



FOCUS ON Ethiopia

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Focus on Ethiopia is produced by UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in collaboration with other UN agencies and partner NGOs. Focus on Ethiopia provides a monthly overview of humanitarian trends and activities in Ethiopia, as well as focusing on particular issues of interest. Send comments, suggestions and contributions to ocha-eth@un.org

IODINE DEFICIENCY "THE SILENT EMERGENCY" ¹

By Michelle Langdon

The large round mass that bulges from Abebe's neck is the lead weight that threatens his future. The 10-year-old suffers from a goiter, caused by Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD).

¹ All data can be found in the document: *Iodine Deficiency Disorders National Survey in Ethiopia (2005)*, conducted by Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute (EHNRI), Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) and UNICEF.

The affliction is easily prevented but impossible to treat once developed.

An estimated twenty-eight million Ethiopians suffer from IDD. The disorder poses serious health risks for pregnant women and their unborn babies. It is the world's leading cause of preventable brain damage and mental retardation. IDD has been virtually eradicated in the industrialized world, yet the prevalence rate in Ethiopia remains shockingly high, estimated at up to 83 percent of women and children.

While the problem is devastating, regular use of iodized salt constitutes a simple prevention. "The amount of iodine needed over a lifetime is equivalent to a mere teaspoonful," Says Dr. Iqbal Kabir, a nutrition expert from UNICEF. "Prevention costs less than a cup of tea."

IDD poses a particular risk to women and children. The prevalence of goiter in Ethiopia increased from 26% in 1981 to 40% in 2005 with rates as high as 63% among children in some areas. It is the cause of approximately 50,000 pre-natal deaths of Ethiopians each year. A mother with IDD suffers from a high risk of spontaneous abortion and/or still birth. The survival of her child after birth is put in



jeopardy. Iodine deficiency is also the world's leading cause of negative and irreversible effects on brain development. This is particularly true in early childhood years, resulting in potential IQ reduction of up to 15 points and in extreme cases may result in cretinism and mental retardation.

The highland populations of Ethiopia are particularly susceptible to the disorder because iodine is missing from the soil. Run-off from the highlands causes the earth to lose minerals. Soil degradation from floods and over-farming also puts local populations at risk.

In 2007, a rapid assessment was conducted by the Federal Ministry of Health to identify iodine deficiency "hot-spot" areas in 5 regional states -- Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray, SNNP and Beneshangul Gumuz. This rapid assessment identified approximately eight million people with moderate-to-severe cases. Resettlement sites and migrant areas appeared to be much more vulnerable to iodine deficiency for reasons that have yet to be clearly understood.

While regular use of iodized salt will provide adequate protection less than five percent of salt available in Ethiopia is iodized. And the situation is deteriorating. "A decade ago approximately 80 percent of households had access to imported iodized salt," says Kabir. "Ethiopia now falls well below global IDD standards."

A Universal Salt Iodization (USI) campaign for Ethiopia was developed by the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) with a start date of November 2006, though it has yet to be implemented. In an effort to restart the process, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Mines and Energy along with its partners in the USI campaign, UNICEF, Micronutrient Initiative, and Ethiopian Health and Nutrition Research Institute, have conducted a salt mapping survey to determine the number and location of salt producers and their capabilities in Afar Region, Ethiopia's primary salt-producing region. The results are being finalized and the group is working to obtain the required equipment to iodize all domestically produced salt in order to implement the USI program. Discussions are underway between officials at the FMOH, the regional state and salt producers in the Afar Region. Ninety percent of the salt consumed in Ethiopia currently comes from the Afar and their cooperation is imperative to finding a sustainable solution to the problem.

In the meantime, nutrition experts believe there is an urgent need for an interim relief strategy to prevent the irreversible effects of iodine deficiency. A plan has been developed by the Nutrition Unit of the FMOH, in collaboration with UNICEF, to provide iodine supplementation targeting *kebeles* in the five regions with highest goiter rates: Amhara, Oromiya, Tigray, SNNP and Beneshangul Gumuz. The intervention can be channeled through the current Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS)

programme in order to minimize costs and maximize efficiency and access. However, the government/implementing actors lack the resources necessary to carry out this strategy. The cost of an iodine supplementation program is estimated to be \$1.3 million, targeting over three million women and children. According to Dr. Iqbal, "Any further delay in providing supplementation will put 300,000 newborns a year at risk in these hotspot areas."



REGIONAL OVERVIEW

SOMALI

Ongoing military operations in Fik, Warder, Korahe, Gode and Degehabur zones have resulted in reduced humanitarian access. The regional government has imposed a strict prohibition on trade in contraband goods coming from Somalia, which has reportedly resulted in shortages of basic commodities, as well as price inflation. Concerns remain that restrictions on commercial trade and rising food prices could lead to a humanitarian crisis among pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in Somali region unless restrictions are lifted soon. The situation could further deteriorate with seasonal floods and poor health conditions. Dialogue between Government and humanitarian partners on the provision of humanitarian access, monitoring of assistance, and support for health interventions is ongoing. Particular concerns include protection of women and children in the zones of military operation, availability of food, and Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD) and other health issues.

There is growing concern about increasing cases of AWD, particularly in Sagag and Degahmadow woredas. There are also reports of AWD in Kebrebayah of Jijiga zone. There are increasing reports of malnutrition in the five military zones.

Approximately 9,600 tonnes of relief food was allocated in June for 530,000 beneficiaries in the region. To date distributions of some 4,000 metric tonnes of food are ongoing in three zones (Afdar, Liben and Shinile). Dispatch has started to the other five zones in the region. As of 3 August, 291 metric tonnes of food had been dispatched to



Warder zone and loading of food for Korahe, Gode and Degehabur is ongoing.

Meanwhile, *gu* assessments have been completed in Shinile, Jijiga, Afder, and Liben zones, as well as in the five zones under military operation. Findings are expected to be available in August.

The outbreak of unidentified camel disease in woredas of Afder and Liben has now significantly subsided in all but Hudet woreda of Liben Zone where the disease continues to spread unchecked.

Severe water shortages are being reported from Gorobakaksa in Afder and Hudet in Liben where herds are being forced to make distress migration outside their woredas. In Hudet, the shortages are so serious that emergency water trucking for human consumption has started.

Approximately 4,000 refugees from South and Central Somalia have recently been granted refugee status by UNHCR and the government's Authority for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA). Out of which, a total of 1,549 refugees were relocated from Kebribeyah to the reopened

Teferi Ber camp, 72 km from Jijiga between 13 –19 July. This relocation will continue at a rate of approximately 500 people every three days until all 4,000 refugees have been moved. An estimated 7,000 additional Somalis, who also claim to have fled fighting and insecurity in their home country, are waiting to be screened in Haritsheik, Jijiga zone.

Pre-implementation screening activities for the Enhanced Outreach Strategy have begun on 28 July in Jijiga, Shinile, Liben and Afder zones. Actual implementation has also started at the beginning of this week in most woredas and is planned to take about seven days.

AFAR

The food security situation has remained of concern due to poor performance of the *sugum* rains in most parts of the region.

The *sugum* rains began later than in previous years; although the rainfall was expected in late February, apart from scanty showers in zones 1 and 3, the rains did not begin until mid-April. This unexpected dry period adversely affected most zones in the region.

As result of poor *sugum* rains and scarce moisture conditions, water availability in most parts of the region declined drastically compared to previous years. Serious water shortages have also been witnessed in chronically water deficit woredas such as Elidar of zone 1; Dallol and Berhale of zone 2; and Yalo and Teru of zone 4.

Grassland and browse conditions have deteriorated in most areas apart from the seasonally flooded kebeles of the Awash basin in zones 1 and 3. Fodder scarcity was severe in Dallol and Abaala woredas of zone 2, Ewa and Aura woredas of zone 4, Chifra and Mile woredas of zone

1 as well as Dewe, Telalak and Dalifage woredas of zone 5. Pastoralists in these areas have been forced to move livestock away from their normal rangelands to adjacent regions, as well as to zone 3, where pasture is not as scarce. Following the start of the *karma* rains, water availability has improved, pastures are reviving slowly and conditions of small ruminants and camels are recovering.

Recovery of cattle, however, is likely to take longer. Thousands of cattle that out migrated to neighboring regions have now gone back to their areas.

Poor pasture and water availability has led to the decline in physical condition of livestock, significantly decreasing marketability and productivity. As a result the preliminary *belg* findings anticipate that Chifra and Mille woredas in zone 1, all woredas apart from Teru in zone 4, Telalak and Dewe woredas in zone 5 and Abaala woreda in zone 2 require emergency food assistance for an estimated 45,800 people over and above those currently receiving PSNP benefits, for 3 months from August to October 2007. The PSNP continues to play a stabilizing role for the food security situation in the region, providing food aid to 472,000 people.



Huge price fluctuations have been observed in zones 2 and 4: crop prices in Abaala and Yalo markets have risen by as much as 300 percent, while livestock prices have fallen by as much as 72 percent compared to the same period last year. PSNP food distributions in certain woredas of zones 1, 2, 4, and 5 have reportedly stabilized market prices of staple foods.

In addition to endemic diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and urinary tract infections, AWD has been the primary health challenge in all zones. In the past few months, a total of 8,670 cases and 335 deaths have been registered in 17 woredas, with zones 1 and 3 having the highest caseloads. Shortages of medical and transport facilities, operational funds and skilled personnel remain major obstacles in controlling the disease.

AMHARA

The food security situation is of concern in some parts of Amhara Region particularly Oromiya zone, Wag Hirma zone, parts of North Shoa zone, and western woredas in North and South Wollo zones. The situation is critical in Ensaro Wayu and Merabete woredas in North Shoa zone, Gondar Zuria in North Gondar zone where DPPA has



dispatched a one month ration for over 47,000 affected people based on regional request and preliminary *belg* assessment reports. The food was distributed immediately.

The onset of the *belg* rains was timely in most areas, though the amount and distribution of rains was poor in those areas in which food security is of concern. Oromiya

zone and the western *belg* growing woredas of South and North Wollo were particularly affected by adverse weather conditions, receiving only ten days of rain in April as well as sporadic hailstorms.

Inadequate performance of *belg* rains in these areas has resulted in insufficient pasture and has contributed to poor physical condition and productivity of livestock. There are reports of large livestock migration particularly from Artuma-fursi, Jile, Bati, and Dawe-Harewa woredas, Oromiya zone to Cheffa Valley in neighboring Dawa-Cheffa woreda in search of grazing land and water.

Pest infestation and other crop diseases damaged and further reduced crop yield. As a result, a 21-55% reduction in crop production is anticipated in the major *belg* crop producing zones.

There is a sharp increase in the price of grains and livestock compared to the same period in previous years. The poor *meher* 2006 harvest, an influx of external traders into the local market, and high cash inflows into rural communities from different food security intervention programmes are among factors that contributed to the price increase. These high commodity prices have led to deteriorating terms of trade for livestock, and has decreased purchasing power for most of the rural population, as very minor increases in livestock prices could not match the large increase in grain prices.

SNNP

The overall food security situation in SNNPR is good following favorable *belg* rains that resulted in improved crop and livestock production. Flooding and localized landslides, however, have damaged crops in some areas.

The onset of *belg* rains was timely in most parts of the region, though delays were observed ranging from one week in the lowlands of Gamo Gofa to two-three weeks in Kembata and Tembaro and Kochere woredas in Gedeo zone and Burji Special woreda. A two-three week dry spell in some areas of Sidama, Kochere, Amaro, Burji Special Woredas, Kembata Tembaro, and Zala woredas in Gamo Gofa zone was also reported.

In addition, water logging from excessive rains, flooding, and hailstorms have damaged crops and property in Merab Abaya woreda in Gamo Gofa zone and Humbo woreda in Wolayita zone. Landslides were also reported in Gamo Gofa and Sidama zones. Hailstorms affected various crops in Wolayita zone in February and coffee in Sidama zone in March. Flooding caused by heavy *kiremt* rains have displaced 2,300 people in Hammer woreda in South Omo zone as well as over 800 households in

Humbo and Mirab Abaya woredas in Wolayita and Gamo Gofa zones respectively.



In most areas the *belg* rains merged with the ongoing *meher* rains. Unlike other years, there was no break between the two rainy seasons. *Meher* rain levels have been high in June and July. If this trend continues, there is a likelihood of continued flooding during the remainder of the rainy season.

Despite the effects of adverse weather conditions, in general, the *belg* rainfall has been favourable for crop and livestock production. Given the good onset of the *belg* rains and the extended rains of the 2006 *meher* season, land preparation was timely and rainfall coverage has significantly increased in all areas.

These conditions have also contributed to improved availability of pasture and water. Good physical condition and increased number and productivity of livestock were reported in Sidama, Hadiya, Kembata Tembaro, Wolayita, Gurage, Silti and Gamo Gofa zones. In addition to favourable conditions for livestock reproduction, cattle holdings per household amplified due to purchases made possible by increased crop prices, safety net resources and absence of distress sales.

A tense security situation between Amaro and Burji special woredas and neighboring Guji woreda, as well as fears of cattle raiding prohibited the inhabitants from using available water and pasture in adjacent lowland kebeles. As a result, the majority of the woredas' livestock population is concentrated away from these areas, resulting in a shortage of pasture.

The prevalence of AWD continues to be a serious threat to health throughout Gedeo zone and in some parts of Sidama and Silti zones. Taskforces involving UNICEF, OXFAM, Regional Health and Water Bureaus and zonal health departments have actively mobilised resources including skilled manpower, drugs, water purifying and treatment equipment, and rehabilitation of water sources, particularly in Gedeo and Sidama.

Monthly woreda market reports indicate that the current crop prices (of cereals, cash crops, pulses and root crops) are considerably higher than the same period last year. The



report also indicated that prices of livestock and livestock products increased sharply throughout the region due to relatively good market outlets, favorable supply of pasture and water and improved physical conditions of livestock. Moreover, the daily wage rate of casual labour increased by more than 100 percent compared to last year.

The Household Economy Approach (HEA) has examined food and expenditure deficits in the region and identified some beneficiaries which could be captured by the existing PSNP. The HEA, however, has not fully captured beneficiaries affected by flood and landslide in localized areas. Separate assessments in the hazard areas were conducted and the findings were reconciled with the regional DPPFS Office.

In South Omo zone, flooding from Weyto River affected 3,600 people in three kebeles. UNICEF provided two boats for the rescue operations and sent medical team to the affected kebeles. In addition, DPPA has dispatched a two month food and non-food items in the affected areas.

OROMIYA

The preliminary findings of the *belg/ganna* assessment in Oromiya Region indicate food insecurity in most lowland woredas with reports of below average crop and livestock production. Increased levels of malnutrition have also been reported in some lowland areas.

WFP reports a worsening food security situation in West Arsi and West Hararghe zones. In West Arsi zone, the findings of the recent *belg* assessment mission state that the food situation in Gedeb Asasa, Dodola and Arsi Negele woredas is worrying and immediate relief assistance for 38,000 people has been recommended. The food problem in lowland areas of Arsi Negele woreda is chronic due mainly to recurrent drought.

In West Hararghe zone, reports from WFP field monitoring visits indicate a deteriorating food security situation in Chiro, Darolebu, Meisso, Mesela, Kuni, Habru, Guba Koricha and Doba woredas. Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS) screening results also point to increased levels of acute malnutrition in Doba, Guba Koricha and Habru woredas. The Regional Food Security and Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission transferred targeted supplementary food to help address the malnutrition cases. In the other woredas, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) Contingency Fund has been tasked to address relief food requirements. There are concerns, however, that the contingency fund allowance is insufficient to cover the current need and, more critically, has not, with the exception of Habro, been received by the affected woredas. In response, the region has requested the FDPPA to include an additional case load in the current relief operation.

In response, DPPA also allocated approximately 1,276 tonnes of relief food for July to assist 70,000 food insecure people in East Hararghe and West Wollega, Oromiya Region.

The rains were generally normal in highland areas but were erratic and insufficient in the lowlands. The adverse weather conditions, pest infestation, disease such as potato blight and a shortage of farm inputs such as seeds and draught oxen have led to poor performance of *belg* crop production in the lowlands of Borena, Guji, Arsi, West Arsi, Bale, and East and West Hararghe zones. Major

crops affected by poor performance of the rains during the season include maize, haricot bean, *teff*, barely, Irish potato and wheat.

In most parts of the region, with the exceptions of East and West Hararghe, livestock physical condition is below normal. Moreover, livestock production has also been adversely affected in pastoral areas of Borena, Guji and Bale zones as well as in Fentale woreda, East Shewa zone. Availability of pasture and water is poor in lowland woredas of Moyale Dire, Moyale, Mio and parts of Teltele) and low-lying areas of Guji and Bale zones. Early migration to dry season grazing areas has been observed and water and pasture traditionally preserved for the dry season is now being used in pastoral areas. An unidentified camel disease killed many camels in Borena, Guji and Bale zones, reducing milk production. In West Arsi zone, sheep pox was present but control measures are underway.

Market conditions for livestock remain stable in North Shewa, Arsi, West Arsi, East and West Hararghe zones but prices have reportedly decreased in Borena, Guji and Bale zones due to an increase in supply. The price of crops such as maize, sorghum, *teff*, wheat and barley is high compared to the same time last year. Due to unfavourable rains and the poor 2007 *meher* harvest, the grain supply is below normal in most parts of the region leading to increasing prices.

The *belg* assessment reported AWD in ten woredas of East Hararghe, three woredas of East Shewa, one woreda of West Hararghe, four woredas in Borena, two woredas in Guji, one woreda in West Arsi, four woredas of Arsi and six woredas of Bale zone. According to UNICEF, however, there are now 39 affected woredas.



Asylum seekers from northern Kenya in Borena zone are in urgent need of food and non-food assistance. According to preliminary reports by the *belg* assessment team, the living condition of the asylum seekers is deteriorating with reports



of deaths and malnutrition. Approximately 2,500 asylum seekers have currently settled in Megado and Dillo kebeles in Dire woreda. Their situation is further exacerbated by the failure of the recent *ganna* rains in the area. A one month ration of food has been dispatched by WFP. UNHCR and ARRA are screening the asylum seekers in the coming weeks to determine their status.

GOAL and USAID conducted a standard nutritional survey between 9 -14 July in the settlements sites. The prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) was 13.5 % (8.4 - 18.7 95% C.I.) and Severe Acute Malnutrition 0.0 % (0.0 - 0.0 95% C.I.). The GAM rate of 13.5 % is considered **poor**. According to the DPPC's classification of severity of malnutrition, the presence of aggravating factors such as food aid dependency, poor access to water and high morbidity rates from infectious diseases such as diarrhoea classify the malnutrition rate as serious.

GAMBELLA

The humanitarian situation in Gambella remains tentative as a fragile peace continues to exist between the Lou and Jikany Nuer. Despite ongoing rains, there was no outbreak of AWD and malaria remains at non-epidemic level. Flooding, however, has occurred in some areas.

Flooding, which is seasonal to the region, has occurred in Lare and Itang woredas. A joint WFP, IOM, UNICEF and DPPB/FS mission visited the area to assess the situation. DPPA is also planning to mount a disaster assessment mission to the affected areas. Preliminary findings indicate that ten kebeles have been affected with thousands of people displaced, some of whom were previously displaced by Murte incursions earlier in the year. The impact has been particularly severe in Kuargang, the



capital of Lare woreda. Flooding also occurred in Itang but the impact was limited. Close monitoring of the situation is needed as the rains continue.

IOM and ZOA Refugee Care's projects funded by the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) will commence distribution of non-food items in early August to 21,000 people in Jor, Wantua, and Jikaw woredas, and to 13,700 people in Akobo and Itang woredas. This project has been facilitated by UNICEF NFI stocks which will be replenished with HRF funds. In addition, approximately 572 tonnes of emergency food has been dispatched by DPPA as part of the second round of relief for 31,000 beneficiaries in

Abobo, Dimma, Gambella Zuria, Gog, Itang, Jor, Godere, Akobo, Jikawao, Lare and Wantuha woredas.

Human health conditions are stable within the region. WHO supported Expanded Programme for Immunization (EPI) for polio has vaccinated 89.3 percent of children in the region in June. Screening for the Enhanced Outreach Strategy (EOS) is due to take place in August.

TIGRAY

According to the 2007 *belg* assessment, the overall food security outlook is positive in the only *belg*-growing Southern zone of Tigray. The assessment covered the two livelihood zones in Tigray Region with *belg* production: the Raya Valley Sorghum and Teff Livelihood Zone and the Embalaje-Ofa Highland Livelihood Zone.

The Raya Valley Livelihood Zone includes all of Raya Azebo woreda and parts of Alamata and Hintalo Wejjirat woredas. The Embalaje-Ofa Highland Livelihood Zone includes most of the Embalaje, Endamahoni and Ofa woredas, and a small part of Hintalo Wejjirat woreda. In both livelihood zones, *belg* crop production makes only a minor contribution to overall crop production.

Despite the poor *belg* production in some areas, notably *teff* in the Raya Valley livelihood zone, the food security outlook is good, primarily given the good *meher* harvest posted last year and the minimal contribution of *belg* production to livelihoods.

Generally, no acute water supply problem has been observed in the *belg* producing areas of the six woredas. There are some isolated water supply problems due to the shortage of rain during the *belg* season and damage to a few water sources, such as hand pumps.

The *belg* assessment found that the overall human health condition was found to be stable in almost all six woredas. AWD, however, is a growing concern in the region. In addition, an "unidentified disease" outbreak has occurred in Ketin Hugum area of Alamata woreda in recent months. The disease causes weak joints, especially in the hip area, culminating in walking problems. UNICEF, ENCU, REST and WFP conducted a nutritional survey in response to concerns about the disease, the results of which will be available shortly. In addition, the woreda has undertaken a food distribution in Ketin Hugum from PSNP resources.

Further evaluation by a medical team is needed to assess the situation and recommend an appropriate solution.

Malaria, which is endemic in the Raya Valley Livelihood Zone, has seen a decrease in incidences in the past year. Proper use of mosquito nets and the use of the new malaria drug Quartum have helped bring about this reversal in most areas of the livelihood zone.

A few deaths have occurred last June in Tahtay Koraro woreda of Northwestern Tigray zone due to the impact of a deadly disease called "Arjemen" affecting water sources. To avoid similar risks, the region has relocated over 1,500



people who are now believed to require both food and non-food assistance.

The livestock health situation is good, as there have been no unusual disease outbreaks in recent months. The veterinary service is improving in most woredas, although some are experiencing a labour shortage. The livestock feed situation is good for the highlands, however the *belg* failure in Alamata and Raya Azebo woredas has reduced the availability of livestock feed, resulting in poor livestock body conditions in these two woredas.

Excluding the contribution from the safety net programme to the analysis, only the very poor in Alamata woreda, approximately 9,000 people, face a livelihood protection deficit of about one month of food or the equivalent in cash in the current year. This deficit disappears when the contribution of the safety net programme is included in the analysis, suggesting that there are no emergency food needs for the parts of these 6 woredas falling in *belg* producing livelihood zones.

UPCOMING AND ONGOING MEETINGS

In Addis Ababa

August 16, 23, 30	Information sharing meeting on the Humanitarian Situation in Somali Region, UNDP, 03:00p.m (Invitations only)
August 17, 24, 31	UN Department of Safety and Security Meeting, DSS office, 09:30 a.m. (Open to all)
August 13	UN Communications Group Meeting, UNDP, 02:30a.m, (UN-Internal Only)
August 14	UNCG Meeting, with Interim Heads of Agencies, UNDP, 10:00a.m, (UN-Internal Only)
August 14 & 28	WASH Emergency Task Force Meeting, MoWR, 10:00a.m (Open to all)
August 15	SDMT meeting, UNDP, 09:00a.m, (UN-Internal Only)