

Debt burden worsens Africa's drought of the century

by Dana S. Scanlon

Tens of millions, perhaps as many as a hundred million Africans are threatened by starvation as a result of an unprecedented killer drought affecting huge portions of the continent. This natural calamity, caused by the El Niño current in the Pacific Ocean, is all the more devastating since most countries have been unable to invest in the water and infrastructure projects that could alleviate the impact of the drought, as a result of the "structural adjustment" economic policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other creditor institutions.

The United States and the European Community are unlikely to be able to meet the skyrocketing grain import requirements on an emergency basis, since the policy in those countries has been to cut back on so-called "surplus" food production. So perversely successful have those policies been, that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is cutting back on its allocations to domestic school lunch programs, food banks, and other programs to help the hungry in America itself.

The drought of the century, as meteorologists are calling it, is turning southern Africa into a parched, barren land, unable to feed its people. After two successive years without rain, countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, which normally have a surplus of food and crops for export, are in dire need of imports and emergency food relief. The drought is now extending up and down the entire eastern coast of Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope in the south to Cairo in the north. Several countries in North Africa are affected as well.

South Africa alone, usually the world's sixth largest exporter of grain, will have to import 4 million tons of corn, according to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The estimated South African harvest for corn, 2.6 million tons, compares with 8.3 million in 1991, and is lower than the drought production of the 1980s, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is also the smallest projected grain crop since the early 1950s, when total plantings were lower.

The southern Africa region as a whole will have to import more than 14 million tons of food, including 11.5 million tons of cereals, this year and into next, as a result of the drought. Normally, southern Africa imports only 2 million tons of cereals. The same region's wheat crop is projected to be 1.5 mil-

lion tons, down one-third from last year; wheat imports will have to more than double to bridge that gap. In Zambia, wheat production is likely to fall by 50%, and Zimbabwe's wheat production is provisionally forecast at 120,000 tons, only 40% of the average output for 1987-90, according to the FAO.

Wheat production in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia is projected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be down by 25% this year. Morocco will have to double its wheat imports to a record 3.2 million tons, while Tunisia's imports will have to go up by one-third. Egypt, already extremely dependent on imports (two-thirds of its wheat consumption is met by imports), will need 6 million tons from abroad.

Debt servicing blamed

On June 9, President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya issued an appeal for international support, in which he warned that "as of today, over 1 million Kenyans are faced with a serious famine situation unless immediate corrective measures are taken." He said that approximately 170,000 metric tons of food for general distribution and over 5,000 metric tons of supplementary food for young children is required in the next 12 months to meet the immediate needs of the most severely affected portion of the population.

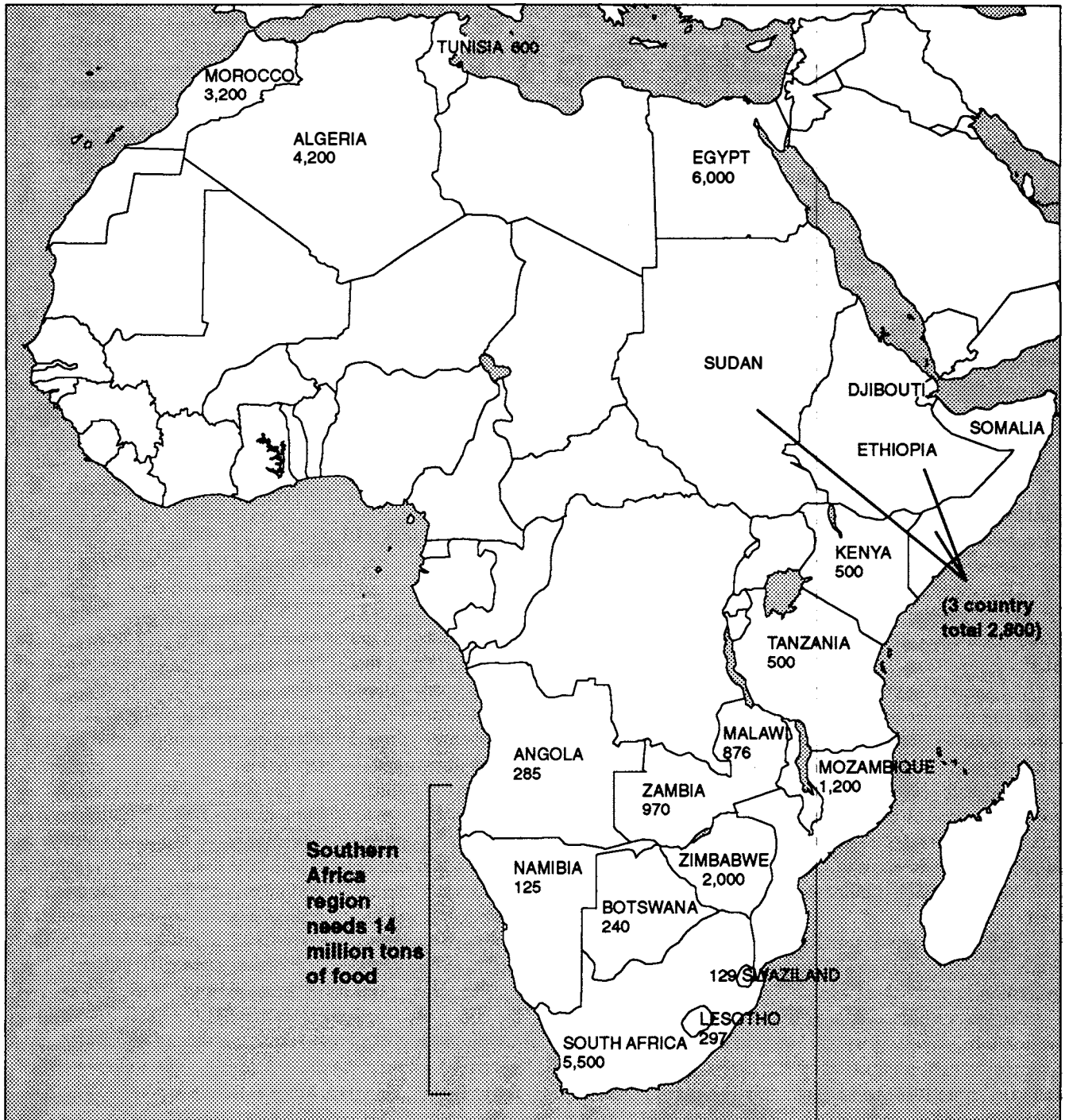
Kenyan Minister of Agriculture Elijah Mwangale announced 10 days later that ministers from 36 countries will hold crisis talks in Nairobi, Kenya on the food shortage in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Reuters, he charged that western governments and donors contributed to the crisis by not subsidizing production of traditional drought-resistant crops and by demanding repayment of foreign debts. He said Africa was struggling to service debts of \$380 billion.

Indeed, a major preoccupation of the IMF, donors, and the U.S. State Department, is that the drought might result in the jettisoning of the economic structural adjustment programs (ESAP) in many of the countries. The policies pursued under ESAP, however, are precisely the policies that have rendered many nations ill-prepared to cope with the crisis: Economic activity is geared toward export earnings for debt repayment, rather than building up the economic and productive base of the country through infrastructure, industry, and agriculture.

For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) sent a team from its Office of Foreign Disaster

Emergency grain needs in African countries most affected by drought

(thousands of tons)



Assistance into southern Africa in March and April, to produce an assessment of the drought, its impact, and the needs of various countries. The report issued by the team warns that "there is great concern among donors and government that the

drought will derail the economic reform programs, especially in Zimbabwe. . . . There is concern that some governments may seize the drought as an excuse to go off ESAP as decision-makers do not differentiate the drought and adjustment pro-

gram impacts on their populations. . . . Abandonment of ESAP will result in a loss of donor confidence in countries' commitment to economic reform and a consequent loss of future donor and World Bank/IMF resources which will be desperately needed for drought recovery. The result will be a downward spiral which would set economic growth back for years to come and place many countries in a position of requiring emergency assistance year after year."

Kenya's Mwangale also noted the degree to which the food shortages had been exacerbated by civil wars and drought. "This year, people suffering from chronic famine in the Horn of Africa, Angola, and Mozambique will be joined by as many as 18 million people threatened by starvation for lack of food and water in southern Africa," the Kenyan minister said.

Some agencies estimate the number of people at risk from food shortages and in need of rapid assistance in the Horn of Africa, at 23 million people. In Somalia alone, at least 6 million people are in urgent need of food, water, and medicine.

Mozambique, where the drought has compounded the effects of years of civil war, is also in need of large-scale emergency assistance.

In most of the affected countries, the death toll is expected to rise sharply this fall, although in the most seriously stricken, the deaths will begin mounting this month, unless urgent international action is taken.

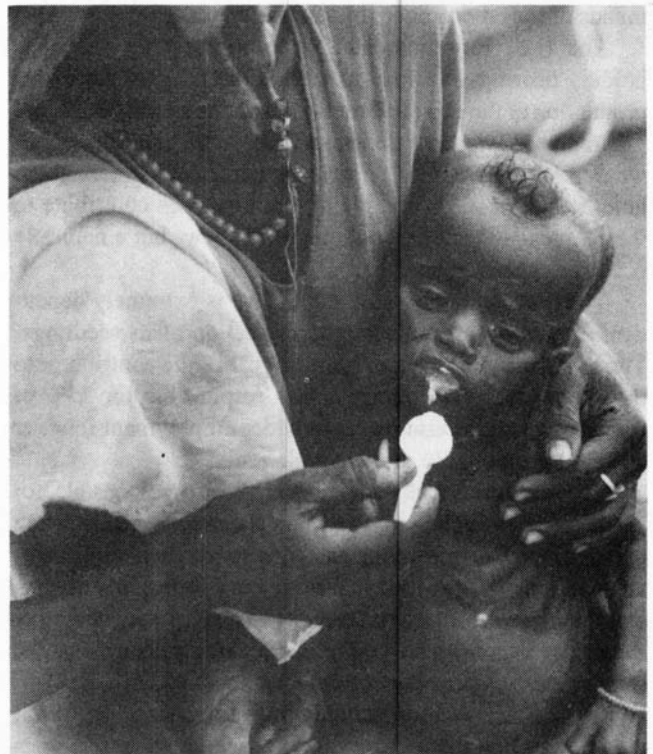
'State of national disaster' in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is one of the hardest-hit nations of all. On March 6, President Robert Mugabe declared a state of "national disaster" in accordance with the Civil Protection Act, following three years of poor rainfall. At the time, only a month's supply of food was on hand for distribution, and the industrial city of Bulawayo posted billboards warning "Twelve Weeks Left in Our Dams. Conserve Water." The government drew up a program designed to provide water to rural communities. About 600 water bowsers were to be installed at all vital institutions such as schools and hospitals.

More than half of Zimbabwe's 10 million people, according to some estimates, are threatened with thirst, starvation, and death. Industries and whole cities may be shut down. Many schools have closed because the children are too weak to walk the several miles usually required to get there.

The shortage of rain has decimated Zimbabwe's corn crop. Zimbabwe is usually the southern African region's second largest corn producer, but its production this year is estimated to be just one-third of the 1991 crop. (Corn meal is the dietary staple.) Zimbabwe usually produces three-quarters of its own wheat consumption, but that will not be the case this season. The drought has also ruined its previously thriving cattle and dairy industry. Sugar, also an important crop, has been devastated.

Zimbabwe's current emergency food requirements can be estimated as follows:



Mother feeding a malnourished child at a relief center in Ethiopia, during the drought of 1984.

1.7 million tons of corn
340,000 tons of wheat
160,000 tons of oilseeds
240,000 tons of sugar
15,000 tons of rice
4,000 tons of powdered milk
10,000 tons of beans
1,000 tons of butter oil

In April, President Mugabe officially launched a "Water for Life" campaign, intended to raise funds and equipment to alleviate water shortages. The campaign is seeking drilling rigs, pumps, storage tanks, and bowsers. A massive public works campaign has been launched by the government. It involves dams, weirs, piped water and irrigation schemes, roads and bridges, health centers, vegetable gardens, and schools.

Thanks to its previous sizeable investments in irrigation, Zimbabwe has not only recovered from previous periods of drought, producing enough food for its own people, but has exported to its less fortunate neighbors. Most immediate among its neighbors to suffer are Mozambique, which has millions of people displaced by the long civil war there, and Malawi, where more than 1 million Mozambiquan refugees have relied on food from Zimbabwe.

Environmental threat

Zimbabwe is threatened by more than drought. Man-made disasters are looming, as a result of the extremist de-

mands of the environmentalist movements.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is holding hearings intended to lead to the phasing out of the production of the chemical methyl-bromide by the year 2000. The radical environmentalists, who have successfully brainwashed a generation of Americans with scare stories about holes in the ozone layer, claim that bromides contribute to these holes—which are in fact nothing new, but a naturally occurring phenomenon.

The tobacco industry of Zimbabwe is extremely dependent on methyl-bromide for the protection of its seedlings. The tobacco industry there is the largest single contributor to the Zimbabwean economy, and is responsible for 25% of foreign exchange earnings. It provides employment for over 520,000 people—6% of the population.

The environmentalist movement is also responsible for Zimbabwe's struggling to cope with its current overpopulation of elephants. Far from being an endangered species, elephants are over-running the country. This creates a particularly dangerous situation when water is scarce. The elephant population of Zimbabwe is now up to 70,000, and biologists believe that the country's eco-system can only support about 45,000.

In 1905, Zimbabwe had only 5,000 elephants. By 1960, the number had grown to 33,000, at which point scientists noted that the elephant was destroying its own habitat, thus threatening the long-term survival of the species. (Unlike man, the elephant is unable to introduce technologies into his environment that would make the eco-system capable of sustaining an ever-increasing population.) Culling was introduced in the 1960s, otherwise the elephant population would have grown to 134,000 by the year 1991. But pressure from environmentalists has prevented the sale of the ivory.

U.S. Congress does nothing

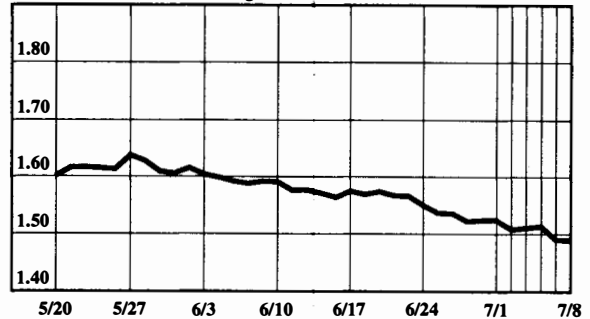
While Africa burns up from the effects of the drought, the U.S. Congress has been busy fiddling over what it calls human rights issues. For example, while Kenya has been appealing for assistance to fend off the possible starvation of 1 million people, and Malawi is considered one of the countries in need of the most urgent aid, hearings were held by the House Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on June 23, to discuss human rights issues in both those countries.

Apparently food, water, and shelter are not considered basic human rights by Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-Mass.). Kennedy took to the floor to denounce the Moi government of Kenya for "autocratic rule" and for not engaging in a voter registration drive among the nation's youth. Not a word did he utter about the perils facing the people of Kenya who are being condemned to slow death by starvation and dehydration. On the contrary, Kennedy praised the international donor community "for maintaining pressure on Kenya through its decision to withhold much of Kenya's economic assistance."

Currency Rates

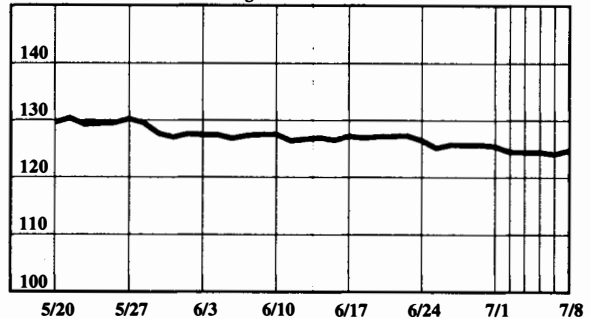
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



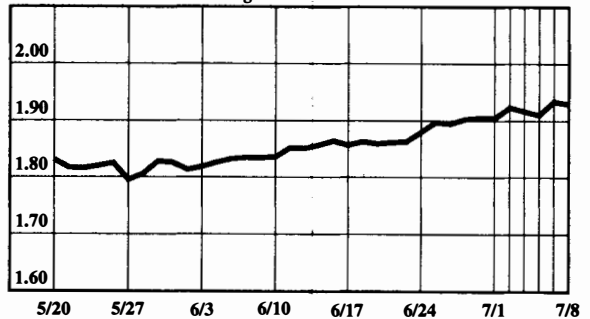
The dollar in yen

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

