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**OFDA**  
**Disaster**  
**Case Reports**

**Ethiopia Drought/Famine**  
**1977-1979**

**Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance**  
**Agency for International Development**  
**Washington, D.C. 20525**

## ETHIOPIA - Drought/Famine

### Data

**Date:** 1977-1979 (FY 78 and FY 79)

**Location:** Administrative region of Welo and adjacent areas of Tigray, Gonder, Shewa

**No. Affected:** 1,400,000

**Damage:** Lack of rain, insect infestation, and plant disease resulted in substantial crop losses that threatened widespread disease and famine in the affected areas

### The Disaster

In late 1977 and through 1978 Welo and adjacent areas experienced drought, insect infestation, and plant diseases that caused cumulative food crop losses over five harvest periods. These factors, added to underlying problems of overgrazing, overcropping, deforestation, and overpopulation, resulted in severe food shortages in the region. Warning signs of famine were: sale of animals, population migration, increases in the number of marasmic children, and a higher incidence of kwashiorkor. In addition, in at least two highland districts of Welo there were outbreaks of gangrenous ergotism, a disease caused by consumption of grain contaminated with the ergot fungus. (More than 300 cases were suspected and at least 50 deaths recorded; many victims who survived suffered the loss of limbs through auto-amputation.) A shortage of vehicles to transport relief supplies was a major constraint to aiding the victims.

### Action Taken by the Government of Ethiopia (GOE)

The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) of the GOE, the government agency charged with the coordination and distribution of relief supplies, established 14 distribution centers in the affected areas. Food supplies were distributed by truck, pack animal, and air transport. By the end of 1978, some 45,000 MT of food grains, seed grain, and supplementary food had been distributed. The RRC planned to eventually relocate up to 500,000 people. The Ethiopia Red Cross contributed at least 550 MT of foodstuffs plus clothing and blankets. The Ethiopia Christian Relief and Development Agency, an umbrella organization of secular and religious agencies, contributed emergency foods and cooperated with the RRC in the distribution of supplies.

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Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

The USG was aware of potential disaster situations in both the Welo and Ogaden regions of Ethiopia. In September of 1977 an initial disaster determination was made, relating primarily to civil strife in the Ogaden. In November 1977 a grant of \$2 million for the purchase of trucks was made to the transportation trust fund for Ethiopia administered by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP); the trucks were used for the delivery of food supplies in both disaster regions.

In December 1977 a grant of \$15,000 was made for helicopter surveys of both regions. (These amounts are accounted for in the Ethiopia-Civil Strife Case Report, FY 1977, and are not included in the USG total below.)

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A separate disaster declaration for the Welo and Tigray areas was made by the US Charge on April 10, 1978. A grant of \$100,000 was made to the Relief and Rehabilitation Commissioner (RRC) for operational/assessment expenses, including helicopter support, a joint medical and agricultural ergot assessment team, prosthesis support for ergotism victims, and emergency seed procurement. U.S.A.I.D. also arranged for a plant pathologist/ergot specialist to visit Ethiopia and assess the ergot problem at a cost of \$4,986. Expenses for relief officers from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance came to \$1,030.....\$106,016

A grant for \$87,612 was made to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for food transport, resettlement, welfare, and start-up of maternal/child health clinics in the affected areas. Actual amount expended was.....\$86,641

A grant from reprogrammed development funds was made to the RRC to help finance emergency transport, up-country storage, equipment for the Assab port, a better communications system, and a joint UNICEF/RRC emergency feeding program totalling.....\$250,000

The USG contributed 12,500 MT of wheat and cornsoy milk (CSM) from P.L. 480 stocks valued at (including transport).....\$5,000,000

TOTAL        \$5,442,657

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The situation in Welo, Tigray, Gonder, and Shoa continued to deteriorate through the summer and autumn months of 1978. Lack of rain, new ergot contamination of grain crops, and infestation by worms and locusts dashed hopes that the winter harvest would be sufficient. In view of the continuing crisis, Ambassador Frederic L. Chapin made a subsequent disaster declaration on November 22, 1978 (FY 1979).

A grant to the League of Red Cross Societies in November 1978 was used by the League to purchase 80 MT of milk powder and 32,000 blankets worth \$275,000.....\$275,000

TOTAL \$275,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) - implemented the relief program financed by the USG grant mentioned above

Mennonites - 1,000 MT wheat

Assistance Provided by the International Community \*

International Organizations

European Economic Community (EEC) - 15,000 MT wheat; in kind contributions totalling \$587,217

UNICEF - 6,000 MT wheat; joint emergency feeding program with the RRC

World Food Program (WFP) - 50,000 MT cereals (contributed by United Kingdom, Canada, and Finland)

Governments

Australia - 10,000 MT wheat

Canada - cash contribution of \$165,290

Canada (British Columbia Agricultural Aid) - cash contribution of \$4,448

Denmark - cash contribution of \$118,106

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Germany, Federal Republic - 5,000 MT wheat

Netherlands - 6,000 MT wheat

Norway - cash contribution of \$94,684

Switzerland - In kind contributions worth \$134,969

United Kingdom - 14,500 MT barley; In kind contributions including 4 landrovers for a total of \$203,712

U.S.S.R. - 3,000 MT wheat; 3,000 MT rice

Yugoslavia - 25,000 MT wheat

Voluntary Organizations

Australia Red Cross - cash contribution of \$19,286

Belgium Red Cross - cash contribution of \$8,681

Bulgaria Red Cross - In kind contribution totalling \$100,104

Canada Red Cross - cash contribution of \$8,549

Czechoslovakia Red Cross - In kind contribution totalling \$95,678

Denmark Red Cross - cash contribution of \$36,998; In kind contribution of \$2,571 totalling \$39,569

Finland Red Cross - cash contribution of \$7,772; In kind contribution of \$7,254 totalling \$15,026

France Red Cross - In kind contribution of \$19,488

Germany, Democratic Republic Red Cross - In kind contribution totalling \$203,524

Germany, Federal Republic Red Cross - In kind contribution of \$390,251

Hungary Red Cross - In kind contribution of \$11,917

Ireland Red Cross - cash contribution of \$6,394

Japan Red Cross - cash contribution \$8,055; In kind contributions including 20,000 pieces of clothing worth \$115,554 for a total of \$123,609

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League of Red Cross Societies - Issued combined appeals in June and again in November 1978 for both the drought and locust swarm emergencies. (See the East Africa - Desert Locust Case Report, FY 1978.)

Luxembourg Red Cross - cash contribution of \$1,087

Monaco Red Cross - cash contribution of \$1,183

Netherlands Red Cross - cash contribution of \$117,953; in kind contribution of \$2,133 totalling \$120,086

New Zealand Red Cross - cash contribution of \$8,574

Norway Red Cross - cash contribution of \$99,632

OXFAM - cash contribution of \$35,345; in kind contribution of \$80,818 totalling \$116,163

Romania Red Cross - in kind contribution of \$15,627

Spain Red Cross - cash contribution of \$1,994

Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) - cash contribution to the RRC of \$676,500; food and equipment from Sweden of \$676,500 equalling \$1,353,000

Switzerland Red Cross - in kind contribution of \$42,982

Thailand Red Cross - cash contribution of \$461

United Kingdom Red Cross - in kind contribution of \$27,410

U.S.S.R. Red Cross - in kind contribution of \$113,782

Yugoslavia Red Cross - in kind contribution of \$13,896

Miscellaneous - cash contributions of \$61,478; in kind contributions of \$54,331 totalling \$115,809

TOTAL \$4,382,188

\* Please note - the figure for total international assistance is an approximation. In many cases the cash value of in kind aid is unavailable.