

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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FAMINE IN AFRICA

(Commission communication to the European Council,
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1. According to the latest information available the most urgent food needs of the twenty African countries worst affected by drought appear to be covered.

The European Community has contributed substantially to this work of international solidarity by pledging to supply 2.3 mn tonnes cereal equivalent to the drought-stricken countries of Africa. It has made a special push to help the eight hardest-hit countries: to date, 65% of the Dublin Plan aid (1,232,000 tonnes cereal equivalent) has already been distributed or is in process of being provided by the Commission and the Member States.

The Commission has, like the Member States, coupled its emergency food aid with various operations to tackle other emergency-related needs (health) and restart productive activities (seed, use of local resources and labour, &c.).

2. But while in terms of overall commitments food requirements appear to be covered, major problems have arisen in the implementation of international aid which in some cases still persist. These concern

- (i) coordinating the incoming consignments of aid from the different donors;
- (ii) getting the aid to the end consumers, which has not always been managed;
- (iii) doing more to cope with the additional needs in connection with health and with malnutrition.

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It must further be stressed that the present tragedy has been worsened by the ongoing economic situation in these countries, which are becoming less and less able to meet their food requirements.

In face of all this it is clearly necessary to establish for the future an overall Community-level short- and long-term anti-drought strategy.

3. Short-term action should have three main aims: to get emergency food aid to the starving as soon as possible, to keep them from moving away from the areas where they pursue their productive occupations, and to provide them with the means to resume a normal life.

As concerns emergency food aid, it should be a priority to improve the early warning system for detecting production shortfalls beforehand. This will necessitate strengthening the relevant services in the countries concerned, and developing remote-monitoring systems covering the whole of Africa. Here it is important that the interested parties (the EEC, the Member States and the recipient countries) should work in better coordination to determine and select the most appropriate systems, and set to introduce them.

Secondly, it is vital to get the food faster to the people who need it, using in the first instance the food and transport resources available on the spot or in adjacent countries. To do this it will be necessary for the donors in future to earmark appropriate funds.

With this in view the Commission has already decided to propose in its preliminary draft 1986 Budget a special reserve appropriation to enable 500,000 tonnes cereal equivalent to be mobilized over and above the regular food aid amounts should more famine situations develop.

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Thirdly, the resources must be assembled to enable aid to be delivered to destination in the case of those Member States which do not do this.

Lastly, decision-making procedures on the allocation of food aid must be simplified and speeded up.

Given the obvious need to expand emergency resources and streamline their deployment, it would be well to establish a separate, decentralized European emergency aid facility based on a crisis management staff backed by a permanent Commission unit to be responsible for the organized, pre-established coordination of all the funds made available to the Member States and the Commission.

4. For the purposes of immediate restarting of economic activity, emergency aid will need to be accompanied by the provision of aid essential to the resumption of agricultural production. To this end action should be taken to mobilize all Community and Member State resources still available for programmes of quick-disbursement operations, and consideration given now to what special extra resources could be deployed in case of need.

5. As concerns the long term, it is absolutely essential that the African countries replan their internal food-security policies and mount environmental conservation programmes.

Food security is a goal written into Lomé III, and the Member States would do well to give priority, along with the Commission, to assistance for food-security policy in their national aid programmes, in order to reach the financial critical mass together.

As for environmental conservation, and in particular the combating of desertification, given the scale of the need quite obviously all European aid, Community and bilateral, will have to give this a high priority, to continue for a long time and to be so organized as to ensure properly coherent operations through appropriate coordination machinery.

Notwithstanding the worsening food situation and the present horrors, Africa as a whole is not ineluctably doomed to be unable to feed itself. For their part, the Community and the Member States, which account for something like 55% of the structural aid supplied to Sahelian Africa, have a major responsibility to it. Given these two facts, it is apparent that the Community and the Member States must undertake to implement the measures planned to tackle the emergency, restart agricultural production and attack the root causes that make these countries so vulnerable to the effects of drought, in order to ensure that calamities such as the one the world has just witnessed never happen again.

7. Conclusions

To make Community aid more effective, it is proposed that an overall anti-drought strategy be mounted by action

- (i) to improve early warning systems by better coordination and stepping-up of European efforts in this connection with a view to such systems' covering the whole of Africa;
- (ii) to help the stricken countries mobilize and maintain all their means of transport—but some countries are so poorly off for road and rail transport that the best course would be to have Community transport available to get the food through in time;
- (iii) to streamline the machinery for action, in particular by establishing a permanent crisis-management staff of the Member States, with its coordinating centre at the Commission organized around the existing crisis unit;
- (iv) to help the restarting of economic activities in the stricken countries in 1986 (e.g. by funding input import programmes), and in the longer term the carrying-out of agri-food development and environmental conservation programmes, by drawing up a coherent and coordinated European programme in each of the countries asking for the Community's assistance in this connection.