

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE  
WEEKLY MEETING

**Summary Notes**

1 February 2006  
Geneva

**I Eastern Africa – Humanitarian Situation and Inter-Agency Cooperation**

Robert Mister (IFRC), welcomed participants to the meeting, which would focus exclusively on Eastern Africa. He referred to the decision of the IASC Working Group in November 2005, where it was agreed that the IASC Weekly meetings could be used as a forum for country / region specific discussions on the basis of recommendations in the IASC Early Warning – Early Action Report. It is in this context that the IFRC took initiative for this meeting with the objectives to: a) informally share information between agencies on the humanitarian situation in the countries of the region as well as on agency programmes and activities; and b) to examine the potential for inter-agency response strategies. The choice of Eastern Africa has to do with the apparent short-term needs because of the present drought and food insecurity, but also because the region suffers from a number of reoccurring needs that must be addressed in a collaborative and long-term fashion.

**1.1 IFRC activities**

*By Anna Al Ahmar (IFRC), Regional Officer, Africa Department, Eastern Africa*

An estimated 11 million people or more are facing serious food shortages in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa as a result of the prevailing drought coupled with the effects of past and/or ongoing conflicts. The short October to February rains normally provide water and pasture feeding at a critical time of year, interrupting the long dry season ahead of the main March to May rains. When the short rains fail, livestock face an extended dry season. This year the short rains season is considered particularly vital because of the successive rainfall failures in recent years, which had adversely affected the food security of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in the East and Horn of Africa. Among the affected countries are Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.

The initial response of the IFRC to the drought has been in Kenya, which was the first country to seek assistance. In response to an appeal from the Kenyan Red Cross the IFRC released CHF 400,000 to assist some 329,000 beneficiaries for the following interventions: a) Destocking of livestock (10,000 heads of cattle and 40,000 goats) in the most affected districts; b) Food distribution (50,000 families); UNIMX supplementary feeding (10,000 children); c) improvement of access to safe drinking water, livestock water, hygiene promotion and sanitation facilities; and d) strengthening of frontline health services.

The general situation in the region led the IFRC to take a wider look to address the food security situation. A meeting was held in Nairobi on 19 January, bringing together 18 Red Cross / Red Crescent National Societies (NS) with the objectives to: a) review the overall acute food

security problems in East Africa and identify priority areas of action; b) review the ongoing operations running under annual appeals (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Kenya), also with a view to make the appeals more long-term based; and c) review existing response plans of the NSs and look at how IFRC could support them in terms of human and financial resources.

Among the outcomes of the meeting were: a) An agreement to carry out capacity assessments of the NSs as well as needs assessments to identify possible areas of intervention in the respective countries; b) that the food security situation in the region is a chronic matter and it needs to be resolved in a multi-sectoral manner; and c) an agreement to establish a Food Security Unit for the region to monitor medium and long term development, provide technical support and establish and follow-up implementation of policies. Furthermore, the meeting resulted in the establishment of a drafting committee (met for the first time on 30 January), composed of Ethiopian RC, Kenyan RC, Norwegian RC, ICRC and IFRC aiming to look at long term strategic planning and to agree on priority areas where Field Assessment and Coordination Teams (FACT) will be deployed. The FACT assessments will lead the way for a full-fledged appeal for the region, which is expected to be launched in 3-4 weeks for CHF 30-35 million. Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement partners are coordinating closely with the governments in the region as well as UN agencies on the ground.

Mr. Christopher Lamb (IFRC), Special Advisor, International Representation, complemented Ms. Al Ahmar by underlining that the IFRC is currently looking at how to bring the focus on Africa in general. A special session of the IFRC governing board dedicated to Africa will be held. The IFRC is working in collaboration with the African Union, NEPAD as well as ECOWAS and other sub regional organisations. Mr. Lamb informed that IFRC would be looking at bringing together a number of African governing board members to an extended IASC forum to exchange views and information.

Information received from the NSs in the region along with other details of the response to the eastern African drought can be found on the IFRC website: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org).

## ***1.2 Other Agency Activities and Information***

### ***1.2.1 UNHCR***

The need for increased focus especially on Somalia, where an estimated 1,7 million people need food assistance, the majority of which emergency food assistance, was stressed. The lack of proper government institutions in the country is a major concern.

### ***1.2.2 WFP***

Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Djibouti have been identified as the main concern areas in the region. Despite of the serious needs in Eritrea, the political situation in the country prevents major operations. WFP plans to assist 5,3 million people in those 4 countries at a value of approximately USD 234 million.

Regarding preventive measures and future actions, WFP has conducted a review of the food security for the pastoral and agro-pastoral population in the Greater Horn of Africa in cooperation with NGOs, governments, regional scientific institutions and other partners. The review recommended the establishment of an operational coordinated integrated early warning system over 5-10 years to enhance coping strategies and diversify income generating activities as well as to strengthen governance to support pastoralist communities. The report has been finalized and discussed at the country level in Kampala with organizations working in the region.

### 1.2.3 ICRC

Current and planned interventions focus on Somalia and Ethiopia. In Somalia a first assessment was done in December based on reports from the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS), among others. Destocking activities commenced in the relevant areas in late December and early January for about 10,000-15,000 heads of cattle, with an ultimate target of up to 70,000. Water related interventions are planned, including water trucking as well as food interventions in cooperation with WFP and Care. A programme for free food distribution for 120,000 people will hopefully start in about 2 weeks. Currently about CHF 12 million are available to the delegation in Somalia.

In Ethiopia assessments have been carried out in some areas. Free veterinary treatment has been given for some 250,000 animals and destocking of about 3,000 heads of cattle was carried out. Interventions are planned in the area of agro-production, including pumps for irrigation systems. Food distribution is planned for about 5,000 families as well as seed distribution in due time. Furthermore there will be various water related interventions including water rehabilitation.

### 1.2.4 WHO

The need for strong collaboration with the respective Ministries of Health was stressed as well as the need for capacity building in the national health systems of the region, especially with regard to surveying the nutritional situation.

### 1.2.5 UNDP

Related to the present drought and food crisis, the focus of UNDP is mostly on prevention and mitigation of future crises. UNDP is concerned about the natural disaster vulnerability in the region and has strengthened its cooperation with the regional development coordination organisation IGAD to make sure that early warning is effectively provided. For the region in general, UNDP has mobilised almost the full range of assistance provided in post-conflict situations (focussed on Sudan and Somalia) such as natural disaster vulnerability reduction measures, security sector assistance e.g. mine action and DDR, recovery and reconstruction as well as support to conflict prevention initiatives and capacity building in the justice sector.

### 1.2.6 UNOSAT

Satellite map support was offered.

### 1.2.7 OCHA

Given the chronic status of food insecurity in the region it was underlined that a major challenge will be to move from short term to long-term assistance. The need to build on existing initiatives such as the Clinton Initiative and IGAD was underlined. Furthermore, the need for special focus on Somalia, given the countries fragile security situation, was emphasised. OCHA informed that an IASC mechanism had been established in Nairobi to support efforts in Somalia.

### 1.2.8 ILO

The importance of looking at the transition from short-term humanitarian assistance to more long-term development aid was re-emphasised. ILO has various projects in the region focused on reintegration of vulnerable and marginal groups into the socio-economic structures of the local communities.

## Participants

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