

# U.N. talks of 'recovery' in grain output, but admits Africa's dire food needs

by Jutta Dinkermann

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), based in Rome, has the staff and means to send monitoring teams to critical crop areas, such as in Africa, to report on harvest prospects, soil moisture, livestock conditions, and to provide a picture of both emergency needs and long-term projects and requirements to further agriculture output and food supplies. Each month the FAO publishes "Food Outlook: Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture."

This is theoretically how the FAO should work, but the reality is quite different. The February issue of "Food Outlook" is typical. It praises what it calls a "recovery" in global cereal output: "The world cereal supply/demand outlook for 1992/93 has improved further. . . ." It states that there will likely be a replenishment of global cereal stocks, "above the range considered by FAO as the minimum necessary to safeguard world food security." Yet a feature titled "Food Situation in Africa" paints a detailed picture of the precarious state of agriculture across the entire continent, and food *insecurity* on the scale of genocide. The facts are especially dramatic, because 1992 was the year of the "drought of the century" in southern Africa.

What does the FAO report say about food aid? Their statistical table notes, without accompanying comment, that food aid in cereals is likely to drop this year down to 12.8 million tons worldwide, down from 13.5 million tons last year, and in the mid-1980s. This tonnage is inclusive of cereals aid to Africa, and also for Bosnia and all other points of need.

We here summarize, region by region, the update on the agriculture and food situation in Africa, to make the point, from the U.N.'s own figures, that a world mobilization is required for emergency food assistance, and also for infrastructure development—water, power, transport, and public health measures.

## A few good harvests don't make a recovery

According to the FAO, in recent months there have been promising developments in a number of countries of sub-Saharan Africa. These include above-average to record harvests in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and most of the Sahelian countries. But yet, sub-Saharan Africa will require extensive emergency assistance throughout 1993 to cover the needs of

large numbers of refugees, displaced and drought-affected people, and demobilized soldiers. A crucial factor in the coming months will be the development of the 1992-93 coarse grains crop in southern Africa; prospects are unfavorable in Angola, Lesotho, and Mozambique, and shortage of seeds has reduced planted area in several countries.

Aggregate cereal production in 1992, for the 26 African countries that are in their 1992-93 marketing year, is estimated at 37.4 million tons, some 12% lower than in 1991. The food aid requirement for these countries in 1992-93, estimated at 5.2 million tons, is substantially higher than in 1991-92, mainly reflecting the sharp increase in the needs of the drought-affected countries in southern Africa. Food aid pledges for 1992-93 cover some 80% of the estimated requirements, but less than half of the pledges have actually been delivered. There is an urgent need for donors to expedite shipments, particularly to Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, and Somalia.

Initial indications of the needs of the 20 countries, which have just entered their 1993 marketing year, are that food aid requirements, while remaining high, will fall from the 1992 levels, mainly on account of increased cereal production in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

## Eastern Africa

In **Somalia**, some 1 million people remain at risk of starvation. Security conditions remain precarious in many locations, several of which can so far only be supplied through airlifts. As a result of the collapse of the agricultural infrastructure and a livestock-population sharply reduced by drought and war, only a slow recovery of the agricultural sector can be expected.

In **Ethiopia**, food assistance will be required by some 1.1 million returnees from settlement areas and persons displaced by ethnic conflict, and a total of 840,000 demobilized soldiers and their dependents. A further 2.4 million persons are estimated to have been affected by crop and livestock losses.

In **Eritrea**, the much improved security condition is expected to lead to an increase in the numbers of returnees requiring assistance in 1993 to a total of 200,000 persons. Despite the good rainy season, livestock numbers will take at least another year to recover.

In **Sudan**, an estimated 2.78 million displaced and

drought-affected people will require 324,000 tons of food assistance in 1993. Some 1.7 million displaced persons require an estimated 184,000 tons of food. About 14,000 tons of food are needed for 395,000 displaced people in vulnerable groups, mostly children under five. An estimated 1.08 million persons living in food deficit areas will require 126,000 tons of food assistance.

In **Kenya**, widespread malnutrition is reported and livestock losses have been severe. An estimated 1.7 drought-affected people will be reliant on relief assistance at least until the next main harvest in August 1993, and there are some 400,000 refugees in the country.

In **Tanzania**, acute local food shortages persist, notably in the drought-affected central and lake areas. Relief operations are targeting some 600,000 persons, but efforts to transport grain from surplus areas continue to be hampered by financial constraints.

In **Uganda**, drought affected 1992 crops in Masaka, Mpigi, and Rakai district, while a combination of drought and civil disturbances led to food problems in Saroti.

In **Rwanda**, some 350,000 displaced persons will continue to require food assistance well into 1993.

## Southern Africa

The food supply situation across much of southern Africa has improved somewhat, following substantial commercial and food aid imports.

The signing of the **Mozambique** peace treaty has allowed relief assistance to be delivered to areas which, until recently, have been inaccessible to agencies. Emergency food aid needs for 1992-93 have been increased by large numbers of returnees and demobilized soldiers and their dependents. A catastrophe has been temporarily averted in **Malawi**, but food stocks are at critically low levels. Livestock and crop losses from the 1991-92 drought have necessitated large-scale emergency programs in all the countries of the sub-region. However, in **Angola**, the recent renewal of hostilities has hampered relief distribution efforts to drought-affected rural populations in the south and has led to acute shortages.

Although land preparation and planting of the 1992-93 coarse grain crop is complete in southern Africa, rains were generally late and have been below normal in several areas. Shortages of seeds are reported, particularly in **Angola**, **Mozambique**, and **Zimbabwe**. In all the developing countries of the sub-region, the number and quality of livestock was reduced by the 1991-92 drought. Reductions in planted area are reported from **Lesotho** and are anticipated in several other countries. Prospects are bleak for cereal production in Mozambique and Angola. In the former, the peace treaty will allow a gradual return to the land, but labor supplies will remain inadequate. Seed distribution has fallen well short of requirements and the rains were late in southern and central areas. The recent renewal of hostilities has led to further population displacement and has disrupted seed supplies.

Despite good rains, cereal production is expected to be below the 1991-92 level.

Growing conditions in **South Africa** have been generally satisfactory following ample rains in the main maize areas in November and early December, but recent dry conditions have seriously affected crops in several areas, and a below-average harvest is now in prospect.

## Sahelian countries

Following generally good harvests, the food supply situation in most of the Sahelian countries is expected to remain satisfactory in the 1992-93 marketing year, except in north-west parts of the Sahel. In **Mauritania**, following successive poor harvests, the situation will be tight for drought-affected populations. Tuareg refugees in the eastern region are putting pressure on the available supplies. In the cities, the food supply situation is better, following substantial commercial cereal imports in 1992, but the recent devaluation of the national currency resulted in price increases of food items and will severely affect the poorest segments of the population.

In northern **Senegal**, the situation is also difficult, following another poor harvest and the transfer of cereals from surplus areas in the south are required. In **Cape Verde**, a below-average harvest is anticipated, but the country has already planned substantial commercial imports of food in 1993.

## West Africa

Following unfavorable growing conditions, below-average harvests have been gathered in several countries along the Gulf of Guinea. As a result, aggregate cereal production is likely to decline and import requirements, mostly wheat and rice, will increase.

In **Ivory Coast**, an exceptionally long dry spell between mid-June and early September seriously affected staple food crops.

In **Nigeria**, most areas had poor rains and the production of cereals in 1992 is estimated at 3% less than last year and below average.

In **Liberia**, the harvesting of the paddy crop has been hampered by heavy fighting. Following massive displacements of people from rural areas, and shortages of seeds and farming implements, plantings were below normal. As a result, the 1992 cereal harvest is estimated at 100,000 tons. With this poor cereal harvest, the food supply situation in 1993 will remain serious.

In **Sierra Leone**, weather conditions were generally favorable for the 1992 cereal crops. However, plantings were again below normal due to the displacement of a large number of people following civil strife, shortages of seeds and farming implements, and flood damage to swamp rice in some areas. Consequently, production of cereals in 1992 is estimated to be below average. By contrast, above-average crops have been gathered in **Benin** and **Togo**, while a record harvest is in prospect in **Guinea**.