

Bleak picture for African agriculture

by Mary Lalevée

While the latest special report from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on the food crisis in Africa writes reassuringly that "a substantial recovery of production is now assured" in most of the 21 countries affected by famine in 1984-85,* and that "the food supply prospects are generally favorable," the FAO's own annual report, *The State of Food and Agriculture 1985*, reveals a horrifying picture of the state of African agriculture.

The report claims that only five countries will continue to need "exceptional emergency food assistance" in 1985-86—Angola, Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Sudan. Rains in the Sahel region have meant favorable prospects for harvests, with crops estimated at 6.3 million tons compared to less than 4.0 million tons in 1984. "Record or near record harvests are anticipated in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Senegal."

So, the FAO concludes, "The food supply situation is now returning to normal in 16 of the 21 countries." But the FAO admits that despite these record harvests, most of the 21 countries will continue to need food aid, and that of the 7 million tons of food aid considered necessary in 1984-85, only 5.8 million tons were actually delivered. Significant amounts are backlogged in ports.

TABLE 1
Selected cereal food aid pledges to 21 affected African countries known to FAO as of November 1985
(Thousand tons)

Donor	All cereals
Australia	108.9
Canada	500.6
China	160.5
EEC	1,740.4
Ghana	2.0
United States	3,347.8
U.S.S.R.	7.5
Zimbabwe	25.0
Total	7,081.1

Note small amount of food aid given by the Soviet Union.

The 7-million-ton estimate is highly questionable in any case. Writes the FAO: "The final estimate of the cereal food aid requirements of the 21 countries is likely to be conservative, because it is well below what is required to meet the minimum nutritional needs. . . . For the affected countries of Eastern and Southern Africa, the estimates are calculated to meet effective demand only, and per capita consumption is assumed to continue to decline from levels which are already below the minimum nutritional needs established by the joint FAO/WHO expert group. In Western Africa, the consumption requirements are calculated on the basis of per capita consumption rates, which are also below this minimum level. . . . It has been assumed that all of the affected countries not visited by joint FAO/WFP [World Food Program] assessment missions maintain their commercial imports of cereals in 1984-85 at the previous year's levels; in a number of cases, this may not be possible due to a sharp deterioration of foreign exchange availabilities [emphasis added]."

Nowhere in the FAO's special report is there any mention of how many people lost their lives in Africa during the 1984-85 famine. The FAO correctly points out, "The early 1980s have been dominated by the economic recession. . . . The recovery . . . has been quite uneven, weak, and even non-existent in a majority of developing countries. . . . In the first half of the 1980s, agriculture was seriously affected by the weak performance of the global economy and difficulties in servicing debt." On Africa, the FAO writes, "So far, the decade has been characterized by economic stagnation, rising debt, falling international commodity prices, drought and famine. Many governments are in a state of retrenchment."

On the orders of the International Monetary Fund, Africa has drastically reduced imports, including food, while exports have grown slightly after severe falls in 1981 and 1982. Africa has succeeded in having small positive trade balances for 1983 and 1984, as per IMF recipes, but at the cost of the lives of unknown hundreds of thousands or millions. Lack of

TABLE 2
Selected Input Indicators, 1980-82 average
(Indicated units)

	Arable land ¹	Fertilizer ²	Irrigation ³
	ha per capita	kg per ha	%
Africa	1.4	9.3	1.7
Latin America	4.5	39.2	8.3
Total developing countries	1.0	49.1	19.1
Industrial economies	14.4	117.5	9.6

¹Arable land and area under permanent crops per capita of agricultural labor force

²Consumption of fertilizers per hectare of arable land under permanent crops

³Share of irrigated area in arable land and area under permanent crops

Source: FAO

imports has also meant lack of spare parts for industry, lack of means to repair or build infrastructure, and lack of transport facilities to bring the tons of food aid where it is needed.

Africa's debt service ratio has doubled over the last five years, while the amount of capital inflow into Africa has fallen by half over the last year.

The FAO notes that demand for agricultural products fell during 1980-84, which led to a fall in agricultural commodity prices, and writes: "By 1982, agricultural commodity prices were at their lowest level in real terms since World War II. While prices recovered modestly in 1983, the recovery was short-lived; the IMF all-commodity index (1980 = 100) was only 76 in January 1985."

This fall in demand was due to falling incomes, especially in Africa and Latin America, "where per capita incomes were reduced the most," writes the FAO. By 1983, African food consumption was only 93% of estimated caloric requirements, the same as in the early 1970s.

The FAO summarizes the key agricultural indicators during the early 1980s in Africa:

- "Per capita food and agricultural production declined by nearly 2% a year;
- The volume of food imports rose by 4% a year;
- Agricultural income terms of trade declined by 4% a year;
- The volume of agricultural exports had virtually no growth during 1980-83;
- Daily per capita food supply calories declined by 1.2% a year.

"At stake is the survival of those threatened by recurrent food shortages, some African ways of life, and possibly even some nations. A fear shared by many African governments is that their destiny is controlled by global economic forces outside their control"—the IMF and international banks, determined to drastically reduce Africa's population.

* The 21 affected countries are: Burkina Faso (Upper Volta), Cape Verde, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Morocco.

TABLE 3

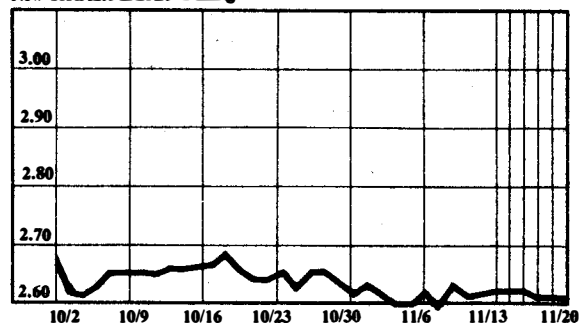
Daily per capita food supply, developed and developing countries, 1969-1971, and 1981-1983
(Calories per day)

	1969-71			1981-83		
	Vege- table	Animal	Total	Vege- table	Animal	Total
Industrial economies	2,200	1,040	3,260	2,290	1,080	3,370
Africa	2,030	140	2,170	2,080	140	2,220
Latin America	2,100	400	2,500	2,180	460	2,640

Currency Rates

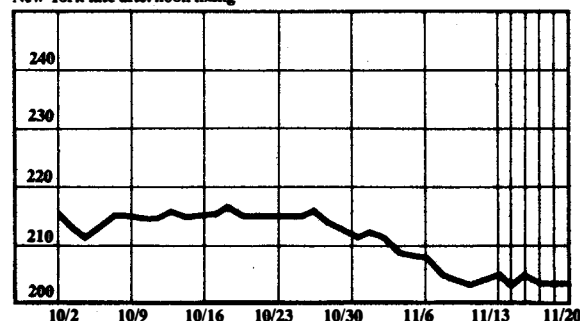
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



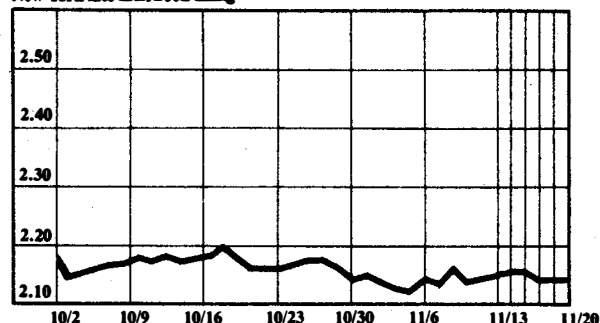
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing

