to ensure that families in the hardest hit regions are not forced to consume or sell the seeds to survive. The spring rains – a key factor for the programme's success - have arrived, but it is too early to judge whether they will be sufficient for a good harvest. The ICRC will continue to distribute food aid in the worst affected areas until the harvest in August – November in Erob, and to monitor the situation closely. If the rains fail, the ICRC is ready to respond to new needs.
- This preventive emergency action has been one of the biggest logistic operations carried out by the ICRC in recent years. Warehouse space was rented in 14 locations to house some 55,000 tonnes of goods. Over 150 trucks were needed to deliver the aid. In the crucial month of March, just before the start of the rainy season, some 1,700 tonnes of seed and 13,500 tonnes of food were distributed to over 700,000 people in mainly remote areas of the country. Close and effective cooperation with the Ethiopian Red Cross has been a key factor in the smooth running of the programme. Some 30 ICRC expatriate and

200 national personnel have been working alongside over 400 Ethiopian Red Cross staff and volunteers.

Humanitarian situation

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the United Nations Human Development Index. The main factors for this are a dramatic annual population growth of about two million people, an underdeveloped national economy reliant on rain-fed agriculture, and a decline in international market prices for coffee – Ethiopia's main export. The 1998-2000 war with Eritrea further hampered the country's development. In addition, Ethiopia has been increasingly hard hit by recurring drought, which is at least partly due to a rapid deterioration of the environment. Against this backdrop, some 60% of the population is permanently living at a minimum subsistence level and is extremely vulnerable to the adverse effects of drought. Even in drought-free years, Ethiopia is reliant on international humanitarian aid.

In recent years, the Ethiopian government, with the help of international organizations, mainly UN agencies, has developed a national Early Warning System to detect signs of possible deterioration in the country, in particular food shortages. In the second half of 2002, the indicators pointed towards a crisis. The severe shortage of rain in 2002 meant thousands of farmers did not produce sufficient crops to feed the population. Nomadic farmers living with their livestock in already harsh, semi-arid environments experienced a drastic reduction of water and pastureland for their animals. This scarcity of resources sparked additional tension, sometimes even violence, between ethnic groups. Owing to the cumulative effects of repeatedly poor rainfall and an underdeveloped economy, many farmers were on the verge of destitution. They lacked food, as well as seeds for the next planting season in 2003, and their animals were dying.

In early December 2002, the Ethiopian Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission (DPPC) appealed to the international community for aid in areas particularly at risk. In reply, the Ethiopian government, together with many international organizations and NGOs, launched a massive preventive aid action, aiming to provide food to prevent famine, as well as seed to restore agricultural production to acceptable levels in 2003.

ICRC response

With over 20 years of experience in Ethiopia and a strong commitment to helping its people, the ICRC, together with the Ethiopian Red Cross, launched a large-scale, emergency preventive action to provide food and seeds for over 700,000 people who were living in drought-stricken, insecure regions, and whose needs could not be met by the government or other organizations (Update REX 02/951 17.10.02, Update REX 02/1222 16.12.02 and Budget Extension Appeal REX 03/53 13.01.03). In December 2002, on the basis of independent assessments and consultations with national and local authorities, the Ethiopian Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations, the ICRC identified 600,000 people in the following areas who needed aid urgently: Tigray/Erob in the north; Eastern and Western Hararghe in the east; and Wolaiyta and Sidama in the south. Prior to this, the ICRC had launched an emergency food aid programme in October for 100,000 mainly semi-nomadic farmers in the Afar/Shinile area in the north-east. All the targeted regions were suffering from the consequences of internal armed violence, disturbances or tension among various groups. The adverse effects of the drought threatened to inflame tensions. The selected areas, therefore, corresponded well to the ICRC's mandate.

The main aim of the ICRC action has been to provide high-quality seeds in time for farmers to plant for the first 2003 rainy season, enabling them to produce food and regain a level of self-sufficiency. In addition, rations of cereals, pulses and vegetable oil, along with soap, have been distributed to families in the worst-off areas to ensure they would not have to sell or consume the seeds to survive and their health would not deteriorate up to the harvest in August – November in Erob.

Aid distributions on schedule

The ICRC action is running as planned. Distributions began in the Afar/Shinile area in October 2002 and in February 2003 in the other targeted regions.

To date, the ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross have delivered over 1,700 tonnes of seed and 13,500 tonnes of food to some 600,000 people in 101,000 households in 46 different distribution sites in the areas of Tigray/Erob, Eastern and Western Hararghe in Oromia and Wolyaita and Sidama in the SNNPRS. At this time, it is planned to continue to distribute monthly food rations in the hardest hit areas until the short-cycle harvest in August 2003.

In the Afar/Shinile area, 8,424 tonnes of food and 75 tonnes of seed have been delivered to some 117,000 people, mainly semi-nomadic farmers, at 62 sites during five rounds of distribution. On the basis of continuous monitoring, the ICRC has adapted its programme to better meet the needs of people in the area. The initial plan to distribute four rounds of food aid was extended to a fifth round, which has just been completed, to see the beneficiaries into the *Belg* rainy season. In addition, the number of 100,000 beneficiaries was increased in response to changing conditions, for example an influx of people into the Shinile zone in December 2002 in search of pasture and water for their livestock. As well, given that a large part of the population in the Mieso district (Shinile zone) and Argoba district (Afar region) grow crops, in March the ICRC provided 5,000 families in these areas with a one-off parcel of maize and sorghum seeds.

Seed quality and timing crucial to success

The quality of the seeds provided is a crucial factor for the programme's success. ICRC agronomists put a great deal of time and effort into identifying the local varieties of high-quality, short-cycle seeds best suited to Ethiopia's very complex and diverse geography and climatic patterns. In addition to maize and sorghum seeds – main staple foods in Ethiopia – the ICRC also included haricot-bean seeds, which have a high nutritional – and market – value and improve the soil, being a free and natural fertilizer. The ICRC procured the seeds from specialized, private Ethiopian companies. Although providing the required quantity and quality of seeds was sometimes a challenge for these companies, this approach had the advantage of supporting the local economy and guaranteeing that the most suitable local varieties were chosen for different areas, promising the best possible harvest. The seed selection was closely coordinated with local agronomists in the field and approved by the responsible Ethiopian government bodies – The Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Inputs Authority. Reactions from local farmers indicate they are very satisfied with the quality of the seeds.

Another key factor has been the timing of the seed distribution. The *Belg* rains were expected to start as early as March. The ICRC and the Ethiopian Red Cross managed to deliver the seeds to the farmers in time for planting, despite significant logistic challenges and a short time frame of just three months from the inception of the action in late December.

Positive impact to date

The final impact of the ICRC preventive emergency action can only be judged after the result of the harvest, following the main rainy season, in August 2003. The ICRC action has, however, already produced some positive results. It has helped to stabilize the nutritional and economic situation of the people most in need in the targeted areas, and contributed to easing tensions that were aggravated by the food and water shortages. The UN's Emergency Unit for Ethiopia reported recently that the food security in the Afar region was improving. Another positive effect has been the stimulation of the economy and labour market through the local purchase of many of the goods.

Prospects and exit strategy

The weather forecast for the rainy seasons in April and June varies (Drought Monitoring Centre Nairobi and Ethiopian National Meteorological Service), but the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture has already reported a substantial improvement in most areas compared to last year. In the SNNPRS, locals say the current rainy season is the best in four years, and many farmers have planted the seeds provided by the ICRC. In contrast, rainfall has been light in Tigray and Eastern Hararghe, and erratic in Western Hararghe.

Assuming there is sufficient rainfall, short-cycle crops will begin to mature in June, providing families with their main staple food. In the Afar/Shinile area, the first good rainfall would trigger the almost immediate recovery of pastureland and water points essential for the survival of livestock – the main economic asset of the predominately nomadic population. The ICRC's emergency preventive action would then be considered complete and the responsibility for meeting the ongoing, chronic need for food aid in Ethiopia would be handed back to the DPPC. If the rains fail in some ICRC-targeted areas, adjustments would have to be made. On the basis of information from its own monitoring system and in coordination with the Ethiopian government, the ERCS and international organizations, the ICRC is reviewing its action, and a decision on the possible extension of aid distributions will be taken by mid-May.

Monitoring

In each targeted region, a team has been set up to monitor the effects of the drought and the impact of the ICRC aid distributions. Targeting the most needy families continues to be a challenge in the face of claims that all people in the areas have been affected. The teams have been visiting villages regularly to confirm that the most vulnerable people have received the aid and that it has been used appropriately. On the basis of the teams' reports, steps have been taken to ensure the aid has the maximum positive impact. Regular discussions have also been held with local authorities to develop a better understanding of the ICRC's action and its goals.

Personnel and logistics

This preventive emergency action has been one of the biggest logistic operations undertaken by the ICRC in recent years, requiring extensive and careful planning and coordination. Some 30 ICRC expatriate and 200 national personnel and 400 Ethiopian Red Cross staff and volunteers have worked together to ensure the smooth running of programme. In addition, more than 500 daily workers were hired, mainly to load and unload goods. Warehouse space was rented in 14 main locations to store some 55,000 tonnes of food and seed, with over 125 trucks needed to deliver the aid to mainly remote areas.

Water, health and environmental projects reinforce aid distributions

To reinforce the benefits of the emergency distribution of food and seeds to over 100,000 people in the Afar/Shinile area, the ICRC is now launching a community health programme in the region. Modelled on its successful project on behalf of the semi-nomadic population in the Afder zone of the SNRS, the ICRC will select and train 20 community health workers to diagnose and treat the most common local diseases and provide hygiene and health education in areas where access to basic health care is poor. In response to severe water shortages, 7,788 cu. m. of drinking water have been trucked into Borricha and Sidama in the SNNPRS since late January, benefiting 90,000 people, and vital water points have been repaired in Eastern Hararghe. In other areas targeted by its preventive emergency action, the ICRC plans to initiate some small-scale environmental protection projects in May, including kitchen gardens, improving water catchments and promoting energy-saving stoves to counter deforestation.

Humanitarian coordination

Throughout the planning, preparation and implementation of this emergency action in Ethiopia, the ICRC has been in regular contact with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and worked very closely with the Ethiopian Red Cross at the national and field level. With a network of local branches covering the whole of the country, the Ethiopian Red Cross has been an invaluable partner, providing in-depth knowledge of the situation in the targeted areas. Its long experience of aid operations and the dedicated work of its members have been crucial in carrying out this programme. In the Amhara and Oromia regions, the ICRC and the Federation supported each other's actions to provide aid for drought victims.

The ICRC has also maintained close contact with the Ethiopian national and local authorities, in particular the DPPC. In addition, regular meetings were held with other international organizations and NGOs working in the region, such as the WFP, Unicef, Save the Children Fund, Care and

Goal. These efforts will continue in order to coordinate activities and optimize the impact of humanitarian programmes.

For further information, please contact the External Resources Division.