

NIGER - Drought

(Please note: This disaster was still active at the time of publication.)

Date: November 1983 through November 1984

Location: Countrywide; Diffa, Agadez, and Tahoua most affected

No. Dead: Not reported

No. Affected: 2,000,000

Damage: 50% reduction in agricultural production and livestock population; 12% decline in gross national product

The Disaster

Normally self-sufficient in food production, Niger in 1983 experienced its worst crop shortage since the great Sahel-wide drought of the early 1970s. The northern departments of Agadez and Tahoua were the most affected as these normally marginal areas did not produce enough range grasses to support the area's large cattle herds.

After several months of sporadic and insufficient rainfall, Niger suffered its worst harvest in 15 years. The deficits in October and November 1983 were localized, however, and surpluses in Niamey, Maradi, and Zinder Departments were adequate to compensate for shortfalls in northern departments. Falling cattle prices, however, left the herder populations without a source of income and few financial reserves to face the coming year.

As the 1984 harmattan moved into what are normally its last weeks, farmers in the south and marginal areas of the north prepared their fields for planting. The rains required for the millet and sorghum crops did not arrive on schedule, however, and the rains which did arrive were short, sporadic, and insufficient to sustain new seedlings. Throughout July, August, and part of September, farmers planted and replanted. Each time, their fields were "burned" by the sun because the rains arrived too late. Some farmers planted as many as seven times, hoping to reap at least one good harvest and each month the disappointment increased. In October, the rains halted and seed reserves were exhausted.

Action Taken by the Government of Niger (GON)

Unlike many other drought-affected Sahelian countries, the GON had pursued an active policy of promoting domestic food production. After the great drought of the 1970s, the GON established a grain marketing agency (OPVN) to stabilize grain prices throughout the year and maintain stocks to meet emergency needs. OPVN purchased grain from the farmers at harvest and sold it back to the population throughout the year at a flat price. OPVN also maintained a large emergency stock to be used in the event of a harvest deficit.

On November 4, 1983, the Minister of Rural Development called a meeting of the international donor community. He reported that although food assistance needs had doubled as a result of the disastrous 1982/1983 harvest in Diffa Department, stocks maintained by OPVN were adequate to meet the 30,000 MT deficit. Transport funding remained an outstanding need, however. One month later, the estimate of shortfall was revised to 70,000 MT, yet the combination of OPVN stocks, domestic purchases, and unrecorded imports were expected to be sufficient.

By August of 1984, it became clear to the GON that the poor harvest of 1982/83 was not an isolated event. The sporadic rains continued to thwart Nigerien farmers in every region of the country. OPVN stocks continued to be depleted during this typically lean period of the year (pre-harvest) but with less and less prospect of replenishment. The potential for a large-scale crop failure received attention from the local village level to the office of the President. GON ministerial missions traveled throughout the country to obtain early estimates of the upcoming harvest in October-November.

President Kountche, who came to power in 1974 as a result of the previous government's failure to feed the population during the 1970s drought, named the Etat-Majeur of the GON Armed Forces responsible for mobilizing and coordinating all available resources to ensure that no one would go hungry. The GON regularly advised the USG and other donors of the situation and on August 31 convened a meeting of donors. The Minister of Rural Development described the situation as bleak, especially with regard to livestock, and accepted an offer from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization to conduct a multi-donor assessment of the situation.

The Ministry of Rural Development was asked to provide comprehensive assessments of the locations and magnitude of the crop failures, region by region. Each prefecture prepared detailed tabulations of the numbers of cattle lost, hectares barren, and families affected. OPVN was directed to continue selling grain at its distribution centers, which would normally be closed during the harvest season.

In September, the President established an Interministerial Committee to address the drought and its effects and, on September 20, officially requested food assistance from the USG. The GON requested an initial tranche of 15,000 MT to be delivered in equal parts of 2,000 MT to each of the seven departments, except that Zinder would receive 3,000 MT because of its growing population of displaced herders.

At the same time, the GON initiated a major nationwide program to cultivate areas surrounding small bodies of water. Out-of-season cropping programs were established in each department to serve two purposes: the farming projects would generate a small but valuable harvest of food, and they would provide work to the many herders and farmers who were destitute because of the drought. Wells were sunk in areas where the water table was close to the surface and farmers/herders were supplied with seeds, tools, and technical assistance.

On another front, the GON undertook efforts to assist the herders, all of whom were encouraged to migrate south following their traditional trans-humance patterns. Small-scale programs to transport cattle by truck from northern departments to the south assisted those herders whose cattle would not survive the long migration across barren fields. Later the GON began to buy cattle from the herders through a price support program. The purchased cattle were slaughtered and their meat preserved through a natural drying process (sun and wind) for later use as a supplementary food for the nomadic herders. This program provided cash to the herders, enabling them to buy food and other items and maintain their independence.

The GON maintained regular and open communications with the international donor community throughout the early assessment and relief phases of the drought. Each of the responsible ministries was committed to relieving the effects of the drought and coordinating and facilitating international aid and its distribution.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

As early as November 1983, when the GON first alerted the donor community of its increasing harvest deficits, the USG Mission in Niamey expressed its fears of a large-scale food shortage to Washington. In response to the GON's needs, USAID/Niamey requested and received permission to donate 5,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II food, left over from an FY 82 program, to the GON for distribution in Diffa.

By February 1984, the magnitude of the drought began to exceed Niger's ability to respond. U.S. Ambassador William Casey determined that a disaster existed and made available \$25,000 from the International Disaster Assistance account to aid the Nigeriens in transporting dried milk powder to affected areas in the north.

The U.S. Mission in Niamey continued to monitor agricultural and grazing conditions, reporting regularly to OFDA and other bureaus in Washington. By July, USAID was predicting dramatic shortfalls in grain production for the October/November harvest. Declining market prices for all types of livestock were also reported. A Food Status Monitoring Unit established within the USAID Mission's Agricultural Development Office conducted field assessments of market and pasturage conditions in principal and secondary trading centers in August. The unit collected and analyzed data obtained from personal inspections, other AID projects, and international donor projects, voluntary agencies, and the GON Ministry of Rural Development.

In early September, AID's Assistant Administrator for Africa visited Niger and met with President Kountche to discuss the magnitude of the unfolding problem. OFDA offered and the U.S. Mission in Niamey accepted the services of a two-person team to conduct a nationwide assessment of the food shortage and develop recommendations for a U.S. response. The team was scheduled to arrive the end of September.

Before the team arrived, however, Ambassador Casey made a second disaster determination on September 21, in response to the GON's formal request for assistance. A first tranche of 15,000 MT of red sorghum was pledged to the GON, as well as financial assistance to meet internal transport costs. OFDA gave the GON \$1.78 million from its special appropriation for internal transport of emergency food in Africa. (This figure is not included in the total USG assistance as it is noted under the section Disaster Relief in FY 1984 - "Special Appropriation for Inland Transport.") In addition, the U.S. Mission established a Drought Relief Policy Committee headed by the Ambassador and consisting of the AID Director, USIS Director, the Deputy Chief of Mission, and the AID Deputy Director. A Drought Relief Action Unit was also created to provide recommendations to the Policy Committee and to effect the Policy Committee's recommendations. The AID Deputy Director headed the Action Unit.

On September 30, the two-person team contracted by OFDA arrived in Niamey to assess the situation, evaluate GON mechanisms to respond, identify other donor actions, and make recommendations for a U.S. response to the potential disaster. Through discussions with local and national government officials, farmers, and voluntary agency representatives, the team performed a comprehensive assessment of conditions in each region. The team's recommendations to the U.S. Mission included graduated increases in food deliveries, a health/nutritional assessment of the most affected populations, and contingency plans for shelter and medical needs in the event that large numbers of people were displaced.

By the middle of December the U.S. had pledged a total of 60,000 MT of sorghum to Niger. During November 1984, a CDC Nutrition Surveillance team arrived in Niger and trained three teams of GON Ministry of Health (MOH) personnel in health surveillance and reporting methods. Data on the health of vulnerable population groups was collected, and a system was established to continue the monitoring and record-keeping over a period of several months. The MOH selected Zinder and Tahoua Departments for the initial surveys and the three MOH teams conducted similar sampling in the other five departments to develop a national profile of conditions. The preliminary results were analyzed and recommendations were reported to the MOH and USAID. The CDC team planned to conduct a follow-up visit in early 1985.

To monitor and coordinate the arrival and distribution of the emergency food, USAID hired additional temporary staff, including two food monitors, and acquired two 4-wheel drive vehicles for their use. USAID also funded three large-scale projects coordinated by voluntary agencies to meet the emergency needs of the displaced population. Using the Ambassador's disaster authority (second declaration) for start-up funds, USAID provided grants of \$12,500 to CARE and \$12,500 to Africare to conduct complementary projects in the Tanout area. The CARE project aided 12,000 persons and provided meningitis vaccine to 25,000 children. CARE procured shelter matting materials, sleeping mats, blankets, and soap; cooking equipment for a nutrition center; and medical supplies to augment existing village health and midwife programs. Also, two 4-wheel drive vehicles were repaired. An additional grant of \$218,869 was awarded to fund this project fully, and \$5,638 million worth of P.L. 480 Title II food (2,900 MT of corn-soya mix, 1,208 MT of vegetable oil, and 1,890 MT of non-fat dried milk) was provided.

Africare managed a Food for Work project in Tanout to complement the CARE program. Utilizing approximately 600 MT of GON food stocks, Africare provided technical assistance, tools, seeds, fertilizer, materials for well construction, and staff for the FFW projects in the off-season irrigation sites. USAID provided a grant of \$222,851 in addition to the original \$12,500 to implement this project.

Finally, USAID reoriented its existing livestock management project to respond to the conditions created by the drought. The program was redirected to provide emergency feeding, shelter, blankets, and medical attention to those who lost all or most of their cattle; augment and extend village health worker support to the herders; maintain supplementary maternal and child feeding; and expand the emergency dried meat program for supplementary protein feeding. This program was administered by USAID under an existing program with Tufts University, at a cost of \$175,000.

Summary of USG Assistance

Ambassador's authority, used to transport milk (first declaration).....	\$25,000
Ambassador's authority for emergency programs by CARE (\$12,500) and Africare (\$12,500) (second declaration).....	\$25,000
TDY of drought assessment team.....	\$22,469
OFDA funds for CDC team.....	\$10,532
Africa Bureau funds for food monitors, 4-wheel drive vehicles, and maintenance.....	\$190,000
Africa Bureau funds for logistics support for CDC team.....	\$20,000
CARE emergency mother and child health program.....	\$44,368
P.L. 480 Title II food for CARE project.....	\$5,638,000
CARE Tanout emergency project.....	\$218,869
Africare Tanout emergency FFW/feeding project.....	\$222,851
Emergency support program for nomadic herders.....	\$175,000
60,000 MT of P.L. 480 Title II sorghum, valued at.....	\$7,791,100
Ocean freight.....	\$13,650,000

Internal transport.....	\$2,550,000
Total IDA 1984.....	\$25,000
Total IDA 1985**.....	\$719,089
TOTAL (as of January 1985)	
	\$30,583,189

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

Africare - expanded agriculture/nutritional programs into Illela and Diffa; administered Tanout emergency FFW feeding project with CARE.

CARE - provided \$10,000 for transport of seeds donated by France; submitted a FFW proposal for Bouza to WFP; administered USAID/CARE maternal and child health program with GON; administered Tanout emergency project with Africare, and contributed 8,998 MT of food.

CWS - provided 10,000 blankets and approximately 50 MT of food and \$10,000 in cash.

LWR - accelerated garden project activities in Madoua area; pledged \$100,000, and provided blankets, quilts, and soap.

Sudan Interior Mission - contributed 40 MT of grain, provided food to 25 villages in Maradi area.

TOTAL \$120,000

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

EEC - emergency aid included provision of 10,800 MT of cereals, of which approximately 5,000 MT was purchased in West Africa and was valued at \$575,000, for use in FFW programs; 3,000 MT of corn and 5,000 MT of cereals for sale; 200 MT of powdered milk, valued at \$20,000, for free distribution (this was purchased from the GON milk monopoly to be replaced later); \$22,000 to purchase and slaughter 700 cows for dried meat processing and subsequent free distribution; \$32,000 to support local transport and distribution costs of EEC and other donated grain to secondary points; and \$32,000 to the Niger Red Cross for blankets (locally purchased), medicines, and vaccines.

FED - 7,450 MT of corn, 5,000 MT of cereal, and 5,000 MT of milk/sorghum.

World Bank - provided an emergency transport grant of \$200,000.

WFP - 6,462 MT of sorghum, valued at \$1,615,000, and 144 MT of milk valued at \$50,000, and pledged 25,000 MT of mixed commodities.

Governments

Belgium - signed accords totaling \$1,915,333 to undertake three drought and food related projects.

Canada - purchased trucks for GON emergency food distribution program and pledged to reinforce Zinder-Diffa section of the Route National at a cost of \$33 million.

China, Peoples Republic - contributed medical supplies and equipment valued at \$21,710.

France - provided 1,000 MT of seeds, of which 300 MT were airshipped at a value of \$150,000; contributed 2,500 MT of wheat valued at \$375,000; and signed three accords totaling \$1,057,445.

Germany, Fed. Rep. - 5,000 MT of sorghum valued at \$625,000; and pledged \$333,333.

Netherlands - contributed 5,000 MT of sorghum valued at \$1,250,000; 5,000 MT of maize valued at \$750,000; 2,000 MT of powdered milk (some sent through CARITAS) valued at \$300,000; an estimated 40 to 50 trucks valued at \$500,000; and spare parts, lubricants, oil, gasoline, and warehousing valued at \$500,000.

TOTAL \$43,323,821