



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

# DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for  
International  
Development

Washington D.C.  
20523

## MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

Date: 1983-1985

Location: Nationwide

No. Dead: Not reported

No. Affected: 1.6 million affected (91% of total population); 800,000 seriously affected

Damage: The October 1984 cereal harvest came to only 20,000 MT of millet and sorghum, almost one-third of normal annual cereal production. Approximately one-half of the population was dependent on emergency food aid and an estimated 200,000 were displaced by the drought.

### The Disaster

Once considered part of the Sahel, Mauritania is now almost entirely covered by the Sahara Desert. Only a thin strip of fertile land along the southern border normally receives over 400 mm of rain between the months of June and September. In this region, farmers can grow millet and other crops on the banks of the Senegal River and nomads can graze cattle, sheep, camels, and goats in the savanna grasslands of the southeast. By the end of the 1984 rainy season, this region had received only 50 percent of its average annual precipitation and domestic cereal production had declined to only 20,000 MT.

The drought that began in 1977 produced a severe food shortage that affected approximately 91% of the total population. The most seriously affected group was Mauritania's nomadic population, which was forced to abandon its traditional way of life. Many nomads migrated south into Senegal and Mali in search of water and pasture for their herds. Those who stayed behind camped on the outskirts of towns or along the east-west highway to be closer to food distribution centers. The health situation remained serious among the most affected groups: children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Children under five years of age continued to suffer from severe levels of malnutrition. An epidemic of measles broke out in several of the relief camps and 424 cases of cholera were reported in the Guidimaka and Gorgol regions in May 1985.

## MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

After seven straight years of disappointing rainy seasons, heavy rains finally returned to Mauritania in July of 1985. Abundant and well-distributed rains fell just in time for the annual planting season. With the advent of the rainy season, most of Mauritania's nomadic population returned to their southern grazing lands. In some areas, the rains caused flooding that damaged many houses and paved roads. In September, a new threat emerged as swarms of grasshoppers infested the regions of East Hodh, West Hodh, Assab, and Guidimaka. However, by October, nearly 60,000 MT of cereal had been harvested nationwide, a threefold increase over 1984.

### Action Taken by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM)

In November 1983, the government adopted an emergency action plan and established a National Commission for Assistance to People Affected by the Drought (CNAPES). Although the December 1984 overthrow of President Haidalla attracted international attention, it had little effect on the GIRM's drought relief strategy. In March 1985, the GIRM published a revised emergency action plan, which included detailed sectoral assessments of the food, health, water supply, and environmental situations. The plan also outlined short-term and long-range plans for alleviating the disastrous effects of drought and desertification. The plan was presented at a UNDP/OEOA donor meeting held in Dakar, Senegal in April and was reviewed by representatives of various UN agencies and donor governments.

The GIRM's Commissariat for Food Security (CSA) distributed emergency food rations to approximately 800,000 people at over 200 community feeding centers. In July, the CSA initiated a food-for-work (FFW) program in an effort to increase national employment and reduce the population's dependence on free food aid. At the same time, the CSA began a program of offering incentives to encourage displaced farmers to return to their villages. Families were offered free food rations, transportation, seed, and tools and assured that the CSA would purchase their crops if they returned to their farms and began cultivation. With the return of abundant rains in July, thousands of Mauritians migrated back to rural areas.

The GIRM's Ministry of Health launched a nationwide vaccination program with the support of WHO, UNICEF, and USAID, and dispatched mobile medical teams to improve health conditions among isolated nomadic groups. The Ministry of Rural Development adopted a water supply rehabilitation strategy to reverse the progress of desertification. With the assistance of UNDP, UNICEF, and the governments of France, Canada, and Saudi Arabia, several wells were built or repaired to provide water to towns and returning livestock herds.

MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

For the second consecutive year, the USG provided emergency food aid and relief supplies in response to Mauritania's drought and food shortage. In FY 1984, the USG contributed 20,000 MT of emergency food commodities, over \$134,000 worth of medical supplies, and over \$2.5 million in support of inland transportation costs of food and relief supplies. On December 5, 1984, Ambassador Edward Peck declared a state of disaster in Mauritania. Following discussions with representatives of the GIRM and WHO, the USAID Mission in Nouakchott requested that OFDA provide partial funding for the delivery of WHO emergency health kits to Mauritania. OFDA provided \$18,000 to finance the airfreight and crating costs of nine WHO emergency health kits.

Responding to a direct appeal from the GIRM's Ministry of Water and Energy, OFDA allocated \$735,000 from the 1985 African Famine Relief Supplemental (see "Introduction") to refurbish the Ministry's fleet of well-drilling and water tank trucks. Of this amount, \$425,000 was used to purchase spare parts and provide service engineers (both provided by International Harvester) to return vehicles of the fleet to working order. The remaining \$310,000 was used to purchase six double-axle, 3,000-gallon water tank trucks that were used to deliver water to displaced nomads living in remote areas.

The USG was the largest single emergency food donor to Mauritania in FY 1985. A.I.D.'s Office of Food for Peace allocated 10,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II wheat and 10,000 MT of NFDN directly to the GIRM's Commissariat for Food Security (CSA). As part of its allotment to Mauritania through WFP, the USG contributed 44 MT of ICSM and 98 MT of NFDN. In response to a LRCS appeal, the USG provided 2,500 MT of wheat, 65 MT of CSM, 270 MT of butteroil, and 380 MT of NFDN to be distributed at community feeding centers run by the Mauritanian Red Crescent. In support of CRS's emergency feeding program, USG contributed 1,916 MT of Title II SFSG for distribution by CRS.

Summary of FFP Assistance

<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Metric Tons</u>	<u>Commodity Cost</u>	<u>Transport Cost</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
GIRM Title II 10,000 MT wheat	10,000	\$1,580,700	\$4,977,700	\$6,558,400

MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Metric Tons</u>	<u>Commodity Cost</u>	<u>Transport Cost</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
GIRM Section 416 10,000 MT NFDM	10,000	\$11,000,000	\$2,850,000	\$13,850,000
WFP Title II 44 MT ICSM 26 MT NFDM	70	\$36,900	\$19,300	\$56,200
WFP Section 416 72 MT NFDM	72	\$46,800	\$20,500	\$67,300
LRCS Title II 2,500 MT wheat 65 MT CSM	2,565	\$415,400	\$564,300	\$979,700
LRCS Section 416 270 MT butteroil 380 MT NFDM	650	\$665,500	\$185,300	\$850,800
CRS Title II 1,916 MT SFSG	1,916	\$410,200	\$278,000	\$688,200
TOTALS	25,463	\$14,155,500	\$8,895,100	\$23,050,600

Summary of OFDA Assistance

Airlift of nine WHO emergency health kits (supplemental funds)....\$18,000

Purchase of six water tank trucks and spare parts (supplemental funds).....\$735,000

TOTAL OFDA-administered Supplemental assistance.....\$753,000

TOTAL FFP assistance.....\$23,050,600

TOTAL USG assistance.....\$23,803,600

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

CARE - In late 1984, OFDA allocated \$1,245,656 to CARE to implement a food transportation program in Mauritania. As part of its project agreement with CSA, CARE contracted private trucking companies to

MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

transport food from central warehouses to regional distribution centers and from there to remote rural villages and camps. CARE was also responsible for monitoring the program to ensure that food was reaching the people in need of supplemental food. CARE also received funding from UNICEF and EEC.

CRS - continued its emergency feeding program in Mauritania, distributing monthly food rations to approximately 30,000 mothers and 40,000 children at 35 feeding sites. CRS also managed several small-scale water pump and vegetable gardening projects in rural areas.

USA for Africa - allocated \$65,000 to Terres des Hommes to support maternal and child health (MCH) centers; provided communication equipment to CARE, worth \$400,000, and tools and equipment to support the CSA food-for-work program, valued at \$85,000; and donated \$450,000 in support of a UNDP drilling project.

WVRO - managed a dry food ration program at 14 feeding centers in the Tagant region.

TOTAL                    \$1,000,000

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

EEC - 500 MT of DSM, 200 MT of butteroil, 14,000 MT of wheat (\$1,800,000); internal transport subsidy (\$1,400,000); sorghum seeds (\$86,000)

FAO - provision of tools and vegetable seeds (\$140,000); irrigation project (\$85,000); livestock vaccination project (\$117,000); transport of medical supplies to community feeding centers (\$423,280)

LRCS - launched an appeal on June 7 for \$850,000 to be used for emergency food, transport and warehousing, recovery projects, and support of the Mauritanian Red Crescent.

UNDP - provision of fertilizer (\$200,000); support for UNICEF vaccination campaign (\$150,000); measles immunization program (\$12,000); well and borehole rehabilitation projects; 735 MT of fertilizers

UNICEF - nationwide health, water supply and sanitation program (\$100,000); technical and personnel support for national vaccination campaign

WFP - sponsored a three-year school feeding program; donated 669 MT of wheat and 44 MT of ICSM; provided a grant to finance internal transport (\$423,000).

MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

WHO - supported national vaccination campaign; provided \$67,000 for cholera and meningitis control; sent 29 emergency kits (\$154,500).

Governments

Austria - 4,000 MT of grain; sent volunteers to provide technical assistance to the GIRM food-for-work program

Belgium - 2,040 MT of wheat (\$425,000)

Canada - 7,500 MT of wheat (\$1,357,310); 730 MT of pulses (\$361,950); 445 MT of DSM (\$376,428); Nouakchott water supply rehabilitation project (\$97,000)

China, People's Rep. - 3,000 MT of maize, 2,000 MT of wheat

France - 6,112 MT of wheat; water supply rehabilitation project in Tidjikdja (\$55,000)

Germany, Fed. Rep. - 6,000 MT of wheat, four water tanks for outfitting tanker trucks

Japan - 3,100 MT of rice; 300 MT of DSM; pesticides for combatting grasshopper infestation (\$500,000)

Kuwait - provided a \$201,000 cash grant for emergency relief assistance.

Saudi Arabia - contributed ten Land Rovers to GPRM's transport fleet; financed well-drilling project (\$5,300,000).

Soviet Union - 1,000 MT of rice

Voluntary Agencies

MSF - provided mobile medical teams operating in West Hodh.

Terres des Hommes - managed MCH centers in the Brakna region.

TOTAL \$13,831,468