



DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
DevelopmentWashington D.C.
20523

MALAWI – Food Shortage FY 1988

Date

1988

Location

Nationwide

No. Dead

Not reported

No. Affected318,000 Malawians,
plus 560,000
Mozambican
refugees as of
October 1988.**The Disaster**

Malawi was faced with a severe food shortage in 1988, due to a combination of problems. Drought significantly reduced the maize, millet, and sorghum harvests in the central and southern regions of the country. At the same time, an infestation of mealybugs decimated the cassava crop, which is the main staple food in the northern region. Superimposed on these environmental conditions was the influx of over half a million Mozambican refugees that strained the food-producing capacity of Malawi. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that as many as 600,000 Mozambican refugees would require emergency feeding by the end of the year and the Government of Malawi projected that an additional 318,000 Malawians were dependent on free or subsidized food aid. Once a food exporting country, Malawi was forced to appeal for international food assistance.

The Mozambican refugee and the affected Malawian populations were treated as two separate at-risk groups. Malawi has long been a haven for Mozambican refugees, but in May and June of 1988 intense fighting between Mozambican forces and RENAMO guerrillas prompted approximately 140,000 Mozambicans to abandon their farms and villages and cross the border into Malawi. Many of these refugees walked for two or three weeks and arrived in Malawi sick, malnourished, and with little or no clothing. Nsanje district in the far southern tip of the country accommodated over 200,000 Mozambicans, outnumbering the 150,000 Malawian residents. UNHCR-run refugee camps swelled and squatter settlements covered what used to be arable land. Competition for food, water, and firewood intensified in the southern region of the country, and the arrival of sick refugees raised concerns that cholera, malaria, and tuberculosis

could spread throughout Malawi. The primary causes of death among refugees were malnutrition, diarrheal diseases, and malaria, although death rates went down once the refugees settled in camps.

The Malawian population was also severely affected by food shortages. Cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus were reported in the mealybug-infested areas along the shore of Lake Malawi. Many Malawians in this region subsisted on immature cassava, green maize, and other food substitutes. In the southern region, increased demand for commercial food supplies forced prices to rise dramatically, making many Malawians dependent on subsidized food rations. The nation's health care infrastructure was strained to the limit, as doctors and nurses tried to provide medical attention to Malawians, as well as refugees. In an effort to stave off resentment and unrest, relief agencies divided up food and other assistance between refugees and Malawians living in the same area.

Action Taken by the Government of Malawi (GOM) and Non-Governmental Organizations

The Government of Malawi tried to accommodate the overwhelming number of refugees and there were no reports of expulsions or blockades to prevent Mozambicans from entering the country. International organizations, such as UNHCR, World Food Program, and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), provided assistance in the refugee camps. The GOM Ministry of Health provided medical assistance to affected Malawians, as well as to Mozambican refugees. The GOM Ministry of Transport coordinated the transportation of food commodities into Malawi. Most of the donor food aid was trucked in from Zimbabwe and Zambia, with a small quantity coming by way of the port at Dar es Salaam,

Tanzania. Two Malawian private corporations, the Malawi International Transport Company and the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation, were also involved in the transportation and storage of food commodities.

Meanwhile, the GOM Office of the President and the Cabinet (OPC) coordinated the assistance to the affected Malawian population. The Malawian Red Cross (MRC) distributed maize to Malawians in mealybug areas and assisted in the distribution of food to refugees. Later in the year, the OPC implemented food-for-work projects to reduce reliance on free food distribution. The GOM embarked on a number of experimental programs to introduce natural predators to combat the mealybug infestation. The GOM also tried to introduce alternative food crops, such as rice and maize, as substitutes for cassava.

Assistance Provided by the U.S. Government

By February 1988, the number of Mozambican refugees flooding into Malawi had risen to 420,000. Furthermore, the drought and mealybug infestation were beginning to have an impact on the food supply of the Malawian population. On Feb. 24, U.S. Charge d'Affaires Dennis Jett determined that the food emergency in Malawi warranted U.S. government assistance. There was an immediate need for assistance for the more than 20,000 Mozambican refugees that were arriving each month. OFDA quickly allocated \$100,000 from the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference supplemental, which was used to purchase construction materials for a refugee reception center at Kampata in Nsanje district. The reception center was finished in April and included a medical screening unit for new arrivals.

Another immediate need was clothing for the thousands of Mozambican refugees that arrived in Malawi wearing only rags or coverings made out of leaves or bark. OFDA initiated a program to send clothing confiscated by the U.S. Customs Service to several African countries, including Malawi. At a special ceremony in Blantyre, U.S. Ambassador George Trail III consigned over 100,000 pieces of clothing to World Vision Relief and Development (WVRD). The clothing was distributed in Nsanje, Dedza and Ntcheu districts by WVRD, in collaboration with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the Malawian Red Cross. (OFDA's grant of \$243,500 to

WVRD to pay for transport of this forfeited clothing to Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe is listed as an Africa Regional expenditure.)

A third critical need was for medicines to replenish the dwindling pharmaceutical stocks in Malawi's overburdened hospitals and health centers. WVRD proposed providing \$1,218,932 worth of medicines, vitamins, and medical supplies to benefit both Malawians and Mozambican refugees. OFDA agreed to pay the cost of handling, air freight, and inland transport of these supplies. The pharmaceuticals were packaged and assembled by MAP International and arrived in Malawi in July. The medicines were then distributed among district hospitals and health centers through the GOM Ministry of Health.

OFDA Operations Officer Lauren Landis visited Malawi in May and toured both the refugee centers in the south and the mealybug-affected areas in the north. In June, OFDA stationed a consultant, Greg Gottlieb, in the USAID Mission in Lilongwe to monitor the situation and coordinate the U.S. government relief program.

A.I.D.'s Office of Food for Peace (FFP) allocated 15,000 MT of Title II emergency food for Mozambican refugees and an additional 12,325 MT of Title II food for the GOM emergency feeding program. Most of this food was shipped to the port at Durban, South Africa, and then transported by road and rail to Malawi.

The U.S. State Department's Bureau of Refugee Programs (RP) contributed \$4.4 million to a UNHCR appeal for assistance to Mozambican refugees in Malawi and \$300,000 in response to the League of Red Cross Societies appeal.

Summary of U.S. Government Assistance

FY 1988

Mission allotment for reception center (Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) supplemental funds)	\$100,000
Contract for relief coordinator (SADCC funds)	\$134,253
Purchase of vehicle for relief coordinator (SADCC funds)	\$18,000

Grant to WVRD for transport of emergency medicine (SADCC funds) \$67,590

27,325 MT of Title II emergency food (FFP funds) \$3,415,700

Transport costs of 27,325 MT (FFP funds) \$3,195,100

Grant to UNHCR for refugee assistance (State/RP funds) \$4,400,000

Grant to LRCS for refugee assistance (State/RP funds) \$300,000

FY 1989

Vehicle maintenance \$4,600

Total OFDA \$324,443

Total Food for Peace \$6,610,800

Total Refugee Programs \$4,700,000

TOTAL \$11,635,243

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

Africare - built a spring well in Ntcheu District.

International Rescue Committee - provided medical assistance to refugees in Dedza, Lilongwe, and Mangochi districts.

WVRD - distributed U.S. government-donated clothing in refugee camps in Nsanje, Dedza, and Ntcheu Districts and provided \$1,218,932 worth of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies to the GOM Ministry of Health.

TOTAL \$1,218,932

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

EC - donated 16,400 MT of maize through UNHCR; 3,390 MT of maize through World Food Program (WFP); 5,000 MT of maize to Malawians through MRC; \$160,000 to WFP for food storage facilities.

League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS) - contributed 7,072 MT of maize and launched an appeal on behalf of the MRC.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - coordinated the management of the refugee camps in each of the southern districts, providing food, clothing, and medical assistance to new arrivals.

World Food Program - coordinated food aid to the refugee population.

Governments

Australia - provided 5,000 MT of maize and donated \$14,978 to the LRCS/MRC appeal.

Canada - gave 9,000 MT of maize through WFP and \$119,784 to the LRCS/MRC appeal.

China, People's Rep. - contributed 28,500 MT of maize.

Finland - donated \$75,323 to LRCS/MRC appeal.

Germany, Fed. Rep. - provided 10,000 MT of maize.

Japan - contributed 3,600 MT of maize.

Netherlands - provided 4,000 MT of maize meal and 15,000 MT of maize.

Norway - donated \$78,237 to the LRCS/MRC appeal.

Sweden - contributed \$84,172 to the LRCS/MRC appeal.

United Kingdom - donated \$92,446 to the LRCS/MRC appeal and the High Commission donated \$164,460 to the appeal.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The following national Red Cross societies contributed to the LRCS/MRC appeal:

Canada - \$7,842
Denmark - \$23,093
Finland - \$49,381
Iceland - \$4,316
Japan - \$32,014
Netherlands - \$25,180
Sweden - \$83,525
Switzerland - \$26,618
U.K. - \$89,928

Medicins sans frontieres - provided doctors and nurses in the refugee camps.

Oxfam - contributed \$125,108 to the LRCS/MRC appeal.

TOTAL \$1,256,405