

## MAURITANIA - Drought/Food Shortage

Date: 1984

Location: Nationwide; most severely affected regions were Adrar, Brakna, Inchiri, Trarza, and Tagant.

No. Dead: Not reported

No. Affected: 1.7 million (entire population)

Damage: In 1983, severe rainfall deficits were recorded in nine of the country's twelve regions. Cereal production during the 1983/84 season was 15,000 tons, accounting for only 7% of the national consumption requirement. Nationwide, over 30% of the livestock and 50% of the camels died from starvation or disease and a substantial proportion had to be sold or slaughtered to prevent further losses. It was estimated that 80-90% of the population required emergency food rations.

### The Disaster

In 1983-84, Mauritania was afflicted with its worst drought since the last Sahelian drought in the early 1970s. Average rainfall during the 1983 planting season was only 20 percent of normal and, as a result, cereal production was down by more than 75 percent. The desert sands of the Sahara continued to creep steadily southward, covering over 80 percent of the Mauritanian landscape. Land suitable for farming or grazing was only available on a narrow strip along the Senegal River and in portions of the South, where rainfall normally measures more than 300 mm a year. Many wells, oases, and watering holes dried up completely and the Senegal River dropped to its lowest level in years.

Mauritania's nomadic population was the hardest hit by the drought. In some areas, as much as 90 percent of the livestock died from starvation or disease. Many nomads migrated south into Senegal and Mali, in search of water and pasture for their herds. Those that stayed behind congregated into squatters camps near food distribution centers run by the

government and voluntary agencies. Many displaced by the drought camped on the outskirts of Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott, swelling its population to over 300,000.

As a result of the drought and food shortage, the health situation in Mauritania deteriorated seriously. Health conditions in the refugee camps were especially poor, due to the lack of potable water and adequate sanitation facilities. Measles, tuberculosis, schistosomiasis, and malaria infected many Mauritians already weakened by malnutrition. Nutritional assessments conducted by several health organizations reported that between 40 and 70 percent of the children under five years of age suffered from malnutrition. Cases of anemia, diarrhea, scurvy, and vitamin A deficiency were also quite prevalent throughout the country. Due to the absence of any mortality surveillance system, it is impossible to determine how many deaths could be attributed to the drought.

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

The summer of 1983 brought the lowest average rainfall to Mauritania in seventy years. In September, President Haidalla called an emergency meeting of regional governors, cabinet ministers, and military commanders to develop a strategy to cope with the drought. Hydrological and health assessments were made of drought-stricken areas in order to target the most affected regions. Based on these assessments and the recommendations of several donor consultants, the GIRM adopted an emergency action plan in November 1983. The plan included an inventory of the GIRM's financial, human, and logistical resources and a list of the resources needed to combat the drought. A national and international appeal was made to help finance implementation of the plan. Even though Mauritania has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world, the national appeal garnered over US \$1 million in contributions from the private sector and civil servants.

The plan established the National Committee for Assistance to People Affected by the Drought (CNAPE) to coordinate disaster relief at the national level. A technical commission was appointed to recommend long term solutions to the problems caused by chronic droughts. At the regional and local levels, a political movement known as Structure d'Education des Masses (SEM) was organized to assist in the relief effort and educate the populace about proper drought mitigation measures.

The GIRM's Commissariat for Food Security (CSA) was put in charge of distributing approximately 75% of the donated food free of charge to the indigent and as payment to relief workers. Community feeding centers run by the CSA, SEM, Mauritanian Red Crescent, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) provided extra rations of food to drought victims, especially children, young mothers, and the elderly. Perhaps the most difficult problem was getting the food to the feeding centers and isolated nomadic

communities. Trucks owned by CSA, military vehicles, private carriers, and donated land rovers were used to transport food to the regional warehouses and feeding centers. Nomads were encouraged to resettle closer to roads and food distribution sites.

The plan also sought to find ways to mitigate the disastrous effects of the drought. The SEM taught farmers and herders how to protect their land from desertification. Hydraulic brigades were dispatched to the countryside to dig new wells, repair dilapidated wells, and build earthen dams and dikes to conserve water. Mobile medical teams vaccinated both children and livestock in an effort to contain the spread of disease. The plan encouraged vegetable gardening and consumption of dried fish as a means of reducing Mauritania's dependency on imported food. Other mitigation measures promoted by the plan included better nutritional and health surveillance of vulnerable groups and public information campaigns to educate the people about proper health and sanitation practices.

#### Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

On August 29, 1983, USAID/Mauritania received a formal request from the GIRM Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide emergency food aid to Mauritania. USAID proposed an integrated drought relief program targeting three of the most affected regions: Adar, Tagant, and Trarza, which have a total population of 350,000. On October 5, the U.S. Charge d'Affairs declared that the drought situation in Mauritania warranted U.S.G. assistance. USAID immediately requested an epidemiologist from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) be sent to analyze nutritional survey data from the three targeted regions. The CDC epidemiologist found that an alarming number of children under five years of age were suffering from severe malnutrition. The epidemiologist also submitted a list of emergency medicines needed to combat disease and malnutrition in the three regions. The list included antibiotics, malaria suppressants, antituberculars, oral rehydration salts, vitamin and iron supplements, and various medical supplies. The Ambassador's \$25,000 disaster assistance authority was immediately allocated for local purchase of medicines and medical supplies (\$17,000), the cost of the CDC visit (\$4,000), and support of the nutritional surveillance study (\$4,000).

Because most of the emergency medicines were not available in Mauritania, OFDA had to purchase emergency drugs and medical supplies from U.S. pharmaceutical companies. The services of a U.S. international air freight company and an international forwarder firm were procured to transport the medical supplies to Nouakchott. In addition, OFDA provided \$36,056 to UNICEF to purchase and transport additional medicines.

In support of a CRS emergency feeding program, OFDA provided a grant to finance inland transportation of 830 MT of P.L. 480 Title II commodities, the purchase of medicines and medical supplies, and local training and personnel costs. The CRS program provided one extra food ration per month to an additional 9,000 pregnant and lactating mothers for a twelve month period.

In recognition of the serious logistical constraints in Mauritania, OFDA committed over \$2.5 million for inland transportation of P.L. 480 food commodities. Due to the inadequacy of the Nouakchott wharf, most of the donated food was shipped to the port at Dakar, Senegal, and from there transported by private carriers and ferry to Rosso. OFDA provided two grants to the GIRM to pay private trucking contractors to transport 16,670 MT of P.L. 480 commodities to distribution centers scattered throughout Mauritania. A food aid monitor was hired to supervise delivery of these commodities. In late FY 1984, OFDA provided \$1,245,656 to CARE to fund emergency transportation of 15,000 MT of food from the 62 distribution centers to remote rural communities. This money, plus a \$200,000 grant to the GIRM for inland transportation costs, came out of the \$16 million Special Congressional Appropriation. (These figures, which total \$1,445,656, are not included in the total USG assistance below as they are listed in the section Disaster Relief in FY 1984 - "Special Appropriation for Inland Transport.")

OFDA also funded 3-member WASH team hydrological assessment of the Adar, Tagant, and Trarza regions. An agrometeorologist from NOAA was also sent to Nouakchott to brief GIRM officials in the latest drought forecasting techniques.

Summary of USG Assistance

Ambassador's Authority used for local purchase of medicines (\$17,000), CDC epidemiologist (\$4,000), and nutritional survey (\$4,000).....	\$25,000
Purchase of emergency medicines and supplies from U.S. pharmaceutical companies.....	\$98,441
Air freight and international forwarder costs.....	\$41,749
Purchase and shipment of medicines from UNICEF.....	\$36,056
Grant to CRS emergency feeding program.....	\$192,196
Grants to GIRM for inland transportation of P.L. 480 commodities.....	\$1,065,000

Contract for food aid monitors.....	\$100,000
3-member WASH team.....	\$40,367
NOAA agrometeorologist.....	\$2,600
Total OFDA assistance.....	
	\$1,601,409

A.I.D.'s Office of Food for Peace (FFP) provided 16,670 MT of P.L 480 Title II commodities (12,870 MT of wheat, 3,800 MT of NFDM) and 2,500 MT of Section 416 butteroil to the GIRM's Commissariat for Food Security. Another 830 MT of food (475 MT of SFSG, 237 MT of NFDM, 118 MT of vegoil) was provided to CRS for distribution at its feeding centers.

Through GIRM	
P.L. 480 commodities.....	\$2,453,300
Freight cost.....	\$4,400,000
Section 416 commodity cost.....	\$4,550,000
Freight cost.....	\$350,000

Through CRS	
P.L. 480 commodities.....	\$255,500
Freight cost.....	\$245,000

Total FFP Assistance.....	\$12,253,800
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In addition, A.I.D. alloted \$110,000 to USAID Mauritania for an emergency water supply program and a water monitor.....	\$110,000
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TOTAL	\$13,965,209
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Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

CARE - with a grant from OFDA, provided a team of logistics specialists to expedite the movement and distribution of 10,000-15,000 MT of emergency food commodities to rural populations in need.

CRS - manages the largest on-going emergency feeding program in Mauritania, comprising 28 feeding centers and serving 20,000 mothers and 30,000 children. The OFDA grant added 9,000 recipients to this program. In FY 83, CRS distributed 830 MT of P.L. 480 foods. CRS is also involved in a number of on-going projects, including health education, integrated rural development, self-help and irrigation projects, in collaboration with the GIRM and other private voluntary agencies.

## Assistance Provided by the International Community

### International Organizations

EEC - donated 17,000 MT of wheat to the GIRM, gave \$480,000 in cash to the health sector and for transportation costs, and provided \$420,012 in response to a LORCS appeal.

FAO - contributed 2,000 tons of cattlefeed, valued at \$570,000; donated \$200,000 for the purchase of livestock vaccines; and, in conjunction with WFP, allocated 15,500 tons of corn, 1,560 MT powdered milk, and 1,180 MT butteroil, valued at \$11,253,000 including transportation costs.

UNDRO - at the request of the GIRM, launched an international appeal for assistance on December 30, 1983. UNDRO conducted an inter-UN agency assessment of the health, agricultural, transportation, hydrological, and food sectors in Mauritania. Contributed \$25,000 for the purchase of dried fish.

UNICEF - obligated \$150,000 from its emergency funds for implementation of on-going health and nutrition projects.

WFP - committed \$3,601,000 in emergency food supplies, including 20,000 MT of wheat, 1,560 MT milk, and 1,170 MT of butteroil.

WHO - in response to GIRM appeal for drugs and medical supplies, WHO provided medicines valued at \$187,000.

### Governments

Algeria - made a cash contribution of \$84,000 to purchase medicines and donated 2,000 MT of flour, 200 MT of dates, and 50 MT of powdered milk.

Argentina - provided 3,000 MT of wheat.

Belgium - contributed 1,500 MT of wheat.

Bulgaria - donated 1,000 MT of flour.

Canada - made a cash contribution of \$852,357 to LORCS and donated 14,400 MT of wheat.

China, Peoples Republic - donated \$50,000 in cash to the relief effort and provided 2,000 MT of wheat.

France - gave 10,000 MT of wheat.

Germany, Fed. Rep. - made a cash contribution of \$234,000 to purchase medicines and donated 9,000 MT of wheat.

Holland - gave 9,000 MT of wheat and 6,000 MT of flour.

Kuwait - contributed 3,600 MT of wheat.

Libya - donated 3,000 MT of barley.

Japan - contributed 3,100 MT of rice.

Norway - made cash contribution of \$27,000 to Norwegian Caritas.

Romania - gave 200 MT of biscuits, 100 MT of sugar and 1,000 MT of flour.

Saudi Arabia - donated 10,000 MT of wheat.

Soviet Union - gave 1,000 MT of rice.

Spain - contributed 4,000 MT of wheat and 500 MT of barley.

United Kingdom - made a cash contribution of \$308,181 to the LORCS appeal; donated eight Land Rovers and \$98,000 in cash to UNDRO.

Vatican - donated \$15,000 in cash.

#### International Voluntary Agencies

LORCS - appealed for over \$7.7 million in cash and in kind to support the Mauritanian Red Crescent's programs. Programs included a supplementary feeding project to provide emergency rations to 250,000 drought victims. Two medical teams were sent to the Brakna and Hodh El Chargui regions. The following member societies sent monetary contributions and supplies in response to the appeal: (sent or pledged as of 3/31/84)

Belgium Red Cross - \$20,861.

Denmark Red Cross - 100 MT of NFDM and 3,500 MT of wheat, valued at \$980,886.

Finland Red Cross - \$46,636, and 23 MT of NFDM, valued at \$82,727.

German Red Cross - 37 MT of clothing, 1,500 blankets, 50 MT of sugar and 10 MT of beef, valued at \$130,000.

Japan Red Cross - 45 MT of NFDM, valued at \$40,357.

Monaco Red Cross - \$3,011.

Netherlands Red Cross - \$3,209.

Norwegian Red Cross - \$45,454 in cash and fish, NFDM, sugar and spare parts, valued at \$735,000.

Switzerland Red Cross - \$45,454.

Sweden Red Cross - \$136,364 in cash and 900 MT of wheat, 80 MT of vegoil, clothing and blankets, valued at \$427,172.

Lutheran World Federation - made a cash contribution of \$5,143 to the LORCS appeal.

Medecins san Frontieres - supported mobile medical teams operating in the Hodh el Gharby region.

Oxfam - cash contribution of \$22,000 to UNDRO.

Terre des Hommes - signed an agreement with GIRM Ministry of Health to provide emergency medical assistance to drought victims in the Brakna region.

World Vision International - established a health project in Mauritania in collaboration with Terre des Hommes.

TOTAL \$21,278,824