

**Date**

April - September  
1988

**Location**

Area west of  
Fort Dauphin in the  
extreme  
south of the country

**No. Dead**

None reported

**No. Affected**

23,300 families  
(approximately  
116,500 people)

**The Disaster**

The chronically dry region in the extreme south of Madagascar experienced a severe drought in mid-1988 after the complete failure of rains during the normal rainy season (October to April). Farmers planted sweet potatoes after sporadic rains in the Ambovombe-Androka area in April and May, but the hot sun and dry winds of the following weeks negated the effect of the rains and further reduced the prospects for a seasonal harvest. Whatever food was available in the local market was beyond the means of most residents, whose purchasing power had declined during the previous year's drought when they had been forced to sell their possessions, including livestock. A total of 23,300 families was judged to be in need of food assistance.

**Action Taken by Malagasy Non-Governmental Organizations**

The government of Madagascar did not officially request international assistance, and the only reported relief efforts were carried out by NGOs.

Catholic missions in the south were a continuing source of information on drought conditions. The local NGO Caritas worked closely with CRS/Madagascar to raise funds to help pay the costs of providing rations to residents of the stricken area. As of June 23, CRS and Caritas had raised \$12,000 locally, including funds remaining from the 1986 drought emergency.

The Lutheran Church and the Malagasy Red Cross, as well as Caritas, attended donor meetings. CRS and Caritas coordinated with the Lutheran Church in the distribution of emergency food supplies.

**Assistance Provided by the U.S. Government**

U.S. Mission staff attended frequent donor meetings in April, May, and June to monitor the situation in the far south. USAID/Antananarivo sent a U.S.-trained contractor to the area in mid-April to investigate conditions.

In view of the worsening effects of the lack of rain in the region, U.S. Ambassador Patricia Gates Lynch determined on June 23 that the disaster was of sufficient magnitude to warrant USG assistance. The Ambassador's disaster assistance authority of \$25,000 was granted to CRS for the purchase of corn and cassava outside the region and the transport of those provisions and P.L. 480 Title II stocks to the affected area. USAID approved the release of some 158 MT of commodities from CRS stocks: 120 MT of rice, 30 MT of NFD, and 8 MT of soybean. The food was shipped from the CRS warehouse in Tamatave and carried overland by truck. Catholic-Lutheran committees carried out distribution at the village level.

**TOTAL** **\$25,000**

**Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies**

CRS - administered a grant from the USG (see above) and donated an additional \$25,000 to purchase and transport food to the south. With USAID's approval, CRS released 158 MT of P.L. 480 Title II stocks from its regular program for emergency feeding. CRS also located sources of surplus corn and cassava and estimated purchase and transport costs for interested donors.

**TOTAL** **\$25,000**

**Assistance Provided by the International Community**

*Representatives of several international organizations, including UNDP, the EC's European Development Fund (FED), WFP, Swiss Aid, FAO, and UNICEF, attended donor meetings. Information is unavailable on the assistance provided by these organizations.*

MSF/France - conducted a nutritional survey of the far south.

**Date**

1988

**Location**

Nationwide

**No. Dead**

Not reported

**No. Affected**

318,000 Malawians,  
plus 560,000  
Mozambican refugees  
as of October 1988.

**The Disaster**

Malawi was faced with a severe food shortage in 1988, due to a combination of problems. Drought significantly reduced the maize, millet, and sorghum harvests in the central and southern regions of the country. At the same time, an infestation of mealybugs decimated the cassava crop, which is the main staple food in the northern region. Superimposed on these environmental conditions was the influx of over half a million Mozambican refugees that strained the food-producing capacity of Malawi. UNHCR estimated that as many as 600,000 Mozambican refugees would require emergency feeding by the end of the year and the Government of Malawi projected that an additional 318,000 Malawians were dependent on free or subsidized food aid. Once a food exporting country, Malawi was forced to appeal for international food assistance.

The Mozambican refugee and the affected Malawian populations were treated as two separate at-risk groups. Malawi has long been a haven for Mozambican refugees, but in May and June of 1988 intense fighting between Mozambican forces and RENAMO guerrillas prompted approximately 140,000 Mozambicans to abandon their farms and villages and cross the border into Malawi. Many of these refugees walked for two or three weeks and arrived in Malawi sick, malnourished, and with little or no clothing. Nsanje district in the far southern tip of the country accommodated over 200,000 Mozambicans, outnumbering the 150,000 Malawian residents. UNHCR-run refugee camps swelled and squatter settlements covered what used to be arable land. Competition for food, water, and firewood intensified in the southern region of the country, and the arrival of sick refugees raised concerns that cholera, malaria, and tuberculosis



Malawi Red Cross distributes USG-donated clothing.  
*Photo Courtesy of WVRD*

could spread throughout Malawi. The primary causes of death among refugees were malnutrition, diarrheal diseases, and malaria, although death rates went down once the refugees settled in camps.

The Malawian population was also severely affected by food shortages. Cases of kwashiorkor and marasmus were reported in the mealybug-infested areas along the shore of Lake Malawi. Many Malawians in this region subsisted on immature cassava, green maize, and other food substitutes. In the southern region, increased demand for commercial food supplies forced prices to rise dramatically, making many Malawians dependent on subsidized food rations. The nation's health care infrastructure was strained to the limit, as doctors and nurses tried to provide medical attention to Malawians, as well as refugees. In an effort to stave off resentment and unrest, relief agencies divided up food and other assistance between refugees and Malawians living in the same area.

#### **Action Taken by the Government of Malawi (GOM) and Non-Governmental Organizations**

The Government of Malawi tried to accommodate the overwhelming number of refugees and there were no reports of expulsions or blockades to prevent Mozambicans from entering the country. International organizations, such as UNHCR, WFP, and LRCS, provided assistance in the refugee camps. The GOM Ministry of Health provided medical assistance to affected Malawians, as well as to Mozambican refugees. The GOM Ministry of Transport coordinated the transportation of food commodities into Malawi. Most of the donor food aid was trucked in from Zimbabwe and Zambia, with a small quantity coming by way of the port at Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Two Malawian private corporations, the Malawi International Transport Company and the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation, were also involved in the transportation and storage of food commodities.

Meanwhile, the GOM Office of the President and the Cabinet (OPC) coordinated the assistance to

the affected Malawian population. The Malawian Red Cross (MRC) distributed maize to Malawians in mealybug areas and assisted in the distribution of food to refugees. Later in the year, the OPC implemented food-for-work projects to reduce reliance on free food distribution. The GOM embarked on a number of experimental programs to introduce natural predators to combat the mealybug infestation. The GOM also tried to introduce alternative food crops, such as rice and maize, as substitutes for cassava.

#### **Assistance Provided by the U.S. Government**

By February 1988, the number of Mozambican refugees flooding into Malawi had risen to 420,000. Furthermore, the drought and mealybug infestation were beginning to have an impact on the food supply of the Malawian population. On Feb. 24, U.S. Charge d'Affaires Dennis Jett determined that the food emergency in Malawi warranted USG assistance. There was an immediate need for assistance for the more than 20,000 Mozambican refugees that were arriving each month. OFDA quickly allocated \$100,000 from the SADCC supplemental, which was used to purchase construction materials for a refugee reception center at Kampata in Nsanje district. The reception center was finished in April and included a medical screening unit for new arrivals.

Another immediate need was clothing for the thousands of Mozambican refugees that arrived in Malawi wearing only rags or coverings made out of leaves or bark. OFDA initiated a program to send clothing confiscated by the U.S. Customs Service to several African countries, including Malawi. At a special ceremony in Blantyre, U.S. Ambassador George Trail III consigned over 100,000 pieces of clothing to WVRD. The clothing was distributed in Nsanje, Dedza and Ntcheu districts by WVRD, in collaboration with UNHCR and the Malawian Red Cross. (OFDA's grant of \$243,500 to WVRD to pay for transport of this forfeited clothing to Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe is listed as an Africa Regional expenditure.)

A third critical need was for medicines to