

Distr.
GENERAL

A/CONF.172/10/Add.5
27 April 1994

Original: ENGLISH

Item 10 (g) of the provisional agenda*

NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION: DROUGHT MANAGEMENT

Technical session

Addendum

Components of an emergency relief strategy

Summary of presentation by the World Food Programme

1. The focus of this section of the presentation is on drought management in Africa, and more specifically on subsistence farmers and agro-pastoralists. These are the real experts on drought management, and any intervention must be based on a close understanding of their world and on consultation with representatives from the community.
2. The World Food Programme (WFP) is expanding its use of vulnerability mapping to improve its own understanding of the conditions of the people affected by drought and thus its response to the situation on the ground. Such mapping would complement the information collected through the Early Warning System of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The objective of vulnerability mapping is to identify better the risks in areas subject to drought, and to both target emergency assistance earlier, and to target development resources at areas where people are most at risk of food scarcity.
3. To establish the relative vulnerability to food shortfalls of various areas within a country, it is necessary to look not just at indicators on food availability but also at the structure of the economy on which the population in high risk areas depends, and the strengths which are manifest in the household strategies, or coping strategies, of the people. Knowledge about these household strategies can also help us to find more effective ways to use food aid to enhance people's ability to guarantee their own food security without dependence on deliveries of emergency food aid.

* A/CONF.172/1.

4. The findings of WFP while monitoring household level response to drought in Zimbabwe during the drought relief operation of 1992/1993 provide a microcosm of the situation in many other countries and demonstrate many of the household strategies which are used by a drought-affected population. The household strategies which carried people through the drought were a mixture of traditional seasonal coping mechanisms, a high dependence on remittances from working family members in the cities, and registering for food distributions. Some coping strategies were shared between both rural and urban family members. Two major coping mechanisms in the worst hit parts of the country were gold panning and a high dependence on goat sales and consumption. In many families, there were difficult decisions to make between longer-term household strategies and short-term strategies to deal with the drought. Food aid made some longer-term options possible in areas where there was not a total dependence on the distributed food for survival.

5. In the presentation, two factors and their relationship to household strategies are given special focus: migration, and the role of local markets. Certain WFP interventions which are aimed at strengthening people's coping mechanisms are described. Some issues that arise in the management of drought operations are also touched upon.

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