



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# Special Report on Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region

FEWS NET FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM NETWORK

September 2003

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Chemonics International Inc.

**FEWS NET**

Famine Early Warning System Network

Contract No. AOT-I-00-00-00142-00 – Task Order 1

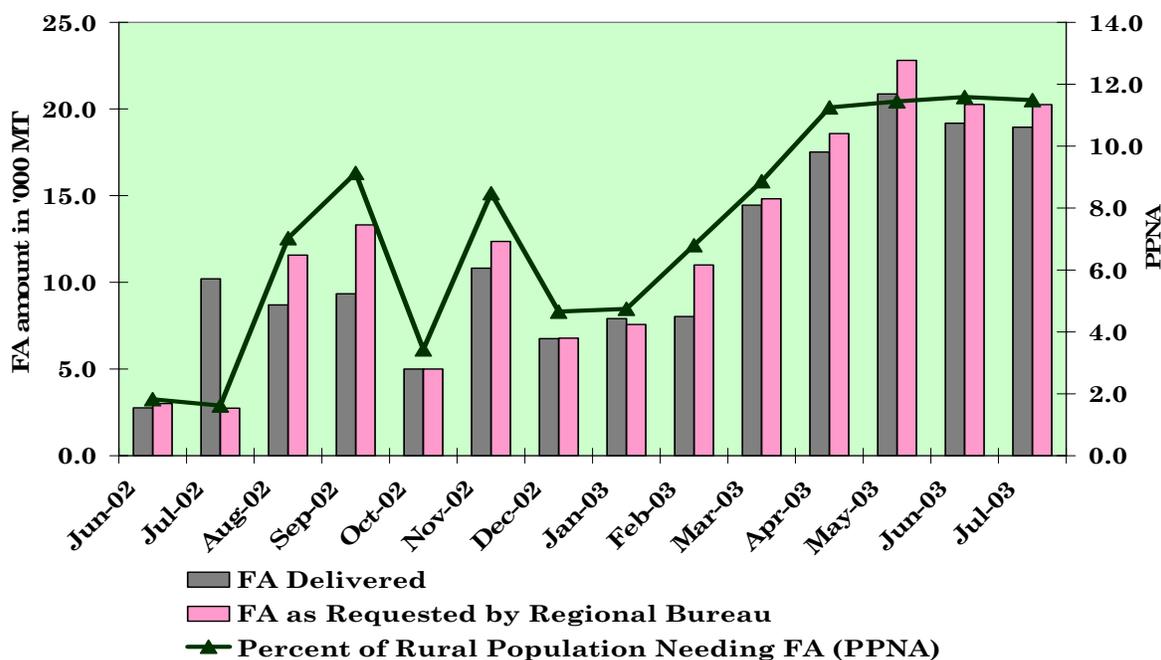
The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

## Special Report on Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region September 3, 2003

*The current food insecurity crisis in SNNPR, which has escalated since December 2002, remain precarious for the most vulnerable among broad improving indicators; a comprehensive approach that strengthens livelihoods is required to address the underlying causes of food insecurity.*

Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) is an area becoming synonymous with the term 'Green-Famine' designating a situation in which the rain is enough for the land to be green and crops are growing, but yields remain low. The paradox of green-famine once again gripped the Region in 2002, the impact of which is still continuing. Aggravated by many structural problems, the current drought, one of the worst in recent years, has claimed the lives of thousands of children, according to Bureau of Health reports. Despite some improvements for seriously malnourished children sent to the Therapeutic Feeding Centers (TFCs), it is feared that many more children have died who never made it to the centers. Many parts of the Region have experienced diminished harvests since 1999, weakening the ability of households to cope with food insecurity. Considerable efforts by the Government, donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have helped to stabilize food insecurity since March 2003. As depicted in Figure 1, although the

**Figure 1: Food Aid (FA) Requested and Delivered in SNNPR and Percent of Population Needing Food Assistance (June 2002 to July 2003)**



Source: Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission and Office (DPPC and DPPO).

food security crisis has steadily increased as early as December, 91 percent of projected food aid needs were delivered between June 2002 and July 2003 implying that the response was reasonably good.

Nevertheless, the problems are much more than the failure of rains (drought) and the response requires much more than food aid. The return of good rains this year will not be sufficient to end the crisis as the crisis is more chronic in nature. Poor access to infrastructure, water and health facilities, lack of productive assets and extreme poverty is widespread. According to the Household Consumption Expenditure survey in Ethiopia, poverty in SNNPR is among the highest in the country. Furthermore, the relative inexperience of the regional government with managing food crises like this one has also exacerbated the problem. Drought aggravates vulnerability to food shortages and erosion of assets making households more susceptible to future crises. Furthermore, the increase in cereal prices (Figure 4) which are currently at their record highs and the collapse of coffee production and prices (Figure 3) are limiting purchasing power for food and pushing many more people into destitution, dependence on others for survival. All these structural problems leave the Region at constant risk of food insecurity each time the rains fail.

### **Underlying Causes of Food Insecurity in SNNPR**

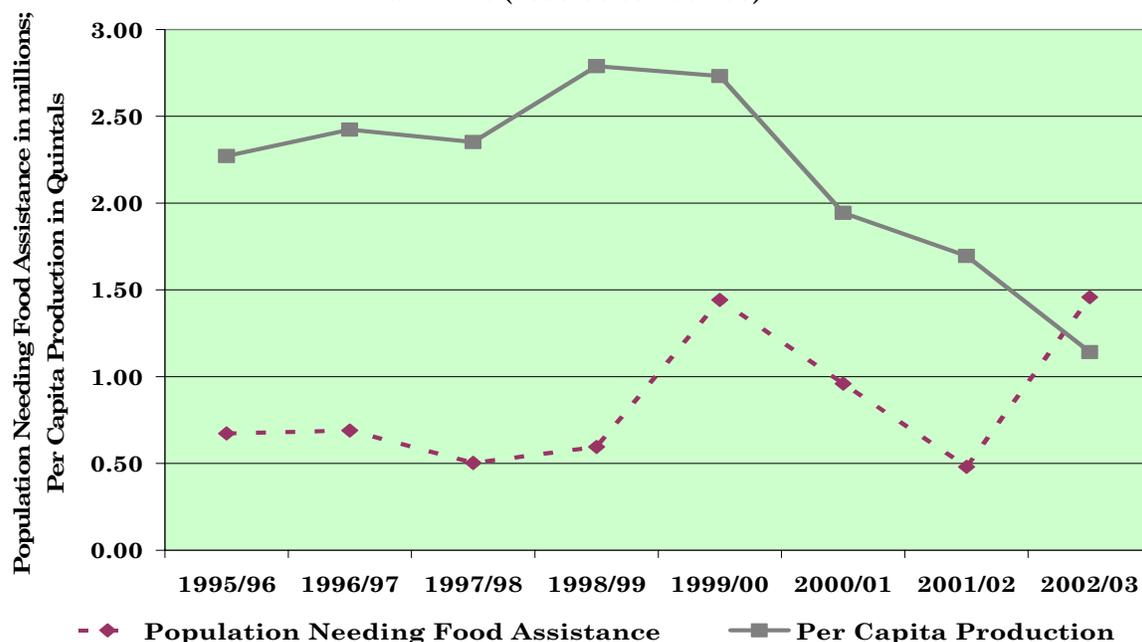
Chronic food insecurity is a dynamic process, *people are edging closer to destitution and their resilience to small shocks has dwindled over several consecutive years of drought.* Livelihood shocks and other compounding factors have limited their basic coping mechanisms (such as daily wage labor) leading to a rise in the number of food aid beneficiaries over many years. As observed in Figure 2, the number of food aid beneficiaries in SNNPR has jumped in the last year while *per capita* crop production has declined for the past 5 years. Coupled with declines in other income sources and employment opportunities, per capita crop production declined by about 60 percent between 1998/99 to 2002/03, limited the regional per capita calorie availability of about 1,800, already less than the international minimum standard of 2,100 calories and much less than the standard for an adequate diet of 2,400 calories.

*Coffee, the main cash crop and a critical source of income and employment, has been seriously affected for the past three years.* Due to the *collapse of world coffee prices and local coffee production*, the share of coffee to the aggregate value of production declined from 23 percent in 1994/95, providing about US\$ 82 million of yearly income, to less than 10 percent (equivalent to less than US\$ 40 million) last year, directly or indirectly affecting more than 5 million people in SNNPR. As depicted in Figure 3, regional coffee production declined significantly for the past three years, during which prices also declined significantly (about 64 percent between 1999/00 and 2002/03). Coffee growers increased their deliveries to the central market, but this was not enough to compensate for the 28 percent decline in regional coffee earnings. Even then, SNNPR earnings from coffee sales to the central market declined by 28 percent between 1998/99 and 2002/03 with the unit price collapse of 64 percent. The failure of other cash crops, including *chat*, pepper, and root crops, have had similar detrimental impacts on people's livelihoods.

*The recurrence of drought* with increasing frequency and decrease in mean annual rainfall is becoming a norm in the SNNPR, forcing people to rely more on lower-yielding and cheaper varieties of crops. Because of the probability of drought, farmers are less willing to invest in higher yielding, more expensive varieties and the costly inputs these varieties require. Years of acute drought in the region that stunt crops and leave little to harvest have left farming

households impoverished, and unable to feed themselves. In the absence of irrigated agriculture, dependency on rain-fed agriculture makes them more susceptible to acute food shortages due to declining and erratic rainfall. Many farming households have not yet been able to recover from the 1999/00 drought, when more than 1.4 million people required food aid (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Population Needing Food Assistance and Per Capita Crop Production in SNNPR (1995/96 to 2002/03)**



Data Source: Rural population is from CSA, production from Bureau of Agriculture and Population Needing Assistance from Regional DPPO.

Note: Production includes all crop production produced in the Region including grains, pulses, oil seeds, root crops and *enset*. However, it excludes *chat* and coffee.

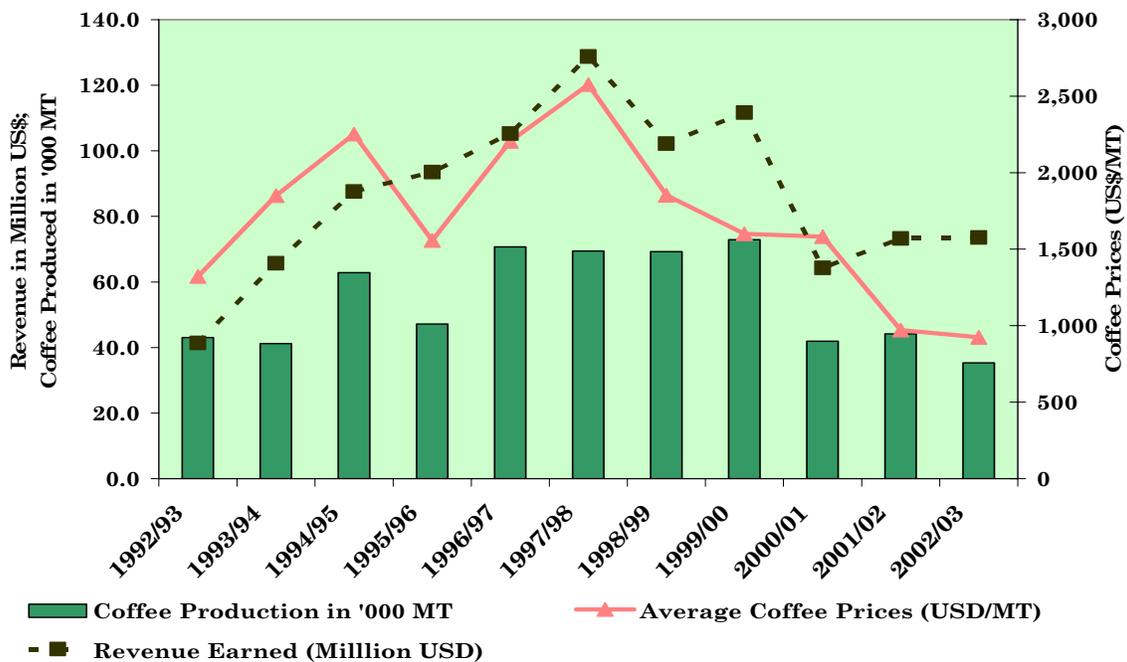
*Population explosion*, as high as 3.6 percent growth in some years, far above the national average of 2.9 percent, is another cause of prevailing food insecurity. The *population density*, which goes about 1,000/km<sup>2</sup> in Wenago *woreda* of Gedeo zone, and the SNNPR average of 122/km<sup>2</sup> are very high compared to the typical crop dependent areas average of 87/km<sup>2</sup> elsewhere in Ethiopia. This increased population may have exceeded the carrying capacity of the fragile environment. According to the Bureau of Agriculture, it is estimated that more than 75 percent of all households (with an average size of 7 members) ekes out a living on less than a hectare of land. These fragmented and small landholdings are becoming unproductive and infertile due to intensive cultivation. Furthermore, population pressure limits land for grazing, making it difficult for households to keep draught animals or compelling households to further encroach onto pastoral areas.

The *recurrence of serious human epidemics*, such as meningitis, pneumonia, measles and diarrhea, are seen in higher levels during and after drought. Endemic malaria, in particular, is the leading cause of hospital and health center morbidity. The prevalence of disease further

increases vulnerability and weakens immune systems, leaving adults and children more emaciated, prone to disease and less able to withstand food shortages. Disease limits productivity, income earning capacity and household livelihoods and thus constitutes a major barrier to growth and development.

*Education and health facilities* are poor and inadequate. The SNNPR infant mortality rate is 128 deaths per 1,000 children (compared with an average of 107 for East African countries) with malnutrition underlying more than one-third of infant and child deaths. According to the Central Statistical Authority (CSA), only 24.4 percent of the SNNPR population is literate, lower than in other developing countries, such as Mali (32 percent) and Chad (29.8 percent). Relatively more males than females are found to be literate. Widespread illiteracy severely limits off-farm employment opportunities.

**Figure 3: Total Coffee Production and Revenue Earned and their Respective Unit Prices in SNNPR (1992/93 – 2002/03)**



Source: Coffee production data are from SNNPR Finance and Economic Development Coordination Bureau; Supply and unit prices are from Ministry of Trade and Industry, Coffee and Tea Authority.

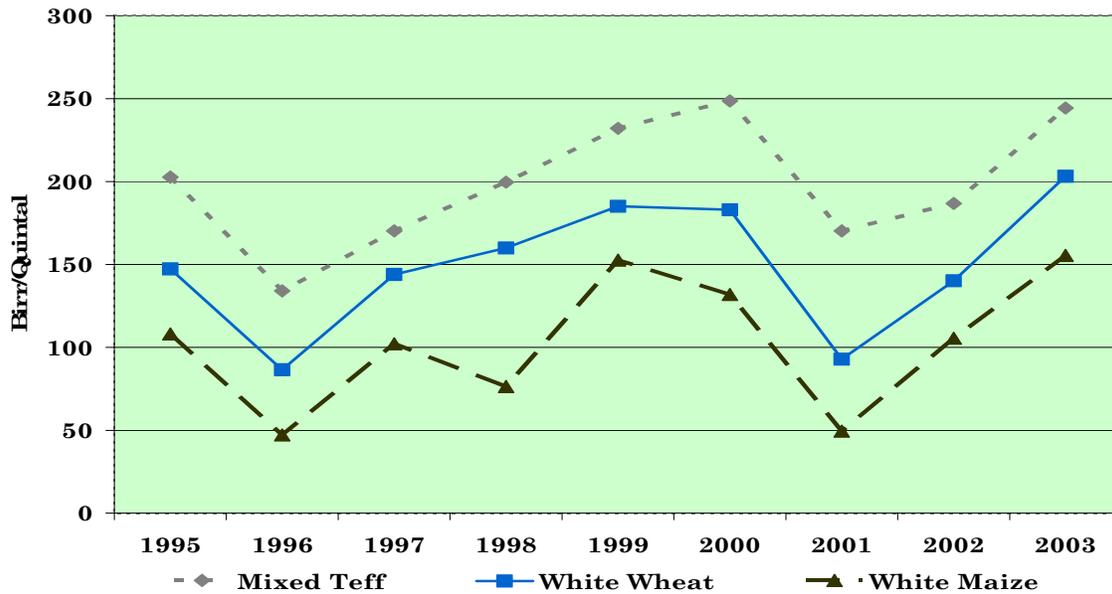
*Cultural habits* and limited knowledge about consumption and nutrition (extensive consumption of low-protein *enset*) sustain malnutrition. Limited knowledge of good health and hygiene practices increases the spread of disease. Polygamy, though declining, is still a dominant feature of the family structure in some parts of the Region, contributing to the high population growth rate and leading to a high number of female headed households with limited means to provide for their children. Women and children in polygamous households are vulnerable as they are usually disfavored by the bread-winner husbands. Mostly women are confined to their farms and seriously disadvantaged in terms of health care, education, and

employment opportunities. Furthermore, female headed households, predominantly due to cultural reasons, are more likely to be food insecure than male-headed households.

*Limited off-farm income and employment opportunities* leave people no choice but to exploit their overworked and fragile land resources. Many of the state farms, which used to employ large numbers, have already been closed. The coffee-processing industries, which used to provide gross added value of more than US\$ 1.4 million per year, have also been seriously hit by declining international coffee prices and many have gone bankrupted. Seasonal laborers who traditionally depend on seasonal coffee-picking and coffee processing industry wages to supplement subsistence agriculture face hunger from plummeting world coffee prices. There are no new employment opportunities to absorb the ever increasing able-bodied labor force (increasing about 3.5 percent annually).

In conclusion, the underlying causes of the current food insecurity crisis in SNNPR are rooted in chronic poverty, dwindling household productive assets and erosion of income-earning opportunities, exacerbated by yet another climatic shock. This food insecurity crisis needs a more comprehensive approach that aims to strengthen and preserve livelihoods. Integrated, multi-sectoral strategies for recovery, transition and development using a multi-year framework are necessary to address the underlying causes.

**Figure 4: Real Retail Prices for Selected Cereals in Awassa (Capital of SNNPR) for the Month of July (1995-2003)**



Source: Market Information System of the Ethiopian Grain Trade Enterprise (EGTE) and European Commission Local Food Security Unit (EC-LFSU); data archives of FEWS NET/Ethiopia.

Graphics by FEWS NET Ethiopia.