



Volume 9, No.2 June 2009

Food Justice Network UPDATE

The Food Justice Network is a community of supporters, staff and members of Canadian Foodgrains Bank engaging in issues of hunger and injustice. We invite you to join us.

END HUNGER 



Ethiopia – what is the food security situation in 2009?

In 2008, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank supplied 9000 metric tonnes of food to Ethiopia. This was needed because of a poor crop year, rising food prices, and increasing hunger. That food helped countless poor families to survive through a tough year. But what about 2009? Is the situation any better now?

I put that question to Sam Vander Ende, Foodgrains Bank's representative in East Africa. In short, his answer was "No". 2009 is looking like another difficult year for Ethiopians. The reasons are related to weather, food prices, and a carryover from last year's crisis.

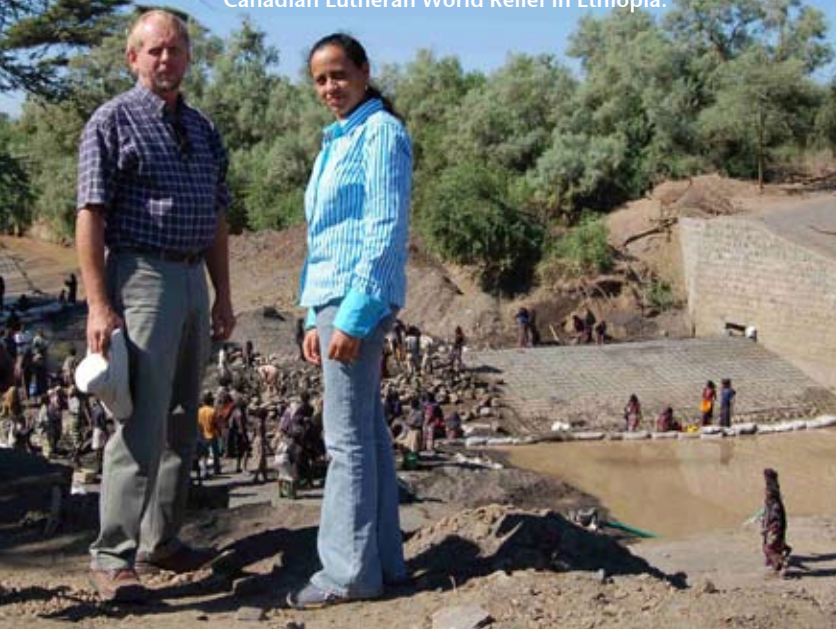
Weather - The "short rains" (in February and March) were poor in much of the country, and Sam told me the "long rains", which should have started in May, aren't showing much promise. With over 90% of Ethiopians depending on farming for their livelihood, a poor rainy season means hunger is on the way. Sam says the country is on a knife-edge now. Without good rain in the coming weeks, many areas will be facing food shortages in a few months. Some of the most vulnerable areas are the regions of Sidama, Wolayta, Hararghe, Afar & Somali, areas which Sam knows well, due to ongoing activity by Foodgrains Bank partners.

Prices – Food commodity prices in much of the world have come down from their peaks in 2008, but the price of maize (the staple food for Ethiopia's poor people) is now 47% higher than it was in February 2008, and over twice as high as the 2004-2008 average. Sam explains that inflation was almost unknown in Ethiopia until recently. This year the inflation rate is 45%, mostly because of higher food prices, and people are struggling to deal with this. The government of Ethiopia has made subsidized grain available in urban areas to ease the burden for the urban poor, but this does nothing to help those in the countryside. Most rural Ethiopians grow some of their own food, but they are still dependent on the market for the rest, and with poor harvests two years in a row, certainly people will be looking to the market for grain.

Carryover from 2008 – In order to cope with last year's poor harvest, people found other ways to raise money or reduce expenses, and these coping strategies often have long term impacts. Some cut trees to sell firewood or make charcoal (deforestation and risk of erosion), some sell livestock (less milk, meat and draft power at home), some migrate to find work (abandoning their own farms and causing family disruption), and some pull children out of school (reducing their chances of better jobs in the future). It takes years to recover from one bad season, and Ethiopia will need several good seasons now to recover from two consecutive years of poor harvests.

Continued on page 2...

Sam Vander Ende overlooks a water diversion project in the Afar region with Elizabeth Milton, an employee of Support for Sustainable Development, which partners with Canadian Lutheran World Relief in Ethiopia.



What is Foodgrains Bank doing in Ethiopia right now?

Ethiopia is a large part of Foodgrains Bank's 26 year history. In addition to several ongoing long-term food security programming, CRWRC, with the help of other members, has recently committed nearly \$1.5 million through its Foodgrains Bank account to support Food for the Hungry Ethiopia with a project to protect the lives and livelihoods of people in neighboring Sasiga and Belo Jeganfoy districts. The communities in 13 *kebeles* of the two districts continue to suffer from food shortages. A general ration of food commodities will be distributed to 24,702 people.

Continued from page 2...

At the current time, about 18% of Ethiopia's population (of 80 million) are considered food insecure. According to Sam, this number could increase over the next few months, depending on the arrival of the rains. Even with good rains, Ethiopia will still need a lot of assistance to keep people alive and healthy over the next year. But Sam reminded me that it is not aid alone which keeps poor people going. "Ethiopians are no strangers to hard times" he says, "They are resilient, and they will find ways to deal with the hardship."

—Paul Hagerman is the Public Policy Manager at Canadian Foodgrains Bank

Food Aid...or Food Assistance?

All readers of the Food Justice Update will be familiar with the term 'food aid'. But 'food assistance' has, until now, been a term used only by policy 'wonks'. That is about to change. The Food Aid Convention, the international agreement among 33 countries to provide a predictable amount of international food aid, will be renegotiated. There is strong support for making sure that it includes more ways to provide food to hungry individuals and families, including by giving them coupons or cash to purchase food themselves. There is also strong support for allowing contributions under the new Food Aid Convention to be used to support national food 'safety nets' that provide food to people before there is a full blown emergency. Both of these changes go beyond conventional food aid but recent experience has shown that they can allow faster responses and, in some cases, to help more people.

The Foodgrains Bank has already been experimenting with some of these new approaches. You may see 'food assistance' appearing in some of our literature. Remember that it is simply 'enhanced food aid', the same objective with some new tools.

—Stu Clark is a Senior Public Policy Advisor at Canadian Foodgrains Bank



Response to the food crisis – what are other governments doing?

Canada committed \$50 million of new money to food aid in April 2008. The minister for CIDA announced in May 2009 that food security would be one of three priority themes with CIDA, but the government has not yet announced any funds to support agricultural development.

Several governments have already made commitments to address the global food crisis. Here is a sample of new commitments announced to date. All figures have been converted to (approximate) US dollar equivalents.

COUNTRY	DATE ANNOUNCED	SUPPORT FOR FOOD AID/ SHORT TERM MEASURES	SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT/ LONG TERM MEASURES
UK	April 08	\$865 million	
France	April 08	\$48 million	
US	April 08	\$200 million	\$1000 million
	April 09	\$448 million	
World Bank	May 08	\$1200 million	
Japan	May/ June 08	\$100 million	\$50 million
African Development Bank	June 08		\$1000 million
Spain	July 08	\$800 million (over 5 years)	
European Union	July 08	\$1600 million (over 3 years)	
Italy	July 08	\$22 million	

To join the Food Justice Network send an email to foodjustice@foodgrainsbank.ca.

