

IMF policies mean 150 million Africans face starvation

by Mary Lalevée

Next month's harvest in drought-stricken southern Africa is expected to be poor, compounding the disastrous conditions already prevailing throughout the continent. The executive secretary of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Economic Commission for Africa, Adebayo Adedeji, warned at the beginning of January that "nearly 150 million Africans could face hunger and malnourishment" during the first months of 1984. Food production in most African countries has fallen drastically in the last three years, and is expected to fall even further in 1984. The FAO classifies 24 nations in Africa as facing a "food emergency."

The three years of drought which have hit Africa are partially to blame for the fall in production, along with attacks by insurgents against infrastructure projects. The starvation, however, is primarily due to the fact that African countries cannot pay for imports of cereals to feed their populations.

Adedeji stressed that the 2% per capita fall in African food production "created a need for food imports, but lack of foreign exchange prevented African nations from importing sufficient food."

Look at Mozambique, which is one of the most seriously affected countries. In January 1984, Mozambique's minister of internal commerce, Aranda da Silva, said that 379,000 tons of wheat were needed before the end of April—more than the total food aid provided last year. The three southern provinces of Maputo, Gaza, and Inhambane, where rebels supported by South Africa attacked food convoys and burned local food stocks, have been the most affected, and in the north of the country tens of thousands of people have fled to neighboring Zimbabwe, itself suffering from shortages of food. The minister said that the government was planning to purchase 37,000 tons of wheat on the international markets, "but budgetary restrictions could mean the revision of these figures." He stressed that consumption of wheat fell last year "due to the low quantity of food imports, which was a result of budgetary restrictions, as well as the drastic fall in agricultural production."

Looking at the figures of food production and food im-

ports provided by the FAO, the reader is struck by the fact that commercial food imports have been falling and will fall more this year due to the inability of governments to pay for imports with precious foreign exchange.

The FAO published a report on January 13, warning that the sharp decline in food production in Africa it had previously forecast was now certain to occur, with the continuation of the drought and a cyclone which swept away the topsoil in which seeds were germinating. Assistance is required particularly by Mozambique and Zambia in Southern Africa, by most of the affected countries in West Africa, and by Ethiopia and Somalia. Not only food is needed, but also seeds for planting, as in many areas starving farmers have eaten their seed stocks.

Where to turn?

Countries in southern Africa were formerly able to rely on South Africa for cereal imports. In 1982 South Africa exported 5 million tons of maize. This year, for the first time, it will have to import 1.5 million tons. Zimbabwe, which produced a 1.8 million ton maize harvest in 1981, may reap no more than 500,000 tons this year. In Mozambique, 90,000 tons of food crops were destroyed by the cyclone in January.

The 24 most-affected countries are Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Upper Volta, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Many of these countries have turned in desperation to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). What are the measures proposed by the IMF to these starving nations? Devalue the currency, cut subsidies for basic goods, increase food prices, and cut imports. Senegal is one example: Following several years of drought, Senegal's food production has fallen by 50% over the last three years, and the FAO reports that "agricultural production has been destroyed in all the country except the southern part." What did the IMF demand? The

prices of basic necessities had to be drastically increased, and severe austerity policies introduced. This was put through by the government in August 1983, which in return received a loan of a paltry \$66 million. Senegal's foreign debt is \$1.2 billion, and 1% of interest on that is \$12 million. In other words, the IMF loans paid for part of the interest payment on Senegal's debt, and no more. A 1% increase in interest rates adds millions to a country's debts and cancels out "aid" of a few million dollars.

Upper Volta, one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per-capita annual income of only \$210, is also negotiating with the IMF. Upper Volta's foreign debt has reached \$36 million, three times more than four years ago, meaning a per-capita indebtedness of \$49. Mauritania, one of the countries most affected by drought, is more indebted per capita than Brazil!

Every day that the international economic system refuses to grant credits to these countries for investments in infrastructure such as roads, railways, irrigation projects, and wells, tens of thousands die. Yet the solutions are at hand to rapidly overcome the crisis, using, for example, the production capabilities now lying dormant in North America and Western Europe.

In Savannah, Georgia, for example, a new "long life" dairy processing plant was opened last year, using ultra-high temperature pasteurization technology. Long-life products are aseptically packaged, and last for a year with no refrigeration. Low-interest production credits could be extended to dairy farmers to mobilize the maximum milk output for emergency shipments to Africa. Western Europe also has an extensive network of processing facilities and milk supply lines that could be tapped.

Cereal supply position in 22 African countries

	Total cereal production (thousands of tons)			Total cereal imports			
	1981	1982 estimate	1983 forecast	1976-77 to 1978-79 average		1981-82 or 1982	
				Total	of which food aid	Total	of which food aid
West Africa	3,942	3,412	2,995	1,148.8	346.1	1,244.0	384.1
Cape Verde	3	5	(10)	58.3	38.0	53.2	43.2
Chad	539	496	(490)	47.5	36.8	55.0	47.0
Gambia	102	110	(85)	59.9	11.6	49.6	5.5
Ghana	507	497	(480)	253.4	73.2	200.7	53.1
Guinea	338	330	(300)	88.6	28.1	86.5	40.6
Mali	1,198	926	(950)	76.1	20.6	126.9	53.5
Mauritania	78	20	(10)	122.7	37.0	171.5	57.7
Senegal	884	730	(400)	396.2	88.2	455.6	80.8
Togo	293	298	(270)	46.1	12.6	45.0	3.1
Central Africa (Central African Republic and Sao Tome)	99	106	(96)	32.5	3.3	39.7	7.1
East Africa	7,334	7,340	7,550	530.2	277.2	1,014.0	834.5
Ethiopia	5,649	5,562	(5,800)	226.7	99.7	255.0	155.0
Somalia	369	390	(300)	162.0	80.1	390.0	325.0
Tanzania	1,316	1,388	(1,450)	141.5	97.4	369.0	354.5
Southern Africa	5,636	4,229	3,234	824.6	184.3	1,180.4	407.7
Angola	331	323	350	166.0	11.5	350.0	60.8
Botswana	60	17	14	90.0	6.9	120.0	6.6
Lesotho	166	135	52	125.7	11.0	120.0	17.7
Mozambique	490	468	330	248.5	117.9	306.5	198.6
Swáziland	101	69	45	37.3	0.4	53.0	1.0
Zambia	1,123	927	1,058	121.6	36.6	219.9	123.0
Zimbabwe	3,365	2,290	1,385	35.5	—	11.0	—
Total	17,011	15,087	13,875	2,536.1	810.9	3,478.1	1,633.8

Note: Figures in parentheses are early forecasts.

Source: FAO, 1983.