"Documento original en mal estado"

Increasing food output on marginal land

Experiments at a Mali research station to find the best organic fertiliser for marginal land

IN AN ISOLATED part of Mali, deep in the heart of rural west Africa, experiments are being carried out which could significantly improve food output from the poor, sand-swept land that dominates the area.

At a government agricultural research station in Cinzana, in Mali's Segou region, researchers are examining how farmers can make organic fertiliser that gives maximum crop yields.

Along a row of small plots they are trying out different techniques for compost making. On one plot, manure has been placed on straw, on another it is laid on dry land. On another it lies on land that has been watered. A demonstration plot of each variety is located both in sun and shade so that results can be obtained from both.

When the tests are complete the station intends to work with selected farmers to test the different composts on the fields and find the one which gives maximum yields – so helping to produce more food.

"The global food system must be managed to increase food production by three or four per cent yearly", says *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Experiments such as the one carried out at Cinzana are a vital part of the effort to increase food output and to do it where it is most needed – on the marginal, or poorest lands, of the developing world.

Many of these lands are in semi-desert such as north and eastern Mali. It is the onward march of desert which poses a constant threat to food output in these areas. The World Commission estimated that every year there are 21 million more hectares which "provide no economic return because of the spread of desertification".

One of the main challenges facing the international community is to hold back this spread and take measures that lead to an increase rather than decrease in food output from the marginal land at risk. The soils in semi-desert areas can be improved with fertiliser but first they need protecting from the encroaching desert. A Plan of Action drawn up at the 1977 UN Conference on Desertification pinpointed what was needed but, as the World Commission on Environment and Development has pointed out, plans languish for lack of money, organisation and grass-roots involvement.

Trees can be planted around farming areas to protect soil and increase food output. Experience has shown that tree-planting schemes are more likely to be successful if the local community is involved in their design, management and maintenance. But if more trees are to be planted, more money is needed.

It is not easy for the poorer communities that generally inhabit marginal lands to stop chopping down trees for their own use and for sale at the roadside or in local markets. Wood may be one of the few commodities they have to sell. It is clearly essential for local people to be fully involved in tree-planting schemes.

by John Madeley

Deforestation can play havoc with sloping farm land as flash-flooding washes away topsoil. Again, community involvement – plus government legislation – is needed to stop the problem at source. Changes in land tenure can help. In Thailand, people who were encroaching on forest land have been given security of tenure and are now planting new trees to replace the mature ones they are cutting down.

Research is important in expanding food production on marginal lands – by finding varieties of plants that yield well in the poor soils and low rainfall of these areas. Researchers in west Africa have found that new, taller varieties of the traditional cereal millet grow longer roots and can tap lower sources of water. One tall, high-yielding variety called *souna sanon* yields up to three tons a hectare – four times more than most farmers now reap from their existing varieties. Seeds from this new variety have been sent to extension workers and will shortly be tested out on farmers' fields.

On very hilly marginal land, terracing is widely practised as an essential element in maintaining food output. On less hilly, but still sloping land, terracing could be extended to improve food output. In the Hararghe province of Ethiopia the aid agency Christian Aid is currently funding a terracing project which has already led to a doubling of cereal yields.

Fencing – to keep livestock off crop growing land – is also needed, but is often beyond the financial abilities of marginal land farmers, as are other land protection technologies. Few aid agencies risk money on such farmers by giving them credit but the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has taken that step and is giving credit to improve food output on poor soil. IFAD has found that such loans are profitably used, lead to increased food output and are repaid promptly.

Shortly before he stood down as President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere made a strong appeal for the centuries-old tradition of composting to be more widely used by farmers. Composting is another major way which food production can be stepped up. The 300 atolls in the Pacific Ocean have become desert because their soil has little organic matter but a very high alkaline level and is continually exposed to salty sea-spray. Some of these low lying coral islands – long, narrow strips of land encircling a lagoon – are only 100 metres across in places.

After two years of consultations with atoll dwellers the United Nations Development Programme launched a project in 1984 to help them make their soil through composting. The project has encouraged the local people to start using a traditional but lapsed practice known as 'pit cultivation', in which people dig a pit and make a hole to the fresh water supply. Organic matter is laid at the base of the pit – and the islanders make their own soil.

People are now digging home garden pits measuring about a metre square and laying in them any kind of organic matter that is available, primarily leafy material but including animal waste and food scraps. The result: food output is increasing. "Once people have soil they can grow anything", says project coordinator Jeff Lieu.

If people are helped to have soil and then to protect and maintain it, food production on the world's marginal lands can be increased – with all that means in terms of heading off the threat of famine for millions of people.

Bags of maize being loaded onto WFP-chartered boat in Mozambique

The World Food Programme

25 years of feeding the poor and hungry

A quarter of a century ago, the World Food Programme (WFP) was little more than a novel experiment supported by 12 countries. Today, it is one of the world's major development agencies, the United Nations system's largest provider of direct assistance to the poor. Much has been learned about the uses—and misuses—of multilateral food aid in the last 25 years and WFP can rightly proclaim, "food aid works". Over the years, WFP has demonstrated to the satisfaction of both donors and recipients that food aid, an essential element in humanitarian relief, can also be an effective development tool.

IN THE AFTERMATH of World War II, world leaders began searching for ways to use the agricultural surpluses existing in some countries to meet emergency food shortages. None of the proposals got very far. For one thing, the focus was on the problems of the "haves". Butter and grain mountains were viewed as costly, unwanted burdens that needed to be disposed of as smoothly and as quickly as possible.

A landmark report, "The Ezekial Study", published in 1956, is now considered a classic work on food surpluses as a form of aid because it looked at the problem from another way—from the point of view of recipients.

Inspired by this new approach, in October 1960, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution which for the first time envisaged a multilateral system of food aid. Development experts began to see that food surpluses could indeed make a major contribution to the economies of countries in need.

Finally, at the 1961 Conference of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), delegates were presented with a report describing how surpluses could be an asset to economic development. However, it stopped short of suggesting a multilateral food-aid programme and instead cautiously suggested coordinated bilateral activities.

It came as a surprise to many when the US delegate, George McGovern, a future US Senator and Presidential candidate, stated that his country favoured a multilateral approach. McGovern, then Director of President Kennedy's "Food for Peace Programme", backed his proposal with a pledge of US$40m towards a new pilot programme.

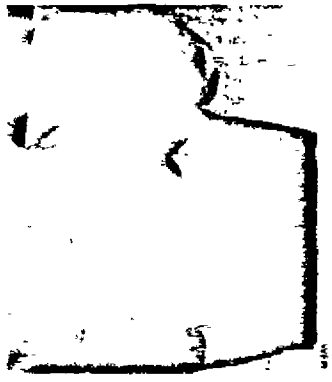
There was still no consensus on whether the new agency's focus should be on emergency relief or economic and social development. Indeed, the primary aim of the World Food Programme in its infancy was to provide for emergency needs.

Needless to say, disasters—natural and man-made—were not held in abeyance while the international community debated how best to deal with them. On 1 September 1961, three months before the Programme was officially launched, an earthquake struck Iran, killing 12,000 people. The harvest was lost; large amounts of livestock were killed, thousands of homes were destroyed. WFP's very first emergency operation was to arrange for the shipments of grain, tea and sugar to help victims survive the winter. Shortly afterward, WFP was called on again to provide emergency relief to hurricane victims in Thailand and Algerian refugees.

WFP's first development project helped resettle 50,000 Nubians in Sudan who were forced to leave their ancestral homes in the Wadi Halfi when water threatened to submerge their land, following the completion of the Aswan High Dam. Food aid was provided for the settlers until they harvested their first crops.

During the next three years, the Programme approved 116 development projects and handled 32 emergency operations in 25 countries. One thing was immediately clear—there was a need for this type of organization. A study of the Programme's first three years recommended that it be continued and expanded. WFP's International Governing Council agreed with that recommendation.

Between 1965 and 1972, the international community expressed its confidence in the young agency with higher pledges from an increasing number of countries, including developing nations.



James Ingram, WFP Executive Director

In 1969-1970, contributions had grown to US$320m, an impressive 160 per cent of the biennium's target.

Widespread food shortages in India and the USSR, changing agricultural policies in major exporting countries and the rapid rise in oil prices leading to the great recession of 1973-1974 severely squeezed WFP's operations. Thanks to a donation of US$50m in cash from King Faisal of Saudia Arabia—the second largest donation ever made—the Programme was able to weather the economic downturn.

This contribution, from a non-industrial, food importing country, also represented a major turning point in how WFP was

▶14

nber-october 1988

perceived. No longer was the Programme viewed simply as a vehicle for food exports and disposal but also expanded production. It had become a means for the international community to share responsibility for feeding the poor and hungry of the world.

In 1987, WFP spent nearly US $900m on development and emergency assistance. Contributions to the regular programme for the 1987-1990 biennium have so far reached US$1 147m. Nearly a quarter of WFP's donations are not in food but cash. Money is needed to pay for essential non-food items—trucks, tools, tugboats—necessary to ensure that food aid is being used to its full potential.

Food aid is limited in its ability to reduce poverty. Even when it is used to support agricultural development, increased production means little if people have no money to make purchases. One of the most important means of reducing hunger is to generate employment. That is where food-for-work comes in.

"Food-for-work enables us to reach the truly poor", says WFP Executive Director James Ingram, "those willing to work for food. At the same time, we also address the causes of their poverty."

In China, for example, WFP is supporting government efforts to restore ecological balance. Food-for-work projects include terracing, tree planting, land leveling and drainage improvements. WFP has so far contributed US$475m to China, not much in respect to the total population, but very important in terms of impact.

In Egypt, WFP has helped the government increase agricultural production by supporting projects in land reclamation, development and resettlement. WFP food aid is also being used to feed formerly nomadic Bedouins while they establish themselves as farmers.

In Ethiopia, where frequent droughts, a highly publicized famine and civil unrest have created untold hardship for millions of people, WFP food commodities are used to subsidize terracing and tree planting activities and to repair the damage to arable land caused by deforestation.

"Whether it is the African food crisis or the influx of refugees from Afghanistan, WFP is one of the most effective instruments of the UN system in providing food aid," says Sartaj Aziz, Special Assistant for Food and Agriculture to the Prime Minister of Pakistan. "If we did not have such an agency, we would have to create one, if only for that purpose."

In theory, food aid's goal should be its own elimination. Great strides have, in fact, been made in food production, particularly in Asia. At the same time, production in sub-Saharan African countries has failed to keep pace with population growth. As the number of man-made disasters multiply and heavily indebted developing countries undergo painful economic adjustments and environmental degradation reduces harvest, the need for food aid is increasing and WFP's support for development must therefore continue.

Ultimately, the Programme's work should not be viewed in terms of the volume of food shipped or the number of people fed, but in terms of the number of people who are able to feed themselves.

WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

Today the World Food Programme brings to the Third World, well over two million tonnes of food a year to those in need in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The amount of food aid that would meet the needs of the world's hungry is really only a small part of total production. In 1974, the World Food Conference established an annual target of 10 million tonnes of food aid in cereals. In 1984/85, for example, farmers in industrialized countries produced 923 million tonnes of cereals, but only about 10 sacks of every thousand were used as food aid for the world's poor.

Food needs of developing countries have grown, the percentage they receive as cereal aid has stagnated. As a result, they have had to import more food commercially. Low income countries suffer particularly from this levelling off in food aid. In 1974, they received 18 percent of their cereal imports as food aid. In 1983/84 only 16 percent was available as aid. Some countries may be able to pay for some of these imports with loans, but that cannot be a solution for all. Paying the interest on such loans consumes much of their limited earnings, choking off funds for development.

WFP has a dual role. Firstly, it advises governments on the efficient and effective administration of food aid. The Programme's staff have extensive experience with transportation and distribution of food aid and with the difficulties that may arise. Field staff monitor the use of the food and ensure its effectiveness as a development tool.

Secondly, WFP ships the food and buys food where necessary, taking responsibility for it from the time it is released by the donor government until it arrives at the port or the frontier of the recipient country. This means that WFP arranges and pays for the shipping and insurance of the food, using contributions of cash and services form donor nations.

Another WFP resource which is increasing in size is the International Emergency Food Reserve (IEFR). It was set up by a special session of the UN General Assembly, to provide standby food stock for emergencies.

The IEFR target is 500 000 tonnes of cereals per year. Resources not used in one year are carried over to the next. In 1986, total contributions to the IEFR reached 598,000 tonnes.

How important is food aid in development assistance? Currently, about US$ 3,00 million are disbursed annually from all sources - roughly 10 percent of the official development assistance provided by major donors.

To handle emergencies. While most WFP assistance is used for development, the Programme also responds to emergencies. Apart from providing food aid itself, WFP has also been called upon to coordinate international food-relief operations in large-scale emergencies. In the wake of disasters, the Programme can use food aid to follow up relief operations with "food for work" projects to bring lasting economic improvements.

Tying food aid to development projects is an effective way to ensure that it reaches the truly poor. When food aid moves through food-for-work projects, only those willing to labour for food - that is, those who really need the food - will receive it.

Food aid used in this way is highly visible as it moves to the project site. Deliveries and distribution can be monitored by field staff which helps reduce mismanagement, misappropriation or spoilage. Moreover, frequent contacts with beneficiaries to keep them informed about their entitlements helps ensure that food aid reaches those who truly need it.

Making food aid available for a project may also motivate other donors or technical agencies to join in, especially if they did not have sufficient resources to undertake a large-scale project by themselves. Food aid can also support innovative projects whose long term viability is unproved and may have trouble attracting investors. Successes may lead to larger-scale support from development banks or other donors.

Although food aid is useful for all the reasons mentioned above, there are some drawbacks or constraints in its use. Food is bulky and expensive to transport, it can spoil or be damaged if not properly handled and not all food that donors make available is universally acceptable.

Moreover administering food aid properly requires managerial and technical experience and capability. In some developing countries these are in short supply, and in a few countries it may be extremely difficult to administer food aid well. In these countries WFP takes special measures to subsidize transport, construct storage facilities and help train local personnel.

There is also the risk that food aid improperly or carelessly distributed could hurt local food production and commercial trade. In planning and overseeing projects, WFP tries to ensure that the longer-term impact of the food aid is to increase local food production and to raise the incomes of marginal farmers. The bulk of WFP's development assistance is used to stimulate food production and rural development through irrigation works, forestry and land management, dairy development and agricultural training - all of which help to improve a nation's self-sufficiency in food.

Overall, food aid has proved to be a valuable resource for development. It serves in ways that other types of development assistance do not. Moreover it makes use of a vital resource that would otherwise be wasted, even though so many people so acutely need it.

Food for work is reclaiming land in Africa as well. Along with being one of the most drought-prone countries in Africa, Ethiopia also faces severe environmental problems. In its largest project on the continent, WFP is halting soil erosion in the Ethiopian highlands. Through a US$ 139 million "food for work" project two million people have work in the slack times between planting and harvest.

The achievements so far are impressive - 200,000 kilometres of hillsides have been terraced, enough to build a one metre stone wall around the world four times, and 95,000 kilometres of soil bunds and 80,000 kilometres of stone bunds have been constructed. In addition, 300 million seedlings have been grown and 1,660 kilometres of check dams built. As the land becomes more productive because of these soil and water conservation measures, the economic status and food security of Ethiopian farmers is expected to improve significantly.

Providing food to people when unforeseen disasters strike is one of WFP's major goals. In 1986 alone 11 million people were helped by WFP emergency assistance.

The Programme used commodities worth US$ 179 million for emergencies in 1986, with onefifth of that coming from its regular resources. The rest was supplied from the International Emergency Food Reserve.

The Programme deals with three types of emergencies, all of which may harm food production and distribution. First, there are sudden natural catastrophes such a floods or earthquakes which damage crops, make farming impossible for a time and often disrupt supply line. Second, and somewhat different, are the slowly evolving disasters, such as drought or crop failure resulting from poor weather or pestilence. These may be possible to foresee, if not forestall.

The third type has been growing rapidly, namely, man made disasters such as wars and civil disturbances. In 1986, over three fourths of WFP emergency aid went to refugees and displaced persons following such disasters, while in 1976, only about half of emergency aid was so used. All told, there are about 10 million refugees in the world today and the World Food Programme is feeding half of them.

The WFP response to emergencies differs considerably from its regular procedures. Since detailed technical scrutiny is unnecessary, the government request is rapidly examined and appropriate clearances obtained quickly. When necessary, the entire process can take only a matter of days, especially when food can be borrowed from local stocks or purchased nearby.

Food allotted to emergencies includes only basic staples. WFP makes every effort to deliver emergency shipments quickly. Sometimes it is possible, for example, to borrow supplies from WFP project stocks near the stricken area. These are then replenished later. Sometimes food is purchased, either within that country or in a neighbouring one. Rice, for example, was bought from Burma for Kampuchean relief operations.

WORLD FOOD PROGRAM
426 Colombo Colombo
00145 Rome, Italy

Learning to live — or die — with famine

By David Pallister in Dessie, Wello Province, Ethiopia

EVERY day Mekuria Demissie sees about 100 starving people in their dirty brown rags struggling past his village in search of food.

Some of them, usually women with their children squat outside the guarded gates of his school compound that has been converted into a feeding centre for 500 local children between the ages of six to 11. A former hospital health worker and now director of the child-feeding programme for the valley, he has an impossible task.

"What can we do?" he asks with an air of resignation. "We haven't enough food for the beggars, although I am sorry to call them beggars. Sometimes we give them food just once, but usually I say we have nothing. They will go on and die." The valley is only configured to take care of its own.

The failure of the "little rains" in March and the late summer rains have left the sorghum crop stunted and sparse. In each field, a small boy is perched all day long on a high platform to keep away the scavenging birds.

As yet, the Government has not opened one of its distribution stores, but wheat, corn, oil, and milk powder — mostly supplied by the American-based Catholic Relief Services — have been trucked in by an Ethiopian Protestant church.

The 500 children who go twice a day to Mekuria's feeding centre for porridge are chosen by the five kibeles — the farmer's associations in the valley — from those most in need. A distribution centre has also been set up for 1,000 children under five.

Their mothers have to choose their most undernourished child, often from a family of five or more, walk with them for up to one hour and collect their monthly rations. Fortunately, the CRS minimum rations are generous as aid agency calculations go and the amount for a mother and child will probably feed a whole family. But it is still not enough: people are dying.

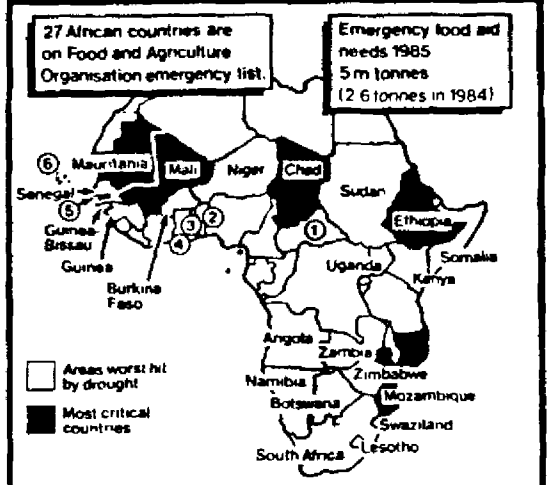
Driving north, the Ethiopian landscape turns into an extraordinary series of contradictory scenes. Groups of wasted people, pleading by the roadside with both hands outstretched would be replaced by well-fed and smartly-dressed school-children going home with satchels over their shoulders or herds of up to 30 cattle, sheep and goats on their way to market. In the villages, signalled by wooden arches with revolutionary slogans, the bars and the grocery stores and the petrol stations were all open for business.

A few miles from the cotton factory and army barracks of Dessie, 15,000 famine victims have descended on a feeding centre set up by the Red Cross at Batu. Eight hundred are arriving every day, some from more than 150 miles away.

On Thursday, 20 babies were born on the earth floor of the corrugated maternity hut. Eighteen people died, two less than the day before. The centre has been set up with remarkable speed in five days with the help of the Ethiopian Red Cross.

The 7,500 children being fed at Korem have seen so many TV crews these last few weeks that some of them have made replica cardboard cameras out of Norwegian biscuit boxes. It is a flash of humour in an otherwise grim situation where 40 children are dying every day.

Africa's food crisis



A strategy to end starvation

Two years ago a report sponsored by two United Nations organisations outlined a strategy for the Ethiopian government which could have reversed the decline in food production. It was never published or acted upon. These extracts are relevant both to Ethiopia's plight and to the 24 other African countries which are running short of food

AGRICULTURE is the foundation of the Ethiopian economy, the largest sector of production and the source of livelihood for 85 per cent of the people. Unfortunately, agriculture is also the weakest sector of the economy and it will require a major effort to stop its decline.

Food production per head had declined by about 5 per cent over the six years preceding the drought. Incomes and the productivity of labour in the countryside are extremely low and hence both the marketable surplus and the potential rate of savings in agriculture are insufficient to finance both its own expansion or the development of the rest of the economy.

The main resource available in the agricultural sector is seasonally surplus labour and our strategy for rural development is based on mobilising this labour for a series of capital construction projects which will (i) bring more land under cultivation, (ii) raise yields on existing land eg through land improvement projects that increase the cropping ratio eg through small scale irrigation works (iii) increase the productivity of labour eg by improving the quantity and quality of farm implements (iv) lead to the development of a local construction industry based on locally available materials and (v) encourage the establishment of small workshops and factories to process agricultural products, produce simple consumer goods used locally and provide inputs for further agricultural development.

The initial investments will be financed not by low consumption of the peasantry but by greater work and less idle time. Once output per head begins to rise part of it can be siphoned off as savings to finance further investment.

This process of labour-investment followed by savings-investment will not happen spontaneously. It will have to be organised. It is here that cooperation has a vital role to play. Any form of cooperation that is viable should be encouraged be it service cooperatives or producers cooperatives.

The thrust of the cooperative movement however should not be collective production but collective accumulation. That is the cooperatives should be regarded as institutions to promote investment by organising labour for capital construction projects and second by amassing accumulation funds out of the revenue surpluses of cooperative owned undertakings. Collective agricultural production should be a secondary objective of cooperatives and one which is subordinate to the imperative of accelerated accumulation.

Great care must be taken to ensure that cooperation is in the material interest of the peasantry. Two dangers in particular must be avoided. First, force must not be used to establish cooperatives. It will only lead to resistance, it will not lead to accumulation.

Second the incomes generated by cooperatives must not be appropriated by the state in the form of high rates or compulsory deliveries of grain at fixed low prices. The objective of policy should be to encourage local initiative, local effort, and local savings for investment in the locality of direct benefit to the people making the sacrifices. The whole purpose of the strategy is to promote grassroots development.

The state should concentrate whatever resources it can devote to rural development on two things providing economic and social infrastructure and improving the performance of the state farms.

Ethiopia has systematically underinvested over a long period in rural infrastructure — roads, power, irrigation, storage and processing facilities — and in the health, education and training of the rural population. In consequence the return on investment in agriculture, industry, and commerce is low because their efficiency is greatly hampered by the lack of complementary services and facilities and skills.

We regard investment in rural infrastructure, primary education, basic health services, potable water supplies, and training as necessary in themselves and a precondition for profitable investment in agriculture, rural industry, and urban manufacturing.

Unless the fragmentation of the economy can be overcome the national market will forever remain small and return on capital will remain low. Hence the importance of state investment in infrastructure.

The state will also have to provide basic social services. A good start has been made, particularly with the literacy campaign and the provision of primary education. We recommend that the approach developed in these two cases be extended to other fields as well. The mass organisations in town and country exist and have demonstrated their ability to organise and run campaigns in their localities. They should be encouraged to expand their activities to include health, nutrition, family planning and the care of children.

There are two great advantages to a mass approach to the provision of basic social services. First such an approach is essential in providing a floor to poverty. The central government cannot be solely responsible for the eradication of illiteracy, universal primary education, widespread preventive health measures, maternal and child care, etc. Yet these are the services every community must have if poverty is to be contained and every family is to enjoy minimum economic security. Second local involvement in administering the social services can lead to local involvement in financing them.

This will relieve the central government of part of the financial burden of the social services and at the same time provide an incentive to the mass organisations to mobilise local resources for the continuation and expansion. Just as we believe that cooperation can lead to capital accumulation in the rural areas so too we believe that mass organisations have an important role to play in limiting economic hardship and guaranteeing minimum standards of public welfare.

From the perspective of the centre, one of the disadvantages of socialism from the grassroots is that local resources will be mobilised and retained locally and not be made available to the urban areas. An obvious worry is that the supply of food in urban areas will not be sufficient to feed the urban population. In principle, and in the long run, this should not be a serious problem in Ethiopia since less than one person in five lives in the cities. If agricultural output can be raised significantly the huge rural population should be able to feed the small urban population with ease.

It is in this context that the state farms assume importance. They are the government's insurance policy against severe food shortages in the cities since virtually the whole of their output from grain producing farms is available to the Agricultural Marketing Corporation to supply the public food distribution system the army, the government institutions such as hospitals.

At present unfortunately the insurance is expensive. The state farms are both technically and economically inefficient and consequently the great majority operate at a loss.

Signatories of the report were **Dr Keith Griffin**, President of Magdalen College Oxford; **Dr Shyam B. L. Nigam**, Chief of JASPA Addis Ababa; **Dr Manzoor Ahmed**, UNICEF New York; **Dr Duri Mohamed**, president Addis Ababa University; **Dr Ajit Ghose**, ILO; **Mr Andrew Graham**, Balliol College Oxford; **Mrs Peggotty Graham**, Open University Oxford; **Dr Roger Hay**, Queen Elizabeth House Oxford; **Dr Vali Jamal**, JASPA Addis Ababa; **Dr Justin Macda**, adviser on Rural Development to the President of Tanzania; **Mr Roger Opie**, New College Oxford; **Dr James Pickett**, University of Strathclyde; **Mr Derek Robinson**, Magdalen College Oxford; **Dr Ashwani Saith**, Institute of Social Studies, the Hague; **Mr Abu Salim**, ILO; **Dr Sheila Smith**, University of Sussex; **Dr Teshome Mulat**, Addis Ababa University.

DAILY NATION, FRIDAY, JANUARY 2, 1987

SPECIAL REPORT

World acts to feed the hungry

PERSPECTIVE

Europe's grain surplus is estimated at 16.7 million tonnes — piled together it would be two-and-a-half times the height of St Paul's Cathedral in London. But shifting it to the hungry in Africa would solve no problems. Food aid must become an instrument of development, says *H. W SINGER*

BRIGHTON, Thursday

The recent African famine made a traumatic impact on the European public. The television pictures of starving children were deeply impressed on the public mind. This has resulted in a shift of public opinion.

Whereas previously the pressures were for reducing aid and "looking after our own" in the belief that "we have plenty of problems at home," now the pressure is towards prompt and generous action in future emergencies of this kind — and more important, action to prevent them.

Bob Geldof has become the symbol of this shift, particularly noticeable among younger people.

Repercussions of the 1985 famine are still being felt and almost certainly will continue into 1987.

The African countries most catastrophically affected were Ethiopia, Sudan and Chad in the north, and Angola and Mozambique in the south. These five countries, although geographically separated and different in many ways nevertheless share three common features.

●A prolonged and exceptional drought often exacerbated by previous environmental damage such as deforestation for firewood needs, overgrazing, lack of terracing and soil exhaustion.

●All are ravaged by civil wars. This gave the famine operations a heavily political character, because of the need to channel financial and food aid programmes to and through governments which were parties to the civil war.

●In all five countries there are vast land areas and tremendous difficulties of transport and communications.

This made it difficult in the first place to obtain information on famine conditions, and then to distribute food and other essential emergency supplies. It also encouraged flight in remote areas from the land into more accessible refugee camps.

In the circumstances, emergency aid did reasonably well. Millions were saved from starvation; many children were saved from irreparable damage due to malnutrition. But there were also major failures.

Neither the donors of aid nor the recipient governments obtained sufficiently early warning of pending famines to take timely action.

Such action would have been much cheaper and more effective if it had supported farmers on their own land, before they sold their cattle, ate their seeds and fled to refugee camps.

Resettling these farmers after their farms were abandoned will be more difficult and more expensive.

The ponderous procedures, particularly of European Community food aid, meant that supplies often arrived too late when the immediate emergency was over.

At this stage it was aid for rehabilitation that was needed rather than emergency food supplies which by that time often competed with the local harvest. The main need then was for seeds and non-food items, to replace cattle and tools and to resume production.

Much thought needs to be given as to how in future to avoid such mistakes. How to get earlier warning to avoid the political difficulties, to get food aid at the right time and in the right amount to the right places, and to help in the rehabilitation after emergency.

In all these respects, non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam, Band Aid and Care, have great advantages over government action. These advantages must be utilised better in the future and give such agencies a proper role in emergency aid.

International organisations such as the UN World Food Programme and Unicef have advantages in prompt and politically neutral action over national (including EC) action.

The creation of the UN's International Emergency Food Reserve has been a great step forward. Like food aid itself, but unlike financial aid, it has easily reached and exceeded the UN target.

Beyond this, however, remains a larger task of giving true development aid of the kind which enables the now famine stricken countries to increase food production and prevent future famines.

The case of India shows that this is not impossible, given a Green Revolution and effective administration. But Africa is still waiting for both.

Huge food surpluses in the West — at least 80 million tons of cereals in Europe and the United States, mostly the latter — are the results of policies basically harmful to developing countries.

In the case of sugar, for example, the artificially-encouraged production of beet sugar in the first world is catastrophic for developing countries dependent on the export of cane sugar.

The protectionism inevitably linked with the West's high agricultural subsidies also prevents developing countries from selling exports.

Surpluses depress world market prices and compete on a subsidised basis with the exports of countries such as Argentina for wheat or Zimbabwe for maize.

But for better or worse the surpluses are there. They represent a challenge and an opportunity to use them in the fight against poverty, malnutrition and famine in the Third World countries, and as a means of helping to finance their development.

If surpluses are indiscriminately dumped on Third World countries with the sole aim of getting rid of them they undermine the market for local producers and reduce the priority that recipient governments give to agricultural investment.

But there are ways of avoiding these dangers and to make food aid an instrument of development rather than an obstacle. The two key measures are:

●To target the food aid effectively to poorer people who have no effective commercial demand for food, thus food aid is additional to and not at the expense of domestic production.

●Government funds could then be effectively used to promote development thus increasing demand for food, and specifically to promote investment in domestic agriculture and as a source of better prices and improved services for local food producers.

The transfer of unwanted food mountains to undernourished Third World populations and their use as development aid is not such a simple and mechanical matter as is popularly believed.

But simple or not the co-existence of the mountains and lack of food in Africa is a scandal and an insult to human intelligence. Ways must be found to convert the store of unwanted surpluses into the bread of human development.

— Commonwealth Features Syndicate

Geldof. Helped shift opinion

Drought victims receiving aid. Surplus food from the West serves better as famine relief than "dumped" export.

Sub-Saharan Africa.

Taking off again

"We have given a great deal of thought to our problems. We have a 90 per cent chance of solving our problems by ourselves. What is now required is efficient management. That is the only thing we have still to master—efficient management."

WHO IS SAYING THIS? A business tycoon? A planner? The marketing executive of a large chain of supermarkets? No, it is a leading farmer of West Africa, Mamadou Cissokho, the coordinator of federations and groups of farmers in Senegal, one of the representatives of a new race of African farmers that is emerging all over Africa, the spearhead of a real grassroots revolution which is Africa's greatest hope today.

In 1984, Mamadou Cissokho's village, Bamba Thialène, was a basket case. Some farmers were eating their seeds, selling their ploughs just to survive. In January 1987, thanks to rigorous planning, the village had food stocks sufficient to cover 60 per cent of the village's total consumption for one year. I myself saw the heaps of millet stored in the village granary.

In our journey of 14,000 kms by car, jungle taxi, train, bicycle, cart, canoe, motor bike and, of course, on foot, in the course of which we spoke with about 1,300 farmers—both men and women—in over 100 African villages in five countries (Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe and Kenya), we became aware of the amazing impact of this silent revolution which is going to make us, in the West, seriously revise the pessimistic and negative ideas we have about Africa.

"We set out on the principle that we must do the most for ourselves", said Mamadou Cissokho. And the results are there for all to see. The ingenuity, creativity, courage and open-mindedness which we witnessed during this long journey would fill many pages. Groups of farmers who decide to operate gas stations, who set up and run tourist camps and traditional medicine centres. Farmers who, with their bare hands, build anti-salination dikes, as in Casamance, or mini-dams so that their womenfolk no longer have to walk 25 kms per day in the dry season to fetch water, as at Nombouri in Dogon territory (Mali).

In the region of Sedhiou (Senegal) some farmers set up, in 1985, an End-Hunger Campaign Committee for the purpose of eliminating hunger from the region by the year 2000. It has several thousand members. Never, in the course of 11 years in Africa, did we witness such determination.

One spokesman of the Committee, Bemba Biaye, told us, "Night and day I work on the project for eliminating hunger. Night and day I think of it. We shall never retreat. We shall move resolutely forward. Nothing will stop us." And when we asked Pathe Diao, the young farmer accompanying us as interpreter for four days, when he expected to get married, he replied without the slightest hesitation, "In any case not before we have overcome hunger."

The Committee has mapped out a whole strategy for eliminating hunger by building village granaries, diversifying cereal, fruit and vegetable crops; community fields, environmental protection and other efforts. An original feature is setting a specific date for eliminating hunger from the region.

"We knew that many organizations were working on hunger—but they were not working so much on the elimination of hunger," one of the founding members, Demba Mansaré, told us. The similarity with the forthcoming Project Hunger, a worldwide educational campaign on the possibility of ending hunger by the year 2000, is striking. (We saw Project Hunger posters on three of the Committee's village granaries.)

Demba Mansaré went on to say: "We must believe that it is possible to eliminate hunger. We must have this firm belief and the firm desire to eliminate hunger. From there on, we have the necessary commitment for organizing activities in this direction."

And in the statute of that Committee we read that "Hunger persists because we believe it is inevitable and consider ourselves powerless to change things. That attitude must be discarded. The first stage is to create an awareness of each person's power and each person's will to act."

When we visited the Committee in February 1987, it was receiving no external aid of any kind. This absence of aid, far from discouraging them, had only strengthened their motivation and determination to succeed. "If we are always requesting aid for building our houses, and if the aid is suddenly withdrawn, the houses will crumble," Demba Mansaré added. "So we depend entirely on our own resources. If we receive aid, all the better. If not, we shall forge ahead with our own resources."

"The Committee is very ambitious. We do not just limit ourselves to collecting food. We say that all the local possibilities of making headway in this direction must be turned to account. It is primarily a matter of grassroot organization and research. There are still many possibilities for the farmers that remain unexplored. We are now surveying and coordinating these possibilities to eliminate hunger."

The Committee publishes a short bulletin entitled "Les moyens des sans moyens" (The resources of the resourceless). It is a whole programme. "If we really want to eliminate hunger, we can do so. It all depends on us, on our motivation, on our commitment," said Barlo Diedhiou, one of the Committee's founding members.

In Zimbabwe tens of thousands of small farmers in the traditional sector have joined together in the National Farmers Association of Zimbabwe. The Government recently asked one of their representatives to sit on the board of directors of the national bank. In five years, from 1980 to 1985, the volume of maize marketed from the traditional sector increased from a maximum of 68,000 tons before independence to over 1 million tons, to the point where Zimbabwe now exports maize, thus demonstrating the tremendous potential of well-managed African farming.

Farmer ringing his lambs, Casamance, Senegal

No one knows exactly how many of these groups of farmers are springing up everywhere like mushrooms. As for Kenya alone, figures of 16,000 to 25,000 women's groups have been quoted. In the Sahel, the farmers' groups probably number at least 12,000 to 15,000.

There are very specific reasons why these groups of farmers are coming into existence first of all, there is the ecological deterioration which spread at a speed and with an intensity that few people realize. "When I was a youngster, there was absolutely everything," we were told by Jacques Méda, a farmer from Dissin (Burkina Faso). "There were lions, cobras, monkeys, antelopes and gazelles and hippopotamuses in abundance. The land was very fertile, not exhausted as it is now." And the forest, rich and bountiful, sustained the wildlife which it sheltered. "There was a huge forest around the village," said Lisette Beliem of Siguinoguin (Burkina Faso).

In 30 years animals have all but vanished, except for a few rare monkeys, and today, 30 years later, Lisette's village is surrounded by a vast plain with sparse trees and a hot wind that deposits a fine dust everywhere and against which there is no effective remedy.

In Kalassirou, a small village of Peuth herdsmen, there is not a single head of cattle left. The women have even sold all their jewels which is a tragic sacrifice for them. "The famine has devoured our jewels," said Jahawa Tamboura, pointing to her stomach and neck.

In addition to rapid environmental deterioration, other factors have played their part: integration of villages into the money economy, the emergence of new needs (e.g. education of children) and especially a drop in many farmers' income. (In 12 African countries, the average income has fallen since 1960.) In some countries there has been an almost inhuman withdrawal of the State after years of intensive and even excessive efforts by all sorts of agencies to integrate farmers. In many countries, community mutual assistance (called "harambee" in Kenya) has become the only way of financing many public services (schools, clinics, etc.).

One important factor is the sudden discovery, by many African farmers, of the scarcity of land, probably a result both of bad growing techniques (abandonment of fallow land, extensive farming) and diminishing rainfall and of population growth or inefficient land distribution in some countries. "The lands under cultivation have shrunk considerably," we were told by Ali Kindibalba, the village chief of Nombouri in Mali. "When I was a child, there was enough land, but now there is less and less." (Ali is in his thir-

th...] In particular the drop in yields has b... catastrophic almost everywhere. Around Dassri the soil is so exhausted that Jean Pierre Debré works in fields 18 kms away from his home!

In view of these challenges—of which we have mentioned only a few, and there are many others in the political, cultural and social fields—the farmers began to organize themselves, often with incredible courage (particularly in the case of women whose workload has steadily increased in the last few years) and sometimes with astonishing ingenuity.

Courage: this reminds me of the women of Cambousséma village in Casamance who make round trips of 70 kms on foot to sell the vegetables they grow in their community garden (for a profit of 5 to 10 French francs).

Ingenuity: this reminds me of the young boy and girl farmers of the neighbouring village of Candion-Mangena, just south of the Gambian frontier, who operate by themselves a traditional medicine centre so efficient that farmers make round trips of over 100 kms away, and even from Banjul, the capital of the Gambia, for treatment.

The size of the groups varies enormously: 15-20 in some cases and 100-200 in others, but the average, between 50 and 80, is probably in the Sahel. What strikes the observer is the fact that women are everywhere in the majority. Between two thirds and three quarters of the members in the Sahel are women, and more than 95 per cent in some regions of Kenya.

The reasons are clear: the women walk farther and farther in search of water and wood. As these resources diminish, they have to look for other sources of income (for example, the women of Kalassirou manufacture a highly appreciated perfume based on roots which they go to sell in Mopti several dozens of kilometres away from their village). In East Africa many men emigrate to the towns and the women are left alone in charge of the entire family because the menfolk often do not come home to help them.

We have the highest respect for these African women who sometimes work 18 hours a day (in the rainy season) and walk and walk without stopping: such as the Sémari women in the Dogon region (Mali) who walk for 40 kms per day in the dry season in search of water (with children on their backs sometimes, and 25 kgs on their heads), or the women of Dissin who walk 30 kms several times a week in search of wood. "We have become machines," Jahawa Tamboura and her friends told me.

In the opinion of the men themselves, the women are more competent and more disciplined. "Women organize themselves better because they have stronger willpower," Bouré Diocou, head of a mixed group in Kodji (Senegal), told us. The inevitable conclusion to be drawn from this is that *the main effort in rural development comes from the women*, so long neglected in all respects.

In the Sahel, these village groups are organized at the local, regional and even the national levels. Thus, the powerful Union of Naam Federations in Burkina Faso embraces 2,500 village groups from the Yatenga region alone (150,000-200,000 farmers; no one knows the exact figure because new groups are formed every day). In Senegal most of the group federations have established the Senegalese Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations (FONGS) which plays a key role in training and could well serve as an inspiration for other countries of the region. In both Senegal and Burkina Faso the governments have decided to play the farmer-groups card to the full extent. In Burkina Faso, this has been done by establishing the world's only Ministry of Farmers' Affairs, whose initial role will be to organize and energize the farming community.

A small millet grinder.

The first groups came into existence in the 1970s on the initiative of men such as Jean Gabriel Séni, a farmer of Burkina, and Bernard L. Ouedraogo, founder of the Naam group, and Abdoulaye Diop and Demba Mansaré in Senegal who have always been pioneers. Gradually these early examples set the pace, although in many cases groups arose spontaneously in response to the pressures referred to above. Very often they grew out of traditional associations which had always existed in the villages and joined in the work together, bearing such names as M'botsi among the Wolofs, Naam among the Mossi, Walde among the Peulhs, Kafo in Mandingo country. Tons among the Bambara, etc.

The great majority of these groups draw up their own rules of procedure and elect their officers. They undertake all kinds of development projects, organize community fields, and in some cases even manage to change centuries-old customs in a matter of years. Thus, some of the groups we met had succeeded in regulating dowries, marriage costs and baptisms, and even burials which, in traditional societies, entailed very heavy costs that farmers today consider a waste of resources.

The village groups are having a major impact on farmers' lives, especially in the Sahel. They represent the rediscovery of traditional forms of solidarity, but on a much wider scale. When asked how the groups have changed their lives, farmers most often reply that the change is based on harmony and togetherness.

Indeed, under the impact of the trading economy and the influence of towns, a certain individualism had begun to penetrate into the villages. "Formerly all a father's sons worked for him. He was the one who made all the decisions. But since the last war individualism has arrived and children have started to work for themselves," said Karamé Dingding Djité, a man over 100 years old, in the village of Boussenku (Casamance). The renewed solidarity and spirit of cooperation, so typical of Africa's cultural background, is now assuming much more important dimensions. There is cooperation between the sexes, between ethnic groups, between villages and even between regions. And this harmony is reflected in the sometimes poetic names given to the groups. For instance, the Diallédou group in Mali is called "Everyone agrees", and the group in the neighbouring village of Kassoukoroji is called "There are no two words here".

The impact of the groups is felt at many levels, starting with a profound change in social relations in the villages. The Wolof proverb of Senegal, "Nit nitaye garabam", means "Man is a remedy for man". For the first time, women and young people dare to express themselves in public in front of men and old people. Better still, they are listened to. Women are gradually filling posts of responsibility in which they will be in charge of men. "The Naam groups have carried out a real revolution in relations between the sexes," we were told by Marcelline Ruamba of Kongoussi in Burkina Faso. "Women now express themselves freely. They trade freely. In earlier times young people did not dare to express their views in front of old people. Now you even see old people asking young people for their views."

Centuries-old customs are changing. For example, it was a tradition in the Sahel during the dry season for men to spend many months doing very little work. They spent long hours chatting. Now we are witnessing what may be called the emergence of a work ethic in certain groups, such as the Naam group entitled "There is no longer anyone who does nothing".

Several villages we visited have succeeded in bringing the rural exodus to a complete halt. Some, like Ronx in northern Senegal, have even reversed the flow. There are young townspeople, sometimes high-school graduates, who come back to settle in the villages of their birth. This is one of the hopeful signs for the groups: their ability to create an economic and cultural environment that competes with the attraction of "city lights".

Food customs are changing. In Yatenga, the spread of kitchen gardens has in a few years' time uprooted centuries-old food habits, testifying to the swift adaptability of the farmers when they face a crisis. The groups are increasingly taking over roles that were traditionally incumbent on the State: building schools, roads, lying-in clinics and village dispensaries, and establishing facilities for assisting the needy. In the Kongoussi region of Burkina Faso, for example, the Naam groups have built 25 village lying-in clinics.

In our opinion, however, by far the greatest impact of the groups is the new self-confidence felt by the farmers. This confidence prompts them to rediscover their identity, to "return to their roots"—a rehabilitation of a long-despised culture. Thus the Bamba-Tialene Entente, one of the most original group federations that we came across, conducts its own historical research into its past and, by means of literacy classes in national languages, is teaching the farmers about their cultural background. This group is undertaking highly original research aimed at constructing its own African agricultural development model.

At present one of the greatest obstacles to sound development of the groups is the eagerness of many Western non-governmental organizations to offer the

groups money before they have learnt to stand on their own feet. We know of some cases of groups ruined by an over generous bounty indiscriminately disbursed.

Moreover, by funding specific projects, these organizations oblige still inexperienced groups to use a typically Western management model designed to produce a short-term but limited result — the implementation of a specific project — without taking into account other options such as group training which is often more important *for the group* than implementation of the project.

There is one organization which is an exception to the rule. It is an international association with a totally original form of aid which, in our opinion, ought to replace the model of aid-through-projects and is much more in keeping with the real needs of the groups. It is called "6-S" — *Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel* (Make Use of the Dry Season in the Savanna and Sahel), with headquarters at Ouahigouya in Burkina Faso.

Unlike all the conventional non governmental organizations, 6-S does not finance specific projects (kitchen gardens, well-digging etc.). Instead, it gives money to federations of village groups which have the authority to decide on the utilization of funds (usually in the form of loans) on the basis of certain criteria. For the first time the farmers feel that people really have confidence in them. Moreover the general meeting of 6-S is attended by farmers' representatives who participate alongside representatives of the major donor agencies, thus constituting a unique dialogue between recipients and donors.

Engaging the farmers' responsibility is a way of stimulating the ingenuity which emerges spontaneously when a farmer has confidence in himself. This confidence of the villagers is the keystone of their real self-sustained development. The following example of "boy mills and girl mills" will illustrate this clearly.

In a village of Burkina Faso a number of women members of the Naam groups received a small grain mill. An old woman farmer made the following suggestion: "Whenever a woman wishes to mill grain she will have to pay. We shall set aside part of the money in a special fund for

buying a new mill. When we have saved enough to buy it, we will give it to a friendly neighbouring village, it will be a 'girl' mill because, according to our tradition, girls marry outside the village. Then we will continue to save and, when we have enough money to buy a second mill, it will be a 'boy' mill. We will keep it in the village, because in our tradition boys marry in the village. It will replace the 'father' mill which will then be ready for retirement."

Dozens and maybe hundreds of villages throughout the Sahel have adopted this principle of self-financing which is now applied not only to mills but also to a series of other projects. And this idea was not invented by an expert in development but by an old illiterate woman. As a leading farmer of the region, Halidou Sawadogo of Séguénégué, used to say, "When the farmers are given responsibility, they are capable of incredible miracles."

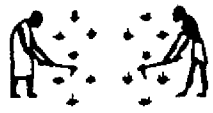
The farmers extol the 6-S. "It is a partnership without conditions," said Samba Gueye, Vice-President of FONGS. "I don't know what would have become of the farmer movement in Senegal without 6-S". "6-S for us is synonymous with hope. With 6-S we have accomplished things which we did not imagine were possible" added Bara Diombele, village chief of Diogani-Bere in Mali. But perhaps the most revealing remark made to us was that of a leading Senegalese farmer, Ibrahima Seck, who simply said, "We are 6-S".

Like any other organization, 6-S has its defects. But we think that the 6-S approach, consisting of letting the farmers manage their own funds, would make it possible to open up a new phase in grass roots international development aid, provided that funds are subject to very stringent criteria (such as the establishment by the villagers of a savings scheme *before* obtaining credits, with the prior implementation of projects testifying to their determination).

The type of projects executed by farmers in Senegal and Zimbabwe would fill entire pages. By way of example we might mention simply the kitchen gardens reforestation the introduction of farming with draught animals, grain mills, countless community fields (fields cultivated by an entire group), all sorts of buildings, grain banks, bartering of food between regions, etc. Particular mention should be made of the amazing eagerness for training which we found everywhere.

But some of the most encouraging successes are to be found in the anti-erosion campaign. In Zom (Yatenga), Bouraima Beliem showed us his field. "In 1984 this was bare rock. Erosion had removed all the soil. Thanks to the anti-erosion dikes I managed to raise rice the following year." Another of his nearby fields had recovered 30 cms of soil in three years. At Wattinoma, a few kilometres from there, Seydou [illegible] showed us [illegible] practically [illegible]. "Thanks to the dikes my yields have increased 3.5 times in two years."

No doubt the village groups, which are at very different levels of awareness and training, also face great difficulties and experience failures. But for someone who has had the privilege of communicating with so many of them over a short period the impression of a genuine wave of enthusiasm is undeniable. What is most



striking is the tremendous optimism, the almost metaphysical optimism of these farmers — and of these women farmers in particular — who tackle incredible problems with admirable courage and tenacity, and who, in addition, radiate both *joie de vivre* and a sense of hope that have long vanished in the countries of the North. "Courage is a total commitment which is immune to adversity" Pathe Diao, a young Senegalese farmer, told us.

In Tintam, a Malian village devastated by drought in 1984, ravaged by locusts in 1986, whose fruit trees have been slowly dying one after the other for 12 years (including karite tree nuts which are an important source of export earnings), which has even been deserted by the bees and whose inhabitants eat only one meal per day, the assembled villagers told us "We are not discouraged. So long as any strength is left in our bodies and God guides us, we think we can overcome these difficulties."

Dendo Péliaba, chief of the small Dogon village of Minti, spoke the following amazing words of wisdom. "This drought has become a weapon for us. In times of plenty, each person worked for himself. The drought has induced us to build dikes in our fields. We have discovered plants that grow more quickly. Hunger has become a master who has taught us to reflect."

In Mayor (Casamance), the members of the group told us, "Everyone — man, women and children — all are involved in the anti-hunger campaign and firmly determined to eliminate it in five years." In the West there are people who speak derisively of those who claim that it is possible to eradicate hunger from the world by the year 2000. As Mamadou Cissokho expressed it so well, however, "We are optimists because we have experienced hunger. You in Europe can allow yourselves the luxury of pessimism because you don't know what hunger is."

One of the most instructive events in our journey was in the small village of Badumbé in Mali. After a full day of discussion with some 40 leading farmers on a strategy for eliminating hunger, the participants said "Don't give us any money. Give us ideas", for such ideas enable them to devise their own ways of countering hunger. There is an African proverb to the effect that "The lack of means is already a means". Hunger becomes a weapon for innovating. Perhaps this is the attitude which prompted Paul Ilboudou, one of the leading lights in the field of functional literacy in Burkina Faso, to reply to our ques

tion about what they considered the main centres of hope in Burkina Faso (one of the Sahelian countries most severely hit and the least favoured by nature) in the following terms. "There are so many such centres that I don't know where to begin."

There are 350 million farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.

Three hundred and fifty million centres of hope. Three hundred and fifty million solutions. □

Pierre Prodersand is a Swiss writer and researcher specializing in development and education. He is currently writing "Africa: the victory of courage" on African peasant movements to appear in 1988.

Africa's food needs in 1988: An overview

Several sub-Saharan African countries will again require large food aid shipments to contain the spread of hunger due to drought and civil strife.

On 17 December, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization announced in Rome that aggregate cereal production in 45 African countries had fallen by 15 per cent in 1987, to 44.4 mn tons.

Their aggregate food aid needs in 1988 would amount to 4.6 mn tons, about 42 per cent higher than in 1987, the FAO estimated.

Only about 2.9 mn tons in food aid had been pledged by donors to meet these needs, with actual receipts so far amounting to 900,000 tons.

The World Food Programme (WFP) had earlier warned on 16 November that 2.7 mn tons of food aid would be needed by the 15 most affected countries in the 1987/88 crop year, (see chart). Of special concern, over 1.2 mn tons of cereal needs and 200,000 tons of non-cereal requirements had not been covered by pledges from donors. An additional 115,500 tons were needed for refugees in seven countries. WFP food shipments had already exceeded the total for 1986 and its emergency stocks were quickly being depleted.

The Sahelian belt

Cereal production in 1987 declined about 12 per cent in relation to last year in the nine Sahelian countries which belong to the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)—Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal.

The FAO, which since May 1983 has been analyzing satellite imagery of vegetation conditions continent-wide—received afresh every ten days and compared with images from previous years—estimates that aggregate cereal output in CILSS countries will still be 8 per cent above average for the last five years, and is 45 per cent more than the drought-reduced 1984 harvest

On the northern reaches of the Sahelian belt, poor rains have hurt cereal crops Harvest shortfalls are expected in northern Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Mauritania.

Niger faces poor crop prospects overall. With a forecast cereal harvest some 20 per cent less than last year's good one, it would face a significant cereal gap.

However, according to the 30 October UN Status Report on the Emergency Situation in Africa, which is based on information provided by the UN system and other multilateral and bilateral sources, ". . . it is expected that problems arising from cereal shortages in these countries can be handled through established procedures between the governments concerned, WFP, FAO and the donor community. The latter's assistance will be required primarily to help finance the purchase and transport of cereals from surplus to deficit areas of the Sahel."

Grasshopper and locust infestations in the Sahel were less serious than anticipated in 1987. The poor rains in June and July helped, as did large scale aerial and ground control operations co-ordinated by FAO in Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger

Western coastal countries

For West African coastal countries (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo) 1987 is expected to be an average year in terms of cereal production. This is despite a 10 per cent decline from last year's record harvests. Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana should have good crops, the same as or better than last year's. Nigeria's cereal production is expected to decline by over 10 per cent, due to poor rains and increased planting of cotton at the expense of cereals. Benin's cereal output is forecast to drop sharply due to poor early rains and excessive late season rainfall and weather conditions were a problem in other countries as well.

Stocks accumulated from the good 1985 and 1986 harvests should help fill most of this sub-region's cereal gap in 1988, but some increase in cereal imports is expected. The ability of these countries to export cereals to neighboring countries will be limited.

East and Southern Africa

Acute food shortages are developing in southern Sudan, where civil strife is disrupting the distribution network and uprooting families According to the UN's Status Report, "a serious food crisis could soon develop unless vigorous measures —including airlifting of relief items—are urgently taken."

Significant pockets of drought can also be found in Zambia, and more localized ones in Uganda and Zimbabwe. The food supply situation in Malawi is serious, particularly in drought stricken areas of the south and in some northern districts where the cassava crop was damaged by a meal bug infestation.

Botswana is in its sixth consecutive year of drought, and has had a cereal harvest of just half its normal production.

"By and large," the UN Director for Emergencies in Africa, Charles La Munière says, "these food deficits can be handled sectorally by governments and non-governmental organisations as concentrated rather than complex emergencies."

However, the situation in Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique, detailed in the articles on the following pages, is far more critical.

Food aid needs for sub-Saharan Africa 1987/88

(in tons)

Country	Cereal food aid needs	Pledges confirmed	Uncovered requirements for refugees
Angola*	240,000	138,140	—
Botswana†	58,760	55,610	—
Chad	35,000	15 000	—
Ethiopia††	1,300,000	420,000	—
Malawi	122 000	87 545	—
Mozambique	750,100	479,892	—
Niger	14,000	3,000	—
Somalia	50,000	50,000	72,528
Sudan	134,000	—	22,861
Swaziland	2,000	2,000	1,278
Tanzania	50,000	30,000	999
Uganda	76,000	23,000	—
Zaire	100,000	73,100	3,275
Zambia	108,800	92,600	5,815
Zimbabwe	—	—	8,710

*Situation has since improved due to higher than expected commercial imports and higher food aid pledges
†Also includes non-cereals
††FAO estimate as of 9 December
Source UN World Food Programme, November 1987