BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

By 2019, East Wollega zone (Oromia region) hosted more than 150,000 IDPs from the villages adjoining the border with Kamashi zone, Benishangul-Gumuz and from within Kamashi zone as a result of the inter-communal violence that broke out in September 2018. The Government initiated return of IDPs in April 2019 and planned to complete this by end May 2019. The return process was completed by the third week of May 2019.

From 21 to 23 May, a humanitarian team from East Wollega zone consisting of OCHA, IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, WHO, Goal Ethiopia, World Vision, Save the Children, IRC, FIDO and Government sector offices conducted a rapid needs assessment in return woredas in Oromia bordering Kamashi zone, including Sasi-ga, Guto Gida, Gida Ayana, Haro Limu and Limu.

MISSION OBJECTIVES

- The main objective of the assessment was to assess the living conditions of returnees, particularly their safety and access to basic services.

MISSION FINDINGS

**Safety and Security** - The majority of the returnees indicated that security in the return areas is very tense and that they feel unsafe. They expressed their concern over perpetrators still being in the loose and that they fear retaliatory attacks. Returnee women are scared to fetch water from a nearby spring. There are reports of threats received by some returnees from some members of the community. There is no visible Government security force presence patrolling the area. The Government peacebuilding initiatives focused on discussions between religious leaders, Abagadas and Government stakeholders, but lacked the much needed inter-community dialogue to create understanding and social co-existence.

**Agriculture** - In some locations, farmers are preparing their land for the planting season. Farming tools, fertilizers and seeds are the priority needs to ensure future household food supplies. Some crops must be planted at the beginning of the rainy season to ensure sufficient harvest. The zonal Government have reported shortage of improved seeds for immediate distribution.

**Emergency Shelter/NFI** - Shelter is amongst the priority needs for the returnees. Most of the shelters are totally or partially damaged, and some returnees are sleeping out in the open exposing them to health and protection risks, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly. Government statistics indicates that 1,975 shelters were totally damaged during the conflict. The NFI need is high, as not everyone could take previously distributed items with them when they were returned.

**Health, Nutrition** - Returnees encounter huge challenges with access to health services. For example, very irregular services, very long distances to reach health services and not transportation facilities are some of the critical issues that need to be addressed, in addition to the need for mobile clinics, availing drugs and conducting nutrition screenings. Eight health facilities were totally damaged and looted, and nine facilities need to be rehabilitated. The last food distribution was in mid-April conducted in their area of displacement, which is affecting their nutritional status.
**Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH)** - Most of the returnees are accessing water from unprotected surface sources (spring and river), taking them an average of one hour (round trip). Some of the protected water schemes, which are found closer to the border with Benishangul-Gumuz, are not accessible due to perceived insecurity. Of 12 protected water schemes, seven are not functional. The returnees also do not have adequate water containers. Due to the lack of latrines, the returnees are practicing open defecation. Most of the households don’t have access to soap, resulting in poor personal hygiene and skin infections/scabies, as well as significant increase of dysentery/diarrhoea cases.

**Food** - The returnees don’t have access to adequate and quality food. In most of the communities visited, returnees reported that it was 1 to 2 months since they last received relief food from Government. Approximately 15kg of maize (without pulses) and 0.44 liters of vegetable oil were provided per individual as a monthly ration. Additionally, there is no budget allocated for grinding and purchasing of spices, and returnees don’t have appropriate cooking materials. The pregnant and lactating Women (PLW) are particularly affected by the lack of adequate food. Meanwhile, TSFP (CSB++ and RUSF) services have not yet started in return areas. This may result in deterioration of nutrition status of children and PLW.

**Protection** - Most returnees either live in the open, unprotected from the elements in very difficult weather conditions while others live in basic shelters made of plastic sheeting or in collective centers such as warehouses and schools, with very limited access to basic services. Physical safety and life-threatening gaps in access to basic services, including water and sanitation, health and nutrition, education, food, shelter and non-food items are key protection concerns. Restrictions on freedom of movement due to security and safety concerns, psychological distress and trauma from previous attacks, as well as cases of harassments and SGBV were highlighted by returnees.

**MISSION RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Emergency Shelter/NFI** - Shelter repair kits comprising of corrugated iron sheets, nails and cash for local materials should be provided to those whose homes are partially or completely damaged. Returnees renting in their kebeles of origin may also benefit from cash for rent until livelihood activities are resumed.

**Protection** - Continue protection monitoring that started in IDP sites to ensure access to services for people with specific needs. Identify the most vulnerable families and individuals for the provision of socio-economic support and referral to essential services (referral pathways for GBV cases and SGBV) through a case management system. Further investigation on the numbers of unaccompanied/separated children should be undertaken and referral mechanisms including family tracing and reunification (FTR) interventions should be established. Establish child-friendly and WFS spaces to prevent children from being exposed to protection risks. Provision of psychosocial support services to children and other vulnerable returnees affected by the conflict is vital.

**WaSH** - Immediate responses are needed through HHWTC distribution and promotion of household water treatment and safe water handling at household level (boiling and filtration techniques). Repair of existing hand pumps and on spot springs must take place immediately. In some locations, durable solution is needed through drilling of new borehole and water scheme construction. Emergency latrines should be constructed where people are still living in community shelters and hygiene awareness campaign should be implemented. Basic hygiene items (soap, detergents) and water containers should be provided along with hygiene promotion activities to improve personal hygiene practices.

**Health, Nutrition** - Provide mobile health services in return areas as a matter of urgency. Rehabilitate damaged health facilities, providing them with medical equipment and essential drugs and supply of supplementary food (CSB++ and RUSF). Surveillance of malnutrition should be activated, conducting nutritional screening for children under 5 and PLW.

**Food** - Immediate food distribution including pulses, maize, and oil supplements as well as cooking materials.

**Education** - In collaboration with woreda authorities, it is important to rehabilitate existing school facilities in return areas and mobilize sufficient number of teachers and school personnel in order to accommodate more pupils. Awareness campaigns on the importance of education and school enrolment with communication and information on back to school activities disseminated in the community is recommended.

**Agriculture and Livelihood** - As the majority of the returnees are farmers, they require seeds and tools support. There is also a need to restore relationships among farmers on both sides of the regional boundary to reinvigorate the cross-border farming traditions, including the longstanding sharecropping practices.