



CARE International Policy Brief

The Drought Affecting the Horn of Africa 2002/2003

A major food emergency is affecting the Horn of Africa, in particular Ethiopia and Eritrea, following sporadic and well below average rains during 2002. Overall, between 12 and 16 million people in the Horn of Africa are expected to be in immediate risk during 2003. Some 2-2.5 Million Metric Tons of food assistance from the international community will be needed to prevent a humanitarian disaster. This situation has been widely known since August 2002, but response in the period since then has been inadequate, and the levels of donor pledges made so far towards the response needed for 2003 remain far below the levels of assistance required.

The attention of the media, and to some extent, donors has been focused on crises already on-going elsewhere in the world. Even before the emergence of this current crisis in the Horn of Africa, projected worldwide requirements for food and humanitarian assistance were well above last year's levels. Now it appears that global requirements may be 50-60% higher in 2003 than in 2002. This comes at a time when there were below average harvests in North America and other major grain exporting regions, which has resulted in substantial price rises in major grain crops.

This means that not only must increased attention be brought to bear on the specific situation in the Horn of Africa, but also that there must be increased lobbying for increased humanitarian assistance budgets across the board in order to effectively prevent a major humanitarian disaster during 2003.

Large parts of both Ethiopia and Eritrea are prone to drought, thus making both countries among the most chronically vulnerable in the world to food insecurity and famine. While the failure of the rains is the direct cause of the crisis, it is the chronic and worsening poverty of large rural populations that reduces the ability of communities to withstand shocks such as drought. With many millions of people already living on the edge of destitution, any significant crop losses due to drought can have a devastating effect across both countries.

As late as July 2002, conventional wisdom was that the food security situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea was better than average. Early warning systems, which are relatively sophisticated in these countries, projected a reasonably good year. However, late and spotty long rains led to extensive crop failure in many parts of both countries. This, on top of the previous periods of drought, combined to push many communities to the edge of an already precarious existence. In some cases, families have not fully recovered from the emergency of 1999/2000. In the past few years many were forced to sell off their livestock and other assets to support their families, leaving them without any safety net to support them during this critical time. In some areas, crop losses will be 90% or more and humanitarian conditions have already started to deteriorate.

Steps are being taken by the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, donors, UN agencies and NGOs to improve both countries' long-term food security situation. However, given the chronic vulnerability in many areas, both emergency preparedness and response capacity will continue to need to be part of a *development* strategy for some time to come. The logic of this is simple: if improving assets is part of a long-term strategy, then protecting these assets in a time of crisis is a necessary element of that strategy. Humanitarian assistance in the short term is therefore not "just relief."

Both countries have strong and well-coordinated existing capacity and experience to offer in response to this emergency through their respective governments, together with UN agencies and NGOs.

Ethiopia

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has warned that his country faces a famine worse than that of 1984. In the view of many people, Ethiopia is always trying to avert a crisis, respond to a crisis, or recover from a crisis. But Ethiopia is a vast country, with limited infrastructure and an impoverished rural population dependent on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihood - the amount of land under irrigation is negligible. Nutritional surveys carried out in the most critical areas over the last two months have reported malnutrition rates of between 13 and

30%. In CARE's operational areas, studies conducted in September reported average global acute malnutrition rates of just over 15%. The international community should consider the following specific points on Ethiopia:

- Existing and pledged resources for emergency response in Ethiopia are inadequate to meet current and projected needs. As an example, only 58% of food needs were met in the month of October;
- Without significant additional pledges of assistance in the immediate future, there is likely to be a substantial shortfall in resources in 2003 and the risk of a widespread famine. To date, no more than one quarter of needs for the first three months of 2003 have been committed;
- Unless there is a greater response by donors in the near future, there will be a need for a larger, more complex and more expensive response later. Therefore, timely delivery of food and other assistance is critical.

Eritrea

While the numbers are not as dramatic in Eritrea because it has a much smaller population, in proportional terms, Eritrea is harder hit. Between one and two million people (one third to almost two thirds of the population) will require assistance in 2003, and 350,000- 400,000 metric tons of food aid will be required. This is in the range of 75-80% of the total consumption requirement for Eritrea — a country that imports substantial quantities of food even in good years. The international community should consider the following specific points on Eritrea:

- Domestic production will be able to meet only 15-20% of the domestic food consumption requirement for 2003. Normal food imports will make up some of the deficit, but the country is in a very vulnerable situation;
- Donors have begun to respond including substantial pledges from the US and several European governments. While latest figures on donor pledges are not yet available, it is expected that Eritrea still faces a considerable deficit in resources for 2003;
- There are currently low levels of donor assistance to support Eritrea's longer-term food security situation by investing in appropriate longer-term development strategies.

The Need for Action

Action is required now in order to avert famine, and a more costly and complicated response in both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Adequate resources made available now, in particular adequate food and supplementary (fortified) food, water and basic health activities, will avert the need for large scale and expensive therapeutic feeding programs later on in 2003.

- **Increase budgets for food assistance.** During 2003, over two million metric tons of food assistance may be needed for Ethiopia and Eritrea. For the first quarter of 2003 in Ethiopia alone, the needs will be around 350,000 to 400,000 MT of food grain. But to date, commitments by donors are estimated to be less than 50,000 MT of food assistance for that time period.
- **A balanced approach to humanitarian assistance.** Food is always the "big ticket" item in a crisis, but other basic requirements—water and health in particular, as well as seeds and tools to support a agricultural production—must be assured as well in order for food aid to have the desired impact.
- **Improve the capacity for comparison across countries and regions.** There will inevitably be global competition for scarce humanitarian resources in the coming year, but the capacity of the international community to compare across differing contexts is limited. Being able to do so adequately in 2003 maybe the difference between coping with the current crises, and a major humanitarian failure.
- **Increased local contributions.** Governments are primarily responsible to provide for the rights of their citizens to have access to adequate food. While Africa unquestionably requires the assistance of the international community, the current circumstances require a domestic re-allocation of resources as well.

CARE International in Ethiopia and Eritrea

CARE has worked in Ethiopia since 1984, and currently is undertaking 14 programs in emergency response, food security, water and sanitation, family planning, HIV/AIDS, education, integrated conservation and development, nutrition, and urban development. CARE's future priorities in Ethiopia are economic development, and expanded programs in the areas of basic education and HIV/AIDS.

CARE has worked in Eritrea since 2000, primarily in areas of rehabilitation in the wake of a devastating war with Ethiopia. CARE plans to respond to the humanitarian crisis with targeted interventions in two key areas: strengthen the capacity of the government to assess vulnerability to food insecurity and to conduct a national survey to generate urgently needed information for targeting food aid; and providing seeds, poultry, livestock fodder and emergency veterinary services to severely drought-affected farmers. These initiatives will be carried out in addition to ongoing programs in the areas of agriculture, education, micro credit and gender. All CARE's programs are carried out in close partnership with Eritrean civil society organizations or Eritrean government agencies.
