

Africa in worst food crisis yet; needs French 'Marshall Plan' approach

by Marcia Merry

Have you noticed the absence of headline stories about food shortages or famine in Africa? Do not conclude the situation has improved. Despite better weather in some regions of the continent, the food supplies for millions of people have become even more marginalized in the last two years. Meantime, deadly AIDS and other diseases are spreading. Only a broad-scale "Marshall Plan" approach, of the type proposed by French Agriculture Minister François Guillaume, will make the difference.

In the United States, the media coverage ignores the starvation crisis in Africa, the shutdown of food output potential in the United States, and proposals such as the Marshall Plan approach, which French President Jacques Chirac presented to President Reagan in March. The media defer to the myths of a misguided President of the United States, who in reality is acting out the script proposed to him by the same cartel banking and commodity groups whose policies are destroying Africa.

In his June 16 television address to the nation after his Europe trip, President Reagan said, "I think it's notable that so many American farmers today would like to see agriculture in the United States and abroad return to the free-market basis. They know government subsidies in other countries are causing a worldwide glut of farm products and a shrinking market for American goods."

The information below shows that far from a glut, food supplies per person in Africa are dropping drastically, and the means to obtain food are likewise disappearing, under conditions of cartel-dominated "market forces." There has never been a greater market for American-grown or European-produced food. There is an emergency need for food.

Food dependency grows

A USDA study of 25 African nations—including both oil-exporting as well as very low income nations, shows that in the last 20 years, there has been a sharp increase in food imports (both commercial and donated). As of the period 1982-84, many nations came to import over half of their food supply, including such "agricultural" nations as Gambia, Somalia, Lesotho, Morocco, as well as oil-producing nations such as Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia.

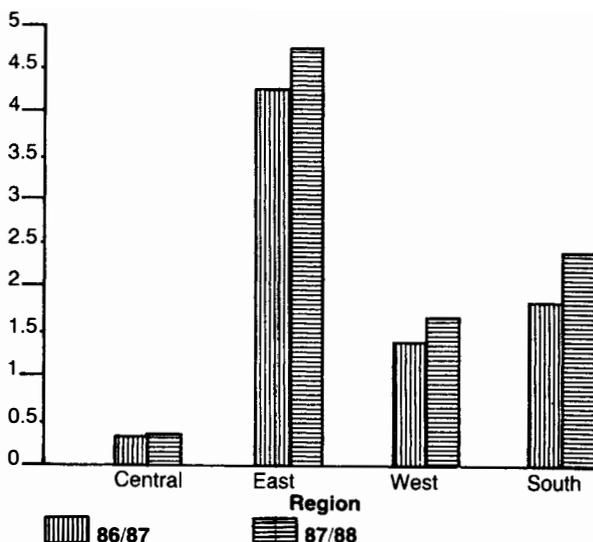
This reflects a process of enforced economic stagnation—the policy of the World Bank-International Monetary Fund to obstruct any form of infrastructure-development for agricultural and industrial advance.

Food availability per person has markedly decreased in Africa since the 1960s. For many nations, total annual food production decreased, and food aid and purchases did not make up the difference. The bar diagram (Figure 1) shows the latest calculations of how much food is needed—but unprovided for—in all of Sub-Saharan Africa for merely minimal nutritional requirements. For the year 1987/88, an estimated 9.5 million tons of cereals is required over and above expected commercial import levels, and food aid pledges. Where is it to come from? No one speaks of it.

Food aid shipments for Africa and other points of need

FIGURE 1
Unmet cereals needs, Sub-saharan Africa, 1986/87-1987/88

Million tons



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

are going down. According to Food and Agriculture Organization estimates, worldwide cereals aid in the July 1986-June 1987 trade year will be about 10.2 million tons, down more than 15% from the 1984/85 peak of nearly 12.5 million tons. That was the year of the publicity of the famine in Africa. But since then, the media have regarded the "story" of food shortages as *passee*, especially NBC—the television network that wrongly took credit for "discovering" the African starvation in October 1984.

U.S. and European government and media offices instead have been publicizing the "problem of surplus cereals stocks"—corn in the United States, and wheat in Europe, as a burden with no place to go. There are proposals in Brussels to burn European Community wheat. In the United States, corn is being burned for gasohol additive.

As the bar diagram shows, the region of worst unmet need is East Africa. Food output is down in Ethiopia for both the 1986-87 and 1987-88 season. There may be a good sorghum crop in the Sudan, but the civil strife in the southern part of the nation requires pre-positioning food stocks around the country where needed, before the rainy season begins.

In Southern Africa, a severe drought has affected all of Zimbabwe and parts of Zambia, meaning that corn output may be reduced by at least 30% in Zimbabwe and 20% in Zambia. In Mozambique, at least 6 million people (out of 14.4 million) need food and other assistance.

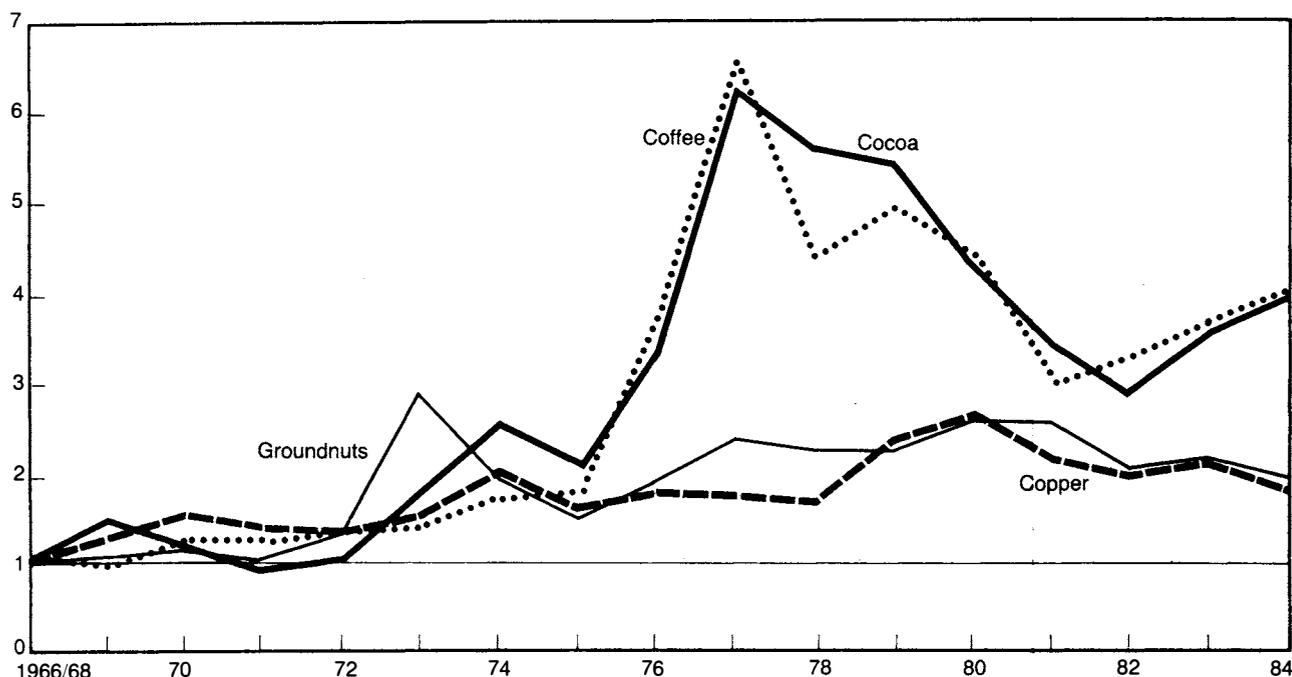
In the decades following the World War II, most food aid went to Asia. However, in the early 1970s, Africa's share began to grow, and by 1980, Africa received half of all the world food aid going to developing nations. Between 1966 and 1985, food aid to the continent grew at an annual rate of over 10%, going from an average of 480,000 tons up to 5 million tons. In the Sub-Saharan African countries, food aid amounted to only about 2% of all food consumed in the 1960s. However, by the early 1980s, it was well over 50% of food supplies for some places. In 1981 in Somalia, food aid was 85% of the food supply.

Inability to grow or buy food

The graph of the fall in commodity prices for principal African exports (Figure 2) shows part of the source of the present crisis. The policy of the cartels has been to pay low prices. Groundnut (peanut) prices were cut by one-third from 1973 to 1984. Beverage prices fell: coffee, cocoa, and tea dropped 40% between 1977 and 1984.

In turn, the cartel-serving World Bank and International Monetary Fund have refused to permit credit for African nations to diversify into growth-based alternative agricultural and industrial projects. Therefore, the politically "independent" nations of Africa, have been economically captive to cartel-imposed monocultures, that now cannot provide even the means for food.

FIGURE 2
Index of world prices for major African exports, 1966-84
 1966-68 = 1



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture.

To acquire food, some nations could only go into debt, and hope for aid. The current account deficit for 25 African nations grew from \$1 billion in 1970, to \$13.8 billion in 1983. In 1983, Nigeria's deficit stood at \$4.188 billion, and Egypt's amounted to \$3.544 billion.

Debt service as a percent of the value of exports rose dramatically between 1970 and 1984. For Kenya, from 5.4% to 22.9%; for Somalia, from 2% to 29%; for Morocco, from 8.5% to 38%; for Nigeria, from 4% to 30%; for Egypt, from 4.4% to 80%.

Egypt, not included in the bar diagram countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, is the largest recipient of food aid in the world. The 1974 Camp David accords mandated sending 2.5 million tons of food annually. In 1978, Egypt's food aid of 3 million tons peaked at 50% of total food imports. Since then, Egypt has imported more food annually, and received less food aid—down to 2 million tons in 1985. Similarly, for Morocco, food aid represented 97% of all food imports in 1972, then food aid decreased, and imports increased. In Tunisia the same pattern prevailed.

At present, in these nations and others, if the means to commercially import, as well as the availability to food aid is cut off at the same time, then the consequence is political disintegration and death. There have been food riots and strikes in Egypt since 1980, in Tunisia and Morocco in 1984; and in the Sudan in 1985.

In 1986, Nigeria limited debt repayment to what the government felt the economy could bear. In May, 1986, at a special session of the U.N. General Assembly on economic problems of Africa, African nations requested \$45.6 billion in additional aid (in contrast to the 1985 level of \$7 billion in aid), and \$35-55 billion worth of new debt relief for 1986-90. So far, the response from the West has been rhetoric about "the market place" from President Reagan and the State Department, and continued backing for the deadly World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

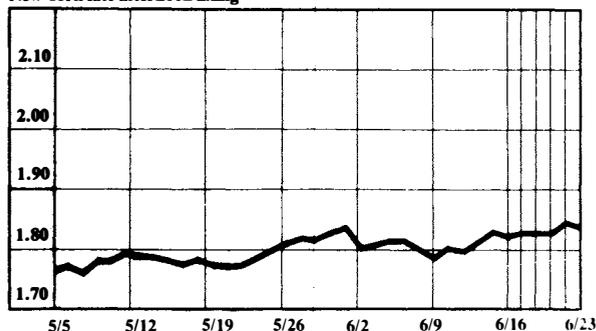
Point of no return

The continent of Africa is undergoing genocide. The debt is unpayable. Emergency quantities of food cannot be produced in the circumstances of the collapse. There is no "magical marketplace" for current African exports. The proposal of a "Marshall Plan" approach, by the EC and allied Western nations, is the only means to reverse the disaster. Emergency food aid quantities can be determined and met out of remaining "surplus" stocks in Europe, North America, and other points of reserves. Quantities for the next five years—including animal stocks—can be determined, and commissioned from both African and food-exporting nations farms—in a high-technology "contract victory garden" approach. Simultaneously, building projects for emergency and long-term logistics infrastructure can be initiated to provide the basis for rebuilding and developing the continent out of the shame and misery of the AIDS and starvation holocaust.

Currency Rates

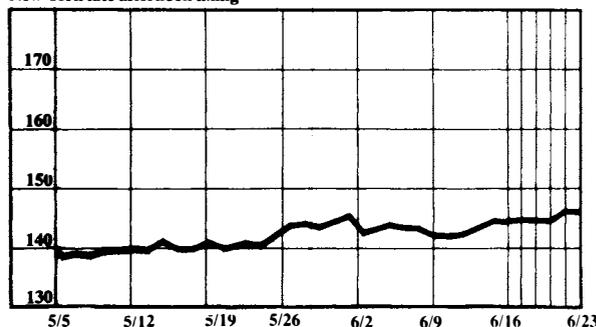
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



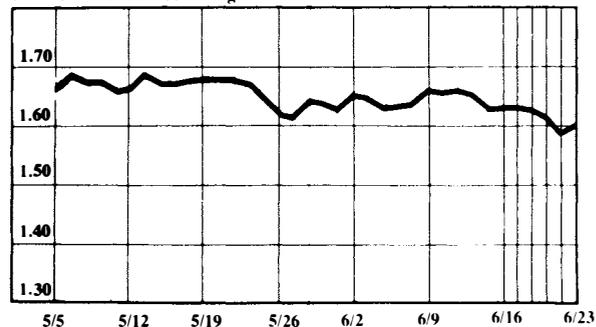
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

