

Striving to Ensure Comprehensive Food Security

Ethiopia's precarious food security has tipped over many times into full-blown famine over the past four decades. The country faces a significant food gap due to its poor agricultural performance. Small holders cultivate about 95% of the land presently used for food production, and their productivity is at subsistence level and in some cases below subsistence.

For these farmers, agriculture is both a way of life as well as the primary source of livelihood.

It is a fact that millions of people suffer from chronic food insecurity and receive aid on an annual basis. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on March 2007 published a report indicating that about 8.29 million people have been facing food insecurity that can be described as either chronic or transitory in nature.

For many centuries there are references to severe famine and food insecurity in Ethiopia. History shows that in the mid of the 18th century there were two successive plagues, the great famine which raged in Ethiopia from 1888 to 1892 being widely known.

More recently there had been famine in 1975 and a serious one in 1984/85 that had devastating case on Ethiopia. Especially, in the latter one a significant percent of the population and cattle have perished.

The cost in human suffering was growing with each cycle of drought which posed a considerable impact on the impoverished economy. This increasing vulnerability is attributed to poor agricultural policy of previous governments which combined strict control on pricing with a low priority given to agricultural production.

Since the incumbent Government took power, however, encouraging activities have been carried out to improve the sector. The liberalization of the economy in 1991 increased agricultural inputs and improved security to result in dramatic increases in harvest.

Best Practices

The government of Ethiopia, realizing the importance of avoiding a slide back into a severe drought situation for the first time, issued Ethiopian Food Security Strategy /FSS/ in 1996. The strategy adopted rests on three pillars:

- increasing the availability of food through domestic production.
- ensuring access to food for food deficit households; and
- strengthening emergency response capability.

Region	Total Number of Woredas	Total Number of Resettlement Sites	Total Number of Household Heads Settled	The Number of Population Settled
Tigray	2	23	29,957	179,742
Amhara	5	50	52,360	314,160
Oromiya	39	76	60,953	365,718
SNNP	18	53	21,462	128,772
Total	64	202	164,372	988,392

The food security strategy as a multi-sector strategy touches on different areas of activity. Among others the resettlement program was carried out in 202 resettlement sites in the Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State. In the last four years of the program close to 2,165,000 households have settled in the aforementioned regions. At the end of the program 440.000 households are believed to attain food security.

There are a lot of proven success stories in these resettlement areas. The great majority of the settlers have stayed and build their livelihood. In terms of food security, some settlers have now managed to feed themselves.

Best Practices

Efforts have also been deployed during the current budget year to improve the life of settlers in the areas of health, sanitation and water supply.

Resettlement program will remain essential component of the strategy as long as there are farmers who volunteer to move.

The government is undertaking the resettlement program based on the major pillars: voluntarism, consultation with host communities, and availability of underutilized land with all round preparation.

Another strategy used to assure food security is Productive Safety Net Programme /PSNP/.

The PNSP provides cash and/or food transfers to chronically food insecure households in ways designed to prevent asset depletion at the household levels while simultaneously requiring households to engage in sustainable productive activities and promoting market development by increasing household purchasing power. The program is functioning for a period of three to five years in 263 chronically food insecure Woredas in eight regions. Approximately 5 million people have become beneficiary from the schemes.

The PSPN consists of two components: (1) labor-intensive public works - for those households who can contribute labor, and (2) direct support for labor poor households. The public works element is basically for community asset building including the rehabilitation of natural resources. The direct support component helps those who can't participate on public works (i.e. elderly, chronically ill, etc.). In 2005 - 2006 close to one million people have become beneficiary of public works undertaken at community level. The programme is designed to serve as leverage for chronically food insecure households to gradually rise to food security status.

Roles have been defined for multiple agencies at each level of government to the level of Kebele. Overall management of programme is the responsibility of Food Security coordination Bureau, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Best Practices

There are a number of alternative food security intervention mechanisms which involve a range of finance by the government and certain international donors. But the three main donor-financed elements of this component are Food Security Project and Emergency Draught Recovery Project, both funded by the World Bank and government budget support by the EU.

The largest part of the resource needed for the program was covered through government's food security budget. The World Bank, European Union, USAID and Irish Aid are some of the contributors, among others. In 2005 - 06 the total financial service committed to the program was over 248 million USD. As Ethiopia strives to make famine history, the support of donors is vital.

In its effort to increase food availability and access at household level for increased livestock and crop productivity, and above all agricultural and non-agricultural income, the government has devised effective packages. There are also packages which consist of giving rural credit, training and providing market information.

The activities so far launched by the government to ensure food security and reduce the biting poverty are encouraging. Even though the government is responsible for poverty eradication, the integrated efforts of all stakeholders is indispensable as the challenge are immense and complex.