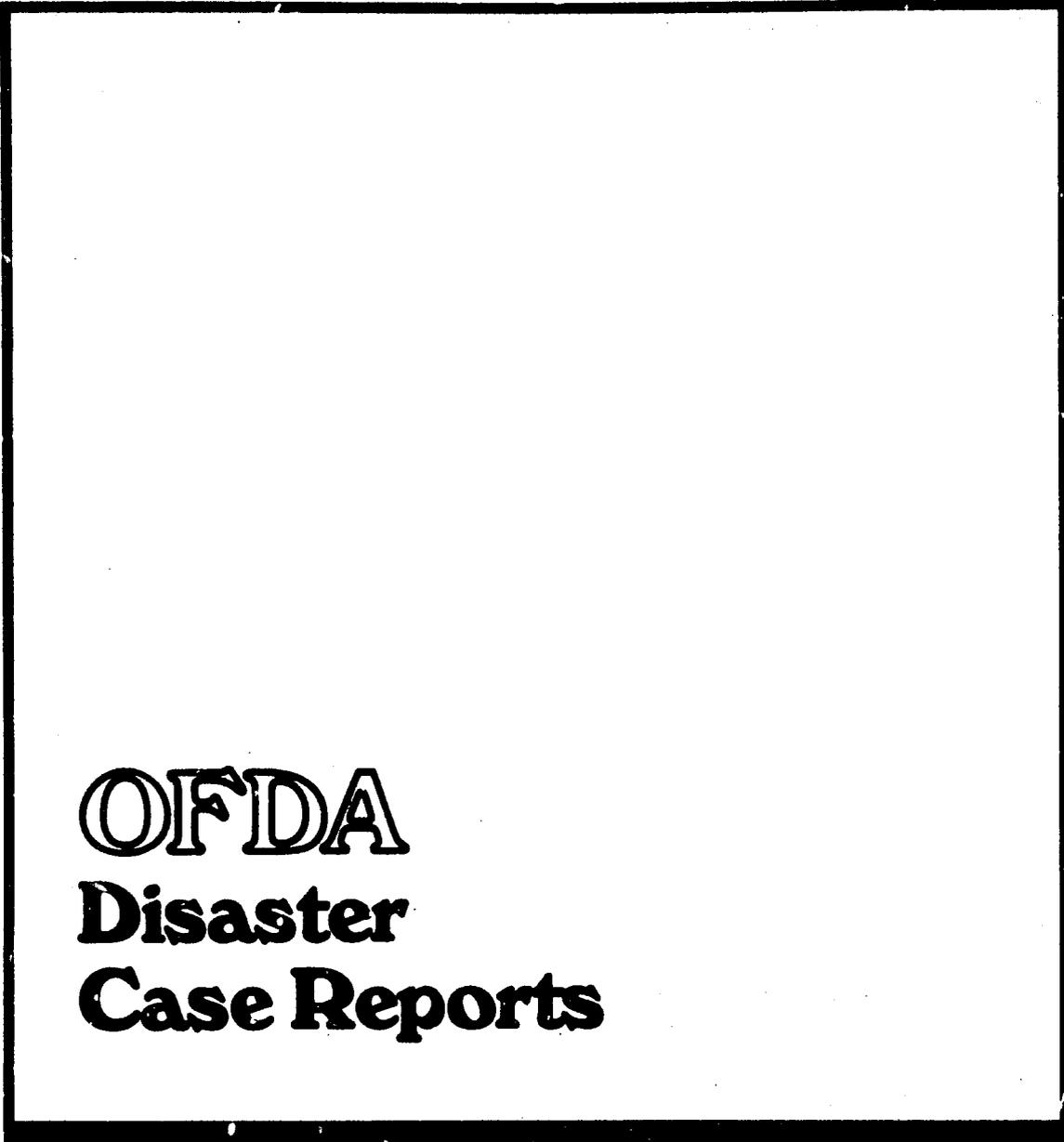


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**OFDA**  
**Disaster**  
**Case Reports**

**Mauritania Drought**  
**January-October 1978**

**Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance**  
**Agency for International Development**  
**Washington, D.C. 20523**

## MAURITANIA - Drought

### Data

**Date:** January-October 1978 (FY 78)

**Location:** The Islamic Republic of Mauritania

**No. Dead:** None

**No. Affected:** 1.42 million

**Damage:** Substantial damage to pasture and forest resources but dollar estimates difficult, if not impossible, to make; cumulative effect of drought caused a shortfall of approximately 7,000 metric tons (MT) of millet and sorghum; 1977 crop yield estimated to range from 21,000 MT to 40,000 MT; normal harvest approximately 75,000 MT or one-half of annual food needs; number of children cared for by mass feeding program estimated at 13,000

### The Disaster

For most of the 1970s, Mauritania has suffered from droughts with the worst one occurring between 1972 and 1973. In 1976 and 1977 rainfall was once again substantially below normal and poorly distributed; shortfall ranged from 41% below normal in Kaedi to 98% in Nouakchott. By late 1977 it was clear that serious losses of crops and livestock pasturage were occurring in the hardest hit regions, which encompassed the area south of a line from Nouakchott to Kiffa to Nema, and west of a line from Kiffa to the southern border. The agro-pastoral situation continued to worsen, so that by April 1978 virtually all of Mauritania had been declared a disaster area.

It should be noted that during a year of "normal" rainfall, Mauritania harvests only half of its annual food needs so that, even in the best of times, not enough food is held by families collectively to last from harvest to harvest. The effects of drought are severe not only on the sedentary population but also on Mauritania's large nomadic population. Droughts often force a longer and more far-reaching transhumance which in turn intensifies the destruction of pasturage on both fertile and marginal lands. If cattle losses are also high, many nomads are forced to abandon their migratory way of life to seek employment in towns and cities already plagued by high unemployment.

## MAURITANIA - Drought

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

As a result of the recommendations of a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) led Multi-Donor Mission survey of the drought areas in 1977, a comprehensive relief program was put into effect coordinated by the World Food Program (WFP) and channeled through the GIRM's Plan d'Urgence (Emergency Planning Office). The latter in turn reestablished the Office Mauritanien des Cereales (OMC) with control over grain management and charged with refurbishing its fleet of trucks needed for transporting food and livestock feed. Only 60 of the 300 trucks in the original fleet were operational at the beginning of the relief effort.

The GIRM also issued an appeal for major international assistance, especially for well-drilling equipment, cattle fodder, veterinary products, vegetable seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, and help in building more grain storage facilities. In addition, the GIRM reinstated the drought tax: one day's wages from all salaried workers, and one percent of all private and semi-private commercial organization earnings went to drought relief. One phase of the relief program, the six-week Water Transport Operation, is worthy of note for its efficient and timely distribution of water and water troughs, allowing transhumant animals to use previously ungrazed pasturage.

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

On December 9, 1977, Ambassador Kryza determined that an emergency existed in Mauritania. In response to the findings of the Multi-Donor Mission, a grant of \$2,680,000 (not including \$1,000,000 for Senegal) was made on April 24, 1978, and was channeled through FAO's Office of Special Relief Operations (FAO/OSRO). The grant was used primarily for cattle feed, salt licks, and water transport. Of the original \$2,680,000, \$766,612 went unexpended and was returned to the USG.....\$1,913,388

In addition to the grant, 10,000 MT of sorghum was provided bilaterally (10,000 MT also channeled through WFP; see below). USG assistance was concentrated in the following locations: human food distribution in Regions III (Kiffa), IV (Kaedi), V (Aleg), VI (Rosso), X (Selibaby), and the district of Nouakchott; cattle feed distribution in all of the above regions, and including Regions VII (Atar), IX (Tidjikja), XI (F'derik), and XII (Akjoujt); water transport in Region III between Kiffa and Kankossa.....\$2,079,000

Support and assessment services were also carried out by the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance's Director, Deputy Director, and Operations Officer as well as by a Livestock

MAURITANIA - Drought

Advisor from Dakar; assessment included an aerial survey of selected drought areas by helicopter. The U.S. Mission also received funding for a cash grant to the OMC to rent trucks for food distribution and, as a long-term follow-up measure, funding was provided to establish an emergency office in Nouakchott to evaluate the overall relief effort.....\$567,295

TOTAL \$4,559,683

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community \*

Australia - 2,000 MT of wheat

Belgium - pledged 2,000 MT of wheat

Canada - 8,000 MT of wheat

Denmark - 200 MT of milk

European Development Fund (FED) - 3,483 MT of animal feed

European Economic Community (EEC) - 7,000 MT of wheat; 1,000 MT of milk; 1,100 MT of butter oil; 800 MT of milk and 900 MT of butter oil were pledged for 1978

FAO/OSRO - Special officer responsible for procurement of commodities and implementation of the program

FED/EEC - Cost of commodities, transportation, distribution, and tubewells amounted to \$2,163,200

Finland - 60 MT of milk

France - 4,000 MT of wheat; spare parts for trucks; 16 million (ouguiya Mauritanian) valued at \$350,000

Germany, Democratic Republic - 5,000 MT of wheat; four, 11-tonne Lorries

Germany, Federal Republic - 4 trucks valued at 472,000 DM, and 500 MT grain, value unknown

Islamic Fund - \$200,000

MAURITANIA - Drought

Netherlands - 4,500 MT of wheat

United Kingdom - pledged 5,000 MT of wheat

UN Sahelian Office/UN Emergency Office - veterinary supplies, rinderpest vaccine, explosives for bird campaign, seeds, cereal, potato seeds, miscellaneous agricultural equipment; total value \$986,000

WFP - 10,000 MT of sorghum (supplied by the USG); estimated commodity and transport costs \$1,730,000

Note: Since January 1977, two governments and 25 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies have given (via the Red Cross), \$406,839 in cash, \$3,653,267 in kind, and \$8,375 in services.

TOTAL \$9,497,681

\* Please note: the figure for total international assistance is an approximation. In many cases the cash value of in kind aid is unavailable.