

COMOROS - Cyclone

Date: January 10-12, 1983 (FY 83)

Location: Moheli, Anjouan, and Grande Comore Islands

No. Dead: 33 (3 confirmed dead; 30 missing)

No. Injured: 52

No. Affected: 30,000 (20,000 on Moheli; 5,000 each on Anjouan and Grande Comore)

Damage: Extensive damage to crops, dwellings, and public buildings occurred on Moheli; damage to public buildings and public works (roads, dikes, bridges, etc.) occurred on Anjouan and Grande Comore. Government estimates of damage were: 2,400 hectares of agricultural land flooded or damaged (1,200 ha on Moheli; 600 ha each on Anjouan and Grande Comore); 2,120 hectares of forest damaged (all on Moheli); 72 public buildings destroyed or damaged (29 on Moheli, 20 on Anjouan, and 23 on Grande Comore); and 4,285 private buildings destroyed or damaged (3,148 on Moheli, 785 on Anjouan, and 352 on Grande Comore). Total monetary damage was estimated at \$23.1 million: \$9.6 million to agriculture, \$9.7 million to public works, and \$3.8 million to public buildings and infrastructure.

The Disaster

The Comoros archipelago, located some 482 km northwest of the island of Madagascar, is periodically subject to devastating cyclonic storms during the hot, humid northeast monsoon season from November through April. Cyclone Elinah, one of the worst such storms in recent years, pounded Comoros from the evening of January 10 to the morning of January 12. Accompanied by high winds and heavy rains, the cyclone whipped up sea waves to a height of 12 meters. The island of Moheli was hardest hit. Damage was less extensive on Anjouan and Grande Comore Islands.

Moheli: The storm's strong winds accounted for most of the damage on Moheli. About 90-95% of the island's mature banana trees, source of Mohelians' staple food, were destroyed. Small and medium sized banana trees, capable of producing fruit in three to four months, generally survived, as did most coconut trees. Clove trees, grown on exposed slopes in the highlands, were the hardest hit cash crop, with 50-70% destroyed. Since clove trees require eight to nine years to mature, their loss represented a long-term economic hardship for producers. About 20% of dwellings were destroyed or damaged. Many small, traditional wood/thatch structures were knocked over by the wind or otherwise harmed, while damage to the more sturdy stone or block houses, and to public buildings, was generally limited to loss of roof. Roads and bridges were blocked by fallen trees in many areas but were otherwise little affected.

Anjouan: In contrast to Moheli, most damage on Anjouan resulted from the rain and high waves. Cyclone Elinah and the 18 successive days of rain prior to the storm exacerbated an already severe erosion problem on Anjouan. Roads, bridges and settlements close to the sea were damaged when sea restraining walls were breached in several places. Damage was most severe between Sima and Pomoni and around the main port of Mutsamudo where the tip of the jetty was broken off and washed out to sea. The only deaths reported in the storm occurred on Anjouan when a 12 meter high wave swept 40 people off a pier. Three people died and 30 were listed as missing. Crop damage was less severe and more localized than on Moheli, with some loss of food crops and about 10-20% loss of the important clove crop. There was scattered damage to dwellings and public buildings. Reconstruction and repair of public works, ideally in concert with an erosion control program, was expected to place a heavy financial burden on the Comoran government.

Grande Comore: Damage to seawalls, roads, and public buildings, especially schools, was about as extensive as on Anjouan. Crop loss was minimal, and damage to dwellings was not expected to exceed five percent.

Action Taken by the Government of Comoros (GOC)

Government authorities, led by Prime Minister Ali Mroudjae and accompanied by representatives of U.N. agencies, the diplomatic corps, and local organizations, toured the most seriously affected areas on January 13. The GOC issued an appeal for international relief assistance the same day. A government commission, chaired by the Minister of Finance, was established to assess cyclone damage and coordinate donor assistance and reconstruction.

Clearing and reconstruction activities were soon underway. The Forces Armees de Comores cleared roads in Moheli of fallen trees, and, where it could be accomplished with the use of indigenous materials, Comorans began to rebuild their damaged homes. According to the World Food Program's plan of operation, local village councils were to be responsible for the distribution of food for work provisions to heads of families.

Caritas Comoros provided relief supplies, but the type and value of assistance was not reported.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

In response to the GOC appeal for international assistance, the U.S. Ambassador to Comoros, Fernando E. Rondon (resident in Antananarivo), announced his intention to contribute \$25,000 based on his disaster assistance authority. Ambassador Rondon visited the Comoros on January 19-20 to view affected areas and to talk with Comoran officials. A check was presented to the GOC on January 27.....\$25,000

At the request of the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo, USAID's Regional Economic Development and Service Office in Nairobi (REDSO/ESA) sent Nicholas Jenks to the Comoros to assess cyclone damage and explore the possibilities for additional USG disaster assistance. Officer Jenks was accompanied on his tour of Moheli, Anjouan, and Grande Comore by representatives of the three local governments.

TOTAL \$25,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

CARE - The Nairobi CARE Director, Rudy Ramp, visited the stricken islands to assist in a needs assessment.

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

UNDRO - contributed \$10,000 in cash.

UNICEF - gave \$36,000 in cash for the purchase of medicines and medical supplies.

World Food Program - provided 2,160 tons of rice and 162 tons of vegetable oil to assist 30,000 people over a period of 180 days; total value (inclusive of freight) was \$1,597,850.

World Health Organization - donated medical supplies valued at \$28,000, including penicillin and other antibiotics, ointments, glucose, and aspirin.

Governments

Egypt - contributed eight tons of food, medical supplies, and cloth, value not reported.

France - provided 10 tons of wheat flour, value not reported.

Germany, Federal Republic of - gave \$20,920 in cash for relief supplies.

Switzerland - provided \$15,000 in cash through UNDRO.

TOTAL \$1,707,770