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REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

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BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL
OF THE UNITED STATES



Need For An International Disaster Relief Agency

UNITED STATES
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GAO's case study of the worldwide relief effort in the Sahel region of Africa shows that the response to future disasters should be more timely and better managed.

To insure a timely, effective, and efficient world response to future disasters, GAO believes the world community needs an international agency capable of mounting and carrying out integrated, large-scale disaster relief operations.

As a step in this direction, GAO recommends that the Secretary of State lead the U.N. in generating members' support for strengthening the U.N. Disaster Relief Office and committing resources for this purpose.

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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To the President of the Senate and the
Speaker of the House of Representatives

This report deals with the need to improve the current state of international disaster relief management. The report (1) summarizes our case study of the recent international relief effort in the Sahel area of Africa and (2) presents our recommendations and proposals for uniting the relief resources of the international community under the leadership and direction of an international disaster relief agency.

We made our review pursuant to the Budget and Accounting Act, 1921 (31 U.S.C. 53), and the Accounting and Auditing Act of 1950 (31 U.S.C. 67).

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the heads of interested agencies.

James B. Stacks

Comptroller General
of the United States

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ABBREVIATIONS

AID Agency for International Development
GAO General Accounting Office
OSRO Office of Sahel Relief Operations
U.N. United Nations
UNDRO United Nations Disaster Relief Office
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
WFP World Food Program

COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

NEED FOR AN INTERNATIONAL
DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY
Department of State
Agency for International Development

D I G E S T

A massive and generous worldwide relief effort was recently mounted to respond to the disastrous famine in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. In the absence of an effective mechanism to coordinate and control this response, each donor independently planned, programed, and implemented its relief operations with little overall coordination.

Predictably, serious problems developed and the tremendous resources made available were not used as efficiently as possible to feed the starving people.

The world community urgently needs to work together to create and support an international disaster relief agency that will ultimately be capable of mounting and carrying out an integrated response to disasters.

The U.N. Disaster Relief Office was established to act as an international focal and coordination point during disasters. It has not been given the responsibilities, authority, or resource base to perform the functions GAO believes will be needed in future relief efforts.

It is, however, a base that can be built on, and the U.N., with its broad membership and other advantages, is perhaps the best location for an international disaster relief agency. (See p. 5.)

As a step in this direction, GAO recommends (see p. 11) that the Secretary of State lead the U.N. in:

1. Encouraging all member governments to pledge to build on the U.N. Disaster Relief Office and strengthen its relief coordination capabilities.

2. Developing disaster response contingency plans and developing agreements with U.N. agencies that specify the role and responsibilities of each agency as well as the amounts and types of resources they can make available in disasters.
3. Urging potential donor nations to articulate a disaster response policy and to enter into advance understandings with the Disaster Relief Office about the kinds of resources they will make available under the Office's coordination.

GAO's review of the Sahel relief effort clearly showed the need for stronger coordination by a single disaster relief agency:

- Although the Disaster Relief Office had been established, it did not respond in Sahel.
 - Two other U.N. agencies, the World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization, tried to coordinate donor efforts, with only sporadic success. (See pp. 19 to 22.)
 - Donors generally provided relief bilaterally, without adequate coordination.
- Consequently, serious coordination and management problems arose in every phase of the relief operation.
- Donors gave food aid in 1973 without knowing the reasonableness of the Sahel nations' requests or what other donors were providing. A 1974 multidonor mission independently assessed the Sahel nations' needs, but a lack of coordination still resulted in a gap in food deliveries to at least one nation. (See p. 22.)
 - Donors scheduled their own food shipments, causing massive port congestion and extended storage under improper conditions. (See p. 24.)
 - Lack of a coordinated system for moving all donor food inland quickly resulted in

backups and storage under improper conditions, increasing infestation and spoilage. (See p. 25.)

--No system existed to monitor food distribution, and reports indicate that the Sahel governments did not always get the food to their people. (See p. 33.)

The U.N. Disaster Relief Office is being strengthened but it will need time to develop into a fully effective disaster relief agency. (See ch. 4.)

The Department of State and the Agency for International Development agree with GAO's specific recommendations for immediately strengthening the relief coordination capabilities of the Disaster Relief Office. However, they believe that GAO's proposal for an international disaster relief agency capable of mounting and carrying out an integrated response to disasters would not be accepted by the international community, even in the distant future. (See p. 8.)

GAO believes that an international disaster relief agency is the best long-range solution, but it recognizes that considerable time and effort will be required to generate the necessary support among nations. For the present, GAO believes the first need is to build the Disaster Relief Office into an effective coordinating mechanism. (See pp. 9 to 12.)

CHAPTER 1
NEED FOR AN
INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY

To insure a timely, effective, and efficient international response to future disasters, the world community will have to build and support an effective international disaster relief agency. The long-term goal should be an agency, preferably located in the United Nations, capable of mounting and carrying out integrated large-scale disaster relief operations using material, financial, and personnel resources committed for these purposes by national governments, the United Nations, voluntary agencies, and others. ONG 10815

It must be clearly recognized that building an agency to perform the above role will take time. Indeed, we know of no organization today that is ready and able to perform all of the functions described in the following pages of this chapter. A small office has been established in the United Nations to serve as an international coordination and focal point in disasters, and should provide a good base to build on. However, this organization is young and basically underdeveloped, and is only now beginning to receive the resources and establish the relationships necessary to perform even that role. Therefore, as the first step toward a full international disaster relief agency, we are recommending that the coordinating capabilities of the U.N. Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) first be strengthened. If this proves successful, ONG 10815 UNDRO would then serve as a good takeoff point to build toward an agency capable of undertaking a more comprehensive disaster relief role.

WHY THE NEED EXISTS

In the absence of an effective mechanism to coordinate and to control the international response to the disaster in the Sahel region of Africa, each donor independently planned, programed, and implemented its relief operations with little overall coordination. Two U.N. agencies variously tried to provide overall coordination, with only occasional success. As could be expected, serious problems developed and the tremendous resources made available by the world community were not used as efficiently as they might have been.

The key to a truly effective international response to future disasters is contingency planning backed by the commitment of resources necessary to carry out such plans. Military planning provides an excellent pattern to follow, and

resources readily available from U.N. member nations could be tapped for this purpose.

The international community must unite and dedicate itself to promptly relieving the intense suffering of people caught up in disasters. Waiting for a disaster to occur and then organizing to respond to it will only result in the same delays, confusion, and less than fully effective use of resources as occurred in the international response to the famine in the Sahel.

CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

An effective international disaster relief organization must have

- clearly defined responsibilities,
- sufficient authority to carry out those responsibilities,
- adequate staff and organization, and
- contingency plans backed by necessary resources.

We believe such an agency should take the lead in concert with the international community in planning, programming, and directing responses to world disasters. This can happen only if the international community is willing to be guided by U.N. coordination and to commit itself to play an effective part in an international relief effort.

Effective U.N. action would require:

1. The ability to confirm assessments of need or to make independent assessments.
2. Coordination of resources committed by donors.
3. Scheduling transportation, including inland transportation, where necessary.
4. Monitoring and, as necessary, helping the recipient nation distribute relief supplies.

This agency should have all the rights, privileges, and immunities granted such international agencies. Both developed and underdeveloped nations should recognize and support the agency and its specific responsibilities.

An international disaster relief agency must be properly staffed and organized. The financing necessary for this will have to be guaranteed over long periods of time without risk of interruption. Staffing needs will have to be developed in terms of specific, assigned responsibilities, but we believe the agency could be organized around a nucleus capable of assimilating experienced personnel on either a reimbursable or nonreimbursable basis from other organizations in cases of major or complex disasters. However, to insure the immediate availability of these personnel, arrangements for drawing on them should be negotiated with those organizations in advance.

Finally, and perhaps most important, an effective international disaster relief agency must have immediate access to the necessary material and financial resources. It will have to call into play such resources as food, medicines, shelter items (tents, blankets, etc.), transport (trucks, boats, aircraft, etc.), and other types of relief supplies. It should have (1) a worldwide network of resources to call upon to insure the widest availability of all types of relief supplies--particularly near the disaster site--to reduce transport problems and to speed relief and (2) a source of funding to purchase relief items not readily available from donors.

To achieve this worldwide resource base, the nations of the world must join together and agree to make available the necessary personnel, equipment, material, and financial resources. This could be accomplished by holding periodic pledging conferences as other international organizations do. However, the critical element will be the willingness of nations to formally commit national resources to the agency and to immediately place them at the agency's disposal. The United States, as the world's largest donor to disaster relief in recent years, will obviously be in a good position to influence other nations toward these ends and should take the lead in advancing these proposals and in committing its resources toward their fulfillment.

An effective international disaster relief agency should also develop the capability to help nations prevent disasters--that is, to minimize the suffering, losses, and other effects of disasters. Possible ways of doing this include:

- Studying how past disasters occurred and how relief was administered in order to develop new techniques for handling future disasters.
- Developing adequate national and international early warning systems to help mitigate the effects of disasters.

--Developing national disaster contingency plans.

--Organizing and training officials of disaster-prone nations in disaster preparedness and administration.

It is important, however, to note that predisaster planning is basically a new, undeveloped field. Therefore, in initially attempting to develop programs in this area, the disaster relief agency should first determine highest-priority needs and concentrate on meeting them; afterward, the full range of programs and their relative priorities, costs, and benefits can be developed and evaluated if adequate interest and resources permit.

ADEQUATE PRECEDENTS EXIST

In recent years, several good precedents have amply demonstrated that nations can establish an international relief agency if they want to. A study of these precedents may yield ideas which can be embodied in such an agency.

3 The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is perhaps the best example of nations' willingness to commit national resources for a common purpose. Specific standing military units of the United States and European nations have for years been committed to the common defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization nations. We believe that if nations are willing to join forces for military purposes, they should be at least equally willing to join forces to solve the serious and growing suffering and problems caused by disasters. ONG 01358

The U.N. peacekeeping missions of recent years provide another precedent. We believe they are important because they reaffirm the principle of collective international responsibility, through the United Nations, for maintaining international peace and harmony. The peacekeeping missions have usually consisted of troops of several nations and have been funded either by voluntary contributions or by regular U.N. assessment procedures. Thus, the United Nations has conducted several large-scale peacekeeping operations which were truly international responses to military problems.

One other important precedent was the worldwide relief effort of late 1971 in what is now known as Bangladesh. In the aftermath of a cyclone and a civil war in Pakistan, which also resulted in hostilities with India, an international relief effort was mounted. Although the Bangladesh relief effort was not completely a U.N. operation, it was an exception to other major relief efforts in that the United Nations did

create a large ad hoc organization which assumed major operational responsibilities, including assessing needs and scheduling relief supplies, shipping them inland from the ports, and actually distributing them.

These precedents demonstrate that U.N. member nations have recognized their collective responsibility to respond to military problems under U.N. auspices, but there has not been the same recognition of responsibility or commitment for a U.N. response to all disasters.

UNITED NATIONS IS THE BEST LOCATION

We believe that using the United Nations as a foundation upon which to build an effective international disaster relief agency is better than establishing such an agency as a separate international agency in its own right (like the International Red Cross). UNDR0 has already been established and the United Nations is the home of other international humanitarian agencies, such as the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, and the World Food Program (WFP). Under the United Nations, the international disaster relief agency will benefit from the interest, attention, and importance accorded U.N. agencies in general. It will also benefit from the existing U.N. framework and machinery in terms of obtaining the widest possible international agreement on and recognition of its charter.

This U.N. framework will also provide the broadest base for obtaining and periodically replenishing the necessary resources that this agency must have to do its job. The agency will have the rights, privileges, and immunities granted a U.N. agency, and it can use the capabilities and expertise of other U.N. agencies. UNDR0 will have to clearly establish its role with respect to disaster relief and to effectively coordinate the activities of the independent agencies.

Finally, having this agency in the U.N. system will provide one other important advantage--the ability to tread where oftentimes bilateral donors and others cannot. When potential or actual political problems are involved in a relief operation, a U.N. or other international organization presence is generally much more acceptable to the host nation and, indeed, nations have on occasion turned to such organizations to do that which they cannot do themselves.

THE IMMEDIATE GOAL

UNDR0 was established to serve as an international coordination and focal point in disasters. As such it was not

intended to have, nor has it been given, the authority and the resource base necessary to manage and carry out relief efforts on behalf of the international community. Rather, it is designed to serve as an information or focal point and to help orchestrate the individual relief efforts of bilateral donors, U.N. agencies, and other participants into one coordinated effort. Chapter 4 outlines the history of this organization and points out the constraints we believe severely limit its effectiveness.

UNDRO would, we believe, be a good base on which to build an effective international disaster relief agency. However, in view of UNDRO's current state of development, it is doubtful whether the international community would be willing at this time to consider assigning greater responsibilities to it. Therefore, as the first step toward developing a fully effective international disaster relief agency, we believe UNDRO should be given the assistance, support, and time necessary to develop its coordination functions.

An independent panel of disaster experts recently studied UNDRO and reported in February 1975 that, to develop its coordination functions, UNDRO needs, among other things, to develop relationships with the independent U.N. agencies and to negotiate agreements with them as to the respective roles and responsibilities of each as well as the types of assistance and resources they will make available in a disaster. The panel similarly recommended that UNDRO seek to develop close working relationships with representatives of major bilateral donors in each developing nation to improve material cooperation and exchange of information, including setting up a data bank of relief supplies stockpiled around the globe by donors.

While the expert panel's report recommended other measures as well (see ch. 4 for full discussion), we endorse the above recommendations as the first and perhaps the most important step toward building UNDRO's coordinating abilities. Developing close working relationships with the U.N. agencies and bilateral donors who provide the majority of actual relief supplies and specialized help (e.g., medical help) is a critical necessity to effective international coordination in disaster relief. These relationships should specify the respective roles and responsibilities each party will play in a disaster.

We believe it is equally important that UNDRO seek to influence potential donors to articulate a positive disaster response policy and to enter into advance understandings with UNDRO as to the kinds of resources and assistance they will

make available under UNDRO's coordination. This will provide a base upon which UNDRO can develop contingency plans to respond to different types of disasters in different areas of the world, employing the different kinds of donor expertise and resources that each type of disaster will require and calling upon those resources located nearest the disaster site.

We believe that if the above relationships and arrangements can be developed over the next several years, they will provide UNDRO with the support and assistance it will need to perform the coordination role assigned it by the U.N. membership. More importantly, however, the real need for the future is to develop an international agency capable of managing and carrying out multiple, large-scale integrated disaster relief efforts utilizing material, financial, and personnel resources committed to it by U.N. agencies, bilateral donors, and others. Developing UNDRO's coordination role should be the immediate goal of the U.N. membership, and this will in turn provide a solid base and takeoff point from which to move toward the greater goal.

CONCLUSIONS

In the absence of an effective mechanism to coordinate and control the international response to the Sahel disaster, each donor independently planned, programmed, and implemented its relief operations with little overall coordination. As could be expected, serious problems developed and the tremendous resources made available by the world community were not used as efficiently as they might have been.

As the following chapters demonstrate, there is an urgent need for the world community to begin to build and support an international disaster relief agency that will ultimately be capable of mounting and carrying out an integrated response to future disasters. We believe that building on existing organizations within the United Nations would be the most feasible road to take for the long term. As the initial step in this direction, however, the United States should lead the United Nations in encouraging all member governments to pledge their support to build on UNDRO and strengthen its relief coordination capabilities.

Disaster response contingency plans should be developed as well as agreements with U.N. agencies which will specify the respective roles and responsibilities of each and the amounts and types of resources they can make available in disasters. Equally important, the United States, as the largest bilateral donor of disaster relief in recent years, should urge and attempt to influence other potential donor

In conclusion, State and AID referred to the ongoing efforts to strengthen UNDR0's relief coordination capacities (see p. 44 for details) and stated that for the United States to go beyond these efforts at the present time would be counterproductive and could be politically inadvisable. They proposed, as an alternative, that the United States (1) take every opportunity to strengthen and support UNDR0 as the world's disaster relief coordinator, both within and outside the U.N. system, and (2) show, by example, its willingness to accept UNDR0 coordination and to be guided by it. Finally, they cited the increasing legislative and executive branch interest and support for developing the bilateral U.S. disaster relief capacity, and stated that capacity must continue to be strengthened. The full text of their comments is included in appendix I.

OUR EVALUATION

We agree with State and AID that international disaster relief needs better coordination. We recognize that some bilateral donors historically have not coordinated their response with others or have not adopted a consistent response policy and that, reasonably, all donors will desire recognition for their contributions and efforts. We equally recognize that recipient nations normally want to maintain management control over external aid. However, it is precisely because of the lack of consistency, good organization, and administrative infrastructure that characterizes the current state of international disaster relief management that we have advanced our proposal, and we are disappointed that State and AID appear to reject any future consideration of our views.

Even with the best of intentions, a multiplicity of national donors in which each manages its own relief program too often just does not provide the most effective and efficient relief for stricken people. So it was in Sahel. In their eagerness to contribute, donors simultaneously shipped thousands of tons of food to Sahel nations without regard to whether the ports and inland transport networks were capable of handling this flow. Once the food was in the ports, the lack of a central system for controlling the flow of inland shipment or for combining and rotating all donor food stocks resulted in deterioration of some donors' food in port storage, while other donors competed for the limited railcar and trucking capacities.

When the food arrived inland, donors made the recipient nations almost totally responsible for distribution. The food was dumped on the recipient nations with little regard

to whether they had the administrative capacities or the resources required to distribute the food. As a result, food distribution was sporadic and uneven and some areas apparently just were not covered adequately. At times this was due to a less-than-maximum effort on the part of the recipient government, but often it was due to a lack of trucking capacity or fuel to handle such massive amounts of food. In this final phase, donors did little monitoring or anything else to assure that their expensive food contributions were having a maximum impact.

The above types of problems are certainly not new to international disasters. While an effective coordinating mechanism would undoubtedly help cut down on some of these problems, we believe that, for the long term, all the disaster relief resources of the international community should be brought together under one central manager--an international disaster relief agency. This agency should respond to all major disasters, especially where massive external inputs of any kind--food, medicines, blankets, etc.--are required. It should be responsible for:

- Assessing damage and what is needed from donors.
- Managing the flow of donor shipments to the recipient country.
- Managing the transportation inland to a landlocked country.
- Monitoring for the donor community and helping the recipient country, as necessary, to internally distribute the relief goods.

The above proposals would not mute the recognition or seriously diminish the role of bilateral donors or humanitarian agencies. Indeed, the humanitarian agencies would continue to contribute and, more importantly, to help distribute relief. Bilateral donors would continue to contribute and ship their relief goods, but they would do so under the direction of the disaster relief agency. Once the goods reached the recipient country, they would come under the direction of the disaster relief agency, which would then control the flow and, if necessary, manage the transportation of the goods to the interior for the mutual benefit of the stricken nation and the donor community.

This management structure need yield no less recognition to donors than do bilateral contributions or contributions made through the United Nations, such as those the Scandinavian nations make or those the United States makes through

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the World Food Program. Indeed, in Sahel, the donors turned at times in their mutual frustration to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization to actually manage such aspects of their operations as contracting for trucks, sponsoring food convoys, and establishing port committees. Central management should yield tangible benefits in effectiveness and efficiency.

Finally, having central management would enable the donors and host nations to better overcome lack of resources or lack of administrative ability on the part of host nations. Too often developing nations just cannot be expected to manage a massive relief program, despite their understandably strong desire to do so. A strong disaster relief agency, backed by the resources of the donor community, can be expected to judiciously assist host countries in that management, yield greater efforts on the part of host governments, and provide additional resources from its pool whenever necessary to fill the gaps. In this way, the disaster relief agency should be able to provide much greater assurance to the international community that its combined resources are reaching the people than has been provided in the past. This element has perhaps been the one most seriously lacking in current management of disaster relief efforts.

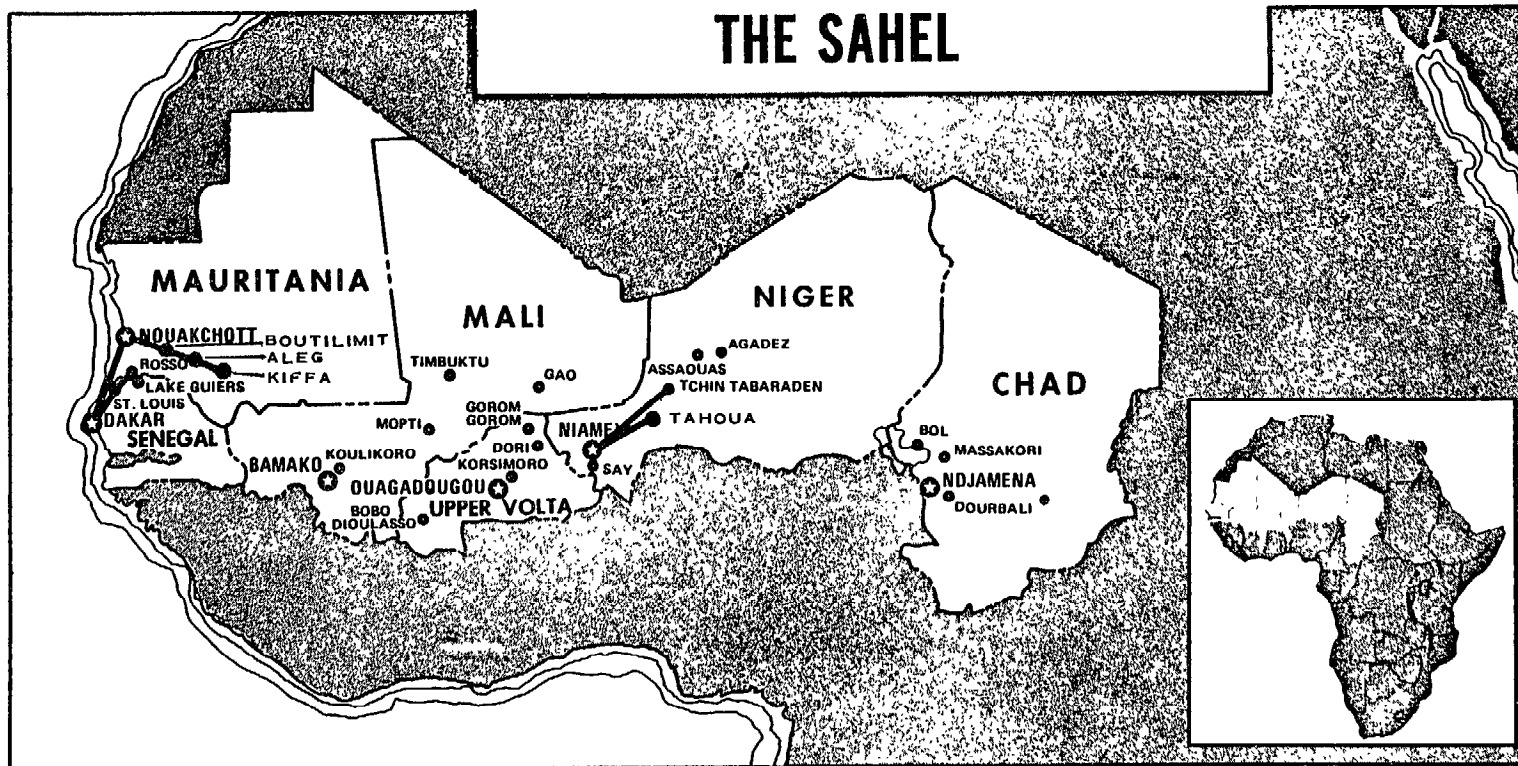
RECOMMENDATIONS

While we believe that the proposal cited above offers the best solution to the problem of disaster relief management for the long term, we recognize that implementing such a program will not be easy. We understand that prolonged and difficult international negotiations will be needed to convince other countries to support a proposal to establish an international disaster relief agency capable of managing and directing a fully integrated and coordinated international response to disaster situations. Accordingly, we are not making formal recommendations on our long-term proposal at this time. For the immediate present we agree with State and AID that the first need is to build UNDR0 into an effective coordinating mechanism; accordingly, we recommend that the Secretary of State lead the United Nations in:

1. Encouraging all member governments to pledge to build on UNDR0 and strengthen its relief coordination capabilities.
2. Developing disaster response contingency plans and developing agreements with U.N. agencies which will specify the respective roles and responsibilities of each as well as the amounts and types of resources they can make available in disasters.

3. Urging potential donor nations to articulate a positive disaster response policy and to enter into advance understandings with UNDRO as to the kinds of resources they will make available under UNDRO's coordination.

THE SAHEL



13

POINTS IN THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM EXAMINED BY GAO

WAR ON HUNGER, AID

BEST DOCUMENT AVAILABLE

CHAPTER 2

THE SAHEL DROUGHT

AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The Sahel region is a belt across Africa some 2,600 miles long from Senegal on the west to Sudan on the east. The region is comprised of six nations--Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad. Together these countries cover some 2 million square miles (equivalent to about 60 percent of the land area of the United States), but more than 50 percent is desert.

Inhabited largely by nomadic herdsmen and subsistence farmers, the Sahel region is one of the poorest in the world. Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad are on the U.N. list of the 25 least-developed nations. Total population was estimated in 1970 at 23.1 million and individual populations were estimated as follows:

--Upper Volta--5.4 million.

--Mali--5 million.

--Niger--4 million.

--Senegal--3.9 million.

--Chad--3.6 million.

--Mauritania--1.2 million

THE DROUGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Life in Sahel is at best a fragile existence, with weather playing the critical role. Annual rainfall varies from about 20 to 40 inches and is concentrated almost exclusively during a 4-month period ending usually in September. The rainy season is the growing season for the grain crops which form a large part of the local diet. Seeds planted in May or June are harvested in late October or early November, provided the rains come.

Beginning in 1968, the rains started to fail. By late 1972 the Sahel region was suffering from the cumulative effects of an expanding drought, and the human and animal inhabitants faced widespread famine. Trees and grasslands were destroyed by overgrazing. Grazing lands became barren and eroded. Lakes, rivers, and wells shriveled and dried

up. Reserves of grain, including seed stocks, were consumed. Thousands of nomads, their livestock destroyed, congregated in cities or refugee camps. Farmers, unable to remain on their land, moved in desperation to the cities and feeding centers.

Livestock losses have been estimated in the millions, and some experts have predicted that it will take years to rebuild the national herds. For the nomads, in particular, these herds were a primary source of food and income, and the drought has changed the way of life for many of them to a sedentary existence.

Drought is not a new phenomenon in the area; it has been customary and will undoubtedly continue to be so. What was new was the extent and severity of the drought. The extent of human suffering it caused may never be fully known because firm data is almost impossible to obtain. However, throughout 1974 the U.S. news media continued to report deaths from the drought.

The rains in 1974 produced fair to good national harvests. The drought appears to be over, and the threat of continued starvation has been averted. External assistance, which started in late 1972, continues even today. The United States still carries on emergency food and nonfood relief programs and short-range recovery and rehabilitation projects. It is also working with Sahelian governments and with other donors in planning for medium- and long-term development of the region.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE DROUGHT

It is difficult to determine exactly when the international community recognized the serious effect of the Sahel drought. In the spring of 1972, the Intergovernmental Committee of the World Food Program (WFP) discussed a proposal of the Director General of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization that the Sahelian nations be given special treatment in emergency food assistance because of the endemic nature of the drought in that region.

In September 1972 the Food and Agriculture Organization early warning system, which was designed to provide information of impending food scarcities resulting from protracted adverse crop conditions, signaled an acute emergency situation developing in large areas of the Sahel due to an exceptionally poor rain fall pattern. By October 1972 the Sahelian governments increased their requests for emergency food, and certain donors, including the United States, began providing such

assistance late in 1972. It was not until March 1973, however, that the six Sahelian governments publicly acknowledged the magnitude of the catastrophe, jointly declared the region a disaster area, and called for international assistance.

World concern for the area focused, quite naturally, on the immediate and urgent problems of famine relief. Donor countries and relief organizations made a wholly understandable effort to rush supplies to the disaster area, even without (1) reliable information as to real requirements or (2) assurances that emergency supplies, once provided, could be handled and distributed to those in need.

Physical and political difficulties impeded the relief effort

Any relief effort in the Sahel faces tremendous physical handicaps. Four of the six countries are landlocked, necessitating delivery of food through other countries' transportation networks and over very long distances. Chad has no rail system at all and, except in Senegal, transportation systems are not adequate to handle the volume of traffic the major relief effort entailed. After the rains begin, many areas of these countries are accessible only by air.

Political aspects also affected the relief effort. Getting six recipient nations and a multitude of donors to agree on how to operate is, at best, difficult. Some donors, notably Russia and China, either did not coordinate their efforts with those of other donors or have only recently begun to do so. The stricken nations themselves are young and financially and administratively weak. Yet they tended to discourage donor coordination and were oftentimes extremely sensitive to any potential criticism or donor offers of management assistance, which they felt would violate their sovereignty. One government, for example, showed considerable sensitivity to criticism. In another country, literally one man, the Minister of Health, was responsible for mobilizing and directing his entire country's participation in the emergency relief effort; yet, this country reportedly refused external offers of management help. These conditions required a good deal of dexterity and an innovative approach on the part of individual donors in their relations with host governments, which at times would rather refuse aid than yield any part of their sovereignty.

Where the assistance came from

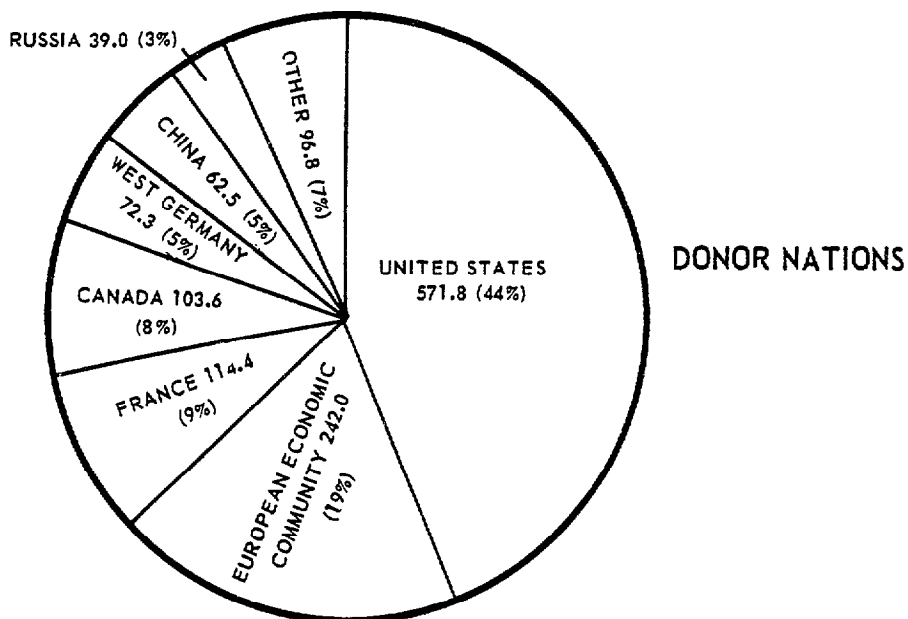
From available data, we estimate that the international community committed about \$500 million in drought relief assistance to the Sahel through March 1975. Within the international community, bilateral donors provided by far the largest share of this assistance. Other participants were U.N. organizations, voluntary agencies, and private organizations and individuals. From November 1972 to March 1975, total known food commitments exceeded 1.3 million metric tons, 1/ enough to fill 13,000 large U.S. railroad hopper cars. The amounts and percents committed by the various donors and provided to the recipient countries are shown in the charts on page 18. The U.S. share amounted to about 44 percent of the worldwide contribution at a cost of approximately \$128 million, including the cost of ocean freight and inland transportation.

Although food constituted the greatest relief requirement, many other forms of assistance were needed. During fiscal years 1973 and 1974, the United States provided about \$30 million in nonfood aid, which included airlifts, trucks, medical supplies and equipment, animal feed, construction of storage facilities, donations to U.N. agencies, technical support, and recovery/rehabilitation projects.

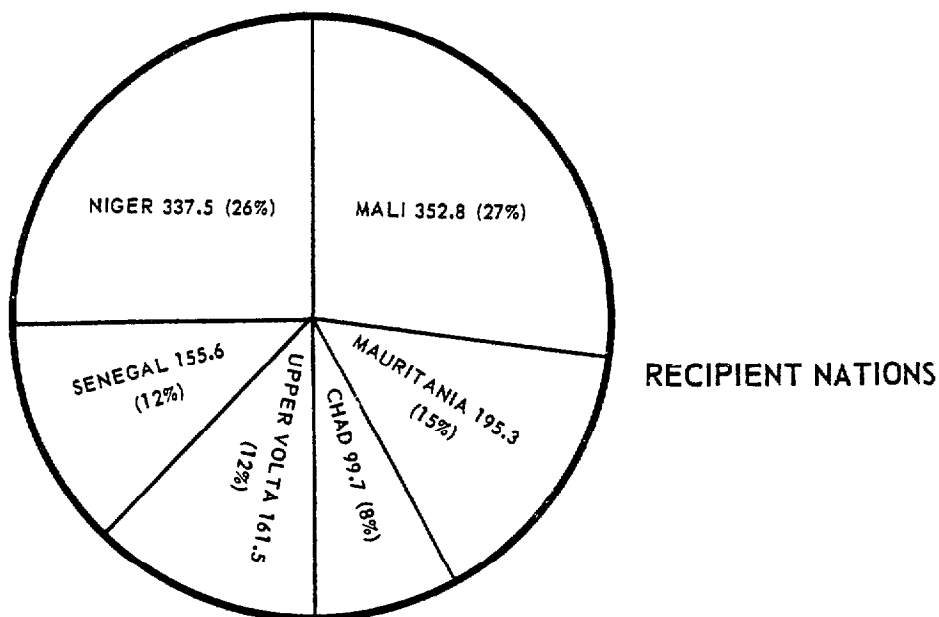
The U.S. Government receives information on much of the nonfood assistance provided by the other donors, but its statistics are not complete, particularly for Russia, the People's Republic of China, and the Arab countries. However, AID has estimated that the value of nonfood assistance from other international donors during 1973 and 1974 totaled at least \$170 million.

1/One metric ton equals 2,204.6 pounds.

**KNOWN FOOD COMMITMENTS TO THE SAHEL
 NOVEMBER 1972 TO MARCH 1975 (note a)
 (THOUSANDS OF METRIC TONS AND PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL TONNAGE)**



TOTAL FOOD AID=1,302.4 metric tons



^{a/} 1975 COMMITMENTS WERE TENTATIVE.

CHAPTER 3

LACK OF EFFECTIVE COORDINATION OF SAHEL

RELIEF EFFORT AND PROBLEMS THAT RESULTED

The United Nations did not move quickly to take the lead in coordinating the response to the Sahel disaster. The U.N. Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO), the mechanism for coordinating natural disaster relief efforts, did not become involved because of its youth, inexperience, and inadequate staff and resources. After several months, some donors recognized the need for an international organization to coordinate their efforts, and in March 1973 the World Food Program (WFP) agreed to serve as an information exchange on shipping matters. However, the fact that the relief effort was already well underway and various other difficulties prevented it from doing this adequately. In May 1973 the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization was designated as the focal point for U.N. activities in the Sahel, and bilateral donors then urged the Organization to coordinate their operations as well. The Organization's initial efforts were ineffective, but over a 2-year period it evolved into a fairly effective coordinating mechanism for several major areas of the relief effort. By then, however, the drought had ended and the donors were shifting their emphasis from emergency food aid to rehabilitation and recovery programs.

For much of the emergency phase of the operation, therefore, the donors had to administer their bilateral programs independently with insufficient, untimely, or unreliable information as to what their counterparts were doing. As a result numerous problems arose, including congestion of ports by relief food shipments, donor competition for inland transportation facilities, spoilage and infestation of donated food stored in inadequate facilities, and inability to determine the quantity of food needed and whether the food was reaching the needy people.

ATTEMPTS AT COORDINATION

WFP

Encouraged and supported by the United States and some other donors, WFP agreed late in March 1973 to assume responsibility for coordinating donor food shipments. WFP realized that the Sahel region's limited port and inland transportation facilities represented the major bottleneck in the food supply line. It therefore concentrated its activities on becoming the focal point for information on emergency food commitments and shipments. However, WFP lacked the necessary

authority to insure an even flow of donor food shipments, and most donors had already made firm plans for shipping the majority of their committed food.

In April 1973 WFP began issuing newsletters on donor food commitments and shipping schedules, together with data indicating port and evacuation capacities, to provide the information necessary for donors to coordinate their food shipments.

In discharging its role, WFP faced several severe constraints.

- It had not previously coordinated bilateral food relief programs.
- It did not establish a separate organization to deal exclusively with the drought situation; instead, it assigned three headquarters staff members the responsibility in addition to their normal duties.
- It had difficulty obtaining information on some bilateral emergency food commitments and shipping plans as well as on commercial food purchases by the recipient governments.
- Its role was only tacitly accepted by some bilateral donors and recipient governments, who preferred to conduct the international relief effort on a strictly bilateral basis.

As a result, WFP's newsletters were not timely, comprehensive, or reliable.

Food and Agriculture Organization

In May 1973, about 7 months after the emergency relief effort began, the U.N. Secretary General designated the Food and Agriculture Organization as the focal point for U.N. emergency relief operations. The Organization established the Office of Sahel Relief Operations (OSRO) as its operating arm for this purpose and set up a trust fund to receive contributions for relief activities.

The Organization's coordination mandate was limited to the U.N. system, and it did not initially accept responsibility for managing or coordinating the entire emergency relief response, most of which came from the bilateral donors. Over a period of time, however, OSRO gradually assumed responsibility for coordinating several aspects of the relief effort.

OSRO was also beset by a number of problems which impaired its effectiveness:

- It had no previous experience in relief operations.
- It was given only limited staff.
- In late 1973, it experienced almost a complete turn-over of staff.
- Until the early part of 1974, it had no effective field organization or communication system.

Like WFP, OSRO failed to obtain cooperation from Russia and the People's Republic of China and to acquire adequate advance information on the amount and arrival of commercial food purchases by certain recipient Sahelian countries. Although most major bilateral donors willingly exchanged information on their food aid plans and were generally responsive to OSRO suggestions, a few were reportedly less willing to cooperate. The Sahel governments themselves were also reluctant to permit any international organization to have authority over management of the relief operation for their countries.

In September 1973 OSRO began issuing weekly reports on donor food commitments and shipments similar to earlier reports prepared by WFP. These reports, however, were not readily usable by the donors because they were not sufficiently detailed. As a result of suggestions made by the donors at a February meeting in Brussels, the report format was revised in April 1974 to present much more comprehensive information. At the Brussels meeting OSRO made a more positive effort to avoid port congestion by distributing tentative shipping schedules--based on commitments, bookings, and expected arrivals--for each recipient country, which enabled donors to identify conflicts in their individual shipping plans. However, the success of this measure was questionable because, although some donors were still in a position to revise or reschedule some food shipments, others had already made firm shipping arrangements and at least one major donor could not agree to renegotiate its shipping contracts.

In August 1974 OSRO prepared a formal, coordinated shipping schedule covering November 1974 to March 1975 and gave it to the bilateral donors. This time OSRO acted before the donors had committed themselves to shipping schedules and, therefore, it was more successful.

OSRO sponsored multidonor mission surveys in the falls of 1973 and 1974 to establish mutual agreement among the

Sahelian governments and the major bilateral donors on needed food amounts. This permitted the donors to program food assistance against commonly accepted standards.

In the summer of 1974, OSRO sponsored several meetings in which it identified problems in the emergency food relief operation and made suggestions to both donors and recipients for resolving them. For example, at a June 1974 meeting in Rome, the donors agreed to set up coordinating committees at each major Sahel port. These committees were to include representatives from the port country, the recipient country, OSRO, WFP, and the donors. The committees were to provide a continuous exchange of information and a mechanism for quick decisions on such questions as alternative methods of transportation and price increases. This would then help to eliminate competition among donors for the use of transportation facilities.

It can be seen, therefore, that, during its involvement in the Sahel disaster response, OSRO did develop mechanisms to help donors program and ship their emergency food aid.

Sahel nations' committee

The affected Sahelian nations established the Interstate Committee for Fight Against the Drought at a meeting in September 1973. Theoretically, this committee was to be responsible for coordinating the Sahel nations' emergency relief efforts and for long-term development of the Sahel region; it was also to work closely with national coordinating committees on both short- and long-term needs. In actuality the committee has done little to provide operational support for emergency assistance. It has, however, served as a focal point for making demands on the donor community for overall support for drought emergency and long-term development needs.

PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM LACK OF EFFECTIVE COORDINATION

Unreliable assessment of needs

In the fall of 1972, donors had to accept the Sahelian countries' evaluations of their needs because an independent assessment was lacking and because most of the donors' in-country staffs were too small to do the necessary research. Since the countries themselves, in many cases, had no good idea of their needs, the donors planned their programs in late 1972 without knowing exactly what the needs were or what other donors were planning to provide.

In many cases countries made the same request to several donors in the hopes that at least one would fill it. Without coordination, there was a good chance that the donors would oversupply some items and not provide others at all.

In 1973 and 1974 the assessment of food needs improved vastly because OSRO organized the Multi-Donor Mission surveys. OSRO, however, had no control over the contributions made, so the chance still existed that donors would oversupply one country and undersupply another. In several instances, such imbalances seemed to occur.

For example, the 1973 Multi-Donor Mission survey had estimated Chad's 1974 food needs at 50,000 metric tons, of which 28,000 tons had already been committed. Several donors then donated large additional amounts of food. As a result, by July 1, 1974, total commitments to Chad exceeded 61,800 tons--far beyond what Chad's inadequate inland transportation system could possibly distribute.

Because of the generosity of the donor community, there appeared to be no serious shortages of food in the Sahel in 1974; however, a serious gap in food deliveries to Niger occurred in early 1974. The 1973 survey had estimated Niger's additional food aid needs at 112,700 metric tons, the largest estimate for any Sahel country. Donor food shipments, however, were slow in arriving. At January and February 1974 meetings, the Food and Agriculture Organization pointed out that only a few thousand tons of food were scheduled for delivery to Niger over the next few months. Since the food already delivered had all been distributed, the Organization appealed to donors to accelerate their deliveries. However, the donors were not able to accelerate them quickly enough. The United States, for example, was unable to significantly increase the volume of its food deliveries until April. In the meantime serious food shortages had developed in Niger relief camps.

The 1973 survey was made in September and October, before the harvest. The needs of Sahel countries were subsequently found to be somewhat higher, because inadequate rains at the end of the crop season caused the harvests to be much smaller than expected in some areas. Individual donors, therefore, had to judge again what the food needs actually were. The United States anticipated that overall needs would rise because the estimates were made before the crops were in. Therefore it based its donations on a higher figure than that originally recommended by the survey team. A representative of another donor, however, told us that the survey estimates did not significantly influence his government's 1974 donation because it believed they overstated the food needs.

The 1974 survey was more successful at estimating food needs because it was not conducted until November 1974, after the harvest. This survey also evaluated existing transport facilities for internal distribution and recommended what additional facilities would be needed for the following year. The survey team was unable to evaluate the need for additional storage facilities or for various agricultural inputs, but it reported on requests received from Sahel governments for these items.

Uncoordinated food shipments

Because neither WFP nor OSRO developed an effective coordinating mechanism for food shipments until late in 1974, shipments of emergency food aid tended to arrive in clusters which overwhelmed the capacities of ports and inland transportation facilities. Donors, therefore, were generally unsuccessful in delivering food so it could be distributed to remote areas before the rainy season--June through September--when floods and deterioration of dirt roads slows down or completely cuts off ground transportation.

Food shipments were slow in the early part of 1973, and only about 171,000 metric tons of the approximately 400,000 tons committed for 1973 arrived by the middle of May. Most of the remainder (about 245,000 tons) arrived during the next 3 months, far exceeding inland transport capacities for evacuating food to stricken areas. Consequently, emergency food supplies accumulated at the ports and certain inland locations.

For example, late in May 1973, it was estimated that it would take 3 months to evacuate food stocks for Mali from the Dakar, Senegal, port. The situation worsened as additional food supplies continued to arrive on an uncoordinated and unscheduled basis and, by July 1973, about 50,000 metric tons were stockpiled at Sahel ports. This quantity increased to more than 70,000 tons by the middle of August and, at the end of September, more than 54,000 tons were still stockpiled.

Thus, much of the 1973 emergency food aid arrived too late to be transported inland in sufficient quantities before the rainy season. When remote areas became inaccessible by ground transportation, donors resorted to airlifting an estimated 20,000 metric tons of critically needed food supplies from the ports and other locations to these areas.

Until the latter part of 1974, most donors delivered their food supplies for Mauritania through the port of Nouakchott, which has limited facilities for offloading cargo. Large vessels cannot approach the wharf, so they

are unloaded into tugs and lighters which transport the food to the dock. We were told this procedure results in food losses of up to 40 percent.

Serious congestion problems also occurred at Nouakchott. Several donor cargo vessels arrived at the same time, and long delays occurred in unloading the food supplies. For example, it took 6 weeks to unload some vessels, and it was not unusual for some donors to wait 3 or 4 weeks for food supplies to be unloaded.

Again in 1974, the major donors working independently attempted to deliver the bulk of the bilateral emergency food supplies before the rainy season. Problems were even greater, however, because food needs were much larger than in 1973 and the donors were trying to get greater quantities of food into the countries. Most of the grain did arrive in the ports just before the start of the rains but in such large amounts that it could not be transported inland in a timely manner.

From November 1973 through October 1974, approximately 767,000 metric tons of food supplies arrived throughout the Sahel region--53 percent (405,000 tons) during April to July. Food arrivals ranged from a monthly low of 26,000 tons in January to 126,000 tons in May. Donated and commercially purchased food that became stockpiled in the ports increased from about 58,000 tons at the end of March to about 200,000 tons by the end of May.

Because of the slow donor shipments and the poor pre-positioning of food stocks by the Sahel governments, sufficient quantities of food did not reach remote areas before the rainy season and the donors again used selective airlifts in four of the six Sahelian countries to move supplies to areas cut off by the rains.

Inefficient inland transportation

No effective coordinating mechanism existed to insure the efficient use of available transportation facilities. Major donors made separate arrangements to transport their food supplies inland from the ports. Each exerted pressure on the recipient governments to have its food evacuated first instead of working together with the other donors to get grain received first moved first or to get grain more likely to spoil distributed before other more durable food supplies.

Some reports indicated that certain freight-forwarding companies in Africa played one donor against the other in an effort to drive up transport prices. At least once during

the first part of 1974, freight forwarders in one country were successful in this regard. To stabilize the price and movement of food supplies, committees comprised of donors and host government personnel were set up in each port in June 1974 and provided what little coordination mechanism existed.

The United States proposed that, for shipments beginning in late 1974, donors arrange and finance the ocean shipment of their donated food to the ports and contribute to the Food and Agriculture Organization trust fund to cover the cost of inland transportation. OSRO would then have the overall responsibility and authority for deciding where and how each donor's food supplies would be transported inland and for making overall contractual arrangements. The proposal was received with some interest, but it was not explored in any depth.

Delays in evacuating food from port areas

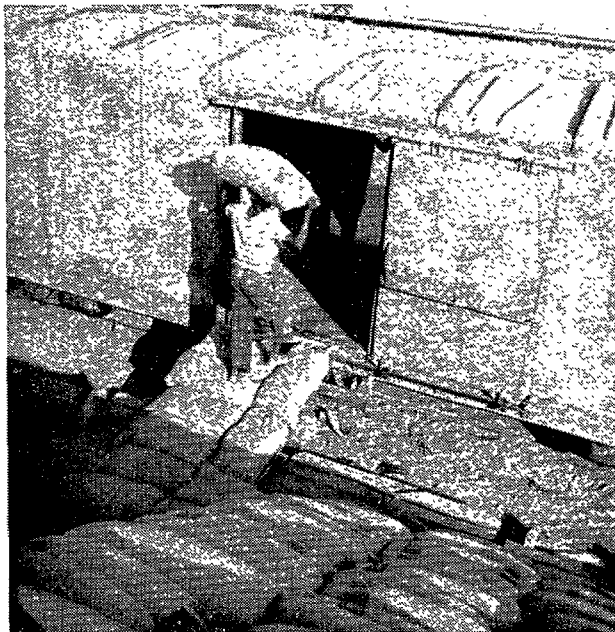
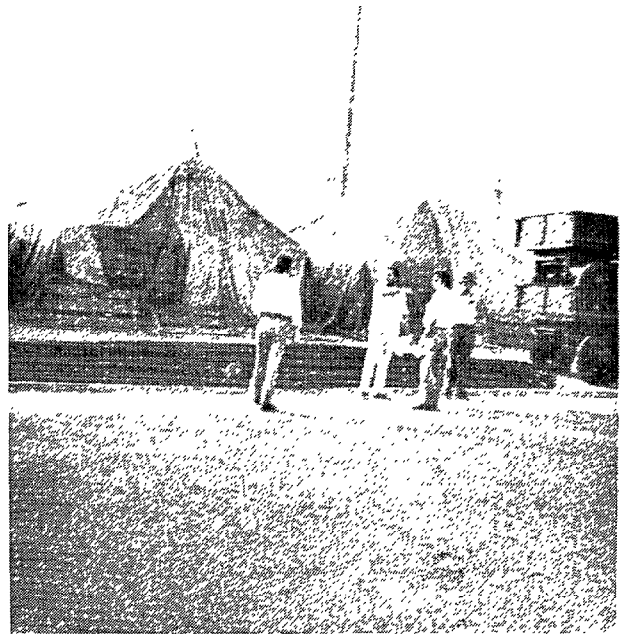
The port of Dakar received more than 32 percent (248,000 metric tons) of all food assistance delivered to the Sahel from November 1973 to October 1974. Dakar is the primary point of entry for emergency food supplies destined for Senegal and Mali, and some donors used it for food shipments destined for Mauritania.

Emergency food supplies destined for Mali were forwarded from Dakar by rail. Starting in 1973, this rail system's capacity was built up until, by 1974, it attained a total evacuation capacity of about 30,000 metric tons a month. (See photos on p. 27.) The railroad was used for transporting emergency aid and other goods throughout the drought emergency, and the Government of Mali each week determined the amount of food and other goods which would be evacuated by rail. The amount of food supplies evacuated varied from month to month, but it rarely exceeded 15,000 tons, or 50 percent of total rail capacity.

From March through May 1974, more than 90,000 metric tons of donated and commercially purchased food arrived in Dakar for Mali, but only about 36,000 tons were evacuated by rail. Consequently, food stockpiled at Dakar for Mali steadily increased from about 9,000 tons in February to about 71,000 tons at the end of May; an additional 8,200 tons of food were scheduled to arrive in early June.

Therefore, OSRO suggested that no further food shipments be made to Dakar for Mali for at least the next 2 months. Major bilateral donors agreed and suspended all further shipments.

**GAO AUDIT TEAM OBSERVING
GRAIN IN DAKAR BEING
LOADED FOR DISTRIBUTION
TO MALI IN NOVEMBER 1974.**



**EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES
BEING LOADED ON RAILWAY
CARS IN DAKAR FOR SHIP-
MENT TO MALI .**

Nevertheless, approximately 21,000 metric tons of additional food supplies arrived in Dakar for Mali from the end of June through October. Most of this was donations and commercial purchases from Russia and China, who are not members of the Food and Agriculture Organization and who chose not to cooperate with WFP or OSRO in exchanging information on planned shipments. The additional deliveries were detrimental to the effort to reduce the pipeline of food awaiting evacuation to Mali, and it took until January 1975 to evacuate the food supplies stockpiled in Dakar.

Emergency food supplies for Mauritania received at Dakar were transported through Senegal either by rail or by road and across the Senegal River (see photo on p. 29) to Rosso in Mauritania, a major storage point. The Senegalese Freight Bureau established the percentage of food to be shipped by rail and by road to Rosso, and it arbitrarily allocated about 70 percent for rail shipment and 30 percent for road shipment.

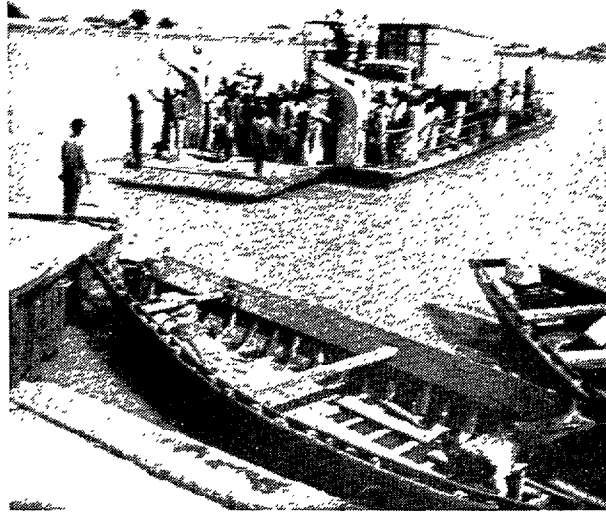
Shipments by road began shortly after the food arrived; those by rail were sometimes delayed for long periods until freight cars became available. For example, a U.S. vessel carrying 4,000 metric tons of sorghum arrived in Dakar on June 8, 1974. The Senegalese Freight Bureau allocated 2,800 tons for shipment by rail and 1,200 tons for shipment by road. After some persuasion, the Bureau agreed to increase the allocation for road shipment by 1,000 tons--apparently because sufficient freight cars were unavailable. The road portion was shipped within 10 days, while the rail shipment took over 6 months--from June to November.

Similar congestion problems and delays in evacuating stockpiled food supplies also occurred at major points used to channel supplies to Chad and Niger.

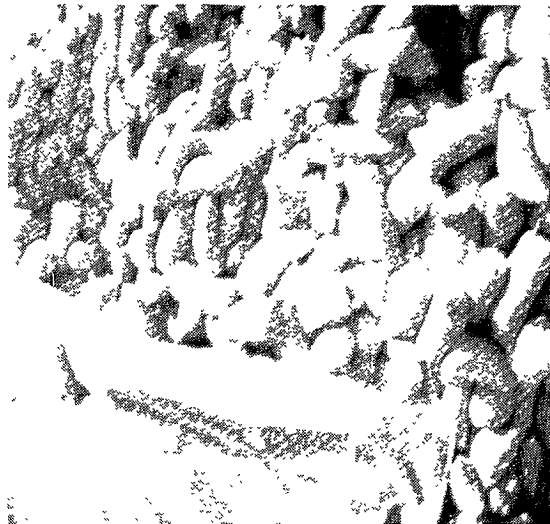
Spoiled and infested food

Throughout the Sahel, food spoiled and became infested primarily because of insufficient warehouse facilities to adequately protect the food during its delay in distribution. (See photos on pp. 30 and 30a.) Records were not maintained, however, which would indicate the magnitude of this problem.

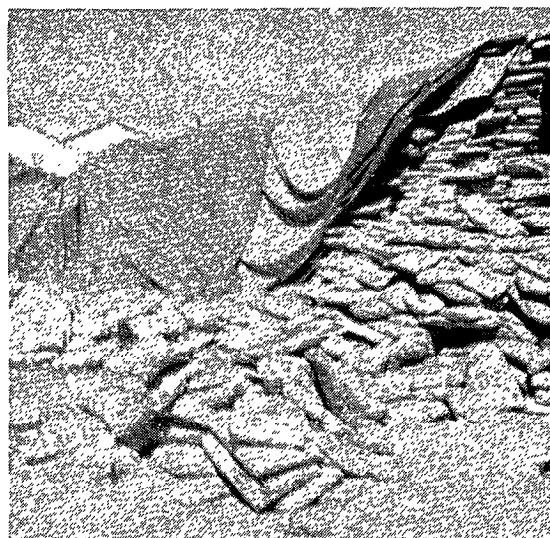
The enormous quantity of food that accumulated at ports and at primary and secondary inland distribution points was stockpiled wherever room existed in and around these areas. Wet grain was stockpiled with dry grain, and newly arrived grain was placed on top of or near infested and spoiled grain.



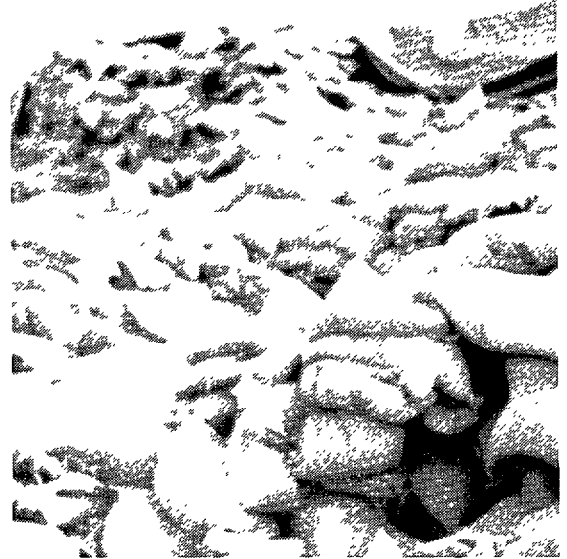
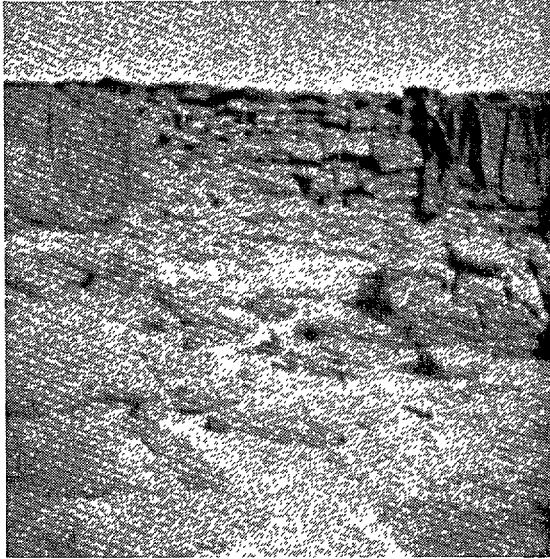
**FERRY ON THE SENEGAL RIVER WHICH MUST
BE USED IN MOVING FOOD SUPPLIES FROM
DAKAR TO MAURITANIA.**



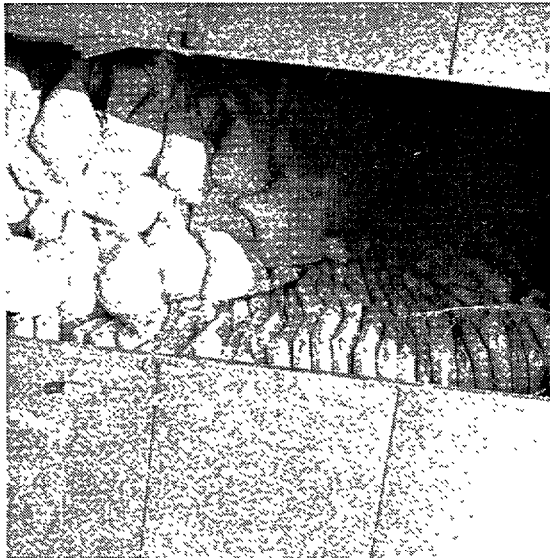
U.S.-DONATED GRAIN STOCKPILED IN THE OPEN AT ROSSO DURING NOVEMBER 1974. NOTE THAT BAGS ARE IMPROPERLY STACKED AND NOT COMPLETELY PROTECTED BY TARPAULINS .



IMPROPERLY STORED BAGS OF A FORTIFIED FOOD CALLED CORN-SOY BLEND IN ROSSO DURING NOVEMBER 1974.



SPOILED CORN IN NOUAKCHOTT IN NOVEMBER 1974.



CORN-SOY MILK DONATED BY THE UNITED STATES WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN STORED IN THIS WAREHOUSE IN ROSSO FOR 3 MONTHS AT THE TIME OF OUR VISIT IN NOVEMBER 1974.

Moreover, failure to give priority to distributing food supplies more susceptible to spoilage contributed to the deterioration of these scarce resources. For example, food shipped to Dakar for Mali and Mauritania was not evacuated on a first-in-first-out basis. Instead, in each period, segments of different food shipments which arrived over various periods of time were evacuated. Consequently, it was not uncommon for some grain to remain stockpiled in the Dakar port for 6 months or more. On November 2, 1974, for example, 22,934 metric tons of food were stockpiled in Dakar awaiting evacuation to Mali; 46 percent of this food had been stockpiled at the port for 4 months or more. As the following table shows, this included portions of grain shipments that had arrived as early as April 1974.

Stockpiled Food Supplies at Dakar Port
Awaiting Evacuation to Mali and Mauritania
as of November 2, 1974

For Mali

<u>Donor</u>	<u>Date of ship- ment's arrival at Dakar</u>	<u>Total amount of shipment</u>	<u>Portion of shipment still in port on November 2, 1974</u>
(metric tons)			
EEC (note a)	April 17	2,700	2,305
Purchase	April 26	15,000	4,025
Purchase	May 10	14,000	1,515
U.S.	May 18	4,500	717
Purchase	June 23	2,000	2,000
Purchase	August 22	5,000	2,720
China	September 2	3,035	1,565
Purchase	October 1	5,000	3,087
China	October 1	5,000	<u>5,000</u>
Total			<u>22,934</u>

For Mauritania

U.S.	June 8	4,000	601
U.S.	August 18	1,542	1,063
WFP	August 29	4,276	967
U.S.	September 10	1,892	1,061
WFP	September 28	5,650	<u>3,704</u>
Total			<u>7,396</u>

a/EEC = European Economic Community.

At interior locations within Mauritania and Niger, we noted that the most recently arrived food was usually the first distributed. Food supplies at these locations were stockpiled in warehouses and open storage areas which, in effect, had only one entry/exit point. Therefore, the oldest food remained stored at the back while the newly arrived food was stored at the front and distributed first.

Some of the food awaiting evacuation spoiled and was unfit for human and, in some cases, animal consumption. We do not know how much of the total food provided by the international community spoiled, but we observed hundreds of tons of spoiled food during our visit to one storage location on November 18, 1974. Spoiled food included grain as well as fortified foods provided by the United States and other donors. A large proportion of the highly perishable instant corn-soy milk provided by the United States through the U.N. Children's Fund for preschool children and pregnant and lactating women was not being distributed promptly; in many instances it was stockpiled in open storage or in other unsuitable locations and was not adequately protected.

While it may be that only a small portion of the emergency food was lost through spoilage, a large portion of the grain was infested by insects which ate the nutrient part of the food, leaving little for human consumption. In September 1974, just before our visit, an inspection of grain in the ports of Dakar, Abidjan, and Cotonou revealed that all the grain tested was infested to some degree. (See photo on p. 33.) The inspection report did not mention the quantity of grain involved, but it recommended an extensive fumigation program.

In January 1975, Agency for International Development officials estimated that thousands of tons of donated grain in Niger, Mali, and Mauritania were infested, but the full extent was not known. Some U.S. and other donors' grain had been fumigated, and we were told that AID was investigating the need for fumigating other U.S. grain and was encouraging other donors to perform similar investigations.

In Mali, the increasing concern of OSRO, AID, and the Mali Government over the deterioration of relief food stocks led OSRO to hire a consultant early in 1975 to survey them. The consultant's report, dated in April, states that of 64,000 metric tons surveyed in Mali, 15,000 tons were unfit for human consumption and 34,000 tons required immediate fumigation and restacking to prevent them from becoming unfit. AID later advised us that, with technical assistance from OSRO, a fumigation and restacking program was carried out.



INFESTED GRAIN IN DAKAR IN NOVEMBER 1974.

Inefficient food distribution

Donor actions for insuring the effective use of donated foods varied. The United States, for example, required recipient governments to submit periodic reports on the quantity of food distributed and the number of people who benefited from it. It also required its missions in recipient countries to monitor the distribution program. Other donors required no reporting on distribution of their donated food because they felt this was entirely the responsibility of the recipient governments. In Sahel, however, most of the recipient governments did not maintain adequate records documenting the ultimate use of the food they received from the donors.

Most donors who did concern themselves with monitoring the distribution of their donated food were not able to monitor systematically because their incountry staffs were too small. Since neither WFP nor OSRO monitored distribution, the international community as a whole had little assurance that its donated food was being distributed efficiently and effectively or that it reached all those in need.

Although it will never be possible to determine exactly how many people died because donated food did not reach them, a number of instances have been reported in which food was not reaching all those in need.

From its nutritional survey in 1973, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Center for Disease Control estimated that up to 100,000 Sahelians may have died from famine.

The Center for Disease Control, as part of its 1974 nutritional survey, visited numerous villages in Upper Volta, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, and Niger and reported that several villages in three of the five countries had received little or no food supplies for long periods of time. In certain instances, this was attributed to the lack of an efficient distribution system since food was reaching certain villages but not others in the same region.

In a region in Chad, for example, the Center visited 21 villages between May and July 1974 and noted that 9 villages had received some food supplies within 4 months before its visit, 2 had received some food supplies from 4 to 6 months before its visit, and the remaining 10 villages had never received any food supplies. According to the Center's report, many of these villages had adequate food reserves for about 1 week, but others lacked any food reserves, indicating the gravity of the situation.

The UNICEF emergency maternal/child feeding program is a good illustration of how donors were operating with no real knowledge of how much of their food was reaching the people of the Sahel. At the request of the Sahel governments, UNICEF initiated this program in early 1973 to provide a fortified food--instant corn-soy milk--to preschool children and pregnant and lactating women to meet their needs for extra nutrition. AID supported UNICEF by donating 1,175 metric tons of instant corn-soy milk in 1973 and 9,037 tons in 1974.

As late as October 1974, UNICEF reported that it had not yet received detailed reports from at least three Sahel governments on distribution and final use of the corn-soy milk. However, reports submitted by UNICEF field offices on their limited inspection trips and their knowledge of distribution indicate that the program encountered serious problems throughout 1973 and most of 1974.

The most serious and widespread problem reported was the failure of Sahel governments to provide sufficient trucking and/or fuel to get the instant corn-soy milk to the villages.

This resulted in UNICEF having to provide funds, fuel, or trucks for distribution. For example, UNICEF field officials visiting one intermediate distribution center in Senegal in May 1974 found that none of the 400 sacks (each weighing 50 lbs.) of corn-soy milk which had arrived in November 1973 had been distributed to surrounding villages due to a lack of either trucks or fuel. At another intermediate distribution point, they found 782 of 1,000 sacks received in late 1973 were still in stock for the same reasons. This lack of trucking and apparent lack of Senegalese interest in moving the instant corn-soy milk (some 1,600 bags had already spoiled in improper storage in Dakar) ultimately resulted in UNICEF financing and actually distributing all 500 metric tons of the 1974 shipments of the product on its own.

In the case of Niger, UNICEF reported that it had agreed to pay the fuel costs of shipment to final distribution points but the government was unable to provide the needed vehicles. UNICEF estimated that only about 50 percent of the target population had received the intended daily instant corn-soy milk ration through late 1974.

The next most common problem was inability to restrict distribution of instant corn-soy milk to the infants and mothers for whom it was intended. For example, a UNICEF report stated that, in one Senegal village, 400 bags of the product had been distributed to 2,800 infants, 350 pregnant or lactating women, and 3,600 "other persons." The report concluded that evidently more than 50 percent of the product was consumed by adults. It noted that in a communal society what belongs to one is shared with one's family and relatives; therefore, any attempt by UNICEF to designate target groups for the product would be futile. Similar problems were encountered in Mali, where the drought minister wrote UNICEF that it was not possible to restrict distribution to the target groups.

In addition, local officials often were not instructed in the proper way to prepare the instant corn-soy milk for consumption or in the proper ration size. Warnings were not given about perishability, and in some cases local officials saved the corn-soy milk until it was "really needed," with the result that it deteriorated and became unfit for human consumption.

By October 1974, as a result of these types of problems, UNICEF concluded that the Sahel governments were unable to absorb more instant corn-soy milk and took action to sharply curtail the maternal/child feeding program.

A U.N. Under Secretary General inspected refugee centers in Mali and Niger in March 1974 and reported that "* * * it would not be inaccurate to say that the situation of the entire population north of the 14th parallel is critical." He found that conditions in Niger were much more critical than those in Mali. During his visit to the Tchín Tabaraden relief center in Niger, he found that poverty among the 15,000 nomads was overwhelming and some diseases had reached the epidemic stage. The children and old people were the most severely stricken, and their graves encircled the center. He blamed this serious situation on the slowness of the donors' grain arrivals.

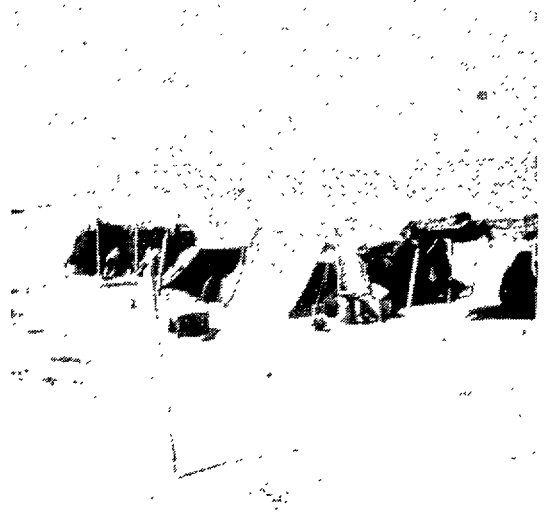
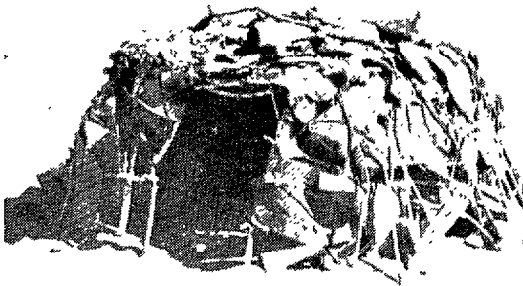
A U.N. representative who had accompanied the U.N. team on the above mission told us in December 1974 that the nutritional situation in Niger had improved but there were still some hungry people in the remote nomadic areas. We visited Tchín Tabaraden in December 1974. The refugee camp had been disbanded and only about 200 refugees remained in the area. (See photos on p. 37.) During our visits to this and other interior locations in Mauritania and Niger, we observed that, although some individuals were sick and apparently undernourished, adequate quantities of food supplies appeared to be available. (See photos on p. 38.)

Sale of donated food supplies

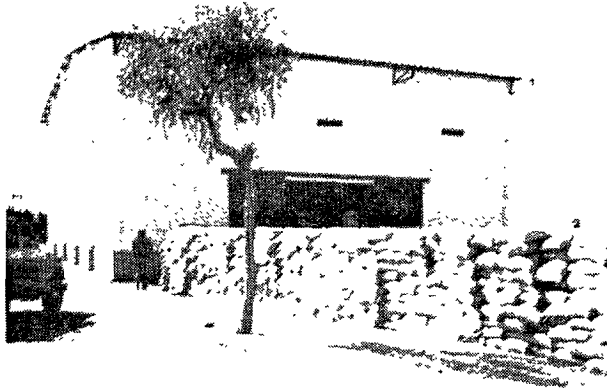
Some Sahel governments sold a large portion of the donated food. It is unclear, however, whether this had any adverse impact on the impoverished populace's ability to obtain sufficient quantities of free food supplies.

Although the United States, for example, intended most of its donated emergency food supplies to be distributed without charge, the Sahelian governments were authorized to sell the portion not required for free distribution to help finance internal distribution costs and other mutually agreed upon drought recovery and rehabilitation projects. The United States, however, had no assurance that the needs of people unable to buy grain were filled before any grain was sold. In Niger, for example, AID internal auditors reported in December 1973 that they had visited a refugee camp of 100 people near Agadez and were informed that only one bag of sorghum (weighing about 100 lbs.) had been distributed in October 1973 for the entire camp. At the same time, all the other centers in Niger they visited were selling sorghum.

We learned that Mauritania sold about 60 percent of its U.S.-donated emergency food supplies and Niger--which received the largest share of U.S.-donated food--sold about 75 to 90 percent. Beginning October 1, 1974, the Government of



**NOMAD DWELLINGS IN TCHIN TABARADEN, NIGER, IN
DECEMBER 1974.**



U.S. AND CANADIAN SORGHUM STOCKPILED IN TCHIN TABARADEN, NIGER, IN DECEMBER 1974.



STOCKPILE OF GRAIN DONATED BY THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER DONORS AT AMEG, MAURITANIA, IN NOVEMBER 1974.

Niger stopped the free distribution of all U.S.-donated commodities except for fortified foods provided through UNICEF. Since then, except in very minor instances, these commodities have been sold. On the other hand, we learned that all the U.S.-donated food supplies were distributed without charge in Senegal, the country least affected by the drought.

Policies and procedures followed by the other major donors relative to the sale or free distribution of donated food supplies varied. One donor stipulated that most of its food aid be distributed free of charge; another donor insisted its food aid be sold; and a third left this decision up to each recipient Sahelian government.

CHAPTER 4

U.N. DISASTER RELIEF OFFICE

AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Even before world attention focused on the Sahel, recognition of the growing need for international cooperation in responding to disasters led the nations of the world to recommend that a permanent office in the United Nations serve as an international focal point for disaster relief. This chapter analyzes UNDRO, its responsibilities and functions, its limited role in recent disasters, and current U.N. efforts to strengthen it. The chapter also discusses those critical elements which this office will still lack after being strengthened and which are, in our view, crucial to developing a truly effective international disaster relief agency.

ORGANIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

U.N. Resolution 2816 led to the establishment of UNDRO in March 1972 to (1) mobilize and coordinate international relief in actual disasters and (2) promote predisaster planning and preparedness. The key provisions of Resolution 2816 describe the specific responsibilities assigned to UNDRO and how it is expected to interface with the rest of the international community.

The resolution called upon the U.N. Secretary General to appoint a disaster relief coordinator, who would report directly to the Secretary General and who would be authorized, on his behalf, to:

- Establish and maintain the closest cooperation with all organizations concerned and to make all feasible advance arrangements to insure the most effective assistance.
- Mobilize, direct, and coordinate the relief activities of the various U.N. organizations in response to a request for disaster assistance from a stricken nation.
- Coordinate U.N. assistance with assistance given by intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.
- Receive, on behalf of the Secretary General, contributions offered to him for disaster relief assistance to be carried out by U.N. organizations for particular emergency situations.

- Help the government of the stricken country to assess its relief and other needs and to evaluate the priority of those needs, to disseminate that information to prospective donors and others concerned, and to serve as a clearinghouse for assistance extended or planned by all sources of external aid.
- Promote the study, prevention, control, and prediction of natural disasters.
- Help advise governments on predisaster planning in association with relevant voluntary organizations.
- Acquire and disseminate information on planning and coordinating disaster relief, including the improvement and establishment of stockpiles in disaster-prone areas, and to prepare suggestions on the most effective use of available resources.

Finally, the resolution recommended that UNDRO maintain contact with governments and U.N. agencies concerning (1) aid available in emergency situations, such as food supplies, medicines, personnel, transportation, and communications and (2) advice given to countries on predisaster planning and preparedness.

The resolution invited potential recipient governments to (1) establish disaster contingency plans with appropriate assistance from UNDRO, (2) appoint a single national disaster relief coordinator to facilitate the receipt of international aid in times of emergency, (3) establish stockpiles of emergency supplies, such as tents, blankets, medicines, and non-perishable foodstuffs, (4) arrange for training of administrative and relief personnel, (5) consider appropriate legislative or other measures to facilitate the receipt of aid, including measures granting overflight and landing rights and necessary privileges and immunities for relief units, and (6) improve their national disaster warning systems.

The resolution invited potential donor nations to (1) respond promptly to any call by the Secretary General or, on his behalf, by UNDRO, (2) continue offering, on a wider basis, emergency assistance in disaster situations, and (3) inform UNDRO in advance about the facilities and services they might be in a position to provide immediately, including, where possible, relief units, logistical support, and means of effective communications.

These provisions show that, as presently constituted, UNDRO's primary role in a disaster is to evaluate the relief needs of stricken nations and to generate and coordinate

a donor response by keeping donors continuously informed as to what these needs are and what each donor is contributing.

The resolution does give UNDRO direct authority to manage contributions made available to it for specific disasters and, perhaps to a lesser extent, to direct the activities of such independent U.N. agencies as the U.N. Children's Fund and the World Health Organization in a disaster. However, these U.N. inputs constitute a relatively small portion of the total contribution in a disaster. Thus, the bilateral donors who provide the majority of relief supplies and finances and international and private voluntary agencies will continue to plan what their contributions will be in a disaster and, essentially, to carry out and manage their own relief programs from beginning to end.

In keeping with the above concepts, UNDRO has been organized as a small office in the U.N. system with no resource base--disaster relief supplies, operational funding, etc.--of its own. Although the United Nations has approved an expansion of UNDRO's staff to a total of 41 members, as of late 1974 it consisted of 6 professionals, including the disaster relief coordinator and 5 general service personnel. The professionals are divided among the executive office and the prevention and planning and relief coordination sections.

To carry out its responsibilities, UNDRO has made arrangements for the U.N. Development Program's resident representatives to act as UNDRO's "eyes and ears" in the disaster-prone developing nations, both in predisaster and actual disaster situations. These representatives are located in some 90 developing nations and are the senior U.N. representatives or "ambassadors." They have been assigned responsibility for working out predisaster cooperative arrangements with host governments and with other U.N. agencies in country and for establishing liaison with embassies of the various bilateral donors and with voluntary agencies in the developing nations.

UNDRO has also been seeking to establish working arrangements with the independent U.N. agencies so it can draw on their expertise (e.g., that of the World Health Organization in medicine and of the World Food Program and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization in food supplies), staff, procurement, and other capabilities. By working through the U.N. Development Program and the other U.N. agencies in this manner, UNDRO would develop "arms and legs" for use when a disaster strikes.

LIMITED ROLE IN RECENT DISASTERS

In his 1973 and 1974 annual reports and in various statements to the United Nations, the disaster relief coordinator has repeatedly pointed out that lack of adequate resources has prevented UNDR0 from effectively discharging its responsibilities. The small UNDR0 staff has been a limiting factor, particularly during simultaneous multiple disasters. Lack of travel funds has been another; UNDR0 was allocated only \$27,000 for 1974 and 1975. The coordinator told us that this sum was grossly inadequate for UNDR0's needs; as a result, UNDR0 had to delay field visits to disaster-stricken areas. He also stated that, on numerous occasions, UNDR0 has had to seek free transportation for its staff members on a space-available basis from international air carriers, with only limited success.

Notwithstanding these and other limitations, UNDR0 has been trying to coordinate disaster relief. The coordinator's annual report of June 1974 and statements before the U.N. Economic and Social Council in July 1974 described some of UNDR0's activities in recent disasters. The coordinator noted that recipient governments often request UNDR0 assistance in coordinating relief action, particularly for international relief. He cited the Pakistan floods of 1973, stating that the Government of Pakistan had requested UNDR0 to mobilize international assistance. A senior UNDR0 officer went immediately to Pakistan to help out in local coordination and in assessing emergency relief requirements.

During the Ethiopian drought of 1973, an UNDR0 representative went to Ethiopia twice to help the government establish a central relief coordination office and to further assess the situation. As needs were identified, this information was disseminated to donors, special relief projects were developed by U.N. agencies, and the Food and Agriculture Organization agreed to monitor large-scale pledges, shipments, and deliveries. At UNDR0's request, donors made available sufficient funds for UNICEF to purchase 25 four-wheel-drive trucks. The British Government made available 20 more of these trucks, on the condition that UNDR0 fund the airlift. The coordinator stated that, within 10 days after his request, donors had pledged the necessary funds and the airlift had been scheduled to begin within 1 week.

Thus, UNDR0 has been performing at least some of the functions necessary to insure a prompt and effective response to a major disaster.

EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN UNDRO

Late in 1974, the United States and 29 other countries sponsored Resolution 3243 calling upon the U.N. Secretary General to provide sufficient staff, equipment, and facilities to strengthen UNDRO's ability to efficiently and effectively mobilize and coordinate international disaster relief.

The resolution was passed on November 29, 1974. To implement it, the coordinator convened a panel of three disaster relief managers ^{1/} who had extensive experience on a national level to advise him on strengthening relief coordination capabilities. The panel presented its report and recommendations to the coordinator in February 1975.

Within this same timeframe, some bilateral donors expressed a strong interest in strengthening UNDRO's pre-disaster planning and prevention functions. Their desire to contribute funds for this purpose led the UNDRO staff to develop appropriate proposals.

By March 1975, both the coordinator and U.N. Headquarters had accepted the panel's report and the staff proposals, as discussed below, and UNDRO is now authorized to implement them.

Relief coordination proposals

For UNDRO, the panel recommends:

- Greatly increased staffing; latest indications are that the staff will increase to a total of 41 members, including about 23 professionals.
- Major increases in communications equipment, including mobile transceivers to use in communicating from disaster sites and a coordination center in Geneva for housing that equipment, archives, a data bank, and other requirements.
- Negotiation of written working arrangements with U.N. agencies to institutionalize present informal understandings of (1) the roles and responsibilities of each in a disaster and (2) the assistance these

^{1/}The heads of civil defense for the Government of the Philippines and of the AID Foreign Disaster Relief Office and the former head of the French Government's disaster relief organization.

agencies will provide in procurement, transportation, and special staff secondments.

- Establishment and maintenance of close working relationships with governments and others who work in disaster relief to improve material cooperation and exchange of information. (For example, UNDRO should maintain a data bank on relief supplies stockpiled around the globe by donors and voluntary agencies.)
- Special orientation and training in disaster management for U.N. Development Program resident representatives and their staffs. This should include preparing detailed field handbooks.
- Field reinforcement of UNDRO representation in a major disaster situation with experts and experienced personnel from organizations in each geographic area of the world.
- Adequate travel funds and a blanket exemption from U.N. financial rules which, among other things, require U.N. approval from Geneva of contract proposals of \$20,000 or more.
- Development of the ability to distribute situation reports in a disaster and after-action reports and a systematic evaluation procedure to review and analyze "lessons learned."
- Consideration of establishing an advisory committee within the United Nations, composed of representatives of donor and recipient governments, to advise it on problems and matters of a substantive or broad policy nature.

Predisaster planning proposals

The UNDRO staff's proposal paper considers predisaster planning as encompassing disaster prevention and predisaster preparedness. It notes, however, that these fields have not been defined but are new areas in which the amount of activity will be determined by the political wishes of member nations. Essentially, UNDRO proposes to:

- Advise governments on disaster prevention and preparedness, including supporting experts and technical cooperation projects for such purposes as establishing national disaster contingency plans and establishing stockpiles of emergency supplies.

- Initiate projects to promote the study, prevention, control, and prediction of natural disasters.
- Prepare periodic reports on technological and other developments.
- Hold seminars and develop a fellowship program on disaster prevention and preparedness for disaster-prone nations.

As these proposals show, UNDRO's work in these fields will be carried out mostly by consultants and experts. The paper notes that such work is going on but only to a limited extent, due primarily to a lack of resources. One severe limitation has been a lack of staff. Another has been the lack of funds, and the paper notes that development of the technical assistance program will depend on (1) the developing nations' increasing their awareness of UNDRO's role-- which hopefully might result in more projects being financed by the United Nations Development Program and (2) voluntary contributions.

HOW TO BUILD ON UNDRO

The establishment of UNDRO is, in our view, a step by the international community toward recognizing its responsibility for collective action to minimize human suffering and losses caused by disasters. Current U.N. efforts to provide additional resources for UNDRO and to strengthen its relationships with the world community, particularly with U.N. agencies, both reflect the current limitations of UNDRO and recognize the need for strengthening the international fabric for disaster relief.

These efforts are, however, just a start, and our case study of the Sahel relief effort clearly shows the need for an effective international disaster relief agency fully capable of mounting and carrying out large-scale integrated disaster relief operations. To develop UNDRO into such an organization, it will be necessary to build on it and to give it the following responsibilities, authority, and resources.

Assign total responsibility

We believe that UNDRO needs to be strengthened so that ultimately it will be able to take full responsibility for mounting and carrying out relief efforts. This will place it in an operational and managerial role, in contrast to its present coordination, or catalyst, role. Thus, UNDRO will have to be assigned those responsibilities set forth

in chapter 1, including independently assessing relief needs of stricken nations; launching worldwide appeals for relief supplies; coordinating resources committed by donors; scheduling or arranging for ocean or air transportation and for inland transportation to landlocked nations where necessary; and monitoring and, as necessary, assisting stricken nations in the internal distribution of relief supplies.

Implicit in such responsibilities is the responsibility of UNDRO to respond to all disasters. The present and somewhat confused distribution of responsibility in this area within the United Nations needs to be clarified. Each U.N. agency should understand in advance what its role is to be in all situations; i.e., medical disasters, famines, and refugee problems. These agencies should also clearly understand their continuing role in responding to long-term disasters like the Sahel drought.

Currently, there is some question as to whether UNDRO or other U.N. agencies should respond to Sahel-type disasters. For example, we discussed UNDRO's response to future such situations with the disaster relief coordinator and his top staff. They stated that UNDRO has authority under its charter to immediately respond to any natural disaster at the host government's request and that it would respond to a Sahel-type disaster if the Secretary General designated it as the U.N. focal point. However, they distinguished between short-term aid (such as after an earthquake) and long-term aid (as in Sahel), and they indicated that the Food and Agriculture Organization or WFP should handle long-term disasters. They further stated that, if other U.N. agencies failed to respond, UNDRO would undoubtedly step in but that the length and extent of UNDRO involvement has not been defined and would be determined by the particular disaster.

Authorize management authority

UNDRO presently has no authority to direct or manage the overall relief effort in a disaster. U.N. member nations have not given it authority to direct their bilateral efforts, and it still has little actual authority over U.N. agencies. It is working, however, toward agreements with the agencies in this area.

To build UNDRO into an effective disaster relief agency, the U.N. member nations will have to formally give it the authority to direct their individual and collective efforts, together with those of the U.N. agencies, as part of one overall international relief effort. Similar authority should also be sought from international voluntary agencies

and others. As the experience of Sahel shows, a large and complex program like a major relief effort must have a top manager. Letting bilateral and other donors do their own managing and trying to keep them coordinated just will not work.

Commit donor resources

Currently, U.N. member nations have given UNDRO virtually no resource base to draw on when a disaster strikes. This is, of course, in keeping with the not yet fully realized concept of UNDRO as a focal point for coordinating the relief efforts of others.

The recent U.N. resolution and subsequent studies on strengthening UNDRO will result in additional resources, including increased staff and travel funds. However, UNDRO must rely on voluntary contributions for these increases. The experts' panel study recommended that UNDRO negotiate written arrangements with independent U.N. agencies specifying the various types of relief supplies and assistance these agencies will make available in a disaster. A top UNDRO official informed us in March 1975 that UNDRO had exchanged letters with the World Health Organization in this regard. He said that UNDRO hoped to reach an agreement with WFP in the near future but that reaching similar agreements with other U.N. agencies will probably take time.

UNDRO has also been able to draw contributions from donors for use in specific disasters. The coordinator reported that, through January 1975, donors had channeled more than \$25 million through UNDRO. In March 1975, a top official told us that UNDRO had a residual balance of only about \$50 thousand that had been freed for its use in any disaster. He said he felt that the next step in UNDRO's evolution would be for some government to act as its guarantor for specific amounts to meet operational needs.

Thus, although UNDRO has demonstrated the capability to use substantial funds for disaster relief, it still has virtually no standing resources. Instead it must wait until a disaster strikes and then solicit donor contributions for the stricken nation. Donors may or may not respond adequately or promptly as the Food and Agriculture Organization learned when it requested contributions to its trust fund. Donors also may or may not channel their relief contributions through UNDRO, resulting again in the possibility of multiple disaster relief managers.

To build UNDRO into an effective international disaster relief agency, the world community will have to provide it with the resources necessary to fulfill that expanded role. Among other things, UNDRO must have immediate access to medicines, food, shelter items (tents, blankets, clothing, etc.), finances, staff and technical expertise, and transport resources (boats, aircraft, trucks, etc.). Traditional bilateral donors (and other nondonor governments) possess these resources in great quantities and should be called upon to formally commit them to UNDRO and to immediately place them at UNDRO's disposal.

For example, the experts' panel report notes that a number of governments and private organizations have established stockpiles of relief supplies at various locations around the globe. Written agreements with these governments and organizations committing these resources to UNDRO on either a reimbursable or nonreimbursable basis would insure that UNDRO could immediately selectively call on these resources to speed relief where needed.

We believe that the United States, as the world's largest donor to disaster relief in recent years, will be in a good position to influence other nations toward these ends and that it should take the lead in advancing these proposals.

Strengthen predisaster planning

UNDRO will have to rely on donations to build itself up at least through 1977, at which time the funding method will be reviewed. UNDRO will also have to rely on the U.N. Development Program and on voluntary contributions to fund the wide range of potential technical assistance activities which it has identified in the preparedness and prevention areas.

In view of the funding situation, we believe UNDRO should first study these areas to identify highest priority activities and then emphasize those activities initially. To do otherwise could mean foregoing high-priority activities in one area in favor of lower priority activities in another, with loss of continuity in high-priority programs if sufficient funding is not available for a broad range of activities. However, once UNDRO has identified the full range of activities which should be undertaken and has quantified resource requirements not available to it to advance international predisaster planning, it should identify needs and requirements which might be available from other nations expert in this area. The United States should, if called upon, provide personnel or in other ways assist UNDRO in its preparedness endeavors.

CHAPTER 5

SCOPE OF REVIEW

We made a critical analysis of the worldwide response to the Sahel drought. We reviewed the manner in which most major donors provided and managed their relief programs and emphasized how these programs were coordinated by various U.N. agencies and bilateral donors.

We did our major work onsite in Sahel in November and December 1974. We observed port conditions for the relief effort in Dakar, Senegal, and in Nouakchott, Mauritania, and traced relief food through the distribution chain for Mauritania and Niger. This included observing the actual distribution to the people. We discussed the relief effort with representatives of several major donors, officials of U.N. agencies, local and national officials of the afflicted Sahel governments, and others. (See map showing locations visited by our audit team on p. 13.)

Work was also undertaken at the U.N. Disaster Relief Office and the League of International Red Cross Societies in Geneva, Switzerland; the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, Italy; and the Department of State and the Agency for International Development in Washington, D.C. In addition, we talked with representatives of the European Economic Community and the national governments of Canada, Germany, and France.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20523

Auditor General

29 JAN 1976

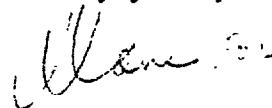
Mr. J. K. Fasick
Director
International Division
U.S. General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fasick:

Attached are comments of the Department of State and the Agency for International Development regarding the General Accounting Office draft report "Need to Build an International Disaster Relief Agency." We apologize for the time required to prepare and coordinate the comments, but believe it important that these Agencies' opinions be fully developed on this issue. I'm sure the positions taken will be given full consideration by the GAO in development of the final report on this important issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this draft report. If there are issues requiring further information or clarification we remain ready to work with your staff on them.

Sincerely yours,



Peter M. Cody
Acting Auditor General

Attachment: a/s

STATE/AID RESPONSE TO GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICES'S DRAFT REPORT TO THE CONGRESS "NEED TO BUILD AN INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY"

State and A.I.D. share the General Accounting Office's belief that the world's disaster capabilities can and must be strengthened. Accordingly, the U.S. played a major part in the original move in the U.N. to create the United Nations Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) and more recently took another initiative to strengthen and expand its operations. We also agree with GAO that there is a need for contingency planning on an international scale which could be undertaken by UNDRO in its role as coordinator of international responses to disasters.

However, State and A.I.D. strongly believe the proposal, even in the unspecified future, to convey or commit to UNDRO all the world's disaster relief resources and responsibility for their management is neither practical nor feasible. It would create more problems than it could solve and it is unlikely that it would be supported in the U.N. by other donor nations. At this point, State and A.I.D. are working closely with UNDRO to strengthen its ability to coordinate the activities of U.N. agencies and donor nations. We do not believe that even a strengthened UNDRO would have the capability or necessary support to undertake global operational and decision-making responsibility in disaster assistance.

This response to the GAO report will outline the various factors which militate against UNDRO being given the scope of responsibility proposed by the GAO.

Sahel/Bangladesh Experience

GAO's proposal to give UNDRO total operational control is based in large part on GAO analysis of two somewhat atypical disasters, the Sahel and East Pakistan/Bangladesh. It was only because of the unusual magnitude and character of each disaster that there was such wide international support. In the case of these two disasters, it is critical to understand that a well-coordinated international response was indeed needed. Full operational control by the complex and, to a degree, compartmentalized machinery of the United Nations would in no way have assured greater effectiveness. Better international coordination (not control) was needed and ad hoc U.N. machinery was created for this purpose. UNDRO was by-passed because of its inadequate capacity (six professionals), but this was prior to the current program of substantially strengthening UNDRO, particularly in the role of coordination. Moreover, it is doubtful that the large amount of resources provided to the Sahel and East Pakistan/Bangladesh would have been supplied if the donor nations had been asked to operate under the control of an international organization. Political facts of life are that bilateral responses, because of the credit received by individual nations or because of their ties to the

disaster affected country, yield greater resources than would be generated through a go-between organization.

Moreover, as noted above, disasters of the magnitude experienced in the Sahel and Bangladesh do not occur frequently. Sahel was a creeping disaster involving six countries over an extended period of time. Bangladesh was a series of catastrophic events both natural and man-made. It is important to further note that almost all of the other 460 disasters to which the U.S. has responded over the past 11 years were confined to individual countries and were with rare exception, less complicated and considerably shorter in duration. It would appear inappropriate, therefore, to base broad recommendations on the unusual experiences in the Sahel and Bangladesh.

In considering various aspects of the GAO proposal, it is important to keep in mind that without the full support of voluntary agencies, international humanitarian agencies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and League of Red Cross Societies (LICROSS), the United Nations and its specialized agencies and bilateral donor countries, UNDRO could not assume international management responsibility for operations even if it had the capacity to do so. In our judgment these donors and organizations would not favor turning over management responsibility to UNDRO. If UNDRO tried to assume such a management role and failed, the opposition generated could adversely affect its existing coordination role.

UNITED NATIONS

During U.N. debate on the creation of UNDRO there was great resistance to giving UNDRO anything but coordination responsibilities--let alone operational control. Initially, UNDRO was given insufficient funds and staff to carry out even its limited coordinating responsibilities. Our support of UNDRO is well known. Indeed, the United States played an essential role in providing funds to UNDRO to increase its coordination capacity as well as staff size. If the U.S. were now to suggest an operational control role for UNDRO, even in the distant future, the proposal would be likely to reawaken old oppositions to UNDRO. Other nations agreed to join the British and us on the basis that it would be limited to a coordinative role and would not assume any operational responsibilities. Given the circumstances, we do not believe that UNDRO could or should assume such operational responsibility. After more than three years effort, UNDRO is just now reaching the point of being able to carry out its coordination responsibilities effectively. It may take another two years to train its larger staff, establish systems, and acquire sufficient experience to perform this difficult role.

RECIPIENT COUNTRIES

Many disaster-prone countries are currently developing national disaster plans designed to meet their own emergencies. But whether or not they

have such plans, they typically insist on maintaining disaster management control of both self-help and external aid. It is a matter of national pride, an expression of sovereignty easily understood; and for a new nation it may be an action of considerable internal political importance. These countries reserve the right to request or not to request help as they choose and the right to request it from whom they choose. No donor nation or organization can force its charity or assistance upon another country.

Recognizing these facts, the U.S. and most donor countries and organizations take the position that the initiative belongs to the country in which the disaster happens. While encouraging the countries to recognize a humanitarian need on a timely basis and to request or accept assistance, donors must consider their help supplementary to what the country can do for itself. This being the case, the U.S. has accelerated its pre-planning assistance to disaster-prone countries. Over the past years where such help has been successfully received and plans developed, requests for outside help have diminished. Of even greater importance, effective self-help more rapidly mitigates the suffering of disaster victims.

For any international organization to assume total management of relief operations for a developing country would be tantamount to treating it as an incurable disaster management invalid, precluding the development of national self-help capabilities, which certainly would not be in the interest of disaster victims.

The U.S. now supports the development of certain regional assistance arrangements in which countries in high risk disaster areas plan together to assist one another following disastrous events. Such arrangements, if successfully made, would share the normal self-help burden and should bring relief resources to a disaster site in the shortest possible time. Such action, which has proven most valuable in the past even when provided on an ad hoc basis, could be diminished by the single management agency proposal.

DONOR NATIONS

As many as 70 nations may provide assistance in one way or another to a single major disaster. While it would be hopeful to believe such help is provided for purely humanitarian reasons--above politics and the battle--it would be untrue. Among world donors, willingness to play a consistent or significant role or to be coordinated varies. For example, Arab help is most often provided to Moslem nations. Latin America responds only modestly to relief needs outside the Americas. Russia and mainland China have not been willing to work in a cooperative way, and the creation of such a management role for UNDRO is not likely to change this. Many countries to date respond only with modest contributions, except where it is clearly in their political interest. In many instances,

disaster aid is given only because of the public image created.

It will be an accomplishment of some magnitude to get most donors to accept even UNDR0's modest coordination role. To go beyond this by suggesting that they relinquish their current management role which yields international recognition to them and just provide funds or pre-commit supplies and equipment to UNDR0 would not be well received. We believe we must, in the interest of the victims of disaster, accept the fact that changes in international disaster assistance evolve slowly, and we should be grateful for what is provided for whatever reasons.

EFFECT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

U.S. disaster relief is an important way for the American public, as well as its government, to express its humanitarian concerns for those adversely affected by natural and man-made disasters. Equally important, disaster relief is becoming increasingly a major instrument of our foreign policy. The assistance we can provide to various nations may have a long term impact on U.S. relations with these nations and their friends. Moreover, the generosity and the expertise evidenced in the past through disaster relief responses have helped to strengthen this nation's image in the world at large.

Thus, in the above context, we know that placing total command in the hands of UNDR0 would mute the U. S. Government's role. The provision of assistance is considerably more complex than the mere shipping of supplies and equipment from stockpiles. The U.S. Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator has intimate knowledge of and immediate access to the disaster-related resources of all U.S. Government agencies. In our judgment, such resources cannot be irrevocably precommitted. In assessing the importance of bilateral action, we must not forget that many Americans regard disaster relief--bilaterally or through voluntary agencies--as a concrete expression of their ties and concern for the countries from which they or their ancestors came.

EFFECT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF U.S. VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

The GAO proposal may be viewed by voluntary agencies as threatening their humanitarian role, which is one of their prime means of obtaining public financial support. Such support is often promoted by a prideful recapitulation of humanitarian accomplishments. A change in the voluntary agencies' mission to that of a collection agent for UNDR0 would surely result in a rapid loss of public support. Moreover, it is likely that their unique role and ability to respond would be limited or conceivably even eliminated if UNDR0 were directly involved. It should be noted that some of the most effective disaster relief provided abroad, especially during the crucial first hours following a disaster, is from American voluntary agencies' resident representatives in the stricken country. Their on-the-ground assessments are frequently of great value to all donors. They also have a proven capability for aiding in longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction.

voluntary agencies may be expected to resist the slightest semblance of government or other external control. U.S. Government/voluntary agency relationships in disaster relief have evolved slowly. U.S. Government support is accepted only on a no-interference, no strings attached basis. We believe voluntary agencies will not submit to any degree of management control by UNDR0, though they would probably be willing to accept a degree of UNDR0 coordination.

U.S. INITIATIVE

The U.S. has strongly supported UNDR0 and will continue to do so at every reasonable opportunity. Not only did the U.S. play a major role in co-sponsoring the creation of UNDR0 in 1971, but we initiated a resolution adopted unanimously by the U.N. General Assembly in November, 1974, to substantially strengthen UNDR0's capacity to carry out its assigned mandate. The resolution called on the Secretary General "to provide sufficient staff, equipment, and facilities to strengthen UNDR0's capacity to provide an efficient and effective worldwide service of mobilizing and coordinating disaster relief, particularly the collection and dissemination of information on disaster assessment, priority needs, and donor assistance." It called for meeting the additional costs from voluntary contributions during the initial three-year period. The resolution decided further that, while the main purpose was to concentrate on coordination, this was without prejudice to improvements in UNDR0's disaster prevention and pre-disaster planning roles. The U.S. offered \$750,000 to substantially meet the first year's costs of this program (which has since been drawn down), and our fair share thereafter.

In early 1975 the U.S. Disaster Relief Coordinator participated in a three-man experts panel appointed by the U.N. Disaster Relief Coordinator to draw up a plan for implementing this resolution. UNDR0 is now in the process of putting the plan into effect, together with a parallel plan to strengthen its disaster preparedness programs. This will mean inter alia an increase in staff from 11 to 42, as well as additional facilities and communications equipment. Pledges to a voluntary fund to meet the first three years' additional costs of about \$3 million have been made by the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Belgium, in addition to the U.S.

A further increase in UNDR0's resources has been authorized by two resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in December 1975, calling for substantial increases, also through voluntary contributions, in the funds available to UNDR0 for modest (token) disaster relief contributions and for program costs of technical assistance in pre-disaster planning and prevention.

For the U.S. to go beyond the significant initiatives recently agreed to by launching an international initiative for support to make UNDR0 the world's disaster commander would not only be counter-productive but also could be politically inadvisable. It would give the rest of

the international disaster relief community of nations and organizations reason to question U.S. understanding of the dynamics and present world attitudes toward international disaster cooperation.

THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE GAO PROPOSAL

We must continue to take every opportunity to strengthen and support UNDRO as the world's disaster relief coordinator, both within and outside the U.N. system. To this end we must continue to support the initiatives now underway and to help UNDRO in its efforts to implement them.. A.I.D.'s Office of Foreign Disaster Relief Coordination consults with UNDRO staff frequently on problems they encounter in accomplishing their goals and, from time to time, provides training for their staff. A.I.D. routinely provides UNDRO with detailed assessment information it receives from U.S. Diplomatic Missions and keeps them informed of relief actions contemplated or taken. There is increasing interest on the part of other nations to join in the support of UNDRO. The Governments of the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland and Denmark have pledged approximately \$1.5 million for that purpose.

The U.S. must show, by example, its willingness to accept UNDRO coordination and be guided by it. We must expand our own association with other donors to draw them into a coordinated system. We must make available to UNDRO whatever expertise it may need for any good purpose. We must also encourage UNDRO's preparedness planning to increase the self-reliance of developing disaster-prone nations and remain vigilant to all other opportunities for international action which may present themselves.

Finally, we must continue to strengthen U.S. international disaster relief capacity. The U.S. at this time possesses the most sophisticated disaster relief response capability in the world. Its disaster relief activities are supported by the American public. The Congress, in recent amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act, has legislated for the first time a separate section focusing entirely on international disaster assistance which places emphasis on developing a preparedness, planning and contingency ability. In this vein, the Executive Branch has attached equal importance to an effective disaster relief capacity. Recently, the President designated the A.I.D. Administrator as his Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance. In so doing, the President has demonstrated the importance the Executive Branch attaches to our bilateral response. This feeling is also demonstrated by the growing support of the American community and the Legislative Branch for U.S. bilateral disaster relief operations.

CONCLUSION

For reasons given, we wish to record our disagreement with the GAO recommendation to make UNDRO the world's disaster manager. At the same time, we wish to commend the report for signalling the urgent need to strengthen international disaster relief activities. In doing so, it performs an important function in the international and domestic dialogue which will serve the cause of more effective disaster assistance in the years to come.

PRINCIPAL U.S. OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR

MATTERS DISCUSSED IN THIS REPORT

Appointed

SECRETARY OF STATE
Henry A. Kissinger

Sept. 1973

ADMINISTRATOR, AGENCY FOR
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Daniel S. Parker

Oct. 1973

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