

CHAPTER 1  
NEED FOR AN  
INTERNATIONAL DISASTER RELIEF AGENCY

To insure a timely, effective, and efficient international response to future disasters, the world community will have to build and support an effective international disaster relief agency. The long-term goal should be an agency, preferably located in the United Nations, capable of mounting and carrying out integrated large-scale disaster relief operations using material, financial, and personnel resources committed for these purposes by national governments, the United Nations, voluntary agencies, and others.

It must be clearly recognized that building an agency to perform the above role will take time. Indeed, we know of no organization today that is ready and able to perform all of the functions described in the following pages of this chapter. A small office has been established in the United Nations to serve as an international coordination and focal point in disasters, and should provide a good base to build on. However, this organization is young and basically underdeveloped, and is only now beginning to receive the resources and establish the relationships necessary to perform even that role. Therefore, as the first step toward a full international disaster relief agency, we are recommending that the coordinating capabilities of the U.N. Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO) first be strengthened. If this proves successful, UNDRO would then serve as a good takeoff point to build toward an agency capable of undertaking a more comprehensive disaster relief role.

WHY THE NEED EXISTS

In the absence of an effective mechanism to coordinate and to control the international response to the disaster in the Sahel region of Africa, each donor independently planned, programed, and implemented its relief operations with little overall coordination. Two U.N. agencies variously tried to provide overall coordination, with only occasional success. As could be expected, serious problems developed and the tremendous resources made available by the world community were not used as efficiently as they might have been.

The key to a truly effective international response to future disasters is contingency planning backed by the commitment of resources necessary to carry out such plans. Military planning provides an excellent pattern to follow, and

resources readily available from U.N. member nations could be tapped for this purpose.

The international community must unite and dedicate itself to promptly relieving the intense suffering of people caught up in disasters. Waiting for a disaster to occur and then organizing to respond to it will only result in the same delays, confusion, and less than fully effective use of resources as occurred in the international response to the famine in the Sahel.

#### CRITERIA FOR AN EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION

An effective international disaster relief organization must have

- clearly defined responsibilities,
- sufficient authority to carry out those responsibilities,
- adequate staff and organization, and
- contingency plans backed by necessary resources.

We believe such an agency should take the lead in concert with the international community in planning, programming, and directing responses to world disasters. This can happen only if the international community is willing to be guided by U.N. coordination and to commit itself to play an effective part in an international relief effort.

Effective U.N. action would require:

1. The ability to confirm assessments of need or to make independent assessments.
2. Coordination of resources committed by donors.
3. Scheduling transportation, including inland transportation, where necessary.
4. Monitoring and, as necessary, helping the recipient nation distribute relief supplies.

This agency should have all the rights, privileges, and immunities granted such international agencies. Both developed and underdeveloped nations should recognize and support the agency and its specific responsibilities.

An international disaster relief agency must be properly staffed and organized. The financing necessary for this will have to be guaranteed over long periods of time without risk of interruption. Staffing needs will have to be developed in terms of specific, assigned responsibilities, but we believe the agency could be organized around a nucleus capable of assimilating experienced personnel on either a reimbursable or nonreimbursable basis from other organizations in cases of major or complex disasters. However, to insure the immediate availability of these personnel, arrangements for drawing on them should be negotiated with those organizations in advance.

Finally, and perhaps most important, an effective international disaster relief agency must have immediate access to the necessary material and financial resources. It will have to call into play such resources as food, medicines, shelter items (tents, blankets, etc.), transport (trucks, boats, aircraft, etc.), and other types of relief supplies. It should have (1) a worldwide network of resources to call upon to insure the widest availability of all types of relief supplies--particularly near the disaster site--to reduce transport problems and to speed relief and (2) a source of funding to purchase relief items not readily available from donors.

To achieve this worldwide resource base, the nations of the world must join together and agree to make available the necessary personnel, equipment, material, and financial resources. This could be accomplished by holding periodic pledging conferences as other international organizations do. However, the critical element will be the willingness of nations to formally commit national resources to the agency and to immediately place them at the agency's disposal. The United States, as the world's largest donor to disaster relief in recent years, will obviously be in a good position to influence other nations toward these ends and should take the lead in advancing these proposals and in committing its resources toward their fulfillment.

An effective international disaster relief agency should also develop the capability to help nations prevent disasters--that is, to minimize the suffering, losses, and other effects of disasters. Possible ways of doing this include:

- Studying how past disasters occurred and how relief was administered in order to develop new techniques for handling future disasters.
- Developing adequate national and international early warning systems to help mitigate the effects of disasters.

--Developing national disaster contingency plans.

--Organizing and training officials of disaster-prone nations in disaster preparedness and administration.

It is important, however, to note that pre-disaster planning is basically a new, undeveloped field. Therefore, in initially attempting to develop programs in this area, the disaster relief agency should first determine highest-priority needs and concentrate on meeting them; afterward, the full range of programs and their relative priorities, costs, and benefits can be developed and evaluated if adequate interest and resources permit.

#### ADEQUATE PRECEDENTS EXIST

In recent years, several good precedents have amply demonstrated that nations can establish an international relief agency if they want to. A study of these precedents may yield ideas which can be embodied in such an agency.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is perhaps the best example of nations' willingness to commit national resources for a common purpose. Specific standing military units of the United States and European nations have for years been committed to the common defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization nations. We believe that if nations are willing to join forces for military purposes, they should be at least equally willing to join forces to solve the serious and growing suffering and problems caused by disasters.

The U.N. peacekeeping missions of recent years provide another precedent. We believe they are important because they reaffirm the principle of collective international responsibility, through the United Nations, for maintaining international peace and harmony. The peacekeeping missions have usually consisted of troops of several nations and have been funded either by voluntary contributions or by regular U.N. assessment procedures. Thus, the United Nations has conducted several large-scale peacekeeping operations which were truly international responses to military problems.

One other important precedent was the worldwide relief effort of late 1971 in what is now known as Bangladesh. In the aftermath of a cyclone and a civil war in Pakistan, which also resulted in hostilities with India, an international relief effort was mounted. Although the Bangladesh relief effort was not completely a U.N. operation, it was an exception to other major relief efforts in that the United Nations did

create a large ad hoc organization which assumed major operational responsibilities, including assessing needs and scheduling relief supplies, shipping them inland from the ports, and actually distributing them.

These precedents demonstrate that U.N. member nations have recognized their collective responsibility to respond to military problems under U.N. auspices, but there has not been the same recognition of responsibility or commitment for a U.N. response to all disasters.

#### UNITED NATIONS IS THE BEST LOCATION

We believe that using the United Nations as a foundation upon which to build an effective international disaster relief agency is better than establishing such an agency as a separate international agency in its own right (like the International Red Cross). UNDRO has already been established and the United Nations is the home of other international humanitarian agencies, such as the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, and the World Food Program (WFP). Under the United Nations, the international disaster relief agency will benefit from the interest, attention, and importance accorded U.N. agencies in general. It will also benefit from the existing U.N. framework and machinery in terms of obtaining the widest possible international agreement on and recognition of its charter.

This U.N. framework will also provide the broadest base for obtaining and periodically replenishing the necessary resources that this agency must have to do its job. The agency will have the rights, privileges, and immunities granted a U.N. agency, and it can use the capabilities and expertise of other U.N. agencies. UNDRO will have to clearly establish its role with respect to disaster relief and to effectively coordinate the activities of the independent agencies.

Finally, having this agency in the U.N. system will provide one other important advantage--the ability to tread where oftentimes bilateral donors and others cannot. When potential or actual political problems are involved in a relief operation, a U.N. or other international organization presence is generally much more acceptable to the host nation and, indeed, nations have on occasion turned to such organizations to do that which they cannot do themselves.

#### THE IMMEDIATE GOAL

UNDRO was established to serve as an international coordination and focal point in disasters. As such it was not

intended to have, nor has it been given, the authority and the resource base necessary to manage and carry out relief efforts on behalf of the international community. Rather, it is designed to serve as an information or focal point and to help orchestrate the individual relief efforts of bilateral donors, U.N. agencies, and other participants into one coordinated effort. Chapter 4 outlines the history of this organization and points out the constraints we believe severely limit its effectiveness.

UNDRO would, we believe, be a good base on which to build an effective international disaster relief agency. However, in view of UNDRO's current state of development, it is doubtful whether the international community would be willing at this time to consider assigning greater responsibilities to it. Therefore, as the first step toward developing a fully effective international disaster relief agency, we believe UNDRO should be given the assistance, support, and time necessary to develop its coordination functions.

An independent panel of disaster experts recently studied UNDRO and reported in February 1975 that, to develop its coordination functions, UNDRO needs, among other things, to develop relationships with the independent U.N. agencies and to negotiate agreements with them as to the respective roles and responsibilities of each as well as the types of assistance and resources they will make available in a disaster. The panel similarly recommended that UNDRO seek to develop close working relationships with representatives of major bilateral donors in each developing nation to improve material cooperation and exchange of information, including setting up a data bank of relief supplies stockpiled around the globe by donors.

While the expert panel's report recommended other measures as well (see ch. 4 for full discussion), we endorse the above recommendations as the first and perhaps the most important step toward building UNDRO's coordinating abilities. Developing close working relationships with the U.N. agencies and bilateral donors who provide the majority of actual relief supplies and specialized help (e.g., medical help) is a critical necessity to effective international coordination in disaster relief. These relationships should specify the respective roles and responsibilities each party will play in a disaster.

We believe it is equally important that UNDRO seek to influence potential donors to articulate a positive disaster response policy and to enter into advance understandings with UNDRO as to the kinds of resources and assistance they will

make available under UNDRO's coordination. This will provide a base upon which UNDRO can develop contingency plans to respond to different types of disasters in different areas of the world, employing the different kinds of donor expertise and resources that each type of disaster will require and calling upon those resources located nearest the disaster site.

We believe that if the above relationships and arrangements can be developed over the next several years, they will provide UNDRO with the support and assistance it will need to perform the coordination role assigned it by the U.N. membership. More importantly, however, the real need for the future is to develop an international agency capable of managing and carrying out multiple, large-scale integrated disaster relief efforts utilizing material, financial, and personnel resources committed to it by U.N. agencies, bilateral donors, and others. Developing UNDRO's coordination role should be the immediate goal of the U.N. membership, and this will in turn provide a solid base and takeoff point from which to move toward the greater goal.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In the absence of an effective mechanism to coordinate and control the international response to the Sahel disaster, each donor independently planned, programed, and implemented its relief operations with little overall coordination. As could be expected, serious problems developed and the tremendous resources made available by the world community were not used as efficiently as they might have been.

As the following chapters demonstrate, there is an urgent need for the world community to begin to build and support an international disaster relief agency that will ultimately be capable of mounting and carrying out an integrated response to future disasters. We believe that building on existing organizations within the United Nations would be the most feasible road to take for the long term. As the initial step in this direction, however, the United States should lead the United Nations in encouraging all member governments to pledge their support to build on UNDRO and strengthen its relief coordination capabilities.

Disaster response contingency plans should be developed as well as agreements with U.N. agencies which will specify the respective roles and responsibilities of each and the amounts and types of resources they can make available in disasters. Equally important, the United States, as the largest bilateral donor of disaster relief in recent years, should urge and attempt to influence other potential donor

nations to also articulate a positive disaster response policy, and to enter into advance understandings with UNDRO as to the kinds of resources they can and will make available under UNDRO's coordination.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS

The Department of State and the Agency for International Development (AID) commended this report for signaling the urgent need to strengthen international disaster relief activities, and stated that it performs an important function in the international and domestic dialogue which will serve the cause of more effective disaster assistance in the years to come.

State and AID specifically agree with our views on the immediate need to strengthen UNDRO and to use it to develop international contingency plans. However, they believe our proposal to ultimately build UNDRO into the international disaster relief agency described in this chapter would not be accepted by bilateral donors, disaster-prone developing nations, and U.S. voluntary agencies, even in the long term. In support of their opinion, State and AID commented that:

- Disaster-stricken nations reserve the right to request help from whom they choose and typically insist on exercising management control over that help.
- The willingness of bilateral donors to be coordinated varies, and many contribute only modestly except where it is clearly in their political interest or for the public image created. They would not be receptive to relinquishing management control.
- The U.S. bilateral response is increasingly becoming a major instrument of U.S. foreign policy. Placing total command in UNDRO's hands would mute the U.S. role.
- International and U.S. humanitarian agencies would view our proposal as a threat to their recognition and roles and, ultimately, to their public financial support. They can be expected to resist any external management control.
- Sahel and Bangladesh were disasters of unusual magnitude, duration, and complexity; what was needed was better international coordination, not control. It does not appear appropriate, therefore, to base our broad proposal for an international disaster relief agency on these two atypical disasters.



In conclusion, State and AID referred to the ongoing efforts to strengthen UNDRO's relief coordination capacities (see p. 44 for details) and stated that for the United States to go beyond these efforts at the present time would be counterproductive and could be politically inadvisable. They proposed, as an alternative, that the United States (1) take every opportunity to strengthen and support UNDRO as the world's disaster relief coordinator, both within and outside the U.N. system, and (2) show, by example, its willingness to accept UNDRO coordination and to be guided by it. Finally, they cited the increasing legislative and executive branch interest and support for developing the bilateral U.S. disaster relief capacity, and stated that capacity must continue to be strengthened. The full text of their comments is included in appendix I.

#### OUR EVALUATION

We agree with State and AID that international disaster relief needs better coordination. We recognize that some bilateral donors historically have not coordinated their response with others or have not adopted a consistent response policy and that, reasonably, all donors will desire recognition for their contributions and efforts. We equally recognize that recipient nations normally want to maintain management control over external aid. However, it is precisely because of the lack of consistency, good organization, and administrative infrastructure that characterizes the current state of international disaster relief management that we have advanced our proposal, and we are disappointed that State and AID appear to reject any future consideration of our views.

Even with the best of intentions, a multiplicity of national donors in which each manages its own relief program too often just does not provide the most effective and efficient relief for stricken people. So it was in Sahel. In their eagerness to contribute, donors simultaneously shipped thousands of tons of food to Sahel nations without regard to whether the ports and inland transport networks were capable of handling this flow. Once the food was in the ports, the lack of a central system for controlling the flow of inland shipment or for combining and rotating all donor food stocks resulted in deterioration of some donors' food in port storage, while other donors competed for the limited railcar and trucking capacities.

When the food arrived inland, donors made the recipient nations almost totally responsible for distribution. The food was dumped on the recipient nations with little regard

to whether they had the administrative capacities or the resources required to distribute the food. As a result, food distribution was sporadic and uneven and some areas apparently just were not covered adequately. At times this was due to a less-than-maximum effort on the part of the recipient government, but often it was due to a lack of trucking capacity or fuel to handle such massive amounts of food. In this final phase, donors did little monitoring or anything else to assure that their expensive food contributions were having a maximum impact.

The above types of problems are certainly not new to international disasters. While an effective coordinating mechanism would undoubtedly help cut down on some of these problems, we believe that, for the long term, all the disaster relief resources of the international community should be brought together under one central manager--an international disaster relief agency. This agency should respond to all major disasters, especially where massive external inputs of any kind--food, medicines, blankets, etc.--are required. It should be responsible for:

- Assessing damage and what is needed from donors.
- Managing the flow of donor shipments to the recipient country.
- Managing the transportation inland to a landlocked country.
- Monitoring for the donor community and helping the recipient country, as necessary, to internally distribute the relief goods.

The above proposals would not mute the recognition or seriously diminish the role of bilateral donors or humanitarian agencies. Indeed, the humanitarian agencies would continue to contribute and, more importantly, to help distribute relief. Bilateral donors would continue to contribute and ship their relief goods, but they would do so under the direction of the disaster relief agency. Once the goods reached the recipient country, they would come under the direction of the disaster relief agency, which would then control the flow and, if necessary, manage the transportation of the goods to the interior for the mutual benefit of the stricken nation and the donor community.

This management structure need yield no less recognition to donors than do bilateral contributions or contributions made through the United Nations, such as those the Scandinavian nations make or those the United States makes through

the World Food Program. Indeed, in Sahel, the donors turned at times in their mutual frustration to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization to actually manage such aspects of their operations as contracting for trucks, sponsoring food convoys, and establishing port committees. Central management should yield tangible benefits in effectiveness and efficiency.

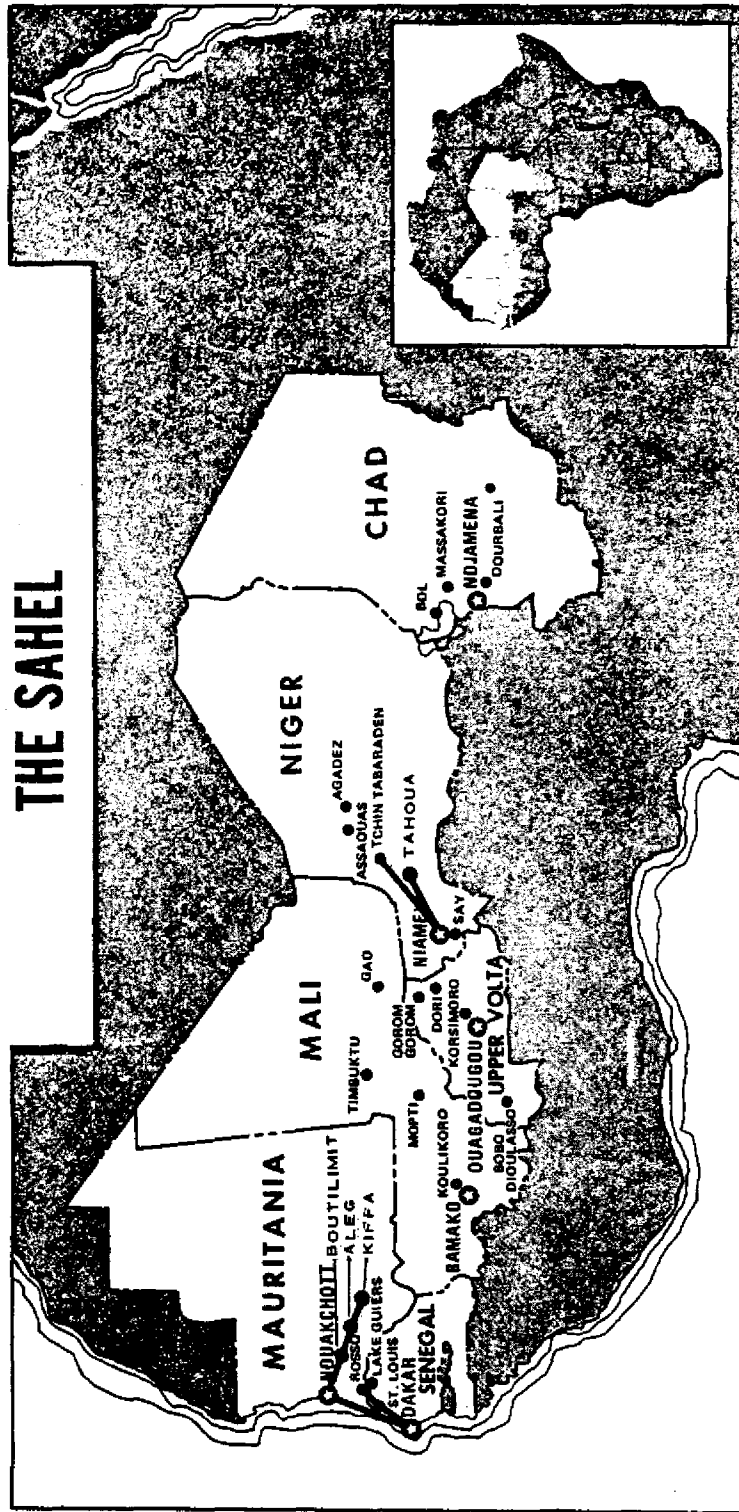
Finally, having central management would enable the donors and host nations to better overcome lack of resources or lack of administrative ability on the part of host nations. Too often developing nations just cannot be expected to manage a massive relief program, despite their understandably strong desire to do so. A strong disaster relief agency, backed by the resources of the donor community, can be expected to judiciously assist host countries in that management, yield greater efforts on the part of host governments, and provide additional resources from its pool whenever necessary to fill the gaps. In this way, the disaster relief agency should be able to provide much greater assurance to the international community that its combined resources are reaching the people than has been provided in the past. This element has perhaps been the one most seriously lacking in current management of disaster relief efforts.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

While we believe that the proposal cited above offers the best solution to the problem of disaster relief management for the long term, we recognize that implementing such a program will not be easy. We understand that prolonged and difficult international negotiations will be needed to convince other countries to support a proposal to establish an international disaster relief agency capable of managing and directing a fully integrated and coordinated international response to disaster situations. Accordingly, we are not making formal recommendations on our long-term proposal at this time. For the immediate present we agree with State and AID that the first need is to build UNDR0 into an effective coordinating mechanism; accordingly, we recommend that the Secretary of State lead the United Nations in:

1. Encouraging all member governments to pledge to build on UNDR0 and strengthen its relief coordination capabilities.
2. Developing disaster response contingency plans and developing agreements with U.N. agencies which will specify the respective roles and responsibilities of each as well as the amounts and types of resources they can make available in disasters.

3. Urging potential donor nations to articulate a positive disaster response policy and to enter into advance understandings with UNDRO as to the kinds of resources they will make available under UNDRO's coordination.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE SAHEL DROUGHT

#### AND THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The Sahel region is a belt across Africa some 2,600 miles long from Senegal on the west to Sudan on the east. The region is comprised of six nations--Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad. Together these countries cover some 2 million square miles (equivalent to about 60 percent of the land area of the United States), but more than 50 percent is desert.

Inhabited largely by nomadic herdsman and subsistence farmers, the Sahel region is one of the poorest in the world. Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, and Chad are on the U.N. list of the 25 least-developed nations. Total population was estimated in 1970 at 23.1 million and individual populations were estimated as follows:

--Upper Volta--5.4 million.

--Mali--5 million.

--Niger--4 million.

--Senegal--3.9 million.

--Chad--3.6 million.

--Mauritania--1.2 million

#### THE DROUGHT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Life in Sahel is at best a fragile existence, with weather playing the critical role. Annual rainfall varies from about 20 to 40 inches and is concentrated almost exclusively during a 4-month period ending usually in September. The rainy season is the growing season for the grain crops which form a large part of the local diet. Seeds planted in May or June are harvested in late October or early November, provided the rains come.

Beginning in 1968, the rains started to fail. By late 1972 the Sahel region was suffering from the cumulative effects of an expanding drought, and the human and animal inhabitants faced widespread famine. Trees and grasslands were destroyed by overgrazing. Grazing lands became barren and eroded. Lakes, rivers, and wells shriveled and dried

up. Reserves of grain, including seed stocks, were consumed. Thousands of nomads, their livestock destroyed, congregated in cities or refugee camps. Farmers, unable to remain on their land, moved in desperation to the cities and feeding centers.

Livestock losses have been estimated in the millions, and some experts have predicted that it will take years to rebuild the national herds. For the nomads, in particular, these herds were a primary source of food and income, and the drought has changed the way of life for many of them to a sedentary existence.

Drought is not a new phenomenon in the area; it has been customary and will undoubtedly continue to be so. What was new was the extent and severity of the drought. The extent of human suffering it caused may never be fully known because firm data is almost impossible to obtain. However, throughout 1974 the U.S. news media continued to report deaths from the drought.

The rains in 1974 produced fair to good national harvests. The drought appears to be over, and the threat of continued starvation has been averted. External assistance, which started in late 1972, continues even today. The United States still carries on emergency food and nonfood relief programs and short-range recovery and rehabilitation projects. It is also working with Sahelian governments and with other donors in planning for medium- and long-term development of the region.

#### INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE DROUGHT

It is difficult to determine exactly when the international community recognized the serious effect of the Sahel drought. In the spring of 1972, the Intergovernmental Committee of the World Food Program (WFP) discussed a proposal of the Director General of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization that the Sahelian nations be given special treatment in emergency food assistance because of the endemic nature of the drought in that region.

In September 1972 the Food and Agriculture Organization early warning system, which was designed to provide information of impending food scarcities resulting from protracted adverse crop conditions, signaled an acute emergency situation developing in large areas of the Sahel due to an exceptionally poor rain fall pattern. By October 1972 the Sahelian governments increased their requests for emergency food, and certain donors, including the United States, began providing such

assistance late in 1972. It was not until March 1973, however, that the six Sahelian governments publicly acknowledged the magnitude of the catastrophe, jointly declared the region a disaster area, and called for international assistance.

World concern for the area focused, quite naturally, on the immediate and urgent problems of famine relief. Donor countries and relief organizations made a wholly understandable effort to rush supplies to the disaster area, even without (1) reliable information as to real requirements or (2) assurances that emergency supplies, once provided, could be handled and distributed to those in need.

#### Physical and political difficulties impeded the relief effort

Any relief effort in the Sahel faces tremendous physical handicaps. Four of the six countries are landlocked, necessitating delivery of food through other countries' transportation networks and over very long distances. Chad has no rail system at all and, except in Senegal, transportation systems are not adequate to handle the volume of traffic the major relief effort entailed. After the rains begin, many areas of these countries are accessible only by air.

Political aspects also affected the relief effort. Getting six recipient nations and a multitude of donors to agree on how to operate is, at best, difficult. Some donors, notably Russia and China, either did not coordinate their efforts with those of other donors or have only recently begun to do so. The stricken nations themselves are young and financially and administratively weak. Yet they tended to discourage donor coordination and were oftentimes extremely sensitive to any potential criticism or donor offers of management assistance, which they felt would violate their sovereignty. One government, for example, showed considerable sensitivity to criticism. In another country, literally one man, the Minister of Health, was responsible for mobilizing and directing his entire country's participation in the emergency relief effort; yet, this country reportedly refused external offers of management help. These conditions required a good deal of dexterity and an innovative approach on the part of individual donors in their relations with host governments, which at times would rather refuse aid than yield any part of their sovereignty.



### Where the assistance came from

From available data, we estimate that the international community committed about \$500 million in drought relief assistance to the Sahel through March 1975. Within the international community, bilateral donors provided by far the largest share of this assistance. Other participants were U.N. organizations, voluntary agencies, and private organizations and individuals. From November 1972 to March 1975, total known food commitments exceeded 1.3 million metric tons, 1/ enough to fill 13,000 large U.S. railroad hopper cars. The amounts and percents committed by the various donors and provided to the recipient countries are shown in the charts on page 18. The U.S. share amounted to about 44 percent of the worldwide contribution at a cost of approximately \$128 million, including the cost of ocean freight and inland transportation.

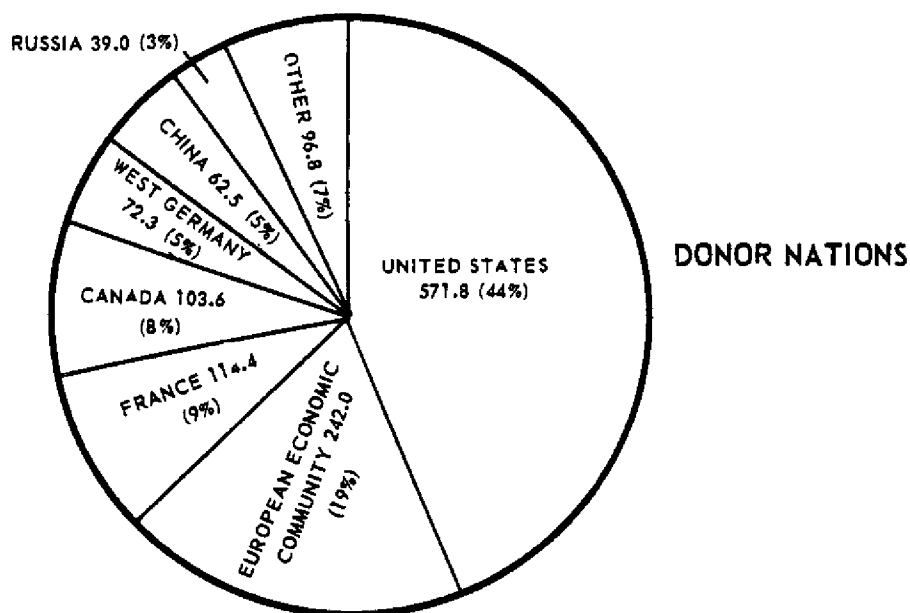
Although food constituted the greatest relief requirement, many other forms of assistance were needed. During fiscal years 1973 and 1974, the United States provided about \$30 million in nonfood aid, which included airlifts, trucks, medical supplies and equipment, animal feed, construction of storage facilities, donations to U.N. agencies, technical support, and recovery/rehabilitation projects.

The U.S. Government receives information on much of the nonfood assistance provided by the other donors, but its statistics are not complete, particularly for Russia, the People's Republic of China, and the Arab countries. However, AID has estimated that the value of nonfood assistance from other international donors during 1973 and 1974 totaled at least \$170 million.

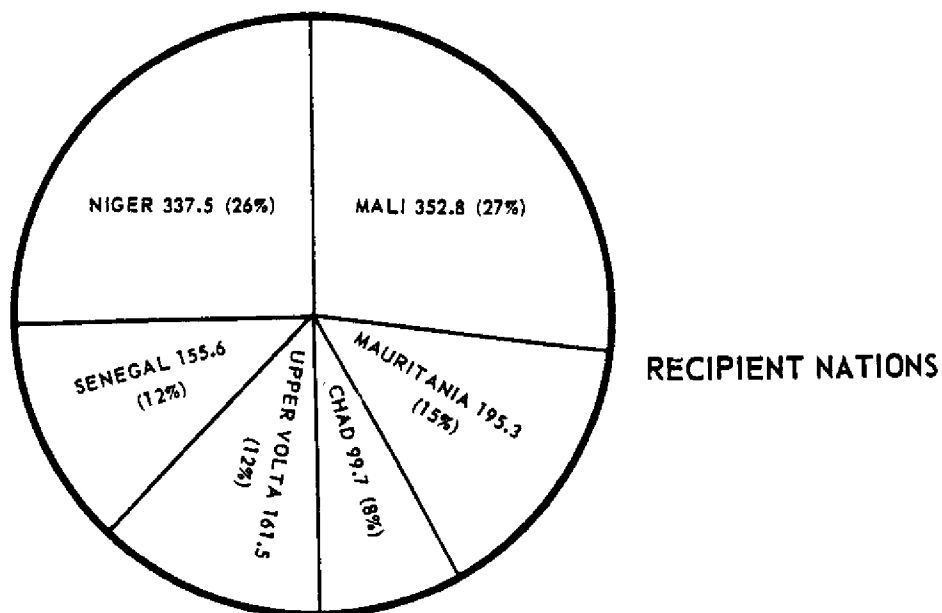
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1/One metric ton equals 2,204.6 pounds.

**KNOWN FOOD COMMITMENTS TO THE SAHEL**  
**NOVEMBER 1972 TO MARCH 1975 (note a)**  
**(THOUSANDS OF METRIC TONS AND PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL TONNAGE)**



TOTAL FOOD AID=1,302.4 metric tons



<sup>a/</sup> 1975 COMMITMENTS WERE TENTATIVE.