

CRISIS IN AFRICA: Situation and UNDP Response

From Development In action 1984-1, UNDP

In today's Africa, emergency is perhaps becoming a permanent factor... The response requires a two-pronged strategy: to alleviate the consequences of the current crisis, and to lessen the chances for a repetition of such tragic proportions.

Pierre-Claver Damiba, UNDP Assistant Administrator
and Director, Regional Bureau for Africa

Drought Grips Africa

Drought -- the worst in living memory -- continues to grip Africa. The rains have come and gone, bringing little or no relief for Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Mozambique alone, four million people acutely need help and 100,000 drought-related deaths have been reported. In Zambia 300,000 are affected, while 250,000 need emergency supplies in Lesotho. FAO warns that these six countries will have to import some 2.6 million tons of cereals in 1984/85.

The traditionally drought-prone Sahel is still suffering. In vast areas of Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso and Chad people are still waiting for the rains with longing and fear. The drought has relentlessly spread to countries outside the Sahel, such as Guinea, Ivory coast, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo.

Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania and Sao Tome are among the most seriously affected countries in East and Central Africa. Up to 6 million people are reported at risk in Ethiopia. Facing one of the worst droughts on record, Kenya expects its 1984 maize crop to reach only 1.35 million tons, down 40 per cent from 1983.

Water Shortages are acute, affecting not only human and animal consumption but also food production. Entire rivers and lakes as well as wells have dried up. Hydro-electric power and urban water supply systems have been disrupted. The average total water yield for all rivers reaching the Sahel has dropped 25 per cent over the last 14 years, according to WMO.

Longer Term Problems

Refugees - numbering at least four million -- are in African countries of asylum. The Second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II), held last July in Geneva, stressed the urgency of concrete steps to alleviate the refugees' plight and the burden on asylum countries. It also recommended measures to encourage voluntary repatriation, seen as the best ultimate solution.

Structural problems with negative impact on African development include longer-term issues which have to be tackled as vigorously as short-term needs:

- . Per capita income is lower than 15 years ago, in low income countries because of stagnant economic growth and rapid population growth.
- . 5 million children die every year in Africa, out of 7 million worldwide.
- . About half the African labour force is unemployed or underemployed.
- . Over 50 per cent of the urban population live in slums or squatter housing.
- . External resources lost yearly because of deteriorating terms of trade for African countries equal their total annual aid receipts.
- . Debt service obligations of sub-Saharan African countries rose by 25 per cent in 1982 alone.

UNDP Response

UNDP's response has included the following special measures, over and above on-going activities (US\$ 250 million worth in 1983):

- . December 1983: Following the Secretary-General's appeal for increased international support for Africa, UNDP mobilizes its country office network to help gather information on the drought situation, and nominates a senior official to work with the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the African Crisis based in Nairobi.
- . Early 1984: Identification of drought-related projects for the UN Emergency Operations Trust Fund made available to UNDP, Africa is receiving over \$27 million from the fund.

- . February 1984: UNDP/UNSO assist Sahelian countries to prepare a plan of action to combat the disastrous effects of drought and desertification. The proposed immediate and medium-term measures are estimated at \$2.3 billion over a four-year period.
- . April 1984: UNDP helps prepare and conduct a study tour in drought stricken areas by senior media representatives from Europe, Japan and the USA.
- . June 1984: During the Governing Council meeting in Geneva, the UNDP Administrator releases a package of proposals to help alleviate the "unprecedented economic and social crisis and unimaginable and unacceptable human suffering" in many African countries. The package calls for expenditure of more than \$90 million on some 100 projects in 31 countries. Designed to meet urgent needs identified by the countries themselves, the projects are ready for immediate implementation.
- . July 1984: The Administrator leads the UNDP delegation at ICARA II in Geneva. UNDP, closely involved in preparing country action proposals costing £366 million submitted to the Conference, is ready to help implement development-related refugee projects as recommended by the Conference.

In the longer-term, UNDP has special responsibility to help plan and mobilize assistance in the 23 least developed countries (LDCs) in sub-Saharan Africa, including their refugee-related development work.

There is no more room for amateurism... From now on the struggle must be fought with a multi-sectoral integrated approach, with medium and long-term programmes that are themselves linked in to national and regional development plans.

Bertin Borna, Director, UN Sudano-Sahelian Office

More Information

More information is available from the UNDP Division of Information, as follows:

- From the Drought Zone (English): reports on projects addressing African drought from a long-term multi-sectoral point of view (agriculture, forestry, water, livestock development, etc.).
- African Drought Clip File: collection of articles by journalists who visited drought zones in Senegal, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. (In Danish, English, French, Japanese and Swedish.)
- UNDP's Response to the African Challenge (English/French): Speech to Governing Council by Africa Bureau Director, Pierre-Claver Damiba.
- Sahel-Action Plan (Arabic, English, French): Proposed assistance to combat drought and desertification, submitted by the Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel with UNDP/UNSO support.