

52440



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CN.14/ECO/57
29 May 1973

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Executive Committee
Ninth Meeting

Addis Ababa, 18-22 June 1973

DROUGHT IN THE SUDANO-SAHELIAN ZONE, 1973

Note by the secretariat

In the second half of 1972, the FAO/WFP Early Warning System gave intimations of critical crop failure and exceptionally poor harvests in the countries of the Sudano-Sahelian zone, due to the cumulative effect of several years of severe drought. Late in 1972, the UNDP Resident Representative in Upper Volta drew the attention of FAO to the drastic situation prevailing in the area and indicated that it was fast approaching disaster proportions. In January 1973, at the request of the Liptako-Gourma Authority, specialists from the Accra FAO Regional Office carried out an emergency mission to assess the extent of damage to livestock in three of the drought-stricken countries, namely Mali, Niger and Upper Volta.

2. With the situation steadily deteriorating, the Governments of Senegal, Upper Volta, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad took action at the national level to alleviate the crisis, and made requests to bilateral donors and to the World Food Programme (WFP) for assistance in the form of food shipments. Some of the Governments also prepared position papers or policy outlines regarding the handling of livestock.
3. - Early in 1973, the critical situation prevailing in the zone compelled the populations, who, together with their cattle, were facing starvation, to migrate towards urban centres and southwards in search of a means of subsistence thus encroaching on the lands of sedentary farmers, which had so far been kept for crop cultivation.
4. At the eleventh session of the Commission held at Accra in February 1973, the ECA Conference of Ministers, noting that the countries of the area could not provide alone an adequate solution to their problems, considered the situation sufficiently grave to warrant an appeal to the international community for assistance to the Governments concerned with relief and rehabilitation efforts. To this end, the Conference of Ministers requested the Executive Secretary to make the necessary approaches to the competent organizations so that all short-, medium- and long-term measures could be taken in order to limit the consequences of the drought.

5. Further to this resolution of the Conference of Ministers (ECA resolution 239(XI) of 23 February 1973 on the drought), the Governments concerned declared the Sudano-Sahelian Zone a Disaster Area and established in Ouagadougou the secretariat of a Permanent Inter-State Co-ordinating Committee responsible for all drought-control measures for the zone.

6. ECA, FAO and WFP representatives had consultations on the needs of the countries and on the measures to be taken to alleviate the consequences of the drought. They continued to exchange information on the situation and to co-ordinate the activities of their missions in the area.

7. Under the auspices of the World Food Programme (WFP), bilateral donors and the European Development Fund which, on 5 March 1973, authorized emergency aid to the drought-stricken countries, are supplying some 45,000 tons of grain for alleviating human suffering in the area.

8. A number of difficulties were encountered, however, with regard to the transportation of the food items from seaports to areas of need, and threatened to constitute a serious bottleneck in view of the size of the relief operations, the complexity of food shipments, their handling at seaports and so on. Some donor Governments therefore agreed to provide aircraft in order to speed up the transportation of food supplies to the remote inland areas.

9. As regards the relief measures for the livestock, a FAO project, supported by the Governments concerned was approved by UNDP for immediate implementation.

10. Owing to the complexity of the task confronting the donor countries, the international organizations and the afflicted countries, the Director-General of FAO appointed Mr. Raymond Scheyven, former Minister of Economic Affairs in Belgium and ex-President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council as his Special Representative to co-ordinate relief and rehabilitation activities in the Sahelian Zone.

11. Accompanied by Mr. Moïse Mensah, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Africa, the Special Representative visited the afflicted countries in April 1973 and exchanged views with the Governments on the consequences of the drought and on the ways of dealing with them.

12. On the basis of the information collected and the analyses made by WFP, FAO and UNDP, the following action was agreed on:

- (i) A team should be set up to co-ordinate the information, which still remains fragmentary and incomplete, and advise on action to be taken to alleviate the acute problem of the livestock population;
- (ii) A co-ordinated strategy for agricultural development in the zone, should be formulated, bearing in mind the fragile ecological conditions existing there;
- (iii) The FAO/WFP Early Warning System should be extended and improved to allow for the compilation of information related not only to crop failure but also to factors adversely affecting animal populations.

13. At its fifty-fourth session held in April/May 1973, the Economic and Social Council noted with concern the persistence of food shortages in the Sudano-Sahelian Zone. Taking into account the fact that, unless additional emergency measures were taken, the situation would cause irreparable losses, especially in human life, the Council requested the United Nations Secretary-General to call upon all elements of the United Nations system to respond to the immediate needs of the affected countries in co-operation with the FAO Director-General.

14. The Council also called upon the Secretary-General to organize as soon as possible in collaboration with the organizations of the United Nations system, the necessary assistance in order to respond to the requests of the Governments of the area with regard to their medium- and long-term needs.

15. Under the auspices of the United Nations, work was under way to elaborate an integrated overall programme for immediate relief as well as for the medium- and long-term rehabilitation measures to be undertaken in co-operation with the Governments concerned, bilateral donors and the organizations of the United Nations system. The components of this integrated overall programme, which has to take account of the regional and national plans for relief and rehabilitation formulated by the Governments concerned, will deal, inter alia, with:

- (a) The supply of food to some 2 to 3 million persons who will be isolated as soon as the rainy season begins;
- (b) The airlifting of some 100,000 tons of food from storage centres to remote inland areas;
- (c) The supply of food to other areas;
- (d) The replacing of livestock and the needs for fodder and vaccines;
- (e) The replanting of crops, and the needs for seeds;
- (f) The halting of the encroachment of the desert and the replacement of destroyed ecosystems;
- (g) The development and maintenance of water supplies; and
- (h) The improvement and extension of an Early Warning System.

16. These are the measures currently being contemplated for the alleviation of the consequences of the drought in the Sudano-Sahelian Zone. Like WFP, UNICEF, FAO, WMO, UNDP and the other agencies involved in the relief and rehabilitation programmes, the ECA secretariat, within its fields of competence, will do everything in its power to provide the necessary assistance to the drought-stricken countries.

- - - - -

