

# A food production strategy for the African continent

by Christopher White

The Rome-based Food and Agriculture Organization released another report this month on the African food crisis. The organization expanded its list of national food emergency cases from 27 to 31. Entire regions of the continent, such as Ethiopia, are immediately faced with life-threatening situations; millions face death through starvation. Other parts will follow if nothing is done.

In report after report, the crisis in Africa is ascribed to two circumstances: first, drought, repeated over years; and second, population growth which is outstripping the continent's capability to produce food. That the first cited circumstance is in any way causal is belied by the horrific remedies proposed for the second. If population growth is the cause of the problem, as the World Bank insists, and as the Agency for International Development of the U.S State Department also insists, then it can also be readily argued that famine and drought are appropriate solutions to the crisis. And it is so argued. But this is the kind of solution for which Nazi criminals were hanged at Nuremberg.

## Food production: Africa and the U.S.A.

Let us look at the crisis in another way, comparing the food production capabilities of the United States and the African continent. Before the PIK (Payment in Kind) program of Orville Freeman and the grain cartel went into effect, North America was producing approximately 1,500 metric tons of grain a year for every 1,000 citizens. The comparable ratio for the comparable year (1982) in Africa is 146 tons of cereals per 1,000 people. That is 10 times less than is produced in North America. While North American production, measured per 1,000 people, increased about 30% between 1968 and the beginning of the PIK program, African cereal production per 1,000 people declined by approximately the same 30% level.

In meat production, North America produces just over 100 metric tons per 1,000 people per year. Africa produces less than 14 metric tons for the same number of people. That is less than 30 pounds of meat per person per year—which can be considered to be nothing. In milk production, North America used to produce about 275 metric tons per 1,000 people, before Daniel Amstutz and the Department of Agriculture created the present shortage. Africa produced about 20 metric tons per 1,000 people.

Do blind forces of nature, or over-population, create these

orders-of-magnitude discrepancies in per capita production? Of course not. Africa cannot feed itself because Africa has not been permitted access to the levels of technology which could permit food production at levels commensurate with human survival.

It is not necessary to compare North American and African production point by point. Instead, let us see what the daily food basket produced within Africa for each member of its population is. Averages are deceptive, but nonetheless indicative. This commodity basket would have made the keepers of Auschwitz blush. Africa is able to produce for itself less than

- 1 ounce of meat,
- less than 2 ounces of milk,
- less than 12 ounces of cereals of all types,
- less than 16 ounces of root crops, such as manioc and cassava (which are so low in food content they are not considered even for animal consumption in the United States),
- less than 1 ounce of pulses (legumes),
- less than 4.5 ounces of vegetables,
- less than 5.5 ounces of fruit.

Thus, the only food produced and available on a daily basis are cereals and root crops, and the root crops are not food in a nutritional sense, but bulk.

Since 1968, per capita production of the above items of a consumption commodity basket have fallen as follows; meat – 5%, milk – 20%, cereals – 30%, roots – 13%, – 18%, fruit – 16%. Vegetable production has increased 5% in per capita terms. The largest such per capita declines are registered in cereal, root, and fruit production, which comprise nearly 80% of what African production would make available for consumption on its own.

Let us now compare some of the technological features of food production in North America, with those enforced on starving Africa. We will compare first the population growth rates and densities of the two continents, and then compare the arable land cultivated in terms of tractors, harvesters and irrigated land available.

The population of North America in 1983 was about 259 million. In Africa, it was about 507 million. From 1968 to 1983 the population of North America grew by 17%. The African population grew by just over 50%. The increase in North American cereal production exceeded the increase in population. In Africa, the reverse was the case. The popula-

tion of North America lives on almost two billion hectares of land. The per hectare density has increased from 117 per hectare in 1968 to 134 per hectare in 1983. The African population lives on almost three billion hectares of land. The per hectare density has increased from 115 per hectare in 1968 to 175 per hectare in 1983.

In North America, about 520 million hectares of the total land area are counted as farm land, including both land used for pasture, and arable land; in Africa, about 960 million hectares of the total—nearly twice as much. But in North America, approximately 240 million hectares of the total are arable land, about 40% of the total farm land. In Africa, only about 160 million hectares are so employed, that is, about 16% of the total farm land.

If the proportion of what is counted as African farm land cultivated as arable land were the same as in the United States, then Africa would have available well over 300 million hectares for arable use, that is, almost twice as much as is now available.

If the proportion of that expanded area producing cereals had been the same as in the United States, and the yield per hectare had been the same as in the United States, then Africa would have produced nearly 500 million metric tons of cereals in 1982—more than seven times the cereal crop actually produced. Why should Africa have less?

### **Destruction of technology**

The differences in yield produced reflect the difference in technology available, or not available. The absence of technology can be shown thusly. In North America in 1983, there were approximately 5.25 million tractors in use. In Africa, there were less than half a million. But, nearly 70% of Africa's tractors are located in the Maghreb countries on the shores of the Mediterranean, and in South Africa. The Sahel, as a whole has 1,600 tractors. West Africa including Nigeria about 17,000, Central Africa 5,000.

North America has available more than 10 times as many tractors per arable hectare as Africa, and far more when sub-Saharan Africa is considered. In 1982, 836,000 harvesters were in use on the North American continent. There were 46,000, or 18 times less, in use in the whole of Africa, of which 90% approximately are located on the Mediterranean coastal strip and in Southern Africa.

But North America has shut down its agricultural implements manufacturers, like International Harvester, John Deere, and Massey Ferguson. The *New York Times* argues that the market for agricultural implements will never revive. And the number of tractors in use on North American farm land has been reduced by almost three-quarters of a million since 1968; we have cut back the number of tractors employed in the United States by almost twice as many tractors as are presently employed in all of Africa. The number of harvesters in use in North America declined by 150,000 in the same period. That is by nearly four times the number available in Africa in 1982.

If Africa were permitted to produce under conditions which gave the continent access to technology, 2.7 million tractors could be absorbed there immediately, to bring the present level of arable cultivation up to present U.S. levels. Nearly 600,000 harvesters would be required to accomplish the same result. The surest sign that Africa has been condemned, and Ibero-America and the United States itself, is the unemployment lines in U.S. cities which could be producing agricultural implements.

Worldwide, in 1980, eleven agricultural equipment manufacturers accounted for over 70% of world production. Four of the top five corporations, which account for about 50% of production, are located in North America. But even before those corporations began to throw their workers onto the streets, world production was only at a level of 1.2 million units per year.

Twenty million hectares of the North American arable total, about 9%, are irrigated. Only about 4% of the arable hectareage of Africa is so irrigated, with the greatest proportion of that land along the course of the river Nile. In the Sahel, about 1% of the arable land is irrigated, in Central Africa 0.1%. Again, a tenfold increase would be required to bring African production levels up to those of North America.

We have not considered here the question of labor productivity. Nor have we considered the energy and infrastructure requirements which would enable such technologies to be assimilated into productive use. In North America, remember, about 2% of the total population produces all the food. In Africa, more than 70% of the population is so employed, producing at levels less than required for human subsistence. But we have shown that those like Timothy Raison from the British Foreign Office, and the World Bank, who argue that large-scale development projects are not only outdated, but a mistake, are either fools or mass murderers—on a scale Hitler would not have dreamed of.

If Africa is to feed itself at a level deemed appropriate for human existence in the United States, then

- the proportion of arable land must be more than doubled;
- the proportion of irrigated land must be increased tenfold;
- the number of tractors per hectare must be increased tenfold;
- the number of harvesters per hectare must be increased more than tenfold;
- and the productivity of labor in per capita terms must be increased accordingly.

There is no way this can be done without "Great Projects." Nor can it be done without reopening, and revitalizing, the American industrial capacity that Paul Volcker and his friends decided to close down. Other things must be done. But such measures must proceed from the standpoint that Africa has access, as of right, to the best of the technology available for the job, so that Africa can become a food producer.