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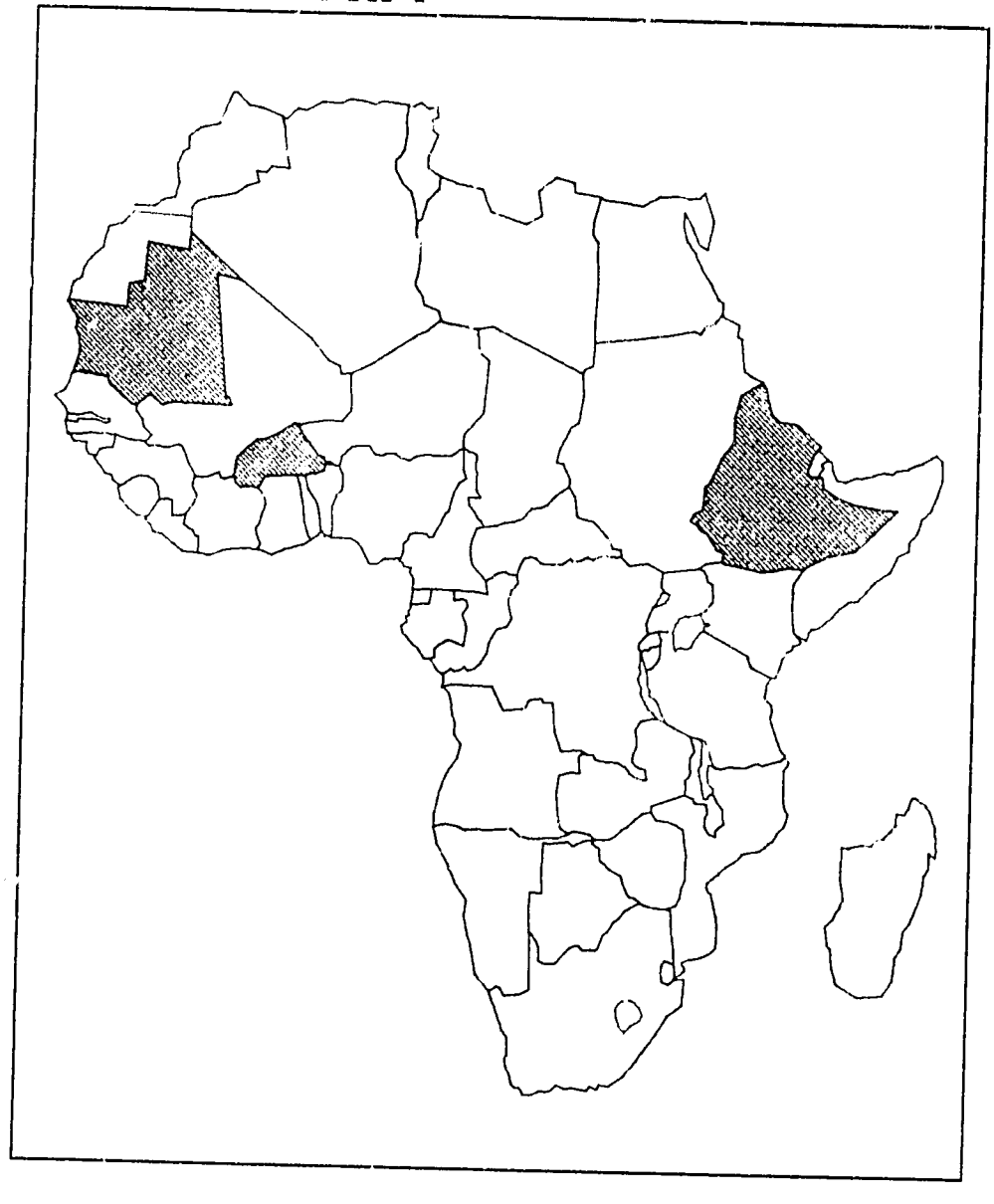
Report 21
April 1988

FEWS Country Report

BURKINA, ETHIOPIA and MAURITANIA



Famine Early Warning System
Africa Bureau
U.S. Agency for International Development

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BURKINA, ETHIOPIA and MAURITANIA

Report 21, April 1988

Prepared for the
Africa Bureau of the
U.S. Agency for International Development

Prepared by
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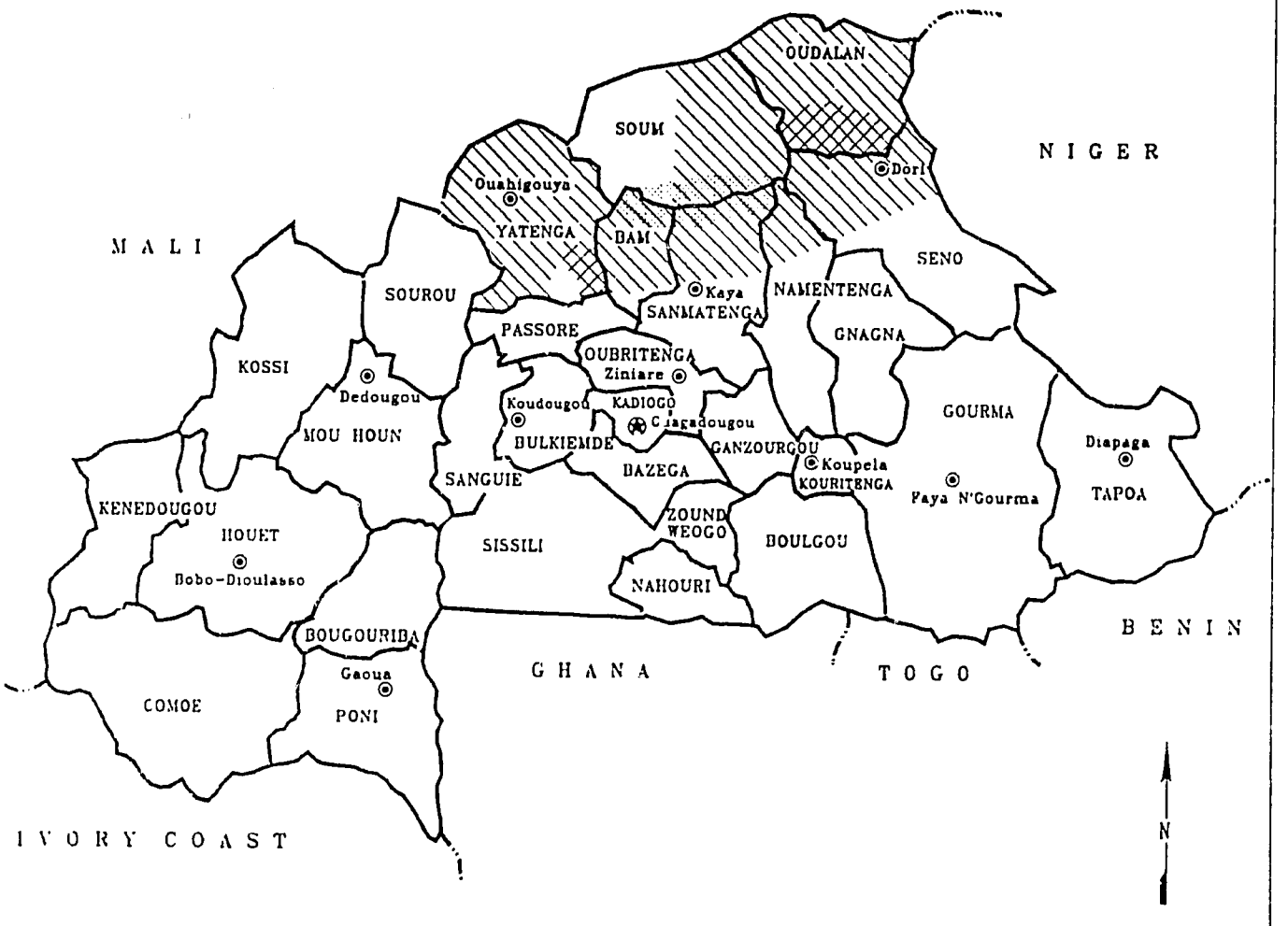
Overview

Food distributions are proceeding in the northern provinces of *Burkina*. In northern *Ethiopia*, the intensification and spread of conflict have seriously impeded an already inadequate food distribution system. The probability of spontaneously formed camps at previous feeding sites and large-scale migrations to Sudan increased during March. A prolonged dry spell in the *belg* (Spring) rainy season has probably reduced *belg* crop yields significantly. There are localized food shortages in *Mauritania*, although there should be sufficient cereal stocks in-country to meet overall 1988 food needs. New reports indicate that the 1987 rains in central Mauritania were so meager as to prevent the development of pastureland, forcing people to take their herds to more remote grazing areas. Unseasonal rains in late February and early March of this year have increased potential pastureland in southern, central and eastern Mauritania.

Map 1: Burkina



National Capital	
Regional Capitals	
International Boundaries	
National & Regional Boundaries	0 25 50 75 Miles
Immediate food shortage likely due to extremely poor harvest and limited resources	0 50 100 Kilometers
Poor harvests and localized crop failure due to drought	
Pasturage poor and water sources drying up	

FEWS/PWA, April 1988

BURKINA

Food Distributions Proceed

An estimated 1,500,000 people are affected by food shortages in Burkina, with 200,000 severely affected (primarily malnourished children, old people, lactating mothers and handicapped children). In seven northern provinces of Burkina, the distribution of 2,000 metric tons (MT) of drought commission relief supplies (donated by Italy) is underway with local planning for distribution. Catholic Relief Services may already be distributing 3,000 MT of locally purchased sorghum at reduced prices through local parishes. West Germany is still considering the purchase of 7,000 MT from the National Cereal Marketing Board (OFNACER) stocks for use as relief food, while the World Food Program (WFP) still has 6,000 MT of stocks available for its 1987/88 program. USAID is expected to contribute an additional 6,000 MT of sorghum as well. This sorghum will be distributed free to the severely affected and at a reduced "social price" to those who can pay. While under the supervision of the National Drought Commission, provincial Drought Commissions will be responsible for actual food distribution. The Government of Burkina and donor commitment to providing relief supplies for needy areas should substantially reduce the impact of locally poor harvests.

Map 1: Summary

Ethiopia

National Capital

Regional Capitals

International Boundaries

National & Regional Boundaries

Immediate and serious food shortages

Food shortages late in 1988

0 50 100 150 Miles

0 50 100 150 Kilometers

FEWS/PWA, April 1988

ETHIOPIA

Increasing Conflict Impedes Relief Effort

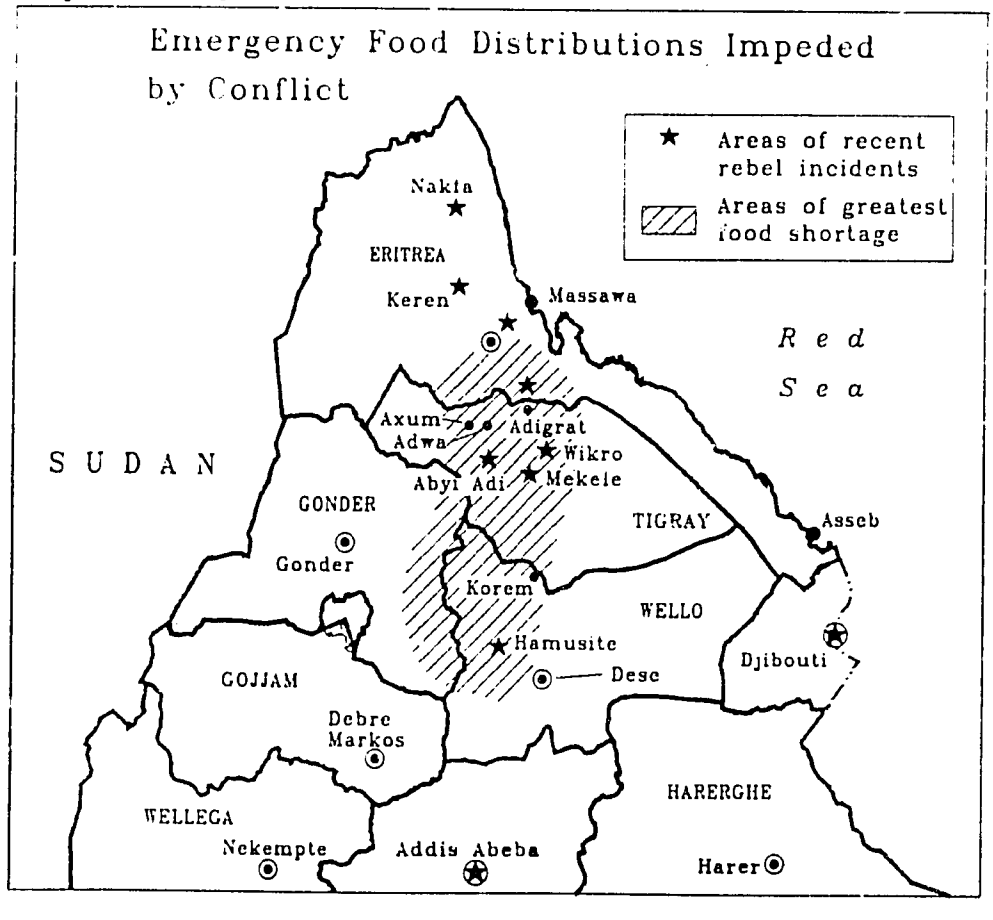
Summary

Increasing insecurity and levels of conflict in Eritrea, Tigray and Wello Provinces have had a serious compounding effect on the already inadequate distributions of emergency food, especially in Tigray and Eritrea. The escalating hostilities and inadequate food distribution could result in the spontaneous formation of camps of hungry people, as well as migrations to Sudan. A three-week dry spell has interrupted the *belg* season, and yields of *belg* and longer-cycle crops will be significantly affected.

Rebel Military Activity Widens and Intensifies

The warfare between the government and the two main rebel armies, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), shows signs of becoming much more widespread and more intense than in recent years (see Map 2). It is fast becoming the primary

Map 2: Ethiopia



problem in assuring adequate distributions of food aid in much of Eritrea, Tigray, and Wello. Amid indications of a major government offensive in Eritrea during late February and March, TPLF rebel forces mounted a series of attacks on several important towns in Tigray. Included among these towns were some of the most critical emergency food distribution centers. A number of towns were occupied for several days by rebel forces, who then apparently abandoned them without further conflict. At the same time, a group of rebels attacked and burned several trucks bringing emergency food stocks to a PVO project in southeastern Gonder. This occurred near Hamusite in western Wello, an area that had been without major recent conflict. Later news reports indicate that the EPLF defeated a large government force in Eritrea, around and to the south of Nakfa.

The eventual response of the government and the rebels to this striking series of events is uncertain. It appears likely that emergency food distribution sites in Eritrea, Tigray, and perhaps also in Wello will be increasingly hostage to the war that surrounds them. Rebel groups generally profess no desire to disrupt emergency food convoys and distribution sites. Nevertheless, there have been several prominent cases, including the recent incident in Wello, in which they have apparently done just that. The government, meanwhile, acts as if it will not permit large stocks of emergency food to fall into rebel hands, and stocks are low in the most insecure areas. These areas include some of the most food-short localities in Ethiopia. The government's actions tend to compound the impact of the closure of critical roads to emergency food transport (in the name of protection), and have left many peripheral distribution sites with no stocks throughout most of February and March.

Continuing Problems with Emergency Food Distributions

The already severe problems affecting the transport of emergency food to Tigray, and then out to secondary distribution sites, have worsened in the last month. The World Food Program recently estimated that only 10,000 metric tons (MT) of food were delivered to Tigray during February and the first 11 days of March. This quantity is well below half the amount generally believed to have been required. Recent fighting and the fall of several important towns along the main road from Adigrat to Mekele have all but stopped food convoys moving along the road south from Asmara (see Map 2). The airlifts operating out of Asmara, Massawa, Asseb, and Addis Abeba have been plagued by a lack of fuel, poor fuel quality, a lack of airstrips, and long flying times. Only airlifts are maintaining a regular, if minimal, flow of food into Mekele.

Inadequate food aid is reaching some areas to the west of Mekele and Adigrat, particularly in the northwest corner of Wello Region and large areas around Axum and Adwa. This inadequate service is attributable to a small number of distribution sites, poor access and the increasing insecurity of the area. These areas may have particularly acute, but less well-recognized, needs than those areas along the main road through Tigray. A convoy of emergency food arrived in Axum and Adwa during the third week of March, and was the first aid arriving by road in the area in two and a half months. The rehabilitation of the airstrip in Axum may help to increase deliveries of food.

Predictable Consequences of Emergency Food Distribution Problems

As in 1984 and 1985, Eritreans and Tigrayans are likely to respond to inadequate emergency food distributions by congregating at perceived food distribution points, or by migrating to Sudan. These options may confront several millions of people in Eritrea, Tigray, and (to a lesser degree) in Wello Province. Unless the severity of the food supply problems in these areas has been vastly overestimated, and there is no evidence to suggest this, then the events of February and March will almost certainly begin to produce these reactions. Appropriate preparations to meet the needs of these likely migrants may now be imperative. Remaining uncertainties include the reaction of the Ethiopian government to

meeting the different political and logistic demands of organizing and administering emergency camps, and the reception that the Sudanese government might offer to Ethiopians crossing the border in great numbers.

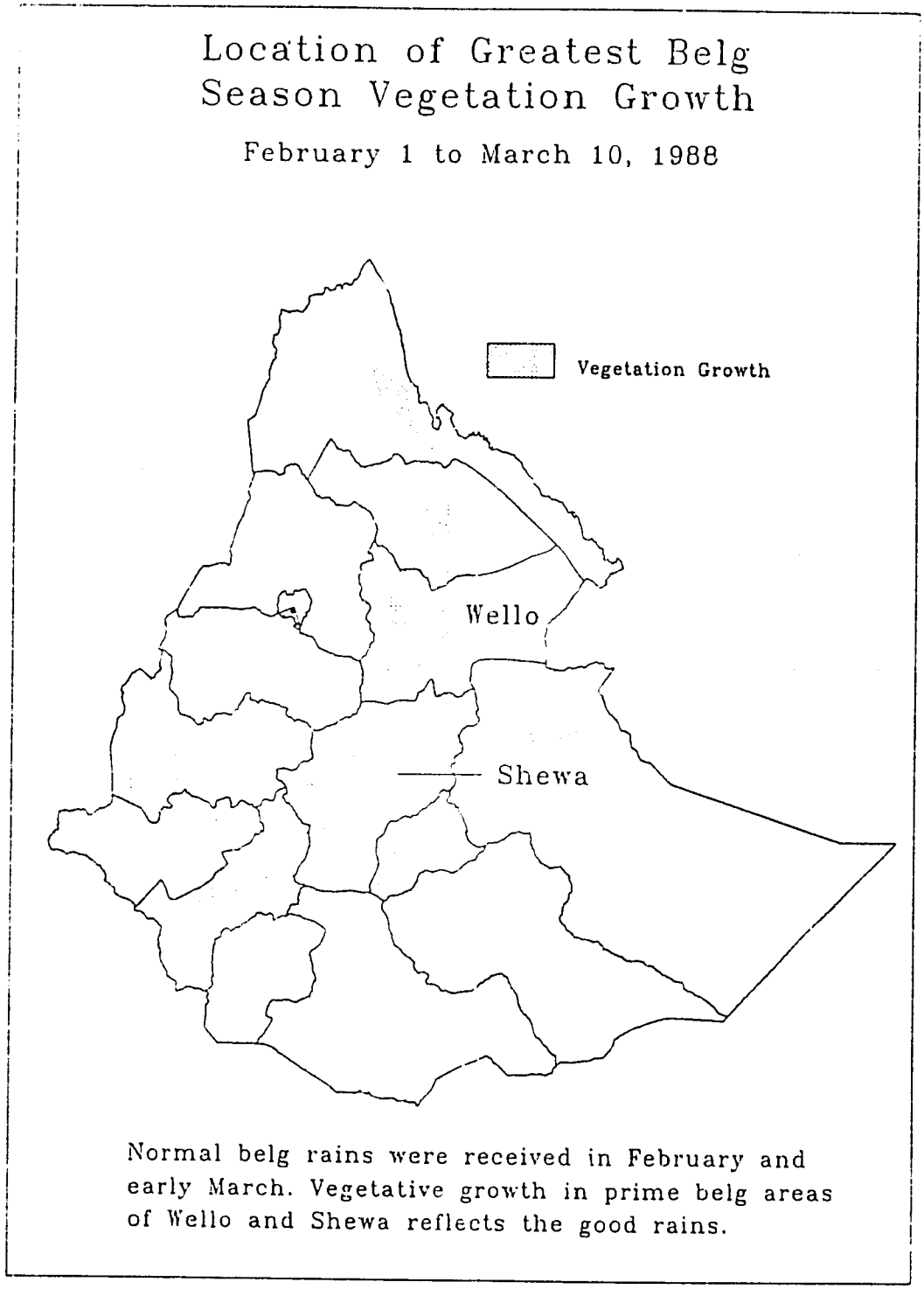
Asseb Port Congestion Continues

Asseb port congestion has increased in the past month, despite the best efforts of donors. Large quantities of imported goods other than emergency food aid crowd the port for failure of importers to pay customs duties. Large shipments of fertilizer are expected in late March and may worsen a difficult situation. Current overall stock levels in the port total 247,000 MT, of which almost 107,000 MT are emergency food aid. The recent approval to use a 50,000 MT Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) warehouse for temporary storage of emergency food has permitted some of the emergency stocks to be moved out of the way. Nevertheless, a shortage of trucks (due to reported "Spring harvest" activities, as well as to use in a government military offensive occurring north of Asmara) has compounded the already serious problems of catching up with near-term scheduled deliveries. The increasing difficulty in delivering food to Tigray and much of Eritrea renders a satisfactory solution to this problem unlikely in the next month or two.

Belg Season Rains Show First Signs of Trouble

Rains in the *belg* (Spring) harvest areas began normally in early February, and appeared regular and sufficient in quantity until the second week in March. Since then, rains have been infrequent and light. Satellite imagery through this same period (see Map 3) confirms the early favorable patterns, as well as the later rainfall hiatus reported by the small number of rainfall stations in the area. Note in Map 4 that the areas most affected by the dry spell are exactly those prime *belg* areas in Wello and Shewa that need the rain the most. Although cumulative rainfall at Dese, in the middle of the *belg* zone, is about normal, the two recent weeks without rain (through the 19th of March) have significantly hurt crops. This season's vegetation (March 11-20) already shows less growth than at the same time in 1986, which was generally a very good *belg* season. If rainfall continues to be as poor as it has been in early March (early reports indicate very poor rains), a significant decline in yields will be likely. Given the high degree of reliance on *belg* crops in Wello and Shewa, the loss of any amount of the estimated normal 200,000 to 400,000 MT harvest may translate almost directly into increased needs for emergency foods. Loss estimates and numbers of people affected will be clearer as more rainfall data becomes available and as field assessments are received.

Map 3: Ethiopia



Normal belg rains were received in February and early March. Vegetative growth in prime belg areas of Wello and Shewa reflects the good rains.

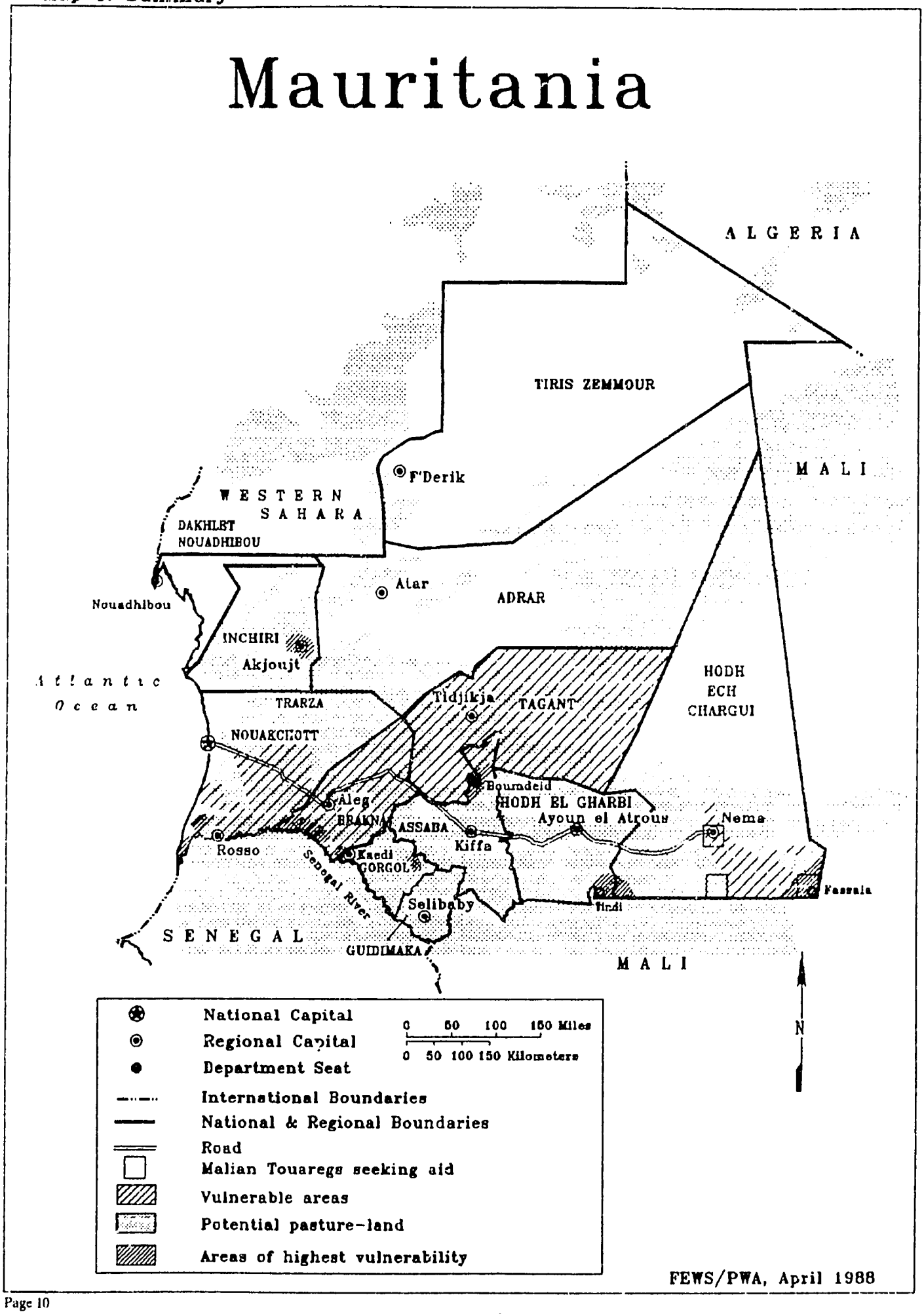
Map 4: Ethiopia

Impact of Recent Poor Belg Rains

March 7-20, 1988

The recent poor rains in prime belg areas of Wello and Shewa are reflected in the lack of vegetative growth in those areas.

Map 1: Summary



FEWS/PWA, April 1988

MAURITANIA

Green-Up

Summary

Commercial and food aid stock plus expected commercial and food aid imports should make up for Mauritania's 1987 production deficit[1], yet there are some areas of the country showing signs of food supply disruption. The most recent reports of food supply problems concern Tagant and northern Brakna Regions in central Mauritania. Altogether, about 276,300 people live in the problem areas, including an estimated 14,160 Touaregs (primarily from Mali) who have migrated to southeastern Mauritania in search of assistance. Highly unusual, late February to early March rainfall was reported at stations as far east as Tidjikja. Except in Tiris Zemmour Region, subsequent satellite imagery suggests moderate vegetation has spread over a larger area than during any March from 1981 through 1986. This may indicate that pasturage now covers a wider area than in any of those years. In Western Sahara and Tiris Zemmour Regions, vegetation shows little or no increase. While it appears that the Desert locusts in Tiris have been controlled, there has been an upswing in Desert locust activity in nearby areas of Morocco.

Food Security

Although there should be enough grain available in Mauritania to meet 1988 food needs, not every area in the country is experiencing full food security. FEWS/Mauritania has been working with in-country organizations to assess areas of current vulnerability. Factors used to identify areas with potential for (and in some cases actual) food shortages include: high or increasing rates of malnutrition, problems with dams, failure of flood recession agriculture[2] along the Senegal River in Brakna Region, crop destruction by grasshoppers, extreme drought, low or non-existent on-farm stocks, and an unusual influx of Touareg families from Mali into southern Hodh ech Chargui Region. As detailed in Table 1, a total of 276,290 people live in areas that have been determined to lack full food security. About 26,000 people live in the areas currently identified as having the highest potential for food shortages.

[1]Mauritania's net 1987 cereal harvest of 107,000 metric tons (MT), which meets less than 35% of the country's 1988 food needs, is actually quite good in comparison to recent years' production.

[2]In flood recession agriculture, crops are planted in soil left moist by receding river levels. Such crops are generally planted toward the end of the rainy season and harvested from January through March.

Table 1: Populations in Areas with Potential for Food Shortages

Regions/Groups	Reason for Assessment	Population in Affected Areas[1]
Riverine Population	Lack of recessional agriculture in 1987	60,000 people
CRS Program Children	Closing of the CRS Maternal and Child Health Program in November, 1987	10,000 children under five years of age
Hodh el Chargui Region, Tindi Area	1987 grasshopper infestation causing 100% crop loss	2,346 people
Inchiri Region, Akjoujt Town	Child malnutrition rates increasing since late 1985; closing of national copper mine	11,290 people
Hodh ech Chargui Region, Touareg Population in Southeast	Requesting asssistance, appear to have no resources	2,832 families 14,160 people
Gorgol Region, M'Bout Department	Flooding of agricultural land in 1987	1,000 people
Hodh ech Chargui Region, Fassala Area	Lack of rainfall, agricultural production in 1987	4,000 people
Central Mauritania, Tagant Region northern Brakna Region	Lack of rainfall, agricultural production, pasture in 1987	116,560 people 50,537 people
Assaba Region, Boumdeid Department	Loss of wadi recessional agriculture in 1987	6,397 people
TOTAL		**276,290 people**

Source: FEWS/Mauritania based on reports from CSA-run joint assessment missions and a University of Arizona/USDA/USAID/AGRES II Project study in the Senegal River Valley.

[1]The actual percentage of the population that is at risk of a food shortage is not yet clear for most of these areas.

A recent joint mission[1] to Tagant and northern Brakna Regions found that poor rainfall in the area during 1987 prevented the development of pasturelands, decreased the area cultivated in wadi recessional agriculture by half, and caused potable water to become scarce in some localities. The lack of pasture caused people to take herds elsewhere (including Tiris Zemmour Region), limiting the availability of meat and milk for local consumption. The mission also reported that, in some areas, there were substantial animal losses ascribed to the lack of forage. The mission found high rates of malnutrition in certain villages (more than 20% of children measured being severely malnourished). A follow-up mission[2] visited these areas in late March to verify the reports and determine where and at what level emergency food aid might be required.

Another CSA-organized joint mission found that the most severe effects of the 1987 failure of the Senegal River flood are felt only in localized areas[3], since many people have on-farm stocks left from previous years' reasonably good harvests. In at least one area in eastern riverine Brakna Region, villagers are not only selling livestock and seeking work, but have also begun selling clothing and jewelry in order to raise cash to purchase food.

Two localities had no crops in 1987 because of troubles with dams. In Boumdeid Department of Assaba Region, the dam at Boumdeid Town broke, preventing most wadi recessional agriculture -- the predominant growing method in the area. In eastern Gorgol Region, at least two villages lost their agricultural lands to the filling of an irrigation project dam on the Black Gorgol River. Identified areas with severe child malnutrition remain the same as reported in FEWS Country Report 19. These areas contain the following populations: villagers in southern Trarza Region; the 11,290 inhabitants of Akjoujt Town, Inchiri Region; and approximately 10,000 malnourished children formerly fed at now-closed Catholic Relief Services feeding centers.

In the southeast of Mauritania, a small area around the town of Tindi in Kobenni Department, Hodh el Gharbi Region, was reported to have experienced 100% crop loss from grasshoppers. The area surrounding Fassala Town (an area in the far southeastern corner of Hodh ech Chargui Region where rainfed agriculture is traditionally practiced) received no rain during 1987, preventing any form of agriculture. Unlike farmers in the Senegal River valley, farmers in the southeast have little or no on-farm stock. All of the southeast of Mauritania has been far slower to recover from the 1983/1984 drought, and farmers there are reported to be heavily in debt to merchants who lent them grain during the lean periods.

Touareg populations are reported to have moved from Mali into southeast Mauritania during January. They are now living in encampments outside the administrative centers of southeastern Hodh ech Chargui Region, with the largest concentration in the area of Fassala (Map 1). While it is not unusual for young Touareg men to migrate to southeastern Mauritania for work, this is the first year that whole families have moved into the area. The CSA provided tents and some food aid to 2,832 Touareg families in January, with assistance from France.

[1] The mission was organized by Mauritania's Food Security Commission (CSA) and contained representatives of ministry, donor and private voluntary organizations.

[2] The mission included the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM), Commission for Food Security and the USAID Food for Peace Officer.

[3] Approximately 60,000 villagers living within 10 kilometers of the river depend on flood recession crops.

February/March Rain and Potential Pastureland

During late February and early March, most of the rainstations in the western half of Mauritania reported rainfall. The rain was part of a larger weather system that extended south into Senegal and as far east as Tidjikja, in Tagant Region. Rainfall in February is highly unusual in Mauritania -- over the past thirty years, such rains have been noted only in 1958 and 1968. As a probable consequence of the rains, satellite imagery from mid-March suggests the presence of vegetation over a much broader area than was seen during any March from 1981 through 1986 [1]. The current vegetation picture is fairly similar in extent and pattern to that of March 1987, with the exception that current vegetation levels in Inchiri Region are higher than seen in any previous March. While ground reports are required to tie information from satellite imagery to the welfare of specific plant species, the potential for expanded pastureland indicated by the imagery should benefit Mauritanian herders.

Desert Locusts

Good conditions for Desert locust development prevailed in Tiris Zemmour from November through mid-March, allowing a generation of locusts to hatch, fledge, and lay eggs. The unseasonal rain mentioned above apparently bypassed that area and Western Sahara. Satellite imagery shows little or no increase in vegetation in these areas, although there still appear to be areas of elevated vegetation levels in Western Sahara. Necessarily modest control efforts, underway since November, have combined with high temperatures, dessicating winds, and lack of rainfall to bring the Desert locust population in Tiris Zemmour under control.

1 The collection of the image series began in 1981.

Famine Early Warning System (FEWS)
Country Reports

FEWS publishes monthly reports on Burkina, Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, and Sudan. These reports are designed to provide decisionmakers with current information and analysis on existing and potential nutrition emergency situations. Each situation identified is described in terms of geographical extent and the number of people involved, and the proximate causes insofar as they have been discerned.

It is necessary to identify or "target" populations in-need or "at risk" in order to determine appropriate forms aad levels of intervention. FEWS reports will employ the term "at risk" to mean...

> ...those persons lacking sufficient food, or resources to acquire sufficient food, to avert a nutritional crisis (i.e., a progressive deterioration in their health or nutritional condition below the status quo), and who, as a result, require specific intervention to avoid a life-threatening situation.

Perhaps of greatest importance to decisionmakers, the process underlying the deteriorating situation is highlighted by the FEWS effort, hopefully with enough specificity and forewarning to permit alternative intervention strategies to be examined and implemented. Food assistance strategies are key to famine avoidance. However, other types of intervention can be of major importance both in the short term and in the long run, including medical, transport, storage, changes in economic development policy, etc.

Where possible, food needs estimates are included in the FEWS reports. It is important to understand, however, that no direct relation exists between numbers of persons at risk and the quantity of food assistance needed. This is because famines are the culmination of slow-onset disaster processes which can be complex in the extreme. The food needs of individual populations at risk depend upon when in the disaster process identification is made and the extent of its cumulative impact on the individuals concerned. Further, the amount of food assistance required, whether from internal or external sources, depends upon a host of considerations. Thus the food needs estimates presented periodically in FEWS reports *should not* be interpreted to mean food aid needs, e.g., as under PL480 or other donor programs.