Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission

Background

The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) formerly known as the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) was first established in June 1974 following the outbreak of famine in the two northern provinces of Ethiopia, namely, Wollo and Tigray. Since then, it has undergone several transformations the latest of which is its re-establishment, in August, 1995, as the DPPC under Proclamation No-10/1995.

The Objectives of the Commission:

- To prevent disasters by tackling their root causes (i.e Prevention),
- To build, in advance, the capacity necessary to reduce the impact of disasters (i.e. Preparedness),
- To ensure the timely arrival of necessary assistance to victims of disasters (i.e. Emergency Response).

New Policy Direction

Cognizant of the country's deep-rooted problem, the Federal Government has since 1993 adopted a National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management/ NPDPM/ which aims at tackling disasters and ensuring that famine situations are addressed in ways that reduce people's vulnerability to such disasters.

According to the NPDPM, relief resources should contribute towards addressing the root causes of vulnerability to famine and food shortages through direct linkage of relief assistance with community-based projects and other development programmes. Such a linkage serves the prevention of human suffering through the availability of relief sources while at the same time promoting development works. The latter includes environmental protection, development of infrastructure, water harvesting, and building up of community assets with drought-proofing content. In line with the Government's federal structure, a bottom up approach in both the planning and implementation of disaster prevention and preparedness programmes is a key element of the policy. In this regard, the empowerment of regions and sub-regions in disaster management is an important aspect.

Major Activities

The objectives of the Commission, as noted earlier, reflect its main activities and cover prevention, preparedness and response.

Prevention

Prevention activities are conducted to tackle root causes of vulnerability to disasters and to promote food security. Employment Generation Schemes (EGS) are the mechanisms through
which relief is provided to be able bodied disaster victims in exchange for work. EGS help build assets and reduce the vulnerability of the affected populations to disasters.

Many development works have been undertaken in different regions using relief food. Relief focused NGOs have reoriented their approach towards linking relief and development. The development efforts currently being undertaken by Regional Government agencies towards overcoming famine conditions and attaining food self sufficiency have already demonstrated positive effects. The Government has furthermore formulated a Food Security Programme, for which EGS is a major instrument, to ultimately attain food security at the household level.

Preparedness

Several of the key preparedness components have been in place for some time. At present, maximum efforts are being exerted to improve them, while new modalities are being introduced. Through such efforts it is believed that disaster victims would be better served and that the lives and livelihoods of disaster victims would be protected. The major preparedness modalities include:-

The Early Warning System

An Early Warning System (EWS) has been in place since 1976 to monitor and warn the threat of disasters ahead of time, and to trigger timely, appropriate, and preventative measures. It monitors closely factors which affect food security at household, woreda, regional and national levels.

The system is an inter-agency activity involving different relevant government institutions. It is led at the national level by a committee with the DPPC acting as its secretariat. Since 1993, The EWS has been decentralised in line with the regionalisation policy and bottom-up planning approach. Training in data collection for early warning and analysis has been given to functionaries at regional and lower levels.

As part of the regular activity of the programme, all relevant indicators of food security are monitored on a monthly basis culminating in an annual nation-wide pre and post harvest crop assessments. Pastoral assessments are also carried out in the livestock dependent regions, while disaster assessments are conducted in an emergency situation.

Early warning reports are regularly issued to Government, donors and the international community. Efforts are now underway to improve the system through the introduction of enhanced methodologies, and tools for data analysis. The system enhancement work which is in progress focuses on six major components: The monitoring of national food security, and crop, livestock, market and agro-meterology assessesments.

The Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR)

The Emergency Food Security Reserve was established, in its present status, in October 1992, to provide, on a loan basis, a readily available relief food in times of emergencies.
Since its establishment, the EFSR has been operating successful and has created confidence among the donor community. It has proved to be an important preparedness strategy providing in-country food for immediate relief until requested relief food aid shipments arrive from overseas or are locally purchased.

The physical storage capacity of the Reserve has been upgraded to nearly 212,000 MT with an additional 79,000 MT of warehouse capacity planned for construction. The reserve stock has almost reached its mid-term target of 307,000 MT. At the same time, the grain mix in the Reserve has been diversified to accommodate the food habits of the population living in targeted areas.

Logistics

In the past, the Commission was transporting relief cargo to different distribution sites by its own Emergency Relief Transport Units (RTP 1,2,3). In this effort, NGOs and UN transport fleets had also played a significant role.

In line with the free-market economic policy of the Federal Government, however, the RTPs, NGOs and UN trucks have been privatised, and the DPPC has since then been able to effect the distribution of relief and other emergency items to disaster prone areas using the private sector trucks.

Given the poor infrastructure in the country, however, full reliance on the Private Sector for the transport of emergency relief is risky. Some of the disaster prone areas are not easily accessible, and, hence, are not attractive to private truckers. To minimise the risk of not reaching disaster victims in such areas, the Government has recently established a strategic transport fleet, consisting of trucks with the right configuration for tackling difficult terrain.

In order to improve the overall relief transport and logistics co-ordination in the country, efforts are also being made to develop a logistics master plan. Other improvements in this area include infrastructural development, such as warehouse construction, and establishment of a well networked logistics information system.

The National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Fund (NDPPF)

A National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Fund has been established to cover funding shortfalls of regions in their efforts to link relief with development programmes. The fund will provide withdrawal rights to regions to support relief programmes based on prioritised needs in the event that such programmes can not fully be resourced from regular budget sources.

Substantial progress has been made towards the creation of the fund: the Government has allocated US$ 8.3 million, and USD 287, 400 has been secured from donors. Moreover, a Board of Management for the NDPPF has been formed and has assumed its duties. A study on the managerial and procedural elements of the Fund is soon to be finalised.

National Non-Food Contingency Stock
The traditional focus at the DPPC has been on drought-related emergencies and food based response. However, the widespread occurrence of disasters such as floods and epidemics, the loss of life and property damage, and the economic and social disruption which they cause have been such that the current state of preparedness (in terms of area-specific plans, stock of non-food emergency items, procedures, etc.).

For such disasters has been found to be inadequate. Hence, the need for more effective non-food response capacity building has become apparent.

This task calls for action to be taken to strengthen the emergency preparedness capability of the country through the establishment of a national contingency stock of essential materials in order to build up a quick intervention capacity when disasters occur. In this regard, the first measure to be taken is to immediately embark on building the stock initially through pooling of available resources. Subsequently, the gap will be filled by mobilising additional resources.

Emergency Responses

Emergency interventions are undertaken with the aim of saving lives and livelihoods. The first phase includes the provision of food, shelter and medical services to victims of disasters, and every effort is made to make the response timely so as to prevent the disposal of key assets. The second response comprises, where and when it is needed, the provision of farm inputs such as draught oxen, seeds and hand tools in cropping areas, and restocking of depleted livestock herds in pastoral areas.

Partners

As disaster prevention and preparedness activities are multi-agency undertakings, the DPPC is not alone in carrying out its mandated responsibilities. Within the Government, the DPPC works closely with concerned line departments both at regional and federal levels, and outside the Government, with NGOs, the UN system, and donor community.

Current Engagements and Future Plans

The DPPC requests and obtains funds and other resources for its activities by launching annual appeals, usually in December. Occasionally, it makes seasonal and special appeals, to which the international donor community often responds favourably. Currently, the Commission is responding to the needs of disaster victims using the resources made available in response to such appeals.

At present, a Five Year National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness plan is under formulation by the Commission with the full participation of its regional partners. Its aim is to create a framework for the Government’s effort to link relief to development thus enabling donors to make multi-year pledges of food and other resources. Long term planning is a prerequisite for successfully linking relief to development and promotion of food security. It also allows integration into the Government's plan and co-ordination of NGO activities.
Structure, Number and Composition of Staff

The DPPC is headed by a Commissioner and a deputy both assigned by the Government. It has recently undergone a restructuring process which aimed at reducing overlapping of responsibilities and downsizing of its staff. Currently, the DPPC has 815 employees of which 329 are women. In order to effectively carry out its activities, the Commission has streamlined its organisational structure. The main departments represented in the new structure include, among others:

- Early Warning
- Aid Programmes Co-ordination and Monitoring
- Policy, Plan and Programme
- Property Administration and Transport Coordination
- Fund Raising and Public Relations

Drought Update

Over the years the name Ethiopia has become synonymous with Famine and Drought - but Ethiopia as a country offers so much more.

The severe drought and food shortage currently being experienced in Ethiopia has been caused by the failure of the Belg and Kirmet rains. Climatic change and crop failure are also to blame. However, it is important to stress that the drought is presently affecting the southern part of Ethiopia (which includes 10.5 million people - 13% of the population) as well as one or two areas in the north. It does not affect the whole country and has no correlation to the war that was being waged on the northern tip of the border.

Over the years the name Ethiopia has become synonymous with 'famine and drought', but Ethiopia is an extremely large country covering many miles of diverse terrain and has much more to offer than the distressing images of starving children and skeletal frames often portrayed by the western media. Small wonder visitors are often astonished at the lushness of the Ethiopian countryside. Having been fed heavy doses of famine stories by the western media they expect Ethiopia to be little more than a dustbowl, so are fascinated by the thickness and density of the lush, green vegetation that appear during their trips throughout the country.

The recent food shortage bears no relation to the famine of 1984. The overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991 brought about a democracy for Ethiopia, which with improvements in agriculture and infrastructure coupled with favourable climatic conditions, meant Ethiopia was able to export food to neighbouring countries in both 1996 and 1997.

The recent drought in southern Ethiopia did not happen suddenly, the situation was monitored over a period of three to four years and appeals for aid from the donor community were made months in advance. For example, the DPPC appealed for aid from the international community regarding the ongoing rain failures several years before the disaster occurred. The Government of Ethiopia also appealed for a total of 898,936 tonnes of food and pledged 100,000 MT.
Consequently, had the international community responded a lot sooner, a disaster of this proportion would never have occurred.

Overall the chief aim is food security for all and since 1991 the Government of Ethiopia has been working steadily towards this goal. Several measures have been taken in order to avert a repeat of the situation in 1984. For example: the building of roads to facilitate the movement of supplies throughout the country, the funding of various institutions and programmes for the improvement of crop yields and survivability and the reestablishment of the DPPC (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission) formerly known as the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission. The DPPC, through its Emergency Food Security Reserve provides relief food in emergencies on a loan basis. However, when the drought occurred its reserves were depleted by loans of grain provided to western donor countries and aid agencies, to date only a percentage of the borrowed stock has been returned - in fact 216,000 of the original 305,000 tons. (For the full text of this story refer to the frequently asked questions on the drought in our briefings section.)

Ethiopians all over the world are doing their best to turn the situation around. For example, fundraising initiatives put on by the Ethiopian communities themselves have been sprouting all over the globe and most have been extremely successful. The Ethiopian Embassy in Stockholm raised 25,000 Swedish kroners, members of the Ethiopian community in Rome and its environs raised a sum of over ten million lira, Ethiopians in Washington DC contributed USD 400,000. Other contributors were Djibouti with a pledge of USD15,338. Beijing also donated a sum of 46,000 birr and the Ethiopian community and Embassy in London raised more that £150,000. The AACC (Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce) recently organised a fundraising telethon, the results of which we are awaiting.*

So far, there has been rainfall in the drought areas in the months from May to July 2000 as predicted by the Drought Monitoring Center for Eastern and Southern Africa (DMC). In addition, as regards relief distribution, 99,912MT of food was transported to drought-affected areas in the country, 84,683MT was transported by the DPPC; the remainder was delivered by NGO's.

*It has raised 296,000 birr so far.