

CHAPTER 3

LACK OF EFFECTIVE COORDINATION OF SAHEL

RELIEF EFFORT AND PROBLEMS THAT RESULTED

The United Nations did not move quickly to take the lead in coordinating the response to the Sahel disaster. The U.N. Disaster Relief Office (UNDRO), the mechanism for coordinating natural disaster relief efforts, did not become involved because of its youth, inexperience, and inadequate staff and resources. After several months, some donors recognized the need for an international organization to coordinate their efforts, and in March 1973 the World Food Program (WFP) agreed to serve as an information exchange on shipping matters. However, the fact that the relief effort was already well underway and various other difficulties prevented it from doing this adequately. In May 1973 the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization was designated as the focal point for U.N. activities in the Sahel, and bilateral donors then urged the Organization to coordinate their operations as well. The Organization's initial efforts were ineffective, but over a 2-year period it evolved into a fairly effective coordinating mechanism for several major areas of the relief effort. By then, however, the drought had ended and the donors were shifting their emphasis from emergency food aid to rehabilitation and recovery programs.

For much of the emergency phase of the operation, therefore, the donors had to administer their bilateral programs independently with insufficient, untimely, or unreliable information as to what their counterparts were doing. As a result numerous problems arose, including congestion of ports by relief food shipments, donor competition for inland transportation facilities, spoilage and infestation of donated food stored in inadequate facilities, and inability to determine the quantity of food needed and whether the food was reaching the needy people.

ATTEMPTS AT COORDINATION

WFP

Encouraged and supported by the United States and some other donors, WFP agreed late in March 1973 to assume responsibility for coordinating donor food shipments. WFP realized that the Sahel region's limited port and inland transportation facilities represented the major bottleneck in the food supply line. It therefore concentrated its activities on becoming the focal point for information on emergency food commitments and shipments. However, WFP lacked the necessary

authority to insure an even flow of donor food shipments, and most donors had already made firm plans for shipping the majority of their committed food.

In April 1973 WFP began issuing newsletters on donor food commitments and shipping schedules, together with data indicating port and evacuation capacities, to provide the information necessary for donors to coordinate their food shipments.

In discharging its role, WFP faced several severe constraints.

- It had not previously coordinated bilateral food relief programs.
- It did not establish a separate organization to deal exclusively with the drought situation; instead, it assigned three headquarters staff members the responsibility in addition to their normal duties.
- It had difficulty obtaining information on some bilateral emergency food commitments and shipping plans as well as on commercial food purchases by the recipient governments.
- Its role was only tacitly accepted by some bilateral donors and recipient governments, who preferred to conduct the international relief effort on a strictly bilateral basis.

As a result, WFP's newsletters were not timely, comprehensive, or reliable.

Food and Agriculture Organization

In May 1973, about 7 months after the emergency relief effort began, the U.N. Secretary General designated the Food and Agriculture Organization as the focal point for U.N. emergency relief operations. The Organization established the Office of Sahel Relief Operations (OSRO) as its operating arm for this purpose and set up a trust fund to receive contributions for relief activities.

The Organization's coordination mandate was limited to the U.N. system, and it did not initially accept responsibility for managing or coordinating the entire emergency relief response, most of which came from the bilateral donors. Over a period of time, however, OSRO gradually assumed responsibility for coordinating several aspects of the relief effort.

OSRO was also beset by a number of problems which impaired its effectiveness:

- It had no previous experience in relief operations.
- It was given only limited staff.
- In late 1973, it experienced almost a complete turnover of staff.
- Until the early part of 1974, it had no effective field organization or communication system.

Like WFP, OSRO failed to obtain cooperation from Russia and the People's Republic of China and to acquire adequate advance information on the amount and arrival of commercial food purchases by certain recipient Sahelian countries. Although most major bilateral donors willingly exchanged information on their food aid plans and were generally responsive to OSRO suggestions, a few were reportedly less willing to cooperate. The Sahel governments themselves were also reluctant to permit any international organization to have authority over management of the relief operation for their countries.

In September 1973 OSRO began issuing weekly reports on donor food commitments and shipments similar to earlier reports prepared by WFP. These reports, however, were not readily usable by the donors because they were not sufficiently detailed. As a result of suggestions made by the donors at a February meeting in Brussels, the report format was revised in April 1974 to present much more comprehensive information. At the Brussels meeting OSRO made a more positive effort to avoid port congestion by distributing tentative shipping schedules--based on commitments, bookings, and expected arrivals--for each recipient country, which enabled donors to identify conflicts in their individual shipping plans. However, the success of this measure was questionable because, although some donors were still in a position to revise or reschedule some food shipments, others had already made firm shipping arrangements and at least one major donor could not agree to renegotiate its shipping contracts.

In August 1974 OSRO prepared a formal, coordinated shipping schedule covering November 1974 to March 1975 and gave it to the bilateral donors. This time OSRO acted before the donors had committed themselves to shipping schedules and, therefore, it was more successful.

OSRO sponsored multidonor mission surveys in the falls of 1973 and 1974 to establish mutual agreement among the

Sahelian governments and the major bilateral donors on needed food amounts. This permitted the donors to program food assistance against commonly accepted standards.

In the summer of 1974, OSRO sponsored several meetings in which it identified problems in the emergency food relief operation and made suggestions to both donors and recipients for resolving them. For example, at a June 1974 meeting in Rome, the donors agreed to set up coordinating committees at each major Sahel port. These committees were to include representatives from the port country, the recipient country, OSRO, WFP, and the donors. The committees were to provide a continuous exchange of information and a mechanism for quick decisions on such questions as alternative methods of transportation and price increases. This would then help to eliminate competition among donors for the use of transportation facilities.

It can be seen, therefore, that, during its involvement in the Sahel disaster response, OSRO did develop mechanisms to help donors program and ship their emergency food aid.

Sahel nations' committee

The affected Sahelian nations established the Interstate Committee for Fight Against the Drought at a meeting in September 1973. Theoretically, this committee was to be responsible for coordinating the Sahel nations' emergency relief efforts and for long-term development of the Sahel region; it was also to work closely with national coordinating committees on both short- and long-term needs. In actuality the committee has done little to provide operational support for emergency assistance. It has, however, served as a focal point for making demands on the donor community for overall support for drought emergency and long-term development needs.

PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM LACK OF EFFECTIVE COORDINATION

Unreliable assessment of needs

In the fall of 1972, donors had to accept the Sahelian countries' evaluations of their needs because an independent assessment was lacking and because most of the donors' in-country staffs were too small to do the necessary research. Since the countries themselves, in many cases, had no good idea of their needs, the donors planned their programs in late 1972 without knowing exactly what the needs were or what other donors were planning to provide.

In many cases countries made the same request to several donors in the hopes that at least one would fill it. Without coordination, there was a good chance that the donors would oversupply some items and not provide others at all.

In 1973 and 1974 the assessment of food needs improved vastly because OSRO organized the Multi-Donor Mission surveys. OSRO, however, had no control over the contributions made, so the chance still existed that donors would oversupply one country and undersupply another. In several instances, such imbalances seemed to occur.

For example, the 1973 Multi-Donor Mission survey had estimated Chad's 1974 food needs at 50,000 metric tons, of which 28,000 tons had already been committed. Several donors then donated large additional amounts of food. As a result, by July 1, 1974, total commitments to Chad exceeded 61,800 tons--far beyond what Chad's inadequate inland transportation system could possibly distribute.

Because of the generosity of the donor community, there appeared to be no serious shortages of food in the Sahel in 1974; however, a serious gap in food deliveries to Niger occurred in early 1974. The 1973 survey had estimated Niger's additional food aid needs at 112,700 metric tons, the largest estimate for any Sahel country. Donor food shipments, however, were slow in arriving. At January and February 1974 meetings, the Food and Agriculture Organization pointed out that only a few thousand tons of food were scheduled for delivery to Niger over the next few months. Since the food already delivered had all been distributed, the Organization appealed to donors to accelerate their deliveries. However, the donors were not able to accelerate them quickly enough. The United States, for example, was unable to significantly increase the volume of its food deliveries until April. In the meantime serious food shortages had developed in Niger relief camps.

The 1973 survey was made in September and October, before the harvest. The needs of Sahel countries were subsequently found to be somewhat higher, because inadequate rains at the end of the crop season caused the harvests to be much smaller than expected in some areas. Individual donors, therefore, had to judge again what the food needs actually were. The United States anticipated that overall needs would rise because the estimates were made before the crops were in. Therefore it based its donations on a higher figure than that originally recommended by the survey team. A representative of another donor, however, told us that the survey estimates did not significantly influence his government's 1974 donation because it believed they overstated the food needs.

The 1974 survey was more successful at estimating food needs because it was not conducted until November 1974, after the harvest. This survey also evaluated existing transport facilities for internal distribution and recommended what additional facilities would be needed for the following year. The survey team was unable to evaluate the need for additional storage facilities or for various agricultural inputs, but it reported on requests received from Sahel governments for these items.

Uncoordinated food shipments

Because neither WFP nor OSRO developed an effective coordinating mechanism for food shipments until late in 1974, shipments of emergency food aid tended to arrive in clusters which overwhelmed the capacities of ports and inland transportation facilities. Donors, therefore, were generally unsuccessful in delivering food so it could be distributed to remote areas before the rainy season--June through September--when floods and deterioration of dirt roads slows down or completely cuts off ground transportation.

Food shipments were slow in the early part of 1973, and only about 171,000 metric tons of the approximately 400,000 tons committed for 1973 arrived by the middle of May. Most of the remainder (about 245,000 tons) arrived during the next 3 months, far exceeding inland transport capacities for evacuating food to stricken areas. Consequently, emergency food supplies accumulated at the ports and certain inland locations.

For example, late in May 1973, it was estimated that it would take 3 months to evacuate food stocks for Mali from the Dakar, Senegal, port. The situation worsened as additional food supplies continued to arrive on an uncoordinated and unscheduled basis and, by July 1973, about 50,000 metric tons were stockpiled at Sahel ports. This quantity increased to more than 70,000 tons by the middle of August and, at the end of September, more than 54,000 tons were still stockpiled.

Thus, much of the 1973 emergency food aid arrived too late to be transported inland in sufficient quantities before the rainy season. When remote areas became inaccessible by ground transportation, donors resorted to airlifting an estimated 20,000 metric tons of critically needed food supplies from the ports and other locations to these areas.

Until the latter part of 1974, most donors delivered their food supplies for Mauritania through the port of Novakchott, which has limited facilities for offloading cargo. Large vessels cannot approach the wharf, so they

are unloaded into tugs and lighters which transport the food to the dock. We were told this procedure results in food losses of up to 40 percent.

Serious congestion problems also occurred at Nouakchott. Several donor cargo vessels arrived at the same time, and long delays occurred in unloading the food supplies. For example, it took 6 weeks to unload some vessels, and it was not unusual for some donors to wait 3 or 4 weeks for food supplies to be unloaded.

Again in 1974, the major donors working independently attempted to deliver the bulk of the bilateral emergency food supplies before the rainy season. Problems were even greater, however, because food needs were much larger than in 1973 and the donors were trying to get greater quantities of food into the countries. Most of the grain did arrive in the ports just before the start of the rains but in such large amounts that it could not be transported inland in a timely manner.

From November 1973 through October 1974, approximately 767,000 metric tons of food supplies arrived throughout the Sahel region--53 percent (405,000 tons) during April to July. Food arrivals ranged from a monthly low of 26,000 tons in January to 126,000 tons in May. Donated and commercially purchased food that became stockpiled in the ports increased from about 58,000 tons at the end of March to about 200,000 tons by the end of May.

Because of the slow donor shipments and the poor pre-positioning of food stocks by the Sahel governments, sufficient quantities of food did not reach remote areas before the rainy season and the donors again used selective airlifts in four of the six Sahelian countries to move supplies to areas cut off by the rains.

Inefficient inland transportation

No effective coordinating mechanism existed to insure the efficient use of available transportation facilities. Major donors made separate arrangements to transport their food supplies inland from the ports. Each exerted pressure on the recipient governments to have its food evacuated first instead of working together with the other donors to get grain received first moved first or to get grain more likely to spoil distributed before other more durable food supplies.

Some reports indicated that certain freight-forwarding companies in Africa played one donor against the other in an effort to drive up transport prices. At least once during

the first part of 1974, freight forwarders in one country were successful in this regard. To stabilize the price and movement of food supplies, committees comprised of donors and host government personnel were set up in each port in June 1974 and provided what little coordination mechanism existed.

The United States proposed that, for shipments beginning in late 1974, donors arrange and finance the ocean shipment of their donated food to the ports and contribute to the Food and Agriculture Organization trust fund to cover the cost of inland transportation. OSRO would then have the overall responsibility and authority for deciding where and how each donor's food supplies would be transported inland and for making overall contractual arrangements. The proposal was received with some interest, but it was not explored in any depth.

Delays in evacuating food from port areas

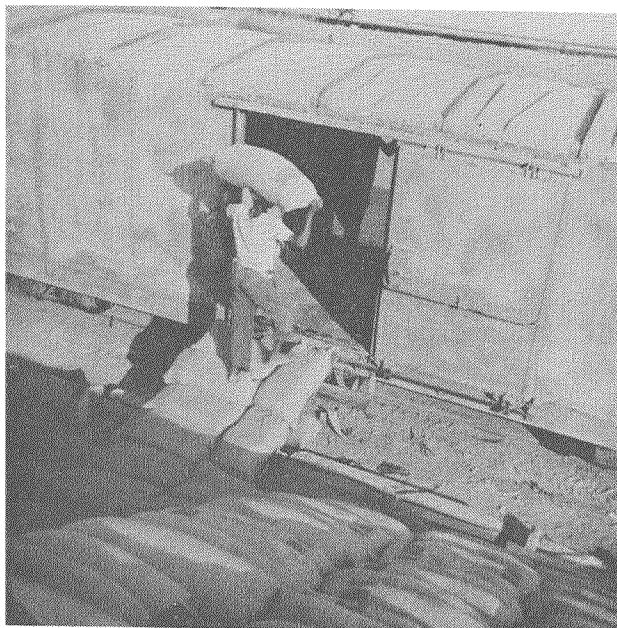
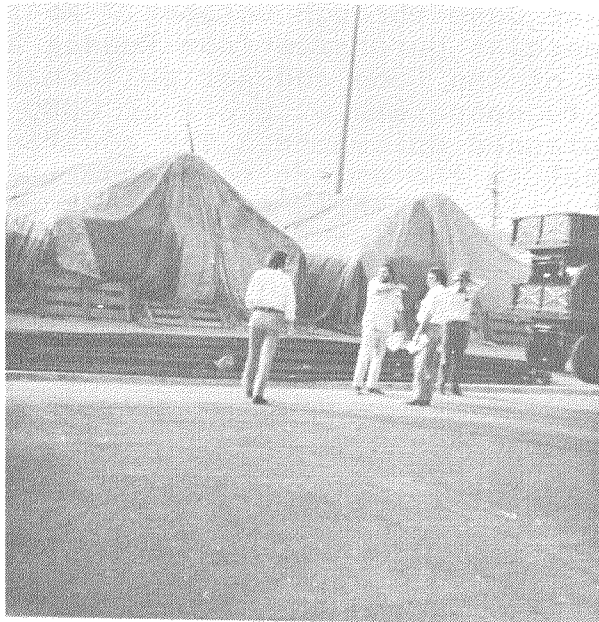
The port of Dakar received more than 32 percent (248,000 metric tons) of all food assistance delivered to the Sahel from November 1973 to October 1974. Dakar is the primary point of entry for emergency food supplies destined for Senegal and Mali, and some donors used it for food shipments destined for Mauritania.

Emergency food supplies destined for Mali were forwarded from Dakar by rail. Starting in 1973, this rail system's capacity was built up until, by 1974, it attained a total evacuation capacity of about 30,000 metric tons a month. (See photos on p. 27.) The railroad was used for transporting emergency aid and other goods throughout the drought emergency, and the Government of Mali each week determined the amount of food and other goods which would be evacuated by rail. The amount of food supplies evacuated varied from month to month, but it rarely exceeded 15,000 tons, or 50 percent of total rail capacity.

From March through May 1974, more than 90,000 metric tons of donated and commercially purchased food arrived in Dakar for Mali, but only about 36,000 tons were evacuated by rail. Consequently, food stockpiled at Dakar for Mali steadily increased from about 9,000 tons in February to about 71,000 tons at the end of May; an additional 8,200 tons of food were scheduled to arrive in early June.

Therefore, OSRO suggested that no further food shipments be made to Dakar for Mali for at least the next 2 months. Major bilateral donors agreed and suspended all further shipments.

**GAO AUDIT TEAM OBSERVING
GRAIN IN DAKAR BEING
LOADED FOR DISTRIBUTION
TO MALI IN NOVEMBER 1974.**



**EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES
BEING LOADED ON RAILWAY
CARS IN DAKAR FOR SHIP-
MENT TO MALI.**

Nevertheless, approximately 21,000 metric tons of additional food supplies arrived in Dakar for Mali from the end of June through October. Most of this was donations and commercial purchases from Russia and China, who are not members of the Food and Agriculture Organization and who chose not to cooperate with WFP or OSRO in exchanging information on planned shipments. The additional deliveries were detrimental to the effort to reduce the pipeline of food awaiting evacuation to Mali, and it took until January 1975 to evacuate the food supplies stockpiled in Dakar.

Emergency food supplies for Mauritania received at Dakar were transported through Senegal either by rail or by road and across the Senegal River (see photo on p. 29) to Rosso in Mauritania, a major storage point. The Senegalese Freight Bureau established the percentage of food to be shipped by rail and by road to Rosso, and it arbitrarily allocated about 70 percent for rail shipment and 30 percent for road shipment.

Shipments by road began shortly after the food arrived; those by rail were sometimes delayed for long periods until freight cars became available. For example, a U.S. vessel carrying 4,000 metric tons of sorghum arrived in Dakar on June 8, 1974. The Senegalese Freight Bureau allocated 2,800 tons for shipment by rail and 1,200 tons for shipment by road. After some persuasion, the Bureau agreed to increase the allocation for road shipment by 1,000 tons--apparently because sufficient freight cars were unavailable. The road portion was shipped within 10 days, while the rail shipment took over 6 months--from June to November.

Similar congestion problems and delays in evacuating stockpiled food supplies also occurred at major points used to channel supplies to Chad and Niger.

Spoiled and infested food

Throughout the Sahel, food spoiled and became infested primarily because of insufficient warehouse facilities to adequately protect the food during its delay in distribution. (See photos on pp. 30 and 30a.) Records were not maintained, however, which would indicate the magnitude of this problem.

The enormous quantity of food that accumulated at ports and at primary and secondary inland distribution points was stockpiled wherever room existed in and around these areas. Wet grain was stockpiled with dry grain, and newly arrived grain was placed on top of or near infested and spoiled grain.



**FERRY ON THE SENEGAL RIVER WHICH MUST
BE USED IN MOVING FOOD SUPPLIES FROM
DAKAR TO MAURITANIA.**