

their resources are the best adapted to the needs of people most severely affected. Farmers in the Nordeste stress long-term needs as priorities, such as education, drilling wells, organisation of water treatment and development of sanitation programmes, but there are concerns about the political implications of such programmes, and the risk of corruption hampering implementation. Land reform is a major issue raised by farmers, as the concentration of land ownership has been growing. Renting land or share-cropping discourages investment in the conservation of resources, and the lack of access to land also means a lack of access to water.

While the potential disaster in the Nordeste will require substantial efforts to meet basic short-term needs, the long-term, recurrent and cyclical nature of drought in the region, together with the fundamental vulnerability of many communities, once again demonstrates that the best choice for disaster management lies in long-term solutions and development programmes. International co-operation could provide much-needed finance for a range of programmes to help people reduce their vulnerability through basic, practical actions, from simple water storage methods to the creation of seed banks for the conservation of biodiversity in a region of cyclical weather patterns.



It is the victims of disasters who take action first to protect their lives, whether digging a neighbour out of the rubble after an earthquake or sifting through the city garbage to find things to sell and food to eat when drought turns grinding poverty into famine. If disaster relief is to be successful, it must build upon this tenacity for survival, working in partnership with, not imposing upon, the disaster victims.
Brazil, 1983. Sebastião Salgado/Magnum