

and maintaining farm prices, as well as the issue of ensuring that projects are undertaken beyond major roads into remote areas.

There are other concerns. A recent survey of hundreds of rural households showed that over 90 per cent of people claim never to have been consulted about the choice of activity or design of food-for-work projects.

Most projects involve soil conservation or reforestation but these are at the bottom of the list of projects people say they want. Top of the list are health and sanitation, such as clinic construction, piped water or latrine building. For more success, food-for-work will have to mix natural resource activities with health, sanitation or education.

Given the history of severe droughts, successive Ethiopian governments have drawn on experience in other drought-prone countries, such as India, China and Botswana, to develop national prevention and preparedness policies backed up with operational guidelines, including a National Programme for Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation.

Ethiopia's new National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management marks a major shift from crisis response towards preparedness and development. Its core principle is: "The community shall play the leading role in the planning, programming, implementation and evaluation of all relief projects." Overall responsibility for policy, guidelines and monitoring of relief activities rests with the National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee, which oversees the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), the government body set up after the 1972/74 famine to coordinate and mobilise relief.

Part of the new disaster strategy is creating a national food bank that can offer agencies loans to bridge import delays. The national Ethiopian Food Security Reserve Authority (EFSRA) has been caught up in long-running arguments between donors and government about its role, management, size and location. Much donor concern recalls the political interference in food reserves by the previous regime.

With a 205,000-tonne target, the reserve has already been offered 50,000 tonnes over two years by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and 25,000 from WFP. Heavily dependent on outside funding, the reserve will have to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness to gain further support to reach its target and respond rapidly to food emergencies.

The outline of agreement now seems clear, with a semi-autonomous authority separate from direct RRC management, and a provision that ministerial committee decisions to release food stock will be made only when advised by the reserve's Technical Committee. There will be increased donor representation on the Tech-

nical Committee from one to three, which should improve understanding, trust and long-term support.

While donors have been involved with key government committees drafting national policies, some still have concerns about what they see as a complex policy-making environment, including the role of ad hoc policy task forces and committees outside the normal ministerial structure. An effective focus point for food-policy planning is necessary, which should consider the role of both national grain reserves in a rural safety net and private grain stores in a liberalised economy.

If satisfying donor concerns means the EFSRA and RRC remain centralised, there may be pressure from Ethiopia's new regional authorities to create their own decentralised reserves and relief systems, which ought to better match the capabilities and demands of local early warning information and response systems, and should be far more sensitive to that region's particular needs.

Apart from the need to increasingly base disaster response on the capacities of local communities, as was examined in detail in the *World Disasters Report 1994*, Ethiopia poses a particular challenge in view of major relief needs localised in remote areas. Wollaita is a good example of how the diversity in rainfall and local conditions can lead to very different circumstances within a very small area. Aggregation of relief requirements can fail to identify needs in particular localities, allowing people to suffer and die.

Aiming for a far more decentralised state, Ethiopia has opted constitutionally for a structure of nine regions, all of them able to secede. One result is that while Addis Ababa has the staff it needs for administration and development, the regions need more skilled personnel if they are to improve disaster preparedness and response, for example.

As the *World Disasters Report* has also emphasised before, disaster preparedness and early warning will be enhanced if the growth of new political structures, including the impetus towards decentralisation, is accompanied by the development of pluralistic political systems and diverse media allowing a broad expression of opinions at national and regional level.

Whatever centralised or decentralised institutional or political structures exist, investment will be needed to strengthen early warning systems of local information gathering and analysis. This can only occur in an atmosphere of greater mutual trust between government, donors and NGOs.

In government-controlled areas in the 1980s, the international community set up in effect a parallel government for early warning, relief decision making, food aid and distribution. Now there is the problem of reintegrating those systems into a country, government and people which are all in transition.

NGOs in transition

In the rebel areas at that time, a number of western NGOs – with or without government support – provided cross border assistance in cash and kind directly to relief organisations run by rebel movements. Now that the rebel movements are governments, they see no reason to change the system, which keeps NGO involvement in relief subservient to beneficiaries. NGOs prefer to sign broad agreements, and formulate and deliver relief themselves. In Ethiopia the government is unhappy at the number of expatriate NGO staff and there are many sources of friction, including relations between NGOs and less experienced field staff in decentralised government – exactly the level at which a good working relationship is needed.

Back in Ethiopia's cities, there is the sensitive issue of price stabilisation for the rising urban population. Responding to urban malnutrition and hunger is far more complex and costly than rural seeds and tools packages, and the danger of dependency is greater. For the urban poor the critical food entitlement factor is cost. Urban growth brings inevitable political pressures on spending at the centre, both

to meet real needs and to deflect opposition on the government's doorstep. Donor governments discourage market intervention in the developing world, despite their own widespread agricultural subsidies. An urban safety net is being designed with the World Bank, using food vouchers to target the poorest 30 per cent, initially just in Addis.

Addis Ababa's population is growing perhaps 5 per cent a year, and the Central Statistical Authority forecasts an extra 7.73 million people in Ethiopia's urban areas by 2005 and an extra 29.64 million by 2020. The city's many street children and beggars demonstrate growing urban poverty, which has many causes: labour mobility, fragmentation of land holdings, displacement of those resettled in the 1980s, and troop demobilisation.

Ethiopia still has the 500,000-strong guerrilla army which defeated the Derg's forces, but peace is making a big difference. The Washington-based Arms Control and Disarmament Agency estimates that Ethiopia imported weapons worth US\$ 3 billion from 1987 to 1991. Arms imports have ceased and military spending has fallen from 50 per cent of the

Box 10.1 Poverty deepens despite reforms in Ethiopia

While Ethiopians are taking advantage of economic reforms for labour mobility, land use and crop marketing, life is getting tougher for many of the poorest in Ethiopia, according to a major survey of famine vulnerability by the International Food Policy Research Institute.

The survey covered 476 households in four areas (part of a larger survey of 1,480 households) in 1994, comparing results with a survey of the same villages in 1989/90. [It should be noted that comparing 1989/90 and 1993/94 is a comparison between one year of lower food aid deliveries reflecting slightly better rainfall and one year of higher food aid reflecting poor rainfall.]

The area planted per capita has increased by almost a quarter in highland farms and almost tripled in the lowlands. The expansion was mainly by wealthier farmers, who increased the area cultivated per capita almost three times, compared with the poorest farmers, whose expansion on much smaller farms was less than 90 per cent.

Yields in 1993 were lower than in 1988 for rich and poor, highlands and lowlands. Cereal yields per hectare were one third lower than 1988 in the highlands and halved in the lowlands. Non-cereal yields in the

highlands fell from 744 kg per hectare to 615 kg, but collapsed in the lowlands from 767 kg to 134 kg.

The average cereal and non-cereal crop values fell in the highlands from US\$ 48 in 1989 to US\$ 33 in 1994, and in the lowlands from US\$ 23 to US\$ 16.

Average net income level for all households in 1994 was US\$ 60, up from an average of US\$ 41.50 in 1988/89, but the gains were mainly by wealthier households. At all four sites surveyed, wealthier households earned more income in 1993 than 1984, while the poorest households earned less.

Perhaps because of the poor rains of 1993, part of the increased income of wealthier households came from sales of animals. The percentage of income from crop sales fell for the wealthiest to 23 per cent and for the poorest to 35 per cent. The contribution of fuel products also fell sharply. Sales of animals and animal products rose from 2 per cent of total income among the poorest in 1988 to 23 per cent in 1993 and from 22 per cent to 57 per cent among the wealthiest.

Despite the draw down of assets, the wealth gap between rich and poor farmers grew. In 1989/90 the average per capita value of the wealthiest households' assets was

roughly double that of the poorest households. In 1994, the assets of the wealthiest households were six times those of the poorest.

Vulnerability is widespread. Three of the four sites in 1994 showed 75 per cent or more households consuming less than minimum calorie levels. In Wollaita, average consumption was well below the 1,456-calorie average of 1989/90, and 95 per cent of households were consuming below 80 per cent of the minimum recommended daily allowance.

Food-for-work schemes in the survey areas do target poorer households: on average, participating households earned US\$ 45 per capita per year, have 0.6 livestock units and total assets of US\$ 48, while non-participating households earned US\$ 93, had 1.95 livestock units and assets of US\$ 200.

Removing restriction on labour mobility has prompted many more people to go looking for work, especially among the poorest households, leaving more female-headed households behind; good if the migrant labourers do find work and send regular remittances, bad if crops fail, work is hard to find and food insecurity grows. ■

national budget to ten per cent, according to the government.

War and drought have together forced massive population movements. In the past five years, 2.5 million people have crossed Ethiopia's borders, and there are still 316,000 refugees from neighbouring countries in Ethiopia. The previous regime's resettlement scheme left many problems. In 1984, 600,000 people were transferred from the highlands – mainly Wollo and Tigray, then centres of rebellion – to the fertile southern lowlands, especially the government stronghold of Wellega. Although the region has coffee and cotton plantations, relations between the natives and the resettled – of different ethnic groups – were tense and most newcomers found it difficult to adapt. Hunger and deaths led many to trek home or migrate to urban areas.

People on the move complicate the crucial issue of land rights. While both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are pushing for real security of tenure, including inheritance, or full privatisation of land, the transitional government has declared that state ownership of land will not change while it remains in power, and this has been confirmed in the new constitution which was approved in December 1994. In theory the new land leases, based on existing use, prevent land "reallocations" – frequent under the Derg – but many farmers remain unwilling to invest in water and soil conservation for long-term returns.

One farmer's reported worries are probably typical. Kebede Gema lives near Leman in central Ethiopia, farming three and a half hectares, planting Ethiopia's staple grain, teff, and chickpeas. In the

past, with 40 hectares, the Gema family was wealthy. The Derg forced several land reallocations, making the farm smaller and smaller. When the transitional government came to power, a further reallocation took place, and there have been rumours of another to come.

Offered help by the UK NGO Farm Africa to plant trees – for fuel, fodder, soil conservation, water retention, and to protect the remaining natural forest – Kebede Gema's main concern is growing enough food for his nine children. Unsure of the future, he opts for short-term crops. "I think if my land was allocated to me permanently, then I would do things very differently. Then I would be very keen to plant trees of my own and take advantage of the Farm Africa scheme. But as things stand at the moment, I don't see the point in doing all that work."

Uncertainty affects other areas of the economy. Given that the government is at the earliest stages of a relationship with the IMF and World Bank – in part because of its reluctance to run up debts – major financial assistance is hard to find. The two institutions are concerned about disincentives to long-term commercial investment because the legislative environment is unclear. With a transitional government, some donors are reluctant to invest in long-term capacity building until they can assess the nature of a permanent government.

Under the government's agricultural strategy, rainfed cultivation is to be expanded from its present seven million hectares – Ethiopia has 55 million hectares of arable land – with more small-scale irrigation and greater use of draught animals. The plan has an ambitious target of 5.8 per

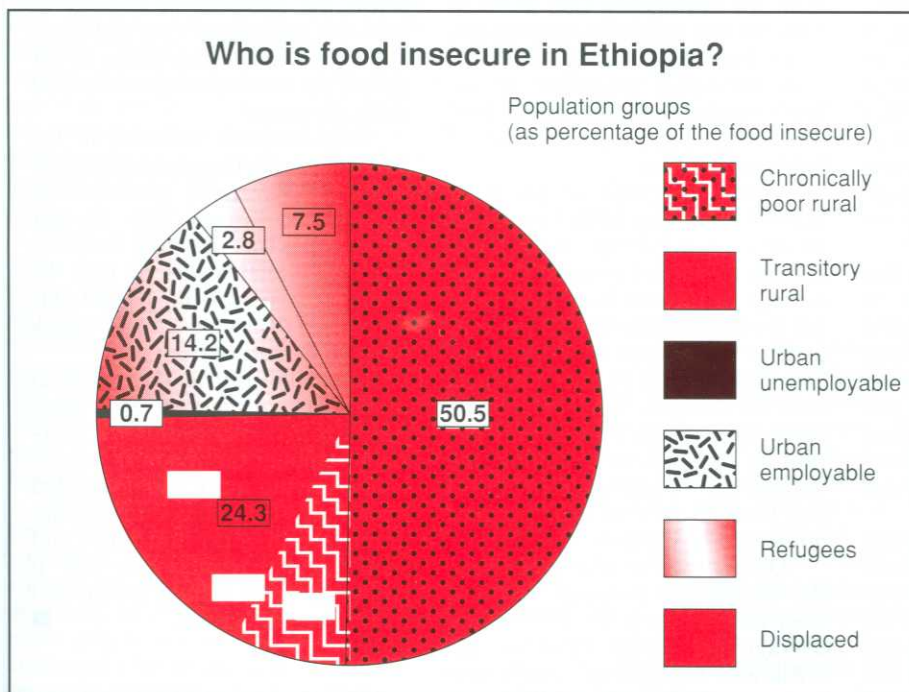


Figure 10.3 Poor and hungry: Who is food insecure in Ethiopia? Ethiopia is a country of rural poverty. More than half of those who suffer from food insecurity are in the countryside, but their numbers are rapidly being augmented by a growing urban poverty sector and a significant number of unemployed people, many of them former soldiers and civilians maimed in the decades long wars from which Ethiopia is now emerging.

Source: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Addis Ababa.

cent growth per year in agricultural output until 2000. Meanwhile, Ethiopia's biggest export – coffee, worth US\$ 139 million in 1992 – gained some benefit from rising world prices in late 1994, though this rise may not be maintained.

Like most African countries, Ethiopia has had no shortage of outsiders' ideas, such as potentially-controversial plans for a regional food bank. Some ideas are more down to earth, such as those of the International Livestock Centre for Africa (ILCA) in Addis Ababa. Its cut-price new twin plough – using two single ploughs lashed together – creates a raised bed edged with two furrows for better drainage, which can raise yields of wheat to two tonnes a hectare.

Another idea focuses on community-demanded programmes with part funding from Ethiopians. The Ethiopian Social Rehabilitation Fund (ESRF) has been financed by World Bank, supported by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). It supports programmes selected by communities with at least 20 per cent finance from that community.

Tools for the long term

Searching for solutions to Ethiopia's food needs, some agreement may be growing. In 1994, arguing that the key is "more investment in agriculture and better planned food aid", the UK NGO Christian Aid proposed that a 500,000-tonne minimum annual delivery of food aid should be decided each summer. This would arrive early the following spring before the dry season when farmers need food-for-work rations and can work on terracing, small dams and reforestation.

USAID has already moved in this direction with a pre-programmed food aid delivery for January 1995, while some in the World Bank are understood to have discussed dividing food aid between the structural, donated with conditions of agricultural policy reform to cut food deficits, and condition-free emergency food.

Christian Aid's proposals cover other ideas not so likely to draw broad support from governments or international institutions.

These include a foreign exchange fund for Ethiopia to buy food imports for emergency needs, integrating food security into structural adjustment programmes, and building a 350,000-tonne food security reserve. Many would agree with the agency's aim of greater fertiliser use – Ethiopia's is among Africa's lowest – but the disagreements are about how to achieve it: free distribution, subsidies, grants or measures to encourage use of manure as fertiliser not fuel.

As many have noted, Ethiopia is a classic example of the cost-effective opportunities presented by long-term investment in prevention and preparedness. The 1984/5 famine demonstrated the costs of

neglecting these opportunities in terms of human lives and relief dollars. Ethiopia has absorbed around US\$ 300 million a year in food aid, rising to US\$ 2 billion in major famines. Despite increasing efficiency, strong commitment, improved distribution and reduced corruption, those who argue for decisive large scale investment in capacity building face the challenge that the existing lack of capacity may make it hard to fully use the demanded levels of development assistance.

One of Ethiopia's biggest donors fears that the scale of any future crisis may overwhelm that slowly growing capacity. Fred Fischer, USAID regional development officer, said: "Like the quake in California, the 'big one' is coming at some point down the road. What's especially worrisome is that we have some 20 million more people in the Horn than we did during the last 'big one' in 1984/85. How are we going to cope?"

Hungry, vulnerable households are not great competitors in the marketplace, so will peace and economic reform be enough for Ethiopia to grow itself out of famine? It is estimated that between five and 15 million individuals – 10 to 25 per cent of the population – would be vulnerable to famine if economic conditions worsen.

Transport and communications problems make markets inefficient, and these farming families cannot respond to market opportunities because they have neither the capital nor credit to afford the oxen, seeds, fertiliser, hired labour and tools to grow more food and sell a surplus. The spending needed to increase food production rapidly is rising almost as fast as the expected benefits. Even with overall economic growth, millions of poor families will remain vulnerable to climatic or economic shocks for many years.

Big problems inspire big solutions, but as others have suggested, famines act selectively not universally; there are no practical universal solutions. Manifestations of collective failure, famines have complex origins that usually require complex answers. Ethiopia's problems and environment are constantly changing, from structural adjustment and rapid urbanisation to demobilisation and regional fragmentation of democratic decision making. New groups of vulnerable people must be considered, new structural problems addressed, and new institutional roles considered.

So will Ethiopia starve again? In 1994, one senior UN advisor visited Ethiopia and concluded: "Given Ethiopia's current population and agricultural production trends, a repeat of the 1984/85 'worst case scenario' could not be handled with the present national delivery capacity. At least one million deaths could be anticipated. Ethiopia's relief and development partners must invest heavily and urgently in recovery strategies... if such a disaster is to be avoided."