

Famine Early Warning Systems NETWORKS

Summary of the 2003 *Belg* Season Performance in Ethiopia

The good *belg* rains in Ethiopia (March to April) and the ongoing *kiremt* rains (June to mid-September) are expected to end the country's 2002 drought. Rains during the 2003 *Belg* season were normal to above-normal in the major agricultural areas. An early start to the *belg* season helped some pastoralists by replenishing their pasture and water sources, and it benefited crop dependent areas in the north and south by allowing farmers to plant early. Alternating wet and dry spells over many of the *belg*-producing areas have created favorable farming conditions for *belg* season agriculture. The intermittent dry spells allowed *belg* crops to ripen and dry before harvesting.

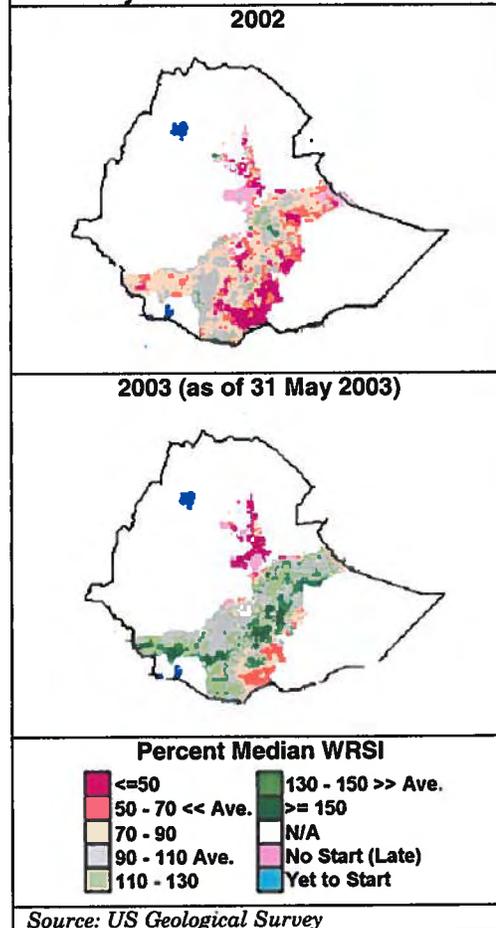
The Water Requirement Satisfaction Index (WRSI), a model of crop performance that takes rainfall into account, also indicates that the 2003 *belg* season performance was better than in the past four years in many parts of *belg* crop dependent areas (Figure 1).

Nevertheless, in places where farmers planted short cycle crops late, the *belg* season was not good. Areas in the eastern half of Oromiya Region and the southeastern parts of SNNPR, which had suffered two consecutive poor seasons (*belg* and *meher*), again faced another dry season. Hence, farmers may have delayed planting their *belg* crops until sufficient rains fell in April, with a likely decline in the resulting production.

Despite improved performance of *belg* season nationally, food aid needs still remain in the drought affected areas of the country. The return of good rains this year may not be sufficient to end to Ethiopia's food crisis. People need time and assistance to recovery from what has become, for many, a chronic crisis.

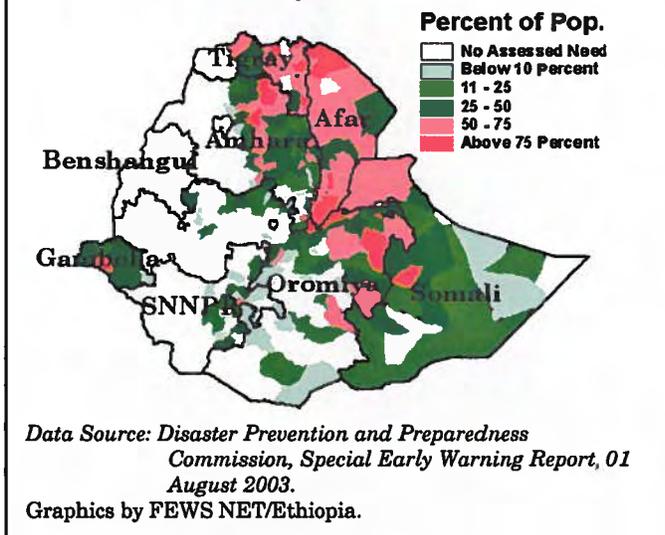
Institutionally, Ethiopia usually appeals for food aid in December or January, following the main season (*meher*) crop and pastoralist assessment. Ethiopia updates its appeal for the remainder of the calendar year in July, following the minor season (*belg*) assessment.

Figure 1: Belg Crop Water Requirement Satisfaction Index Anomaly



According to the DPPC's Special Early Warning Report (August 1) following the 2003 *belg* assessment, 2.4 million people require 259,000 MT of food aid between August and December 2003 in addition to previous estimates (the January appeal, as amended in March and April). Of these 2.4 million people, about 1.8 million (mainly in Somali, Afar and SNNP Regions) require an extension of food aid that had

Figure 2: August to December 2003 Estimated Food Needs: Percent of Rural Population in Need of Food Assistance by District



been planned to phase out. An additional 600,000 people (mainly in Oromiya Region) are classified as new beneficiaries. Thus, the total number of people requiring food aid during 2003 now reaches 13.2 million, up from the previous 12.6 million. The current food requirement (cereals and supplementary food) for the remainder of the year is 617,647 MT.

Current pledges are sufficient to meet this latest increase in food aid demand. Nevertheless, the current pipeline information does not include targeted supplementary food (managed by UNICEF), and it appears the supply of supplementary items like pulses and blended food are not still meeting needs. As a result, the DPPC appealed for an additional 50,015 MT of pulses. Also, in order to maintain stocks to cover unanticipated needs

early next year, the DPPC appealed for an additional 200,000 MT of cereals.

The good *belg* rains in Ethiopia and the ongoing *kiremt* rains are expected to end the country's 2002 drought, but may well lead to a new threat – an upsurge in malaria, which is the third biggest killer in the country.

Alemu Asfaw, FEWS NET/Ethiopia
Phil Steffen, FEWS NET/Washington
 August 28, 2003