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TransAfrica Forum Issue Brief

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THE FOOD CRISIS IN AFRICA

Africa confronts a devastating food crisis. By an ever-widening margin, food production in Africa has failed to keep pace with population growth. Indeed, Africa remains the only continent where per capita food production has declined over the last twenty years. The annual rate of decrease in average per capita food production during the 1960s (-0.7 percent) worsened during the 1970s (-1.6 percent) and will further deteriorate during the 1980s. Although food imports to the Continent have increased, the average person has less access to food today than ten years ago; and average dietary standards have fallen below nutritional requirements. In many countries, twenty-five to thirty percent of the population is malnourished most of the year regardless of climatic conditions.

This year, a disastrous drought has affected large parts of every region of the country. Predictions are that hundreds of thousands of people will starve to death in eighteen countries facing the worst food shortages since the early 1970s. In Ethiopia fifty to one hundred children die daily of starvation or food-related disease. More than half the population of Lesotho has been affected, and 1.2 million people are in immediate need of assistance. Ghana cannot feed a population which swelled by ten percent in just a matter of days this winter.

But malnutrition and famine afflict Africa even in the absence of drought. Many of the causes of food shortages can be explained by the inadequacy of resources to produce more food and to distribute it efficiently, to take protective or precautionary measures, or to respond to emergencies in a timely manner. Africa's poverty, in the final analysis, continually exposes its population to famine, hunger, and malnutrition. Thousands die from starvation only in poor countries, poor social groups, or poor households.

This ISSUE BRIEF, which describes the gravity of the current food crisis in east, west, and southern Africa, begins with an interview of Congressman Ted Weiss (D-NY), a member of the House Subcommittee on Africa, conducted by TransAfrica Forum Executive Director Randall Robinson. □

How would you assess the dimensions of the current food crisis in Africa?

WEISS: The reports that we have been receiving indicate that the current food crisis is perhaps the Continent's most serious since the early 1970s. Eighteen countries are experiencing devastating drought conditions at this point. Estimates are that the number of deaths may exceed the 300,000 which occurred in the early 1970s.

In general, how has the Reagan administration responded to this crisis?

WEISS: They finally have begun to respond; but until just the last couple of weeks, you would have had to draw the conclusion that the administration was treating the situation, particularly in Ethiopia, as a political rather than a humanitarian issue. Overall, this administration has shifted emphasis from food and developmental assistance to military assistance.



Congressman Ted Weiss (D-NY)

But in the immediate instance of Ethiopia, it was quite clear that the administration really was holding off. They cut Ethiopia's total share of the Title II, PL-480 Program for FY1984. They took six months to respond to the Catholic Relief Service's request for monies; and the amount that they finally came up with was relatively modest. They failed to respond to the UN Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) request for transportation funding and argued that the UNDRO appeal was a generalized rather than a specific appeal, not aimed at the United States. They also argued that since the UNDRO was requesting mostly parts for foreign-made equipment, then obviously again they were not aiming their request at the U.S.

THIS ADMINISTRATION—SPECIFICALLY AS IT RELATES TO THE UNDERDEVELOPED NATIONS—PREDICATES ITS ASSISTANCE ON AN ANALYSIS OF WHERE COUNTRIES POSITION THEMSELVES IN TERMS OF THE WORLD POWER STRUGGLE WHAT IS SURPRISING IS THAT THEY DID NOT DRAW THE LINE WHEN IT CAME TO A GREAT NATURAL DISASTER.

Are they now willing to provide the level of assistance that the disaster relief agencies indicate is necessary?

WEISS: They are talking about being a significant participant and not withholding support totally from that situation. A \$3 million Title II, PL-480 Program for Ethiopia in FY1984, as compared with nothing, is a significant increase. If you compare it with the \$14 million program of ten years ago, then it is a significant decrease, which is due—almost totally—to the changing political situation in Ethiopia and our relationship with that country. If you were talking about normal trade relations or about food as a convenience or comfort, then the administration's actions might

be appropriate. But when people are starving to death, then such a response is very inappropriate.

Has this administration's policy been consistent with U.S. traditions? What is so different about the Reagan administration? Why has food been used as a weapon?

WEISS: The administration will deny that its response to the Ethiopian crisis was affected by political considerations at all. But looking at the situation, you have to draw the conclusion that only political considerations explain both the initial refusal to participate and the drastic change that has been made.

This administration—specifically as it relates to the underdeveloped nations—predicates its assistance on an analysis of where countries position themselves in terms of the world power struggle. They have been fairly consistent in following through with that approach from the moment they came into office. What is surprising is that they did not draw the line when it came to a great natural disaster. That is really out of character with American tradition; the people of this country have been committed to helping people in an emergency situation. The administration forgot this; and they now have begun to move back to traditional American positions.

Why have they changed policy?

WEISS: Feedback has been coming from the religious community and the organized communities of concern on humanitarian grounds. This country has never been willing to close its eyes or its heart to people who were struggling for life at a time of natural disaster. And the administration has been hearing not just from those of us in Congress but from around the country and the world. We still have a representative system; and the administration cannot march off in one direction if the rest of the country is going in another.

What would you do specifically in responding both to the Ethiopian crisis and to the general African food crisis?

WEISS: Apparently, in Ethiopia at this point, food supplies either seem to be adequate or are on the way to being adequate. The problems that they are having now are of setting up a distribution capacity and of securing the necessary ground and air equipment. We ought to be getting involved positively in working with the Ethiopian government, with the U.N., with individual countries, and with private or religious relief organizations in trying to see where we can be of help. Perhaps, what we can do best is provide monies to purchase or lease transportation equipment.

If we do not have the parts for Mercedes Benz trucks, then we can provide the monies for them to be purchased elsewhere. Some have expressed concern that if we provide

equipment, then it's going to be used by the Ethiopian military in the wars it is fighting. But the U.S. seems to be the only country raising this question; all others seem satisfied that if the equipment were provided, it would, in fact, be used appropriately.

Transportation is a problem we will have to face in other African countries as well. Only a handful have a sufficient infrastructure which would allow for easy access to the interiors of those countries. But what the U.S. has done is to shift the balance from developmental assistance to security assistance. These programs, however, are the basic need of underdeveloped countries. On a long-range basis, we ought to be helping these governments build institutions which can provide the means for them to deal with the problems themselves.

Living from hand to mouth every year is just disastrous for underdeveloped countries; and in the long-run, this situation should be unacceptable to the world community at large. When we play into the hands of the leaders of those countries who want the immediate gratification of the power inherent in weaponry and high technology, then we do them and their people a disservice. We ought to be leading with our strength: we are the world's expert in agricultural development. We grow too much food for ourselves. Even our preoccupation with the East-West conflict is shunted aside so that we can find markets for our agricultural products. We ought to be using our knowledge, expertise, and funding to help nations of the underdeveloped world build their own capacity, and we ought to be helping them provide the infrastructure necessary for distribution to their people.

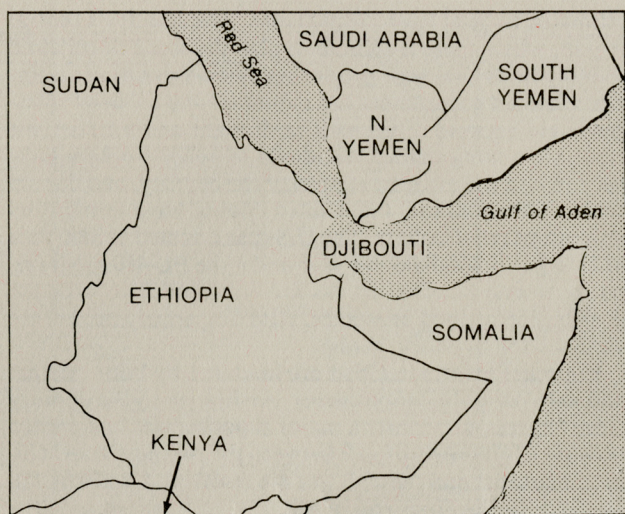
Our most appropriate role, both in Africa and in other underdeveloped areas of the world, is giving people a chance to develop survival capacity. To the extent that we drag in the East-West conflict in every instance—whether it's applicable or not—then we are doing a disservice both to ourselves and to the people who desperately need economic assistance.

What has the Congress done in light of the Reagan administration's response to the Ethiopian crisis?

WEISS: Congress, in many ways, has had to serve as the institutional conscience of the nation. The Executive Branch is usually better suited to implement diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian initiatives because they can move much more quickly administratively. For Congress to do anything, they often have to persuade the administration to expend monies that have been appropriated.

In the case of the Ethiopian crisis, seventy-four members of Congress, around the beginning of June, sent a letter to the AID Administrator urging that assistance be sent to Ethiopia because of the drought and famine. After six weeks, AID responded to the letter, arguing that it was untrue that the U.S. had failed to respond. They were engaging in a certain amount of double-ledger bookkeeping—counting previous appropriations for the Red Cross, committed before the famine appeal, as the U.S. response to the crisis.

On June 27th, because of Congressional prodding, I introduced a resolution with eighteen co-sponsors which again urged the administration to provide transportation and food assistance. It is my sense that AID had wanted to provide the assistance all along; but that agency was caught in an awkward and perhaps embarrassing position because of the administration's policy. Finally, AID got the green light, but it took a long, long time. □



In 1982 the summer rains came late to the Horn of Africa and quickly disappeared during the main growing season, leaving the newly-planted crops to wither and die. The drought and the ensuing famine have drawn world attention to the region. Three East African countries are among the eighteen most seriously affected by the current food crisis on the Continent: Ethiopia, Somalia, and Tanzania.

To date **Ethiopia** has been the country hardest hit by drought and famine. The country's projected death toll is comparable to that of the disastrous famine of the 1970s, which killed 200,000 peasants in two northern regions alone. According to a situation report compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Program (WFP), approximately three million rural inhabitants have been affected by the drought. The impact has been devastating: according to WFP, fifty to one hundred children are dying each day as a result of starvation and food-related disease. There are crop and livestock losses as well as food and water shortages. Food and seed reserves have been depleted, leaving a bleak forecast for the upcoming planting season.

Compounding the difficulties created by the natural disasters are those created by man-made disasters: civil war in the regions hardest hit by drought and famine—Eritrea, Tigre, and Wollo—has seriously reduced the food productivity and economic activities of 1.6 million people. Refugees from these regions are pouring out of the drought-affected areas into neighboring countries.

The international response to this deteriorating situation has lacked coordination and urgency despite ample warning of the impending crisis. The U.S. response has been particularly disheartening and is completely inconsistent with its previous policy of apolitical, humanitarian aid. Notwithstanding the U.S. reputation as a major supplier of relief assistance, U.S. aid to Ethiopia has been modest and calculated.

The present Ethiopian crisis was foreseeable. The Relief Society of Tigre and the Eritrean Relief Association first called world attention to the impending disaster last fall. Requests by the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) to AID were made as early as December, 1982. The initial State Department response did not come until May 6, 1983. At that time the State Department approved 838 tons of food for CRS valued at \$250,000; 630 tons for the WFP valued at \$179,000; and \$25,000 emergency aid in response to an Ethi-

opian Embassy request. During the 1974 Ethiopian drought, U.S. emergency food aid to the country rose from \$1 million in 1973 to almost \$14 million in 1974. Food aid to drought-afflicted Mali rose from \$3.6 million in 1973 to \$16 million in 1974. Yet the initial U.S. response to the present tragedy—likely to be deadlier than the earlier drought—was a modest \$454,000 approved 5 months after it was requested.

Ethiopia had been a recipient of the PL-480 Food for Peace Program since its inception under the Eisenhower administration. But, in the face of a mammoth food crisis, the U.S. decided to drop Ethiopia from this program for FY 1984. It should be noted, as well, that Ethiopia was the *only* African country targeted for elimination.

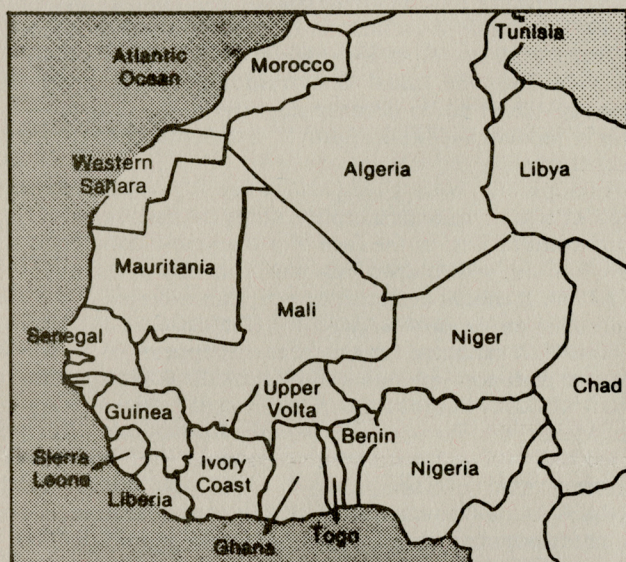
The U.S. rationale for this behavior appears to be embedded in its accusation that the Marxist Ethiopian government was allowing food aid to be diverted by the military. In March the European Economic Community (EEC) launched an investigation which cleared the Ethiopian government and concluded that the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (ERRC) was administering aid to needy populations. Private Relief Organizations (PROs) such as CRS and the Red Cross, which are involved in the distribution of relief assistance, help insure that relief assistance reaches the needy population—including those in provinces engaged in war against the government. The Red Cross has issued statements asserting that its relief supplies are being delivered appropriately through the organization's normal channels with government cooperation.

The UN Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) made a world-wide appeal for \$30-35 million for food, medical supplies, and critical transportation assistance. Fortunately, other nations responded to the UNDRO appeal; and sixty percent of the targeted food goal (100,000 tons) has been pledged or received. Exacerbating circumstances, however, intensify the need for adequate transport services. Growing guerilla activity combined with inadequate roads and transportation mechanisms strain the already difficult effort to get supplies from the country's ports to the people who are starving. CRS sources report that ports are so congested that supplies simply are not moving and that bridges have been destroyed as a result of civil war.

Although the U.S. has increased food assistance to Ethiopia, AID is still assessing "how we might respond to UNDRO appeal for transport and spare parts." But by merely sending food, the U.S. runs the risk that the food will sit in ports while thousands starve in relief centers in the northern regions.

In **Somalia** economic problems have been aggravated by the necessity of providing for nearly 700,000 refugees. Its 1983 crop season was also delayed by late and erratic rainfall. Of the 340,000 tons of cereal which will be required to feed needy populations, only 100,000 tons have been pledged. The U.S. has provided 25,000 tons of this aid; but resettlement aid and fertilizer are needed in addition.

Finally, rural regions of **Tanzania** also have been affected by the drought and are experiencing severe food shortages. Moreover, fuel shortages and other transportation problems contribute to difficulties in feeding the country's entire population. Rinderpest, a disease which kills cattle and other livestock, has broken out in the central region of the country. More than 20,000 tons of emergency food aid, seed, fertilizer, and aid to monitor animal health are desperately needed. □



A mere ten years since the world's attention was first drawn to famine and starvation in west Africa, the current food crisis also threatens the string of nations which lie to the south of the Sahara Desert. The inhabitants of this region still die from the residual effects of the 1970s drought as the Sahara continues to expand at the rate of two miles per year. Those countries which had made some progress during the interim years have seen their modest attempts at recovery set back, and even the wealthier coastal countries have been victims of the ill affects of the current crisis.

Severe food shortages have been caused by a number of natural, political, and economic factors. In addition to the Continent-wide drought, brush fires which destroyed crops, civil war in Chad, the expulsion of aliens from Nigeria, population growth, and the misuse of lands have contributed to the crisis.

The current west African famine differs from the last because it is more widespread this time and marks the effect of a continuing deterioration of food production. Despite studies by hundreds of international consultants and the implementation of hundreds of projects, efforts to increase food and fuel wood production have made little progress. The Sahel has less and less vegetation each year as an increasing number of acres becomes desert. Although climatic fluctuations clearly caused some of the problem, the experts argue that population pressures have been equally harmful. The population of the six main countries of the west African Sahel—Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad—increases by more than two percent each year. Other man-made disasters include: overexploitation of pasture land, overcultivation of marginal lands, bad irrigation practices, and deforestation.

Four west African countries—Chad, Ghana, Mali, and Mauritania—have particularly serious food shortages. In these countries, as in other regions of the Continent, governments are diverting meager resources to deal with the drought and are greatly in need of assistance from the developed economies.

After two years of drought and more than twenty years of political turmoil, **Chad** has a food shortage that is

estimated to be at least 170,000 tons. The country's central region, where there is famine, is also the scene of renewed fighting in its civil war, producing a new wave of refugees. The Chadian government has requested and received emergency aid because of the serious drought and a rinderpest epidemic among cattle. Hundreds of relief workers have been sent to the affected regions of the country, and donors such as France and the United States have committed millions of relief dollars. The U.S. has donated 19,000 tons of emergency food aid this year under the PL-480 program, but over one hundred trucks are still needed to expedite distribution of food assistance. Also desperately needed are vaccines for livestock herds.

But relief efforts in Chad are hindered by both internal and external political problems. Assistance to the country from Nigeria, previously a major supplier, was interrupted because of a border dispute between the two countries. Until this conflict and the civil war are resolved, Chadians will continue to die from starvation.

In **Ghana**, according to Head of State Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, "there is a great deal of hunger in the country." As Rawlings noted, Ghana's economy has been steadily declining for the last twelve years.

The current food shortage was brought on by erratic rainfall, a prolonged "dry season," brush fires in food producing areas spread by a prolonged seasonal Sahara wind (the Harmattan), and the sudden influx of approximately one million Ghanaians deported by Nigeria in February 1983. Low water levels have inhibited farming and reduced hydroelectric capacity for industry. The drought and fire, as well as demonstrations and threatened strikes, may lead to a 80,000-ton drop in the production of cocoa, Ghana's major foreign exchange-earner. By mid-September, Ghana will urgently need 192,000 tons of food as well as crop seeds.

As in other countries, Ghana's problems in food production are compounded by problems in distribution. Ghana's transportation difficulties may be unmatched in Africa. Rags are used in tires on lorries because inner tubes are unavailable. Ghanaian returnees from Nigeria have been dispatched to the villages. The port of Takoradi is clogged. The possibility of moving food down from Upper Volta is diminished because the border has been closed. Relief workers simply cannot find trucks that will transport food all the way to the northern regions of the country. Despite these obvious emergency needs, the response to Ghana's situation by international donors has been minimal to date.

Poor rainfall and low water levels in **Mali's** Niger and Bani Rivers have significantly reduced 1983 food production. Estimates are that the country will need 140,000 tons of food aid this year, including an immediate need for 87,000 tons in emergency assistance. The United States has approved the donation of 10,000 tons of PL-480 emergency food aid—an amount far short of Mali's urgent needs.

Finally, **Mauritania** is suffering from below average rainfall and the extremely low level of the Senegal River. Consequently, the country now has a food shortage of 180,000 tons. Serious losses in the animal population have added to Mauritania's food shortage difficulties as well because of its large pastoral population. The U.S. has approved shipment of 20,000 tons to offset the 1983 food deficit and has committed itself to a multi-year donation of 20,000 tons to help combat the country's chronic food shortage. Total bilateral donations have amounted to 70,000 tons, including 9,800 tons of emergency food aid. □



The countries of southern Africa are facing their most serious crisis since independence. For the last two years, the region has been afflicted by drought. Sixty percent of the territory of most southern African countries is comprised of arid or desert lands. The delicate regional ecosystems have been ravaged by colonialism, and agriculturally-based social systems have been abandoned.

Compounding the natural disaster is South Africa's incessant destabilization of its neighbors. Critical human, natural, and economic resources are absorbed by the effort to combat South African aggression and therefore cannot be put to use to increase agricultural production.

Six southern African countries have been seriously impacted by the food crisis: Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe and South Africa, previously the region's foremost food suppliers, will be unable to export food this year; and neighboring countries are feeling the crunch already. Growing conditions in the region are unfavorable; and outbreaks of animal diseases, particularly rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease, have added to the problem. External food assistance is required to avoid great human suffering and starvation.

Transportation remains a barrier to swift food distribution; and the exceptional infrastructural needs of these countries must be considered if an effective food assistance program is to be implemented.

In **Botswana** the 1982 drought has continued through the 1983 crop planting and growing seasons. Seasonal rainfall has dropped to fifty or sixty percent of normal. Pasture and water shortages for livestock are prevalent. No improvement is expected until the next rainy season, due around November, 1983. Sharply reduced yields of maize, sorghum, and pulses are expected for the second consecutive year. Staple cereal production is expected to be only one-fourth the normal output. Revenue-producing livestock is deteriorating because of poor animal nutrition and health conditions. The government appealed to the international community for drought relief aid in April, indicating that the relief program will be needed through June, 1984.

Lesotho, already considered the weakest economy in southern Africa, has declared 1983 a food emergency year. The drought which severely damaged last year's cereal crop has continued, and seasonal rainfall for 1983 was about half

of normal. River flows are only ten to forty percent of normal. Cereal production is expected to be 50,000 tons as compared to a normal output of 200,000 tons. Crops have completely failed in mountain areas. Food and seed reserves are depleted. Government estimates are that fifty percent of the population will require food relief until mid-1984. PL-480 assistance has been requested.

In **Mozambique** below average rainfall and South Africa-backed guerrilla activity continue to hamper agricultural production. Guerrillas with the Mozambican National Resistance (MNR) have raided and looted food stores, mined the roads and railroads which are needed for food transport, and harassed farmers. While the drought will reduce food supplies by 105,000 tons this year, the government estimates that MNR activity will reduce food production by another 145,000 tons. As a result, more than four million rural Mozambicans will live in hunger and misery. In addition, although Mozambique should be serving as a key to the transport of relief throughout the region, it cannot do so because of constant MNR attacks.

Swaziland continues to suffer from the worst drought in recent history. Rainfall in early 1983 was less than fifty percent of normal. With water rationing already in effect, the economic distress of the rural population is increasing significantly. More than 100,000 people need emergency assistance. The WFP has pledged 7,500 tons of food, but an additional 55,000 will be needed over the course of the next six months. An estimated \$500,000 will be needed for agricultural rehabilitation.

Zambia, like Botswana, has been afflicted by weather conditions that meteorologists have described as "the worst climatic disaster in the recorded history of the subcontinent." As a consequence, an estimated 90,000 tons of corn will be needed to meet minimal food needs until next year's harvest. Assistance also will be needed in a vaccination program for cattle to prevent the spread of animal diseases. The United States has an on-going agreement with Zimbabwe to receive U.S. wheat and to ship the equivalent value of corn to Zambia. This program has been upgraded to meet additional needs this year with 31,000 tons of corn being shipped to Zambia. Moreover, the U.S. has allocated \$3 million to send 5,000 tons of vegetable oil to Zambia under the PL-480 program.

In **Zimbabwe** nearly one-half the population of seven and a half million has survived the winter because of emergency government food. Suffering the worst drought of the century for two years, the communal areas of southern Zimbabwe have been devastated. The results of this crisis are widespread shortages of food in rural areas and loss of cattle or the last-minute sale of cattle for slaughter in the short-term as well as poverty and the possible threat of starvation due to reduction of livestock herds in the long-term. The migration of rural residents to the cities in search of food has begun already and is likely to increase if steps are not taken to distribute food to the areas most affected by the drought.

Zimbabwe's drought also has accentuated its internal political problems. Matabeleland, the focal point of regional conflict, has been most severely impacted by the food crisis. The ZANU government's extreme measures adopted to quell dissident activity, such as cutting off aid to some of the most drought-stricken areas, have only bolstered the accusation that the government is deliberately impeding progress in the region. □



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