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Africa: Coping with Drought

Julius Nyerere

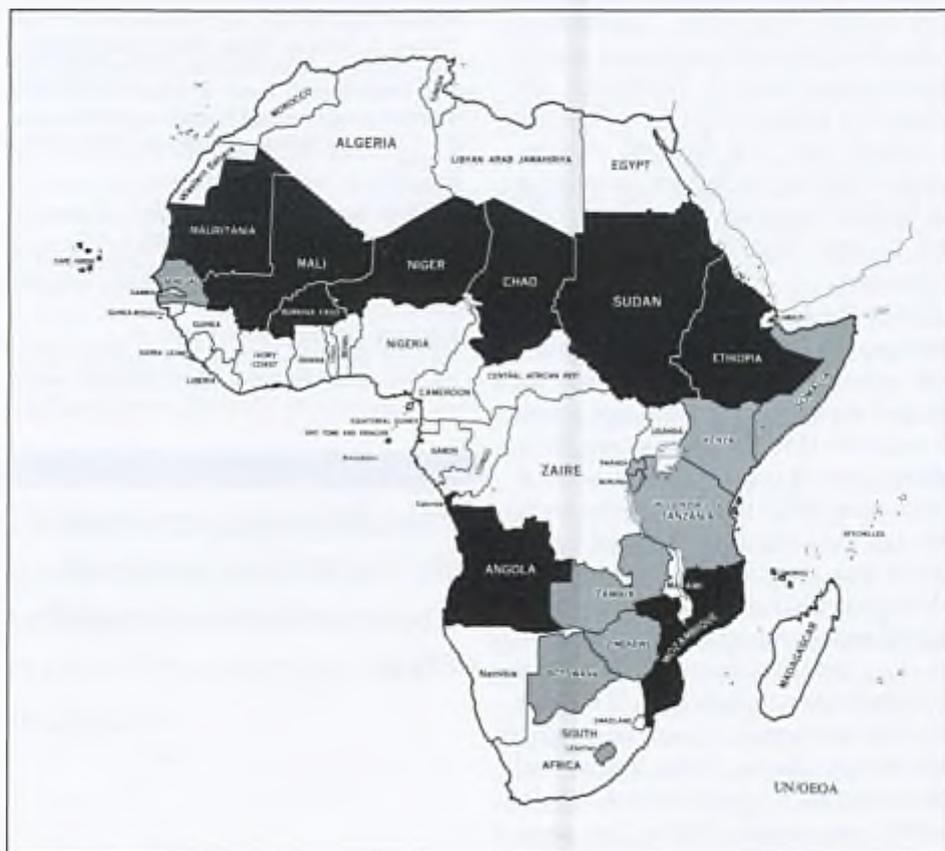
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AFRICA:



EDITOR'S NOTE

The following interview with President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, chairman of the Organization of African States, OAU, was conducted in Geneva by Djibril Diallo, editor-in-chief of *Africa Emergency Report*, a United Nations publication, where it was first published. The additional country fact sheets are courtesy of the U.N. Office for Emergency Operations in Africa:

Mr. President, what do you see as the international community's priorities in Africa?

There are two tasks here. One is the immediate: people need food, and unless food is supplied to them they will die; in actual fact thousands of people have already died. There was a delay, there was a very long delay between the time that it was quite clear that food was needed and the time that there was a response from the countries which could be helpful. And now of course, food is being provided, but

we are still asking for more relief.

But providing food is only the immediate task. The real solution to the African problem is *development*. You have got to help African countries stand on their own feet because the potential is there in Africa for producing enough food to feed the population of the continent. But the conditions have to be created for this development. The attitudes of the rich countries of the world at present are not conducive to the continent's efforts to be self-reliant.

There is a continuing transfer of resources, from the poor countries (including the African countries south of the Sahara) to the rich countries of the world. Unless this is reversed somehow, we are going to have this kind of problem recurring year after year.

What are Africans doing to help themselves?

What we are asking the international community to do is to help Africa do what Africa itself cannot do. The population of Tanzania, for example, is 20 million people, but nobody is asking the international community to feed all these people. And

despite our own difficulties, we agreed at our OAU summit last November that we should establish our own OAU Relief Fund. The Fund has now been established and we are going to be appealing for help to all our African countries, without exception. Some countries — Algeria, Libya, Nigeria — have pledged substantial amounts, while even poor ones like Tanzania have given \$100,000. But there is a shortage still of food after we in Africa have done all that can be done, and *that* is why we are asking additional support from the international community.

What is the magnitude of the problem in Tanzania?

Well, our problem last year was that in one region of more than a million people, the crop almost totally failed. But even then, which is the point I was making earlier, while we did get food from outside Tanzania to help these people, most of the food which the deficit areas required came from Tanzania itself.

As chairman of the OAU, what is your role in the present emergency situation?

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To articulate, really. I can do no more than articulate the needs of the continent. Somebody has to say it, we are all saying it, but at present I have the advantage of being able to say it on behalf of the continent.

What is the biggest problem you face in this articulation?

I think the biggest problem I face is possibly some indifference. I think that once the peoples of the developed countries have been made aware of the problems, they will do what they can. But they have to be informed and *we* cannot do the informing. We can provide the facts but the informing has to be done by the media. It is not surprising that although this problem of famine and starvation had been known in Africa for a long time, it didn't "exist" until the media took it up.

So first, we have to make the people of the economic north *aware*, and that is being done now. Secondly, since the problem is not going to vanish within a few days, this awareness has to continue, otherwise it becomes something which is <http://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol12/iss4/6>

seen on the television screen for a short while and then forgotten.

But perhaps, most important, we must get the governments of the economic north to look at this problem more seriously, not simply at the immediate needs of relief, but the medium and long-term problems of development of the continent.

Could you address that, the medium and long-term?

I am saying that eventually, Africa will have to produce its own food. But it cannot produce its own food without development. I think we have the resources, we *could*. But we are not sufficiently well-developed to begin to handle the problems of development so that Africa can be self-reliant, at least in the production of food.

We would need additional resources even if the resources that we have were not being dissipated. But the resources that we have *are* being dissipated. To give you a single example, at the OAU summit in Addis Ababa last year where, incidentally, we agreed to devote the next summit mostly to the economic situation of the continent, a figure was given of Africa's

indebtedness: 150 billion dollars. Africa has a debt of \$150 billion US dollars. If you think of the interest which is paid on that (and I am told the average rate now is about 10.1 per cent), *Africa would be paying 15 billion dollars annually in interest alone.*

So here is a continent which at present has to live on charity because otherwise millions of its people would die, but that same continent will probably be paying to the rich north this year an amount of 15 billion dollars in interest alone. And of that 150 billion owed, Africa south of the Sahara, the poorest part, owes 90 billion, meaning that it will pay about 10 or more billion dollars in interest alone.

So when one is talking about what Africa can do to be self-reliant, what resources Africa itself can produce, we cannot ignore this yearly drain of \$15 billion in interest alone. We have to sit down with the governments of the north, and discuss more seriously how Africa can be assisted to develop her own resources. □