

FAO report underplays Africa's real food-supply requirements

by Cynthia Parsons

The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) issued in October 1983 an "international alert" on the food crisis facing 22 African countries. "In the absence of urgent and concerted action by the international community, many of the countries reviewed face the prospect of starvation and widespread human suffering," the report warned.

Yet the FAO's "alert" was contained in a "restricted-

circulation" document and received scant international attention. Furthermore, the recommendations contained in the study are totally inadequate to deal with the problem which, as *EIR's* calculations show, is far more severe than the FAO admits. Our investigation also shows that the remedies to deal with the food crisis on an emergency basis are close at hand, and the situation is by no means so hopeless as the FAO, the Club of Rome, and other prophets of doom believe.

The first installment of the FAO task force report, issued in June 1983, declared that "This crisis threatens to assume even more dramatic proportions than that which ravaged the Sahelian countries, in 1973 and 1974. . . . Actually, it is not only the countries of the Sahel which are threatened but also other countries in Western Africa and exceptionally, southern Africa, which is normally a surplus area but which now has a considerable food deficit. . . . It is now clear, however, that part of the estimated import requirement will not be met." Most of the affected countries have "little or no reserve stocks and limited financial means to replenish them," the report pointed out.

Five months later, an updated report was issued under the title "International Alert on the Emergency Food Supply Situation of Selected African Countries." Mr. Saouma, Director-General of the FAO, said of the task force's report: "It causes great concern, as the situation has continued to deteriorate due to a combination of factors. The situation is critical in at least 22 countries where food production and resources are unable to meet the essential minimum requirements." He warned of "mass human suffering and economic loss of livestock" unless aid was forthcoming.

The FAO concluded that the 22 most-needy African countries in 1982-83 required 160 million bushels of food imports and received 66 million; they required 95 million bushels of outright food aid and received 55 million. The disparity for 1983-84 is expected to be greater still. Food production for these countries dropped 25 percent during the past two years, as a result of drought, floods, and epidemics among livestock. Food production is now lower than it was

Figure 6
Emergency food aid requirements
for the 22 worst-off African countries
(million bushels)

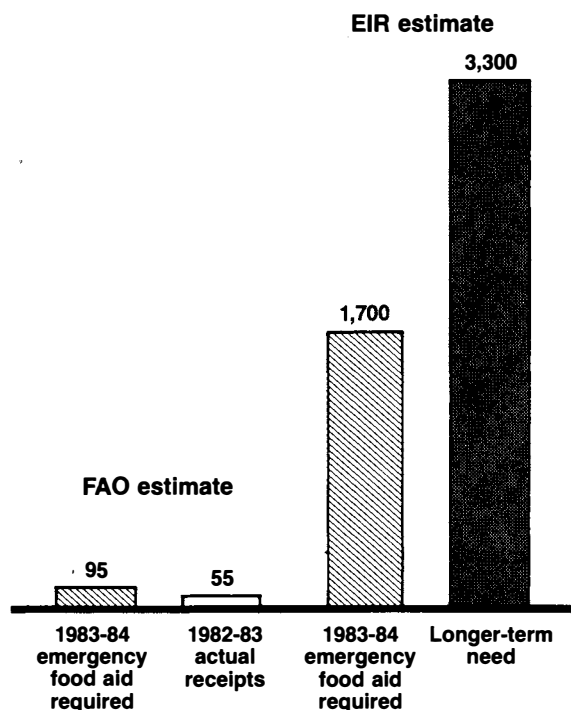


Figure 7
The 22 African countries needing emergency food

Country	Pop'n (Mil.)	1981 Cereal Prod. (1,000 t.)	Per Cap. (bushels)	1982 est. Cereal Prod. (1,000 t.)	Percent change 1981-82	1983 est. Cereal Prod. (1,000 t.)	Percent change 1982-3
Five most affected countries							
Chad (43)*	4.5	539	4.7	496	-7.9	490	-1.2
Ghana (54)	11.8	509	1.7	497	-1.9	480	-3.4
Sao Tome	0.9	1	0.4	1		1	
Ethiopia (46)	32.0	5,649	7.0	5,562	-1.5	5,800	+4.2
Mozam.	12.5	490	1.5	468	-4.4	330	-29.4
Benin (50)**	3.6	459	5.0	NA		NA	
Cape Verde	0.4	3	0.04	5	+6.6	10	
Gambia	0.6	102	6.8	110	+0.7	85	+22.7
Guinea (43)	5.6	338	2.4	330	-2.3	300	-9.0
Mali (45)	6.9	1,198	6.9	926	-22.9	950	+2.5
Mauritan. (44)	1.6	78	2.0	20	-74.3	10	-50.0
Senegal (44)	5.9	884	6.0	730	-17.4	400	-45.2
Togo (48)	2.7	293	4.3	298	+1.7	270	-9.3
C.A. Rep. (43)	2.4	98	1.6	105	+7.1	95	-9.5
Somalia (39)	4.4	369	3.3	390	+5.6	300	-23.0
Tanzania (52)	19.1	1,316	2.8	1,388	+5.4	1,450	+4.4
Angola (42)	7.8	331	1.7	323	-2.4	350	+8.3
Botswana	0.9	60	2.6	17	-71.6	14	-17.6
Lesotho (52)	1.4	166	4.7	135	-18.6	52	-61.5
Swaziland	0.6	100	7.1	69	-31.0	45	-34.8
Zambia (51)	5.8	1,123	7.7	923	-17.8	1,058	+14.6
Zimbabwe (55)	7.2	3,365	18.6	2,290	-31.9	1,385	-39.5
Total	138.6	17,010	4.9	15,083		13,875	-8.0

*Numbers in parentheses indicate life expectancy.

**Benin included because of the livestock problems.

NA—not available.

during the 1960s.

What the FAO leaves out of account are the real per-capita food requirements of a human being—not merely the pittance of rice required to fend off starvation for another month or two. In fact the per-capita consumption levels in many of the 22 cited African countries are below those of the death camps of Nazi Germany (Figure 7).

To sustain the human body with a balanced diet requires at least 24 bushels of grain per year, calculated on the basis of direct consumption as well as the use of grain to feed livestock and poultry. The world average per capita grain consumption is a low 13.5 bushels per year; the average in the 22 worst-off African countries is 5.0 bushels—down from the 1980 level of 6.0 bushels. Mauritania's consumption is 0.2 bushels per capita; Mozambique's is 0.9; Angola and Ghana and the Central African Republic are at 1.5. Zimbabwe and Zambia, the two most agriculturally productive

countries on the continent, are in the 7 bushel per capita range.

Thus the real need of the 138 million people living in the 22 worst-off African countries is at least 1.7 billion bushels of direct emergency aid (Figure 6). In a second phase, 3.3 billion bushels of grain would be required, which would allow the replenishing of livestock herds.

Where is this grain to come from? The emergency aid could come immediately from U.S. reserve stocks, even though the collapse of U.S. farming has driven these from the 6 billion bushel level to an all-time low of 2.6 billion bushels—still more than adequate to prevent an entire continent from starving. The only way that the needs of the second phase of aid could be met would be for U.S. agriculture to receive the credit necessary to start producing again, scrapping the Payment-In-Kind (PIK) program and other incentives to farmers *not* to produce.