

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The drought that struck southern Africa during the 1991/92 agricultural Season had a devastating impact on agricultural production and placed an estimated sixteen million people at risk of starvation. Usually a net food exporter, during the 15-month period from April 1992 to June 1993, the southern African region imported 11.6 million metric tons (MT) of food, at an estimated food and transport cost of four billion U.S. dollars. South Africa, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia were severely affected and had to import massive quantities of food. Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia, although less seriously affected, were required to increase grain imports above the levels they normally depend on to meet their consumption needs.

The United States contributed approximately \$ (dollar sign)806 million to the relief effort, about 86 percent of which was food, primarily yellow corn. The overwhelming share of U.S. relief assistance went to Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Approximately four percent of combined U.S. relief allocations went to Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia. An additional five percent was directed to Angola to address drought-related needs in the southern provinces, as well as other needs caused by years of continuing civil unrest. The U.S. channelled 1.9 million metric tons of food aid through the World Food Program (WFP) and provided another 420,000 tons of food aid through bilateral arrangements with Zambia and Zimbabwe. The U.S. also provided \$112 million in non-food assistance, primarily in support of transportation and logistics coordination, agricultural rehabilitation, and emergency water supplies and emergency health activities.

WFP was given primary responsibility for managing the transport of 3.5 million metric tons of food into the region. The U.S. principally through the Section 416(b) surplus commodities program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), committed approximately 55 percent of total food handled and transported by WFP. The next largest contribution of food was from the European Community, at nearly ten percent. WFP did an exemplary job of managing the transport, storage and handling of a massive amount of food.

Food was supplied to southern Africa in a timely manner and starvation was prevented. Unlike previous droughts in Africa, food was delivered to needy populations before it became necessary for them to leave their homes in search of food. No major migrations occurred and the formation of displaced persons camps was avoided. Preventing migration kept down the costs of the relief operations and permitted agricultural rehabilitation to begin once rain had returned in late 1992. Funds provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for the rehabilitation of water systems were also critical in preventing off-farm migration, particularly in Malawi.

USAID, USDA, WFP, and certain governments within the region, particularly Zimbabwe and Zambia, deserve credit for their effective handling of the situation and for the tremendous amount of resources that were quickly committed to the relief effort. Management and distribution of the huge volume of emergency food involved a level of regional coordination never before undertaken in southern Africa.
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Highlights of the Relief Response

Food Assistance

- USAID missions, particularly Zimbabwe and Zambia, reported the potential seriousness of crop failure early on. USAID/Washington was attentive to these early warnings and was able effectively to organize to provide substantial amounts of foreign assistance to the region.
- By a wide margin, the U.S. contributed the largest share of food to the relief effort. Total food aid contributions amounted to nearly 2.5 million metric tons.
- The U.S. provided significant quantities of food to southern Africa sooner than any other donor.

- The decision by the Government of Zimbabwe to purchase large quantities of grain before any donor-supplied aid had been committed or procured was critical to saving lives.
- Both Zambia and Zimbabwe, with the support and encouragement of USAID missions, were able to eliminate consumer maize subsidies during the relief operation. In part, this was possible because the majority of relief grain was supplied through established food distribution channels and sold at retail outlets. The lifting of maize subsidies has created incentives for increased agricultural production in both countries.
- Mozambique and the Republic of South Africa did an impressive job in off-loading over seven million metric tons of drought relief commodities which were used in the SADC countries. About 50 percent of these drought-relief commodities came through the Republic of South Africa, and almost 40 percent through Mozambique. To put this volume of food in perspective, transporting one million metric tons of food aid requires 30 ocean vessels and 26,500 rail wagons.

Non-Food Assistance

- The U.S. provided \$112 million in non-food assistance, primarily on support of transportation and logistics coordination, agricultural rehabilitation, emergency water supplies and emergency health activities.
- Relief management experts financed by USAID assisted in various aspects of the drought response in several countries, including identification of the most vulnerable populations, and logistics management.
- USAID-funded water projects were critical in preventing off-farm migration, particularly in Malawi.
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- The U.S. played a lead role in supplying agricultural inputs to drought-affected farmers so that they could resume planting once nominal rains returned in crop year 1992/93. This enabled normal plantings that yielded above-average agricultural harvests in most of the affected countries, including Malawi, which had an all-time record harvest in 1993.

Principle Lessons Learned

Donors should begin shipping food as quickly as possible. The fastest that relief food can be programmed, shipped and delivered is in the range of two-to-three months. During the 1992 U.S. relief response, an average of four-to-five months was required to deliver U.S. food to inland destinations within landlocked countries. This suggests that emergency food procurement and shipping should begin even if final destinations are uncertain and distribution plans have yet to be finalized.

In early 1992 USAID/Washington shipped 45,000 metric tons of maize to Durban, South Africa, in response to the first indications of a serious regional crisis. This entire quantity of food was subsequently allocated to Malawi and arrived in-country in June 1992, a full five months before any other Malawi-specific relief food. This timely arrival of food assistance was critical to the prevention of widespread famine in Malawi, a country in which 6.2 million out of a population of 9.6 million were identified as in need of food assistance.

Donor-supplied relief food should not be viewed as the sole solution to a food shortage, but can be used to ensure that sufficient quantities of food are available over the term of the crisis and to help offset the relief costs incurred by the affected country. Most countries cannot rely on donors to provide food quickly enough to meet total consumption needs in the months immediately after the onset of a drought. Experience from the 1992/93 drought response suggests that government faced with extraordinary food shortages should quickly purchase cereal from commercial sources to satisfy early drought-relief requirements. Commercial grain purchases reduce reliance on donor-supplied food which cannot always be

supplied quickly enough in sufficient quantities to meet the extraordinary needs caused by severe drought.

The ability of certain countries to purchase commercial food stocks quickly once the magnitude of the southern African drought was understood was critical to their being able to avert famine. This was particularly true for Zambia and Zimbabwe. The large quantities of commercial food brought into the region reduced reliance on donor-supplied grains and usually arrived sooner.

Use existing food distribution channels. As a first and preferred choice, a disaster response should consider the feasibility of using existing food distribution systems. Such an approach is likely to become cost effective and logistically efficient than setting up a parallel distribution system. A principal goal of a food relief response should be to ensure that affected populations are able to continue to access food from the same supply sources that they rely on under normal conditions. If relief food is monetized, through sales to private sector wholesalers or to parastatals, then the receipts generated can be used to support NGO targeted food distribution, or to provide the most vulnerable households with increased means to purchase available food - for example, vouchers.
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In the case of the 1991/92 drought, the decision was made by USAID to move supplies as much as possible through existing food distribution systems for sale through retail outlets, including using parastatal marketing systems in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and this strategy proved highly successful. The strategy was driven by the desire to distribute food quickly, to ensure that food remained widely available for purchase at retail outlets, and to supply quantities sufficient to maintain retail price stability.

Food-for-work projects may be an appropriate food distribution strategy if they are operational prior to the emergency, or if the affected country has an inventory of already- designed labor-intensive projects which it has the ability to implement once an emergency arises.

In general, however, short-term food-for-work projects are not necessarily an effective and viable alternative to free food distribution. Food-for-work projects created in response to the drought emergency were often poorly designed, did not always have sufficient access to the management skills necessary to oversee implementation, and resources were not always available to complete projects once the emergency was declared over. And, in several countries, emergency food-for-work programs were not able to be implemented quickly enough, or on a large enough scale, to meet their stated employment objectives. Thus, they were ineffective mechanisms for the delivery of targeted relief food. More often than not, free food distributions may be less costly, quicker, and easier to manage than attempts to distribute emergency food through work programs.

Botswana's cash-for-work program appeared to be an effective alternative to the food-for-work programs designed in other southern African countries and should be studied as a model for how to increase the purchasing power of rural populations affected by drought.

NGOs are an effective vehicle for distribution of targeted food assistance. In most countries targeted relief operations were turned over to NGOs. The use of NGOs was, by and large, a resounding success at getting food to those most in need. In several countries, most notably Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and Lesotho, relief efforts would not have succeeded without NGO participation.

The relief effort's success in Zambia was helped by the establishment of a technical assistance unit to coordinate NGO activities and provide assistance in the design, implementation and monitoring of targeted food distribution. This helped NGOs with little or no prior relief experience to quickly mobilize and effectively manage relief efforts.

Planning and administrative capability is a country's best preparation for effectively managing a drought. Those countries that responded most effectively to the drought were the

