



DISASTER  
RELIEF

CASE REPORT

Afghanistan--Drought  
June, 1971-December, 1972

Agency for International Development  
Washington, D.C. 20523

**Foreign Disaster Case Reports are publications of the Office of the Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator, Agency for International Development. This office has responsibility for coordinating U.S. Government foreign disaster relief responses and for the further coordination of such activities with those of the U.S. private and international disaster relief communities.**

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# AFGHANISTAN

## Drought

**Two years of unprecedented drought, one of the worst winters in Afghanistan's history, and floods, combined to cause a massive shortfall of wheat and the loss of thousands of cattle. More than one million people were threatened with starvation.**

Value of U. S. Assistance ..... \$14,354,000  
Value of Assistance by Other Nations ..... \$11,471,320

Afghanistan, a country of central Asia with an area of 250,775 square miles, has an estimated population of 16.5 million. Three traits characterize Afghanistan's climate—extremes of temperature (seasonal and diurnal), windiness and dryness. Afghanistan is a pastoral country—not more than 13% is under continuous cultivation. The remainder consists of dry and desert areas in the south and west, massive mountains on an east-west axis in the center and semi-arid steppes in the north. Some 2.5 million Afghan nomads move their livestock with the seasons, following the grass. Principal source of the agricultural wealth of Afghanistan lies in its immense flocks and herds which roam the great pasture lands below and on the lower slopes of the mountains. The sale of karakul lamb skins, wool, and carpets accounts for almost 40% of Afghan foreign exchange earnings.

During 1969 and 1970 Afghanistan received the lowest amount of rainfall in 13 years. Major rivers were reduced to trickling brooks, and the Arghandab River, the principal water source for Kandahar's crops and orchards, became bone dry. In June 1971, the Royal Government of Afghanistan (RGA) became aware of the drastic reduction in livestock feed and pasturage caused by the drought. It was soon clear that an impending famine threatened over one million Afghans with possible starvation.

Eight of Afghanistan's 28 provinces were severely affected—Farah, Herat, Badghis and Faryab in the west and northwest; Kandahar and Ghazni in the southern and southeastern areas; Oruzgan in the central area; and later Badakhshan in the northeast. In desperate attempts to purchase other foodstuffs, farm-

ers in the hardest hit provinces were compelled to sell their sheep at a fraction of the normal market value.

The central and western provinces of Afghanistan, which traditionally have food surpluses each year, became critically short, and a harsh winter closed access roads to all but 4-wheel drive vehicles. Travellers returning from the severest drought-stricken provinces reported many of the hill people ate the wheat seed which had been allocated for spring planting. When that was exhausted, they ate their livestock, their principal source of income. Thousands of destitute people flocked to nearby provincial capitals and rural towns in search of food.

Three provinces in western Afghanistan not only suffered from severe drought and the harsh winter, but were ravaged by devastating floods which began in January 1972. The floods killed 150 persons, destroyed 8,700 houses and damaged 58,000 others. Thousands of livestock were killed and 10,400 acres of crops were laid waste.

While conditions improved by June 1972 with the arrival of wheat from abroad and the large grain yields in Afghanistan, a crisis situation still existed throughout 1972 in the central and northwestern highlands and in the Badakhshan area in the northeast. Food supplies in these regions were already nearly exhausted, and another winter was approaching with the prediction of heavy snows. It was imperative to bring food into these regions for 250,000 Afghans before the roads became impassable.

No official reports have been received on the number of people who may have died of hunger or diseases related to severe malnutrition.

## **ACTION TAKEN BY THE RGA AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

The Royal Government of Afghanistan (RGA) was faced with three problems—(1) the immediate nationwide shortage of grain; (2) the anticipated severe reduction in forage expected by October; and (3) the longer-range threat of starvation in the most affected provinces.

By July 1971, the impact of the drought was so severe that the RGA was compelled to appeal for foreign emergency and long-term assistance. Appeals went out to the European Economic Community and 27 other countries for wheat for human consumption and long-term assistance for livestock.

The following emergency actions were initiated by the RGA:

- A nationwide ground and air reconnaissance survey was made to determine the severity of the livestock situation and make recommendations.
  - Sources of livestock feed were located and delivered to livestock owners by means of government trucks and personnel.
  - Government-owned water pumps, well drilling rigs, and related equipment were put into use to provide water for drinking, crop irrigation and for livestock. An effort was made to produce more low lift pumps at a local factory, necessitating airlift of 100 diesel engines from West Germany.
  - The RGA requested the Afghan Parliament to amend the customs law to permit export of live animals to neighboring countries, and approaches were also made to the governments of Iran, USSR and Pakistan for such export.
  - The RGA Cabinet authorized the Ministry of Finance to approach all creditors for postponement of debt-service payments for the remainder of the Afghan fiscal year, in order to provide both foreign exchange and internal budgetary relief needed for emergency measures.
- A long-term integrated livestock development program was adopted after other priorities were met.

H. E. Dr. Abdul Wakil, Minister Without Portfolio, was charged with the immense responsibility for organizing both immediate and long-range RGA programs for human feeding. Prime Minister Zahir appeared before the Lower House of Deputies of Parliament on November 2, 1971, and described the RGA's basic drought relief operations and plans. He detailed the fundamental three-pronged program which was being implemented—wheat distribution to the coldest areas; the planting of 500,000 acres of irrigated and fertilized high-yield wheat; a Food-for-Work program utilizing existing provincial development projects of road construction, small water control projects, village water supplies, etc. The programs were well received by the general populace.

By making wheat available, the threat of runaway prices, widespread food shortages, and the development of widespread famine were forestalled. However, by May 1972, the central and western provinces (Badghis, Faryab, Ghor, Oruzgan and Herat), which traditionally have food surpluses every year, also became critically short. These provinces contained approximately 2 million people of whom 600,000 were in need of assistance.

The RGA preferred to meet this need by expanding Food-for-Work programs, holding dole feeding to a minimum. The RGA was confident at the time that there was sufficient wheat in the pipeline from the United States and Europe to meet this crisis—the problem was one of delivery to in-country distribution points.

A government information center was established in the RGA Provincial Development Authority to assemble data from various government departments and shipping and trucking companies; to identify bottlenecks; and propose solutions.

Because of these actions, sufficient rainfall, and the use of improved seed and fertilizer,



*All associated programs were coordinated as a part of "Operation Help." The medical component provided smallpox vaccinations for all beneficiaries. In many cases individuals were given special medical examinations and required medical attention.*

*Photos by: CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES*

Afghanistan harvested the largest crop in its history in July 1972, overcoming to a considerable extent the critical over-all need for wheat that had existed in 1971. Even with this large harvest and imports from other countries, however, the RGA estimated it would be 50,000 tons short of projected consumption. A continuing severe food shortage was predicted for the central and northwestern highlands.

### **Operation "Help"**

Once again the RGA began to develop a major emergency relief program aimed at providing assistance to highland pockets of hunger. The Prime Minister signed a decree on August 21, 1972, establishing a central emergency relief organization, and the

American Mission worked closely with the RGA to develop a plan that became known as Operation "Help." This plan, having the objective of providing emergency food, medicines, and clothing to 100,000 (originally) destitute people in the highlands of Ghor, northern Oruzgan, southern Faryab, eastern Badghis, and northern Herat, was approved in September 1972. The goal was to distribute within 60 days a six-months supply of wheat, cooking oil, and powdered milk, along with other relief supplies.

The Prime Minister met with a committee of cabinet members and representatives of the National Defense Ministry to review priority needs for the drought affected provinces. Decisions were made to rush food supplies to these areas before the closure of access roads by winter snows and to beef up the Food-for-Work and health programs. The Ministry of Public Health was authorized to send a team to the worst areas to handle child and maternal health and welfare problems. The team was given absolute authority to mobilize local distributions of food and medicines.

The Operation "Help" plan was outlined by His Majesty King Zahir to the U. S. Ambassador on September 14, 1972. The Ambassador indicated Embassy and USAID personnel could be assigned to assist the Afghans in its implementation.

Operation "Help" established its field headquarters at Chaghcharan, capital of Ghor province, under General Abdul Zahir with a small supporting staff, a roving inspection unit and 12 distribution groups operating from county centers. Each distribution group consisted of retired senior military officers, a government financial officer, a logistics officer, and one or two Peace Corps volunteers. Food distributions were made to family heads on the basis of demonstrated need in return for a written pledge of future work by able-bodied males. Free assistance was given to family members unable to work.

Operation "Help" was well planned and executed. By mid-October, 400-500 civilian trucks had effectively moved 6,300 tons of wheat into the highlands ahead of schedule.

By early December, 121,000 people had received food and other commodities and Operation "Help" was rapidly phasing down. However, it was found that 40,000 others were still in need in the central highlands and an additional 60,000 in a newly-identified disaster area in Badakhshan Province. It was estimated that by the end of December 1972 all of these would also have been given food and other assistance.

Precise figures on total value of in-country self-help are not available. It appears that for Operation "Help" the RGA had budgeted over \$1 million for food commodities, personnel and transportation costs, and that private Afghan donors contributed \$105,000 in cash, and blankets, shoes and clothing valued at \$1,500. The Red Crescent contributed large amounts of supplies, and the Afghan Women's Association participated in distribution of relief goods.

#### **Evaluation of RGA Relief Efforts**

The RGA made imaginative attempts to meet the drought-caused disaster needs. Emergency food supplies were rushed into the

hinterland areas and thousands of lives were saved in areas which were totally isolated. The RGA considered the possibility of airlift in conjunction with a major effort to employ land transport, if necessary, but relied almost exclusively on surface transport. Camels were actually deployed to haul food to tribesmen living in isolated areas. Specific programs and their over-all impact on meeting the food shortage were successful.

#### **Long-Term Benefits from RGA Actions**

Structural changes were made within the government to promote rapid agricultural development and to focus human and material resources on specific goals. Through these efforts the RGA was able to increase the use of fertilizer and improved seed throughout the country; start a Food-for-Work program that could prove to have major immediate and long-term impact on rural development; and to rethink structural changes that may be needed to promote continued increased agricultural production. The long-term effect of the RGA relief effort may result in a clearer sense of development



*Storage space was wherever you could find it. On the top of the Darzak it was out in the open. In a few places it was in permanent warehouses. At subdistribution points it was almost always in the open. In most cases it was any kind of a building where the commodities could be protected.*



*People who were able to work received their food against a future work commitment. The six month ration was 90 kgs. for each adult and 45 kgs. for each child below 15 years of age.*

priorities, a greater sense of urgency to implement development plans, and a greater ability to focus needed resources on specific projects.

After the successful completion of Operation "Help," the RGA established a permanent Office of Emergency Preparedness in the Prime Ministry to insure continuing ability to respond to other national emergencies. The RGA officially requested the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, Geneva, to assign a disaster relief expert for 3-6 months to assist in the establishment of the new office. The advisor, working closely with the Afghans, will develop a contingency plan and provide technical assistance in organizing and training RGA staff in disaster procedures. In general, the foreign advisor's activities will be directed towards assuring that Afghanistan, through the Office of Emergency Preparedness, is prepared to respond to emergencies on a timely basis.

#### **ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE U. S. GOVERNMENT:**

On August 7, 1971, Ambassador Robert G. Neumann signed a Disaster Relief Determination authorizing expenditures of up to \$25,000 from A.I.D. contingency funds for the purchase of Pakistan animal feed, water pumps, fertilizer and wheat seed to help alleviate the drought situation. A grant of 130,000 metric tons of P. L. 480 Food for Peace wheat and 360 metric tons of cooking oil was made to the Royal Government of Afghanistan and the World Food Program for emergency feeding programs. Another 100,000 metric tons of Title I wheat under long-term, low interest sale was negotiated with the RGA. This, representing two-thirds of all the wheat made available to the RGA from all sources, empowered the RGA to implement aggressive programs to meet the critical situation.

USAID agriculturists were actively engaged in supporting roles on organizational and operational planning, training and distribution of fertilizer. USAID and the Peace Corps worked closely with the RGA to set up an information center to coordinate supply and consumption requirements and to assist the RGA with logistical problems. USAID provided several vehicles and two radio communications vans facilitating informational exchanges with remote areas.

In June 1972 USAID chartered a plane and organized a Survey Team composed of AID and CARE Medico personnel to visit the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Faryab and Ghor. The purpose of the trip was to ascertain the extent of the crisis in the worst affected provinces and to make their reports available to RGA officials responsible for providing assistance.

In September 1972, when the RGA initiated Operation "Help," the Ambassador made the services of Mr. Abe S. Ashcanase, a management specialist with AID, available to the RGA to assist in the program on a full-time basis. Although Operation "Help" was strictly an Afghan project, Dr. Majid-Seraj, Minister of Public Health and director of the project, gave full credit to Mr. Ashcanase for his expert advice and help. After expressing thanks for American contributions of wheat, cooking oil and medicines, Dr. Seraj said, "But the biggest contribution is that we have Mr. Ashcanase as advisor and responsible for the management of the operation."

Before Operation "Help" was completed in December 1972, AID had contributed 20,000 tons of wheat, 360 tons of cooking oil and approximately \$14,000 worth of pharmaceutical supplies. AID Mission staff members and Peace Corps volunteers worked from 7AM until midnight, seven days a week. Everyone worked selflessly and with a firm resolve to give life and hope to the people. High praise was given by Afghan officials and USAID to the work of 20 Peace Corps



*Families left behind struggled for survival and awaited the return of their men.*



*Shortages of seed, large-scale sales of land and mortgaging of crops often forced families to move into town in the quest for food. Success was negligible and some of the displaced families were forced to become cave dwellers.*

volunteers who were active in the highland provinces. The volunteers were among the first to report the developing famine to Kabul officials, to urge immediate action, and they provided continuing field reports on the situation. Private American citizens donated funds for support of an orphanage which had been established in Chaghcharan, capital of Ghor Province in central Afghanistan.

### Summary of USG Assistance

P. L. 480, Title II Food for Peace:

FY 1972—100,000 tons of wheat, including ocean freight .....	\$10,700,000
FY 1973—10,000 tons of wheat through WFP, including freight .....	1,205,000
FY 1973—20,000 tons of wheat and 360 tons of vegetable oil, including ocean freight costs to Karachi .....	2,380,000
TOTAL	\$14,285,000

### AID Contingency Funds

FY 1972—Water pumps for Arghandab River irrigation projects .....	15,000
FY 1972—Purchase of by-product animal feed in Pakistan ..	10,000
TOTAL	25,000

USAID Resources—Pharmaceutical supplies, valued at .....	14,000
Total Value of USG Assistance ..	\$14,324,000

### ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY U. S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES:

#### CARE-Medico

Prior to the drought, CARE-Medico had a team assigned to Afghanistan which was available to assist in an assessment of medical and food needs during the drought. CARE Medico donated 330,500 tablets of children's aspirin for Operation "Help." Value was not reported.

#### Medical Assistance Programs

MAP provided the services of a registered nurse to care for orphans created by the famine in the highland provinces.

#### World Vision Relief Organization

The President of WVRO visited Afghanistan and donated for local purchase of supplies the sum of \$25,000.

#### The Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation was reported to have made local contributions valued at \$2,550.

#### American National Red Cross

ANRC made cash donations for drought and flood relief totaling .....

Total reported assistance by U. S. voluntary agencies .....

### ASSISTANCE BY OTHER NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Several foreign governments and international organizations worked with RGA Ministries to help alleviate the effects of the two-year drought, severe winter conditions and floods. Teams of Afghans, Germans and American Peace Corps volunteers were sent to four of Afghanistan's hardest hit provinces to develop information, pinpoint areas of greatest need, and organize implementation of projects. Following are known contributions made by governments and international organizations in Fiscal Years 1972 and 1973:

#### UNICEF

Developed an infant and child feeding program for Ghor and Faryab provinces, utilizing 589 metric tons of corn/soya/milk mix for distribution to 3,500 children under 5 years of age and 35,070 primary school children. The feeding program was primarily designed to meet the emergency needs of target groups from October 1972 through April 1973, during the time the highland areas were most inaccessible by road and food shortages most critical.

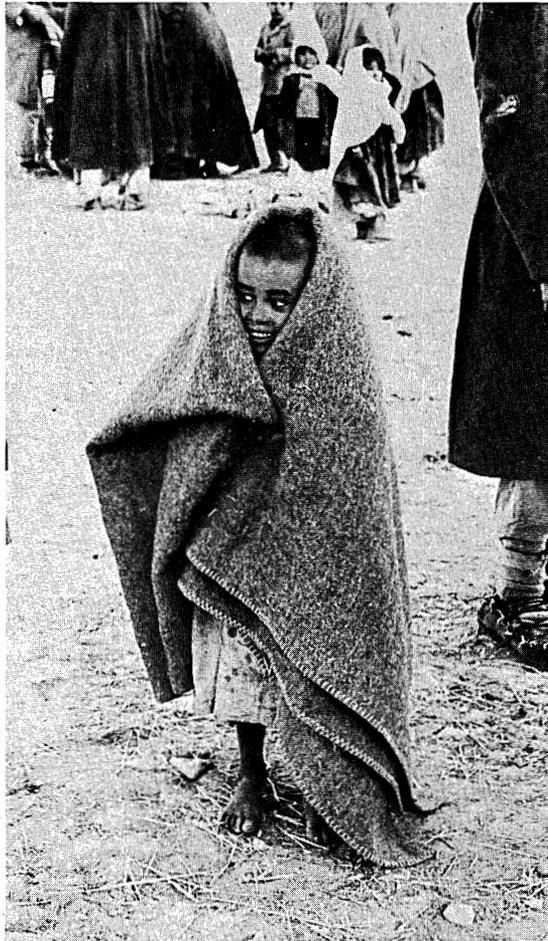
## World Food Program

30,000 tons of wheat were provided by donor nations through the World Food Program.

### The League of Red Cross Societies (LICROSS)

#### Donor Nations:

European Economic Community—21,640 metric tons wheat . . . . .		\$ 1,774,480
Australia—Red Cross: cash donations . . . . .	\$ 2,270	
Government: 14,000 tons wheat . . . . .	1,148,000	1,150,270
Canada—Red Cross: cash and supplies . . . . .	14,290	
Government: cash (\$23,940); 7,000 metric tons of wheat (\$574,000)	597,940	612,230
China, People's Republic: 15,000 tons wheat; 3,000 tons corn; 5,000 blankets . . . . .		3,100,000
Denmark—Red Cross: cash and supplies . . . . .		9,660
Egypt—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		1,650
Finland—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .		39,000
France—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .	2,260	
Government: 8,000 tons of wheat . . . . .	656,000	658,260
Germany, Federal Republic—Red Cross: cash . . . . .	6,060	
Government: 10,000 tons of wheat; \$250,000 cash; and 3,715 blankets—total . . . . .	1,081,140	1,087,200
Germany, Democratic Republic—Red Cross: cash and supplies . . . . .		11,260
Iceland—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		500
Indonesia—Government: cash . . . . .		170
Iran—Red Lion and Sun: cash . . . . .	6,090	
Government: cash, clothing and 20 1-1/2 ton jeeps . . . . .	599,000	605,090
Iraq—Red Crescent: cash . . . . .	26,140	
Government: cash . . . . .	58,000	84,140
India—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .	800	
Government: high protein food and pharmaceuticals . . . . .	50,000	50,800
Japan—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .		36,200
Jordan—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		140
Kuwait—Red Crescent: cash . . . . .		2,880
Luxembourg—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		710
Monaco—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		390
Netherlands—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .	7,430	
Government: 36 tons of ghee . . . . .	*	7,430*
New Zealand—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		2,300
Nigeria—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		690
Norway—Red Cross: cash and supplies . . . . .	31,900	
Government: cash . . . . .	29,000	60,900
Pakistan—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .	5,450	
Government: \$455,000 worth of rupees; 50,000 pairs plastic shoes; 1,000 blankets . . . . .	508,000	513,450
Philippines—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		240
Poland—Government: 19 tons macaroni, 200 blankets, medicines . . . . .		5,000
Rumania—Red Cross: supplies . . . . .		21,000
Sweden—Red Cross: cash, supplies, services . . . . .		290,940
South Africa—Red Cross: cash . . . . .		260
Switzerland—Red Cross: cash and supplies . . . . .	18,140	
Government: medicines . . . . .	24,200	42,340



The smile on the face of this young Afghan boy reflects his gratefulness for a warm blanket.

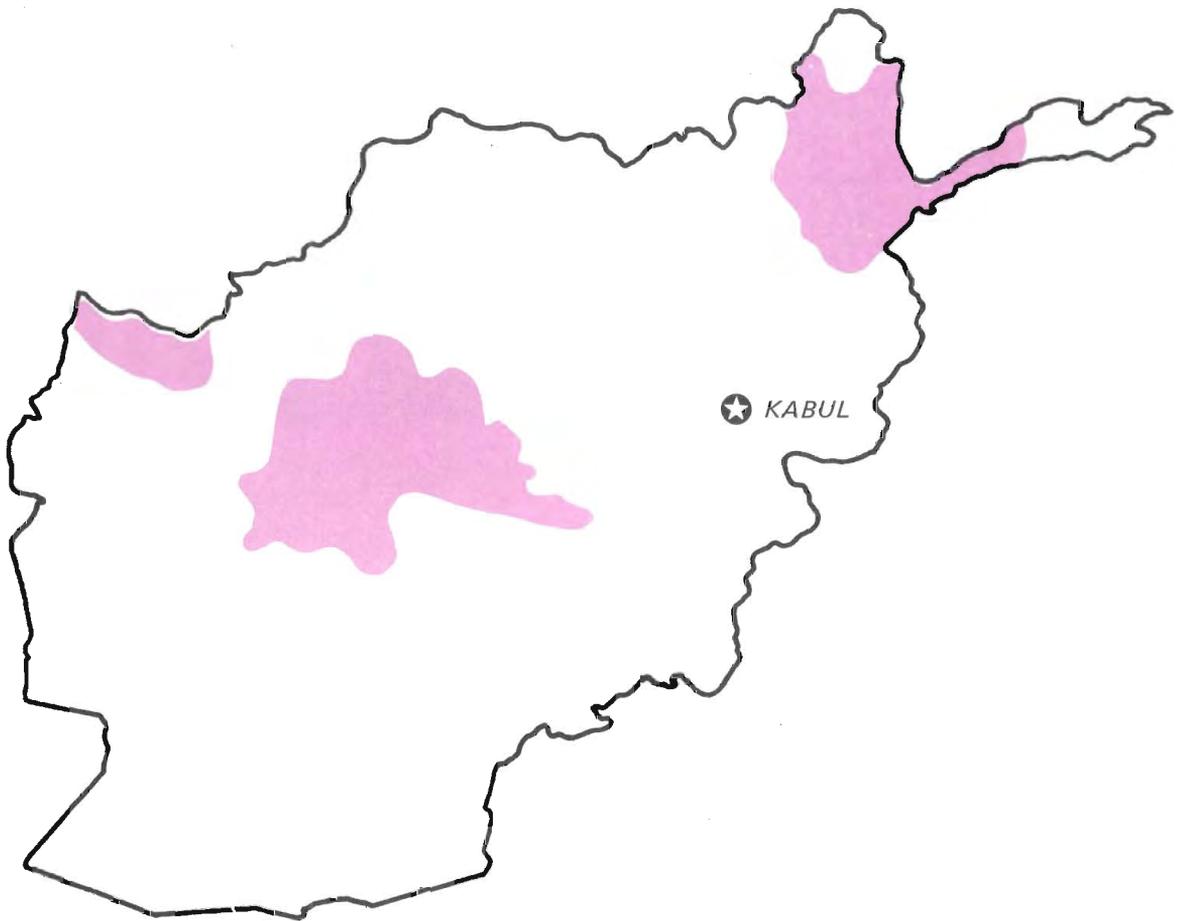
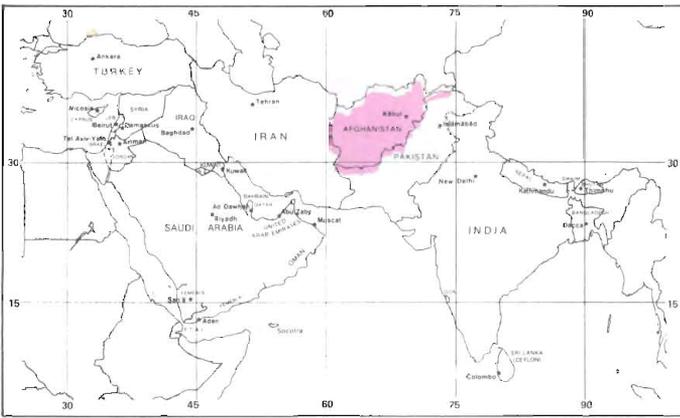


Those who were widowed, ill, aged, or unable to work received the same rations as a grant.

Turkey—Red Cross: supplies .....	149,100	
Government: 5,000 tons wheat .....	410,000	559,100
United Kingdom—Red Cross: cash and supplies .....	4,640	
Government: pharmaceuticals .....	24,000	28,640
USSR—Red Cross/Red Crescent: supplies .....	14,000	
Government: 2,000 tons wheat seed; 500 flour; 50 rice; 20 sugar; 10 macaroni; 1 powdered milk; 2,000 tins condensed milk; 1,000 pairs leather shoes; 10,000 pairs rubber footwear; 10,000 blankets; 10,000 bars soap; clothing valued at \$200,000; phar- maceuticals valued at \$50,000. Estimated total .....	700,000	714,000
<b>TOTAL ASSISTANCE OTHER NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS</b>		<b>\$11,471,320</b>

\* Incomplete or not reported.

NOTE: For many of the above values were not reported but FDRC estimated probable or minimal values based on US costs.



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