



Humanitarian Situation Report

December 2004

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SUMMARY

Eritrea continues to be food insecure and out of the total population of 3.8 million, 2.2 million require food assistance in 2005.

If the current water shortage persists 60-80% of the rural population and livestock in the country will be adversely affected.

Over 70,000 IDPs and expellees remain in temporary camps, unable to resettle and are thus exposed to serious humanitarian and economic constraints.

650,000 people are affected by the fear of landmines and over 100,000 people currently live with disabilities, caused by land mines.

In 2005, the CAP requests for \$157,151,179 to fund the implementation of 24 projects in 10 sectors.

FOOD SECURITY

The Erratic rainfall patterns in 2004 has contributed to poor harvests throughout the country creating a defacto food insecurity, market instability and reduced access to potable water throughout most parts of the country. Preliminary results of the FAO/WFP Crop Assessments show that estimates of cereal production is less than the CAP 2005 estimate of 108,000 MT, and that rural households have grown only one month of food needs, meaning the traditional 'hungry season' will begin in February, not in May. Depletion in food production has also been exacerbated by the existence of mines in farmland. Low availability of tractors and high prices of tractor rental, in turn due to the high cost of fuel hinders most of the farmers from mechanically preparing their land. Shortage of cattle for animal traction further hampers timely field preparation. Sustained high levels

of food aid will be needed to avert a humanitarian disaster.

Out of the total population of 3.8 million, 2.2 million require food assistance in 2005.

Food shortages are also resulting in abnormal grain price increases, which are in turn creating inflationary pressures. Prices of basic goods have been steadily increasing over the last few months, which continue to reduce average household access to food basket goods. In all the major towns' market, cereal prices continue to remain higher than last year's prices.

The last 2 months however have seen two significant food shipments through the Port of Massawa. The largest single consignment of food aid to Eritrea since independence in 1991 was delivered in October comprising 61,200 MT out of which 38,500 MT channeled through WFP and this was followed in December by 42,500 MT donated wheat worth \$13.8 million from the European Union through WFP. Donor response to is predicted that current food stocks will last until the end of March 2005.

For 2005, it is estimated that 348,000 MT will be the emergency food aid requirement and another 157,000MT will be required to support vulnerable groups in the form of food for work, for 2.2 million people (an increase of 300,000 people from 2004).

December is the third month of Bahri rain season. It has started late and is performing below normal. This poor rainfall pattern will adversely affect more the performance of livestock and the crop at seedling stage in Northern and Southern Red Sea zones. Usually, some livestock owners move their livestock from some highland areas to eastern escarpments.

WATER

Water shortages continue to be acute in the many places of the country; water trucking still appears to be the only option. More than 80,000 people in these areas are dependant on accelerated water trucking, even though the price per drum has nearly doubled over. The recent National Nutrition Survey found that 45% of respondents in Gash Barka reported a reduction in water quality and that some water sources had dried up entirely.

In many of the winter rain regions of the Northern and Southern Red Sea zones, the water level has dropped up to 7 meters. Lack of substantive flow of streams from the highlands means that the water table in these regions has not been recharged. In light of the poor rainfall that has been received, it is predicted that serious difficulties in drinking water supplies will be encountered in 2005. It is predicted in the CAP 2005 that unless positive rainfall performance occurs in the near future, 60-80% of the rural population and livestock in the country areas will be adversely affected.

These water shortages have both health and hygiene risks as the drying of surface water is forcing livestock and humans to share water sources. Women in particular are suffering since they are generally responsible for fetching water and have to travel greater distances. Such water shortages are unlikely to improve in 2005 and are placing an added strain on already vulnerable groups.

RETURN AND REPATRIATION

Pending returns of internally displaced persons and refugees will also become more of a pressing concern if the implementation of the border agreement progresses. Currently, over 70,000 IDPs and expellees remain in temporary camps, unable to resettle and are thus exposed to serious humanitarian and economic constraints. Their situation worsened in 2004 with the onset of the rainy season and thunderstorms destroyed tents, household items, cattle and rations for 12,000 IDPs at the Korokon and Mai-Wuray camps. The government has asked for international support to return/settle 30,000 people from Adi Keshi (20,000) IDPs and Kotobia (10,000)

expellees but basic services are still lacking in the new resettlement area and the returning/settling people need assistance to rebuild their houses and basic social services. A predominant concern is that many IDP children are not attending school. In Gherenfit settlement area, 20% of children of school going age are not attending school.

Those who have returned to their homes are unable to re-establish their livelihoods due to the added burden of drought and the lack of socio-economic opportunities. Host communities in turn face their own issues of vulnerability, especially in the region bordering Ethiopia where they are severely affected by the ramifications of war and drought, and are struggling to cope with the added burden of returns.

Return of refugees from Sudan continues assisted by UNHCR. Out of the registered 35,000 refugees to return about 12,000 have returned until 30 December 2004.

UNHCR's four-year voluntary repatriation programme for Eritrean refugees draws to an end on 31 December 2004. Together with its respective governments of Eritrea and Sudan, UNHCR completed its large-scale organized convoy returns. Thereafter, UNHCR will seek durable solutions for those remaining and continue to help those wishing to return on an individual basis.

The main end point of return continues to be Gash Barka, which receives 95% of returns.

The resettlement of around 60,000 refugees from Djibouti and Yemen as well as approximately 75,000 expellees of Eritrean origin from Ethiopia also remain pressing issues.

Eritrea also plays host to about 4000 Sudanese and Somali refugees who require protection, support and urgent humanitarian assistance. However, the progression towards peace in both Somalia and Sudan may lead to a reduction in these numbers in 2005 as refugees begin to return home.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Malnutrition rates continue to be exceptionally high, with 10-20% chronic malnutrition cases among infants in Gash Barka, Anseba and Northern Red Sea Zobas (19.4%, 18.4%, 13.9% respectively). According to the Growth Monitoring and Promotion report of 2004, 50% of children under five are undernourished. At 42% percent, the rate of malnutrition among pregnant and nursing mothers is among the highest in Africa. These chronic malnutrition rates reflect successive years of food insecurity and the direct effect on child development and highlight the need for these issues to be made a priority in 2005.

Communicable and infectious diseases have been showing upward trends, with Acute Respiratory Infections and diarrhoea continuing to be one of the main causes of morbidity. ARI accounts for 17.3% of all outpatient and inpatient morbidity and the Health Management Information System report in May 2004 states that diarrhea accounted for 22% of in-patient cases in hospitals (5% of these were under 5 years of age).

HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in Eritrea (2.4%) as compared to the rest of the Sub Saharan Africa is low. However, there is a growing concern as 70% of the reported AIDS cases are among persons aged between 20 -39 years. In addition there is a great geographical disparity. There is concern that further demobilization and cross border population movement will exacerbate this threat.

MINE ACTION

The recently completed Landmine Impact Survey has indicated that landmines and UXOs seriously affect every region of Eritrea. This report summarized important new baseline information, which will be used to plan the Eritrean Demining Operations (EDO) in 2005. Landmines currently affect at least 481 communities with the highest located in Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Gash Barka and Debub. In total, 650,000 people are affected by the fear of landmines and over 100,000 people

currently live with disabilities.

The high level of mining also proves to be a constricting factor in the impending return of IDPs. 20% of IDP areas of origin are mined and 83% of mine impacted communities report blocked access to pastureland thus severely affecting food security. If the political momentum continues, demining activities will be crucial to facilitating the return of IDPs and returnees.

FUNDING

The 2004 Eritrean CAP was revised down to US\$125,542,804 with an estimated vulnerable population of 1.9 million. The overall response, according to OCHA Geneva Financial Tracking System (FTS), to the CAP was 58.54%, however, responses locally confirmed by agencies are by far higher than what is reported on the FTS. For instance, according to locally compiled information the response to the food aid requirement in the CAP stands at about 90% while it is reflected as 63.64% on the FTS.

In 2005, the CAP request is for \$157,151,179 to fund the implementation of 24 projects in 10 sectors.

Challenges

The donor response to the CAP 2004 picked up during the last quarter of the year rendering agencies difficult to implement their projects timely and this has undermined the efforts of humanitarian agencies in reducing malnutrition and carrying out other projects.

In addition, the fuel crisis currently prevailing in the country has been negatively affecting delivery of humanitarian assistance such as distribution of food aid and provision of water trucking to beneficiaries and rendered difficult for agencies to monitor their projects.

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OCHA wishes all its readers a HAPPY New Year!