



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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April 12, 1985

NATIONAL SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

B-217978

The Honorable M. Peter McPherson
Administrator, Agency for International
Development



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Dear Mr. McPherson:

Subject: An Overview of the Emergency Situation in
Ethiopia (GAO/NSIAD 85-70)

As part of our overall review of U.S. famine relief to Africa, we made a visit to Ethiopia in February 1985 to obtain an overview of the emergency situation.¹

Our work was done at the Agency for International Development (AID) office in Ethiopia where we reviewed documents and interviewed AID officials. We discussed the emergency situation with private and voluntary organizations, as well as United Nations, other donor, and host government officials. We also visited two feeding centers in Wello Province and observed the operations at the Port of Assab.

We obtained information in a number of areas. The information which we feel might be useful to you is summarized below.

PLANNING STATISTICS

Firm statistics are difficult to establish in Ethiopia, but in December 1984, donors generally agreed that, of the country's estimated 42 million total population, about 7.7 million will be at risk of starvation in 1985.² The government estimated that about 2.4 million of the total number of people at risk are located in the provinces of Tigray and Eritrea where rebel activity continues. The number of people at risk of starvation could turn out to be higher than 7.7 million in 1985 even assuming a harvest approaching normal levels for the year.

¹See also The United States' Response to the Ethiopian Food Crisis, GAO/NSIAD-85-65, April 8, 1985.

²In February 1985, the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa estimated the number to be 7.9 million.

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According to many donor officials we interviewed, if the 1985 harvest fails, the number of people at risk would rise substantially, with some estimating that the number would double.

The government of Ethiopia has estimated its emergency food needs as 1.5 million metric tons through December 1985. The international community was using 1.3 million metric tons as the figure for total emergency food needs through the same period. According to UN and other officials, the 1.3 million was based on estimated total port capacity for emergency food imports.

In our discussions with UN officials, we learned that, in the near future, an attempt would be made to update the planning statistics on the number of people at risk by organizing a meeting of donors, the host government, and other interested parties. One UN official told us he would like to see the planning period extended to June 1986 because, even with normal rainfall in 1985, there would be further shortfalls due to farmers leaving their plots and migrating to feeding centers. He also noted that many farmers had lost their oxen to the drought and, for still others, seed might not be available for the planting season.

PORT CAPACITY

Donor officials we interviewed agreed that great improvements had been made in increasing port capacity. World Food Program officials have estimated that total port capacity is now potentially 120,000 metric tons per month, up from about 50,000 metric tons prior to November 1984. The increase was the result of improvements in ship scheduling, offloading, and bagging operations, which are now being coordinated by World Food Program officials. Though some officials said that 100,000 metric tons per month would be a more realistic port capacity estimate, they noted that capacity could be increased even more with some further improvements, particularly in grain bulk handling and bagging operations. All projections assume that the host government will give emergency food shipments top priority in port offloading.

IN-COUNTRY TRANSPORTATION

Increasing port capacity may be a moot point considering the present difficulty in moving food inland from the ports. Many officials said that this was the most serious logistics problem at present. We were told that there was enough food in country but a shortage of trucks to distribute it due both to the inadequate number available and the number that are inoperable because of maintenance problems. Another aspect of the inland transportation problem will be maintaining the roads under increased use, especially during the rainy season.

Some improvement was expected as trucks donated by West Germany and Italy arrived. Some of the private and voluntary organizations were also providing a small number of trucks to meet at least part of their own transportation needs from secondary storage points to their feeding centers. A World Food Program official told us his organization would soon attempt to coordinate the repair and maintenance of the existing trucks. Despite these signs of improvement, it appears that the transportation situation will need much more and continued attention.

COORDINATION

The UN Secretary General appointed an Assistant Secretary General in late 1984 to oversee the emergency relief operation in Ethiopia. The Assistant Secretary General has assumed responsibility for coordinating all donor relief activities. While there had been ongoing coordination among donors and implementing agencies before his appointment, many officials agreed that the Assistant Secretary General had improved coordination and was fulfilling an important role as the main interface with the host government. He meets regularly with donor and implementing agency representatives and has begun organizing smaller forums to focus on specific problems, such as water supply and sanitation engineering.

U.S. EMERGENCY RELIEF AND PROGRAM CONTROLS

At the time of our visit in February, some private and voluntary organizations were distributing U.S. emergency relief food while others had obtained program approval from AID but were awaiting their first U.S. food shipment. In our review of the U.S. famine relief program in five other African countries, we found long delays in the delivery of U.S. food. We were told a similar situation exists in Ethiopia.

We discussed program controls with private and voluntary organization officials, and it appeared that they had taken steps to establish appropriate controls to ensure that the food would get to the intended recipients. However, since some of the organizations had not yet begun distributing U.S. food, we did not test the control and reporting systems they had established.

The first government-to-government shipment of U.S. food arrived during our visit, thus, we are not able to comment on whether AID officials can be assured that U.S. food will reach the intended recipients. We did note that, under a contract with AID, a voluntary organization will monitor the food off-loading and distribution.

Many officials said they did not believe that diversion of emergency relief food from the intended recipients was a

problem. We were told that some relief commodities could occasionally be found in local markets but that the incidence was no greater than could be expected in any food relief program.

The Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission has overall responsibility for the emergency relief program. Many officials said that the Commission is a relatively good organization with an enormous task and that Commission staff is stretched very thin in trying to carry out its job.

In our discussions with Commission officials, they noted that all donors require reports on the final distribution of their food donations. Thus, they said, they have established an accounting and control system for both Commission use and to meet donor requirements. We did not test the system, however, both Commission and donor officials noted that it had limited automation, and thus reports are sometimes late. We were also told that communication between Commission offices could be difficult, which caused some delays in reporting information.

We noted that the situation in Ethiopia presents some special difficulties for U.S. officials charged with program oversight responsibility. With the volume of U.S. food assistance pledged for Fiscal Year 1985 at 326,023 metric tons as of March 17, 1985, and expected to go higher, the sheer size of the monitoring task will be formidable. The five permanent AID staff in Ethiopia, as presently agreed to by the host government, will likely have a difficult time carrying out the monitoring function in addition to their program approval and implementation duties. One important constraint we noted is the time consuming nature of the process of obtaining the so-called "security passes" for any travel outside Addis Ababa. The apparent tendency of the host government to grant approvals only at the last minute, if at all, will add considerably to the difficulties faced by the AID staff in trying to carry out their responsibilities.

REHABILITATION

Many officials said the immediate need is clearly emergency food relief, but they were also concerned about the next step, rehabilitation. Their concern was that many of the people migrating to feeding centers and thus being displaced from their traditional means of livelihood -- unless reintegrated into the economy -- will become permanently dependent upon relief assistance. While aware of the Hickenlooper Amendment³ restrictions on U.S. assistance to Ethiopia, many officials noted that it

³Section 620(e)(1) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 as amended bars aid to any country that expropriated U.S. privately owned property and failed to make prompt reimbursement unless, in essence, the President certifies that such aid is important to U.S. national interest.

will be very difficult for other donors to carry out rehabilitation of these people unless the United States participates in the process.

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We would be pleased to discuss the results of our visit, including information presented in this letter, with you or your staff if you desire. We have briefed House Committee on Foreign Affairs staff on the results of our visit and are providing the Committee, as well as other interested parties, with a copy of this report.

Sincerely yours,



Frank C. Conahan
Director