

SUDAN: DROUGHT

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The Disaster

Severe drought in western and parts of central and southern Sudan has affected at least 900,000 people, 600,000 of whom are acutely at risk of famine as confirmed by the FAO/WFP crop and food supply assessment mission that visited the country in the second half of October 2000 (southern Sudan) and end of November-early December (northern Sudan). Again, low and sporadic rainfall (100-200 mm compared to average 400 mm) has severely affected agricultural production and depleted water resources. A high incidence of pests and diseases have compounded the disastrous effect on agricultural crops. Other assessments including reports from Sudanese Red Crescent (SRCS) state branches verify the magnitude of the looming emergency. The SRCS is also including areas in Red Sea State (Sinkat, Halayeb) as in need of assistance.

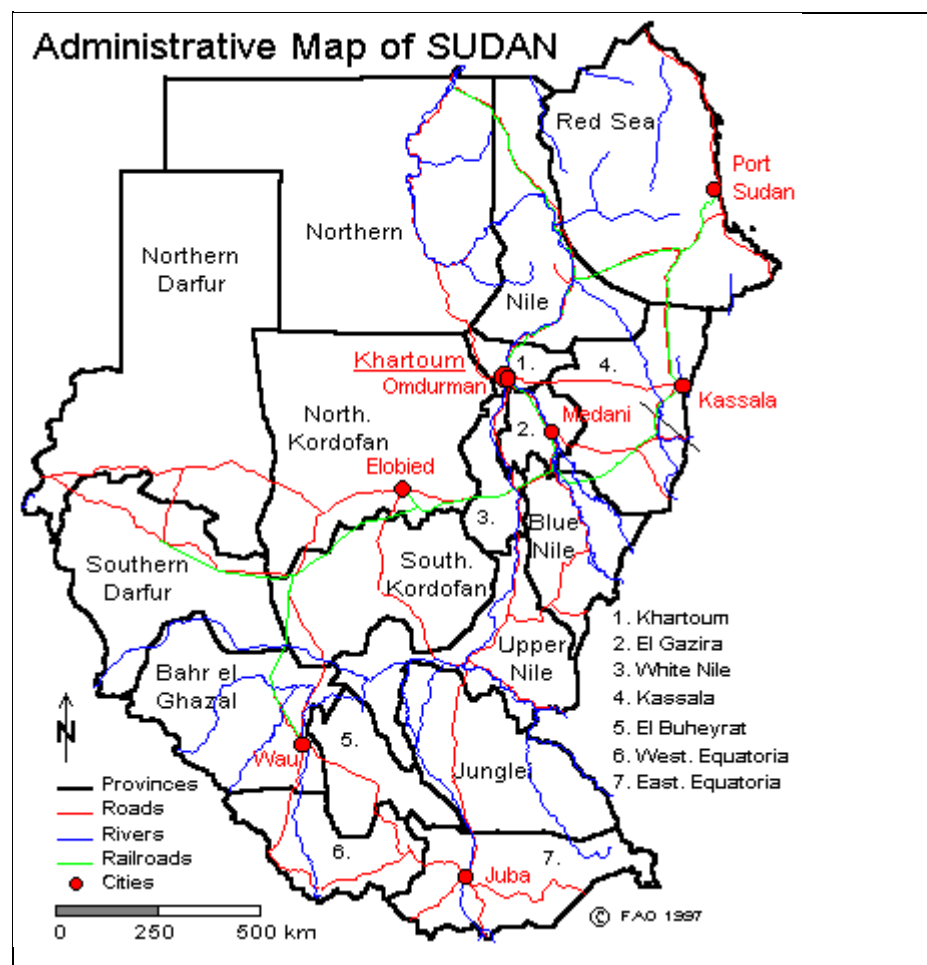
The FAO and WFP estimates the cereals deficit at 138,000 MT after taking into account the country's potential for commercial imports and the amount of food aid already pledged (34,000 MT). The price of sorghum has already doubled since December 1999 (FAO/WFP, Sorghum prices at Nyala Market, South Darfur State) while millet has increased by 50% (FAO/WFP, Nyala Market). The affected population lacks the resources to cover the deficit. Stagnation in the livestock export trade has reduced the access to this additional source of income, hence further eroding the coping capacity of the affected communities.

While in total some 10 million people live in the affected areas, mainly Darfur and Kordofan states, the most vulnerable are either subsistence farmers or small scale pastoralists whose total source of income is threatened by the drought.

Lack of water is causing growing concern for the overall health of the affected. More than half of all hafirs are dry, others will soon be depleted. Too many water yards and hand pumps are non-functional. There are several reports of early displacements of people. The current malnutrition rate is high in most of the affected areas and stands well above 20%. The nutritional status of the population is expected to deteriorate rapidly unless an additional provision of food can be organized timely. Access to health and sanitary facilities, already low in normal times, will be lost if people indeed feel forced to move in search of food and water. An already low EPI coverage and the usual health risks related to a scarcity of safe drinking water sources are bound to lead to a sharp rise in mortality and morbidity due to waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, conjunctivitis and scabies.

Provision of sorghum and millet in particular will be vital to allow for normal planting in June-July. In Northern Kordofan, farmers were already in a poor situation at the start of the season due to bad production in 1999 and 2000. The long dry periods of the 1980s have weakened the pastoralists' economy base in Red Sea State, which makes the pastorals more vulnerable to food shortages. Migration from rural areas in the Red Sea State has been ongoing during the last three months. In western Darfur, people from drought stricken Chad are reportedly arriving.

The impact of the disaster is yet not fully known: displacement of people, and subsequent deteriorating health and the need for shelter will worsen the situation within the next few months. It is expected that chronic malnutrition will evolve into acute starvation by April. The need for assistance is estimated to cover the period from now and over the "food gap" with the next harvest being expected for November/December. In October the potential of that harvest should be possible to foresee. Coping mechanisms of the people are already being stretched to the limit and immediate and targeted action is needed to prevent an already serious situation from developing into large-scale human suffering and loss of life.



Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The SRCS, with the support of the International Federation, is participating in the ongoing planning and coordination of assistance by the Government of Sudan (GoS) and the humanitarian community to the affected areas. The Higher Committee on Humanitarian Aid Policy, chaired by the Vice President, is monitoring the developments from the federal level. The GoS has also established a Food Security Emergency Committee led by the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) and comprising relevant

ministries and UN agencies. Four sub-committees focus on Food Assistance and Nutrition, Agriculture and Animal Resources, Water and Sanitation and Information. International and national NGOs are participating in these committees. The initiatives by the GoS reflects the magnitude of the problem and the government's concern.

SRCS activities are concentrated at four state branches and the headquarters.

Northern and Western Darfur

SRCS is a member of the Development and Rehabilitation Committee of Northern Darfur and as such participated in the village and household survey in October. The state branch is activating its teams of volunteers in preparation for an integrated drought response operation. Emergency committees are being established at the local level to monitor cereal and animal prices and population movement, amongst other indicators. In cooperation with the Spanish Red Cross, the SRCS is presently building water systems in northern Darfur.

Northern Kordofan

SRCS, in conjunction with the HAC, did an assessment in Bara and Tayba Rural Councils in early October 2000. The findings of the survey confirmed earlier data collected by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and CARE that the situation was deteriorating and severely affected the psychological condition of the population with fears of facing yet another crop failure. The state branch is now mobilizing volunteers to be prepared for an intervention as soon as contributions materialize. A Disaster Preparedness workshop has been carried out for key volunteers in the most affected provinces, i.e. Bara and Soderi.

Red Sea

Food distribution to some 7,500 persons in Halayeb province at the end of last year was implemented by the SRCS, with WFP's support. Now SRCS and WFP in Red Sea State have agreed to carry out a comprehensive survey in Sinkat and Halayeb provinces. This is much needed as the FAO/WFP Crop Assessment Mission faced security restrictions when visiting this part of the country. Nutritionists from the State Ministry of Health (SMoH) will participate in the survey. Furthermore, SRCS has assisted 80 displaced families around Sinkat in moving to Toker province where better job opportunities exist. The Society is closely monitoring the situation via a Food Security Committee in Port Sudan and at the local or village level. One hundred and fifty volunteers have formed teams to be located in selected areas to gather and update information.

Headquarters

An Emergency Committee has been established to coordinate training of staff and volunteers, enhance communication links (HF radios) and means of transport needed. The committee is also responsible for overall logistics planning.

Needs

To best determine the exact needs and the capacities available at each branch for future operations and to ensure close collaboration with the GoS and other Agencies, a member of the Federation's Disaster Management Coordination Division will travel to Khartoum on 25 January to meet with the SRCS and the authorities. It is then proposed that three parallel assessment teams be deployed in the first few days of February to verify the available data and propose a consolidated plan of action. One team will travel to each of the Red Sea, Western Darfur and Northern Kordofan areas. Each team will include health, relief and logistics experts, and be comprised of staff from the SRCS, the Sudan Delegation, the Regional Delegation in Nairobi, and from Geneva. The proposed assessment teams will also study reports from other areas indicating similar urgent food security needs.

At this stage it is generally acknowledged that an integrated drought response operation will be needed to prevent large-scale starvation of an already vulnerable population. Any intervention will be planned and

carried out in close coordination with UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations. The anticipated operation will involve assisting in the distribution of emergency food rations, the rehabilitation of hand-pumps and community-based health activities, including hygiene education, early recognition of water-borne diseases and support to EPI programmes. Therapeutic feeding centres and ORS posts may be added depending on the evolving situation. Further support will be needed for those already displaced, including the provision of non-food items (jerry cans, shelter and mosquito nets) plus additional essential health services.

Immediate support from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) will be available when the needs become clearer. All partners concerned about the effects of this disaster on a particularly vulnerable population are invited to start to identify human and financial resources which may be used to facilitate an appropriate response to the disaster.

Further detailed information of those needs and a plan of action will be made available shortly after these missions have reported on their findings and after close coordination with the Government of Sudan, the United Nations and all other partners concerned.

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