



EMERGENCY FEEDING PROGRAM • 1 JULY - 1 SEPTEMBER

Prolonged rain failure in many parts of the Horn of Africa from February to September 2015 has threatened millions of people with malnutrition — in Ethiopia alone, more than 10.2 million people are thought to be in jeopardy. Northern Ethiopia, which borders Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti, is among the most vulnerable of areas. CNEWA's primary partner there, the Ethiopian Catholic Eparchy of Adigrat, encompasses much of this mountainous terrain, with its remote and often inaccessible villages and settlements.

Building on a CNEWA-funded feeding program in the eparchy — which provided 3,354 school children with nutritious biscuits to help sustain them during the 2015-16 school year — **CNEWA released USD \$231,112 in three installments** (late June, July and early September). Funds supported the eparchy's summer efforts to feed families, utilizing alternative distribution centers to focus on the most vulnerable: children, nursing mothers, pregnant women and the elderly.

While the program will continue through autumn, this report focuses on the summer activities only.

There were two components of this emergency feeding program, namely:

1) To feed some 4,990 children living in the most remote and inaccessible districts of the eparchy. To nourish these children consistently, the eparchy's 34 parishes set up three summer camps (from 8 July to 10 September) in more accessible areas, pooling together their resources to offer peer activities, catechesis, tutoring and fun, all while providing nutritious biscuits, bread and supplementary feeding.

2) To feed nearly 2,500 children between 6 months and 5 years of age, more than 1,000 pregnant women and nursing mothers, and some 700 elderly people through two health facilities in Edagahamus and Alitena.

The following report was compiled by two members of CNEWA's team based in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa — Argaw Fantu, regional director, and Tarekegn Umuro, programs officer — who in late August visited three summer camps in Adigrat, Alitena and Mekele, and the two health facilities named above.



SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAM

On the first day of our visit, we met an energetic young priest, the Rev. Negasi Yohannes, who coordinates the youth ministry for the Adigrat eparchy. Earlier in the summer, he said, he was worried about the declining number of children attending catechism classes, evidence he said of the severe food shortage gripping families throughout the eparchy, leaving children stranded in their remote villages, too hungry to walk or worse.

Now, thanks be to God, and to CNEWA's generous benefactors, these same children are being nourished, and many children and youth are now actively participating in all the programs.

During our seven-day stay around Adigrat from 20 to 26 August, we appreciated Father Negasi's zealous engagement. Admiring his enthusiasm and good humor, particularly with young people, I learned he has only been a priest for five years. Many parish priests are helping him to organize programs, and priest professors of the Adigrat Major Seminary are also supporting his ministry.

On 20-21 August, we visited a camp held in **Mekele's Lideta Mariam Church**, which **brought together 306 children from four remote parishes**. The camp had an exciting atmosphere, with biblical dramas, choir singings, panel discussions, question-and-answer competitions, sporting matches and liturgical celebrations. Children and youth, together with their parish priests, expressed gratitude to CNEWA for the food supplements they received during the food shortage. Their parishes were alive and active during the two months of July and August, with youth activities and more. For the children attending the camp from outside Mekele, accommodations were provided at the compounds of the Salesians and the Daughters of Charity, with a nutritious breakfast, lunch and dinner offered.

More than **150 children** attended the camp offered at **Adigrat's Holy Savior Parish**, which we visited on 23 August, while an estimated **2,050 children** gathered at **Lideta Mariam Church** in **Alitena** on 26 August. These children





came from 14 parishes across the mountains, some walking for two to three hours with their parish priests.

I asked the Rev. Hagos Gebray, parish priest of Ara'a Baatamariam Church, for his impressions. He comes from one of the remoted parishes. He walked for three hours with a group of 56 parish children. "In my parish," he said, "the provision of biscuits to our parish alleviated our food shortage, has really energized our parish children and youth; 81 children participated in our catechesis and sporting activities with enthusiasm, and 50 are with me now."

At the conclusion of the day's activities, Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin of the Eparchy of Adigrat, who spent the day with the youth, expressed his gratitude and thankfulness to the CNEWA family. In his closing speech, he reminded all those present that "all of the priests of the eparchy are the result of CNEWA's generous benefactors' continued support of our seminarians' formation and training." Some of our schools, he added,

have long received assistance from CNEWA. At during "times of emergency, when the situation caused us to tremble, CNEWA stood by our side and immediately responded to our schools' feeding needs. "CNEWA is really seeing and understanding our challenging realities. Msgr. John E. Kozar, together with his team, has ... climbed to the highest and most challenging parts of the eparchy. He shares our concerns and has responded immediately. This support for us is very precious and timely."

The camp concluded at 5 p.m., and all went back to their parishes with colorful singing. For us visitors and for the CNEWA family, this festival was very touching — an example of standing by the needy of the eparchy at this moment.

The summer program has been progressing smoothly and created an encouraging atmosphere in all the parishes. All 34 parishes received nutritious biscuits as planned and fresh bread was also provided for some parishes closer to road access. Table tennis sets, volleyballs,





footballs and basketballs have been distributed to parishes to encourage sporting activities, as well. This is an aspect we should consider for future pastoral programs, as the activities gave the children enjoyable memories.

EDAGAHAMUS HEALTH CENTER

On Tuesday, 23 August, traveling to Adigrat from Mekele, we visited Edaghamus Health Center. The health center is located in the town of Edaghamus, about 13 miles south of Adigrat, and is run by the of Daughters of St. Anne.

We asked Sister Azalech Habte, who administers the center, about the food needs in the area and the role the center played in allaying hunger. Her response is summarized as follows. Initially, when the crisis began, the center was running short of supplementary food to feed small children, pregnant women and nursing mothers. Many of those who visited the center were malnourished, due to food shortages in the area, and the sisters and nurses were always challenged to find ways to provide for them. Most of those visiting the clinic were from the surrounding rural villages. Sister reported that the inhabitants of the town are in similar situations.

When the eparchy's Health Coordination Office offered the sisters supplementary food items, Sister Azalech and her staff immediately contacted rural health extension workers serving in the affected villages and asked them to select people exposed to malnutrition. Accordingly, **1,100 children** from 6 months to below 5 years of age, **300 nursing mothers**, **300 pregnant women** and **300 elderly people**, both men and women, were identified and **provided with supplementary food supplies**. Children received 10 kilos of semi-cooked nutritious supplementary food powder (Famix), 1 kilo of sugar and 1 liter of edible oil per month. Pregnant and nursing mothers received 15 kilos of ground *teff* (iron-rich indigenous grain), 1 kilo of sugar and 1 liter of cooking oil per woman per month. For the elderly, Birr 120 is given per month to buy food of their choice from the market. Sister Azalech said that, according to the local tradition, elderly prefer to drink coffee as frequently as possible with some foodstuffs. For this, they prefer to receive cash.

During our visit on 23 and 24 August, we saw mothers, children and elderly people joyfully receiving their monthly share at



the center. Sister Azalech expressed her profound gratitude to CNEWA, noting that her worries and distress “seeing the cry of malnourished children at the center and the suffering of the women” have eased. “My staff and I are now happily serving them. Prayerful thanks to CNEWA and its donors!”

We have seen stores full of food items. We interviewed some of the mothers and pregnant women. Their common response is that they consider the nutrition from the health center “as heavenly manna. ... Thank you to those unknown people who have supported us.”

The purchase of food items from factory and local markets is done by a central taskforce established at the secretariat of the eparchy. The taskforce is closely supervised by the Rev. Abraha Hagos, director, and is overseen by Bishop Tesfaselassie Medhin.

MEETING WITH TASKFORCE

On 24 August, we had a meeting at the secretariat office with the taskforce to understand how the coordination is done and what challenges were encountered in the process. Father Abraha explained: “From the outset of this crisis, and with CNEWA’s support, we set up this taskforce composed of five persons: two from the department of pastoral ministry, including Father Negasi, two from the finance department and one from the health section. The five of them work as one body listening to each other, designing and reviewing the purchase plan, doing the necessary transactions, and communicating to the sisters at the two health centers.”

One challenge explained by the taskforce was that there is variation between initial figures of beneficiaries and timing for provision with the health centers. Initially,

the taskforce planned to support 2,500 children under 5 years of age, 1,000 pregnant women, 1,000 nursing mothers and 700 elderly people all for 6 months from July to December 2016. However, by the time the first installment was made the market price for Famix, teff grain and cooking oil escalated, along with local instabilities, which created a shortage of products. Also initially the price of teff was calculated for ungrounded grain. Since there are not enough grain mills in most rural areas and distributing ungrounded grain would incur a cost beneficiaries cannot afford, it was decided to distribute teff flour. This change has increased the cost of the grain.

*“The less they have,
the more generous
they are.”*

Due to these challenges, the taskforce has revised the number of beneficiaries at the two health centers. Hence the actual number of beneficiary children under 5 years of age was adjusted to 2,200; pregnant women, 600; nursing mothers, 600; and elderly people, 700. Further, to make for more effective distribution, the duration was from 6 months to 4 months from July to October. With this calculation, it was agreed that the committed CNEWA grant of USD \$231,112 will adequately respond to emergency needs for the revised number of beneficiaries. With regard to parishes’ children and youth, the number of beneficiaries and the duration remains the same: 4,990 beneficiaries for the two months of 7 July to 10 September 2016. The final report of the program is expected to reach CNEWA’s Addis Ababa office by the end of December 2016.



At the end of the meeting, Father Abraha expressed his heartfelt gratitude to CNEWA and remembered the deep concern of Msgr. John E. Kozar expressed during his visit to Saese and Aiga Mountain area in early May 2016. He also thanked the taskforce for duly taking this responsibility and engaging in the provision of emergency services.

VISIT ALITENA HEALTH CENTER

Alitena Health Center is located in Alitena, a village in one of the driest spots of the area, which is Irob wereda. The health center is run by the Daughters of Charity and was established in 1973. It currently offers 24-hour service to people in medical need. An average of **2,000 people a month visit the health center**. Sister Meaza Gebray, who is originally from the area, serves as administrator.

“The Alitena area, with a population of about 30,000 inhabitants, is naturally a very challenging area — as it is surrounded by barren mountains with no farm land and frequent and prolonged rain

shortage,” she said. “Having up to eight children per family is common in the area. Due to frequent food shortages, children appear much smaller and younger than their real age. This means many children in the villages are under weight.

“Malnutrition is common in the area. Malnourished expectant mothers suffer a lot during labor. Low weight and premature births are common. Lactating mothers also suffer from dehydration, making nursing painful. On top of this reality, the prolonged food shortage makes it very hard for us to serve at this center with no supplementary food supply.

“When we received the news from the Adigrat Catholic Secretariat that CNEWA emergency support is coming to our center, my staff and I were extremely delighted and thanked God on our knees. This quick emergency response from CNEWA is very helpful for us, as we get relief from seeing malnourished children and women suffering. We thank you (CNEWA) and keep you in our prayers.”

For this **emergency intervention**, **1,100 children** from 6 months to 5 years age, **300 pregnant women**, 300 nursing mothers and **400 elderly** people **were selected** from three villages with the assistance of locally assigned government health extension workers. Currently, children receive 10 kilos of Famix, 1 kilo of sugar and 1 liter of edible oil per child per month. Pregnant women and nursing mothers receive 15 kilos of ground teff, 1 kilo of sugar and 1 liter of edible oil per woman per month. For elderly people Birr 120 is given per month to buy foodstuffs of their choice from the market. This distribution will continue through October 2016.



We have seen people collecting their share and stores filled with quintals of Famix, sugar and ground teff, and cartons with containers of edible oil. We also learned from Sister Meaza that, considering the severe malnutrition condition in the area, ADIA Spain (a charitable organization from Spain) has sponsored 200 critically malnourished children. It will feed them for three years through the center. These children are not in the CNEWA-supported emergency program.

The second family has 7 children remaining with the family. Bisrat Tsaadu, the mother, is about 45 years of age and a housewife. The husband earns infrequent income from a cash-for-work program in the area. They rear some animals, but they died from a shortage of feed. The youngest child, age four, is in this emergency feeding program. The family is dependent on aid support.

As we left the family, Bisrat felt ashamed because according to local tradition, she



To better understand situations in the families, we visited three families in the village who are in the program with Sister Meaza.

The first family includes children, ages 1, 2 years and 8 months, and 4. Both parents are teachers in the village school. Girma Wolde, the father, said: “Even if we earn monthly salaries, there is a lack of grain crops in the area and a long distance from grain access areas. Transportation there is infrequent. So our children are suffering from malnutrition and are included in this emergency program. This is our reality.”

couldn't offer a cup of coffee to her visitors. But she went to an inner part of the house and returned with 10 eggs and offered them to us to take home. We were deeply touched by her generosity. Looking at the situation, the words of Sister Meaza still haunt me: “The less they have, the more generous they are.”

The final family we visited has four children. The mother, Abeba, is in her mid-30s. Sister Meaza said: “Abeba has repeated complications at delivery due to malnutrition.” She is expecting her fifth child. She is now in her eighth month of



pregnancy. Her four-year-old daughter is in the ADIA Spain program. Abeba is now receiving support for pregnant mothers, through a grant provided by CNEWA. Her husband occasionally does masonry work.

OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

The **emergency mobilization** of the Eparchy of Adigrat **has been most effective**. Service providers are well organized and prudent, and the needs of those most susceptible to malnutrition are being met. **Lives are being saved.**

But, hunger remains, particularly in the **remote** and inaccessible **mountainous areas of Alitena**, and the **situation remains tenuous** in general. While recent rains in the Adigrat area have restored the fields, which are green with crops, and *beles* fruit (similar to cactus)

are ripening, torrential rains expected in September (the result of La Nina) could destroy the harvest, which occurs in November and December.

At the very least, the provision of food supplies is needed through the end of the year. Please God, we will be spared torrential rains that could destroy the harvest, thus extending this food crisis through 2017.

Finally, we who make up the CNEWA Addis Ababa staff express our deepest gratitude to CNEWA's generous donors, who through their support enabled us to mobilize quickly in such a very short period of time, accompanying the local church and responding to her crucial needs.

We keep you all in our prayers.
Thank you so much.

CNEWA

a papal agency for humanitarian and pastoral support