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Mozambique and Other Recent Flood Disasters: Comparing the U.S. and International Responses

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Summary

Some have criticized the U.S. response to the recent floods in southern Africa. Their concern has been that the U.S. response has been too little and too late in comparison with disasters in other parts of the world. U.S. spokesmen argue that their response has been appropriate and timely with contributions to Mozambique of over \$32 million and additional contributions to the region of over \$40 million. The U.S. government has responded to eight flood disasters thus far in FY2000 in addition to the current flooding in southern Africa. This report and the table on p. 6 compare the U.S. and international responses to each. The report will be updated.

Current Disaster in Mozambique and Southern Africa

South Africa, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe experienced their worst flooding in decades during January and February 2000. In addition, Cyclone Connie brought rains in the first week of February, Cyclone Leon-Eline crossed the region between February 17 and 23, and Tropical Depression Gloria a few days later added significant rainfall. Continuing release of excess water to protect dams in the region also contributed to the flooding in Mozambique. About 2 million people have been affected by flooding in southern Africa and the regional death toll is estimated to be 1,000. Mozambique declared a disaster on February 7, Botswana on February 16, South Africa on February 17, and Zimbabwe on February 29. Mozambique is the most severely affected country. As the rains continued, the situation grew worse, with growing numbers of people displaced or missing, food and water supplies dwindling, and threats from water-borne diseases increasing. The rainfall and flooding are moderating at this time and the rainy season is ending in the region.¹

¹ Information in this paper is drawn from USAID Office of Foreign Disaster (OFDA) situation reports [www.info.usaid.gov/hum_response] and from the U.N. disaster response web site, [www.reliefweb.int].

Mozambique. Higher than average rainfall, torrential rains in early February, and additional rain caused by cyclones in late February and March led to extensive flooding. Excess water released to protect dams in the region added to the flooding. Mozambique declared a disaster on February 7, and the U.S. responded the same day. The Mozambique government estimated the number affected at 1.2 million. This includes 330,000 in shelters and 400,000 additional internally displaced. The death toll is currently estimated to be 652. As of April 14, the United States had provided \$32.06 million to Mozambique. Assistance to the region now totals \$40.17, including \$7 million in Food for Peace commodities and \$21 million in Department of Defense assistance. International contributions as reported to the U. N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) were \$119.5 million as of March 17. On March 22, UNOCHA issued an appeal for \$102 million for relief and rehabilitation activities through August 2000. (The text of the appeal is available on the Relief web site cited.) A reconstruction conference for Mozambique will be held in Rome on May 3 and 4.

Rivers in the north have receded below flood stage, however those in the south are still receding slowly. Cyclone Hudah has caused no appreciable additional damage and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports that weather patterns indicate Mozambique is now in the dry season. Food aid is now flowing smoothly, according to the World Food Program, and aid will be continued until June when it will be changed to food for work programs. U.S. emergency personnel and the special military equipment left the region on March 28 although aid is still being provided with U.S. funds.

Botswana. Botswana declared a flood emergency on February 16. The government reported that 94,000 people in the southern and eastern part of the country are affected. The United States declared the disaster and contributed over \$53,000 as of April 14. Total international contributions reported to UNOCHA as of March 30 are \$293,720.

South Africa. South Africa declared a flood emergency on February 17. An estimated 100 persons died. Little other information is available from USAID or UNOCHA. The United State has reported contributions of \$25,000.

Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's government appealed for international aid on March 4. As of March 21, UNOCHA estimated that 100 have died and 96,000 are directly affected. About 20,000 have been displaced from their homes. The U.S. has provided \$170,000 in cash and food aid as of April 14. The amount reported to UNOCHA as of March 28 is \$2,081,364.

Other Recent Flood Disasters

The United States has responded to eight other flood disasters in FY2000. The following brief description is based on USAID and U.N. information.

Honduras. Heavy rains accompanying tropical storms caused flooding and damage in Honduras. At the time of the U.S. disaster declaration on October 5, 1999, UNOCHA reported serious damage to the infrastructure which had been temporarily rebuilt after Hurricane Mitch in October 1998. On October 13, UNOCHA reported 28 dead, 15,000 evacuated from their homes and many houses, bridges, and highways destroyed. Flooding continued well into November due to continued tropical storm activity. U.S. funding

reported to USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to date totals \$381,591.00. No estimate of international contributions is available.

Mexico. Mexico also suffered from flooding and landslides in October, 1999. The Mexican government did not request international assistance and chose to rely on local military, police and Red Cross volunteers to provide relief. By October 13, the government had assessed local needs and welcomed international help in those areas. By October 28, the estimated death toll was 379 with over 530,000 displaced from their homes, but the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) noted that it was difficult to get consolidated figures for the number of victims or the magnitude of the damage. According to USAID OFDA records, the United States declared the disaster on October 13, and has provided \$100,000. UNOCHA has reported contributions of \$1.6 million, not including the U.S. assistance.

Ghana. While flooding in Ghana is an annual problem, two months of flooding described as the worst in 30 years led the government to appeal for international assistance on October 25, 1999. At that time, the government estimated 50 deaths and over 290,000 displaced in northern Ghana with flood waters flowing southward. By December 1, the UNOCHA assessment indicated 54,748 were displaced from their homes. The United States declared the disaster on October 26 and USAID OFDA records that the United States has contributed \$25,000. UNOCHA reports contributions of \$1.3 million in international aid.

Mauritania. Flooding also affected Mauritania in October, 1999. Press reports indicate that 30,000 Mauritians were left homeless. The United States provided \$25,000 after declaring the disaster on November 18. There is no UNOCHA disaster report available, but press reports indicate that ECHO, the European Union humanitarian disaster agency, provided \$374,444.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. Flooding of the Congo river forced 20,000 people from their homes in Kinshasa by early December 1999. The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo appealed for international aid on November 30. Some 65,000 people were eventually evacuated in Kinshasa and 13,000 more in Bas Congo. On December 1, the United States declared the disaster and contributed \$25,000 to the humanitarian response, according to USAID OFDA. About \$1.3 million in contributions has been reported to UNOCHA.

Cambodia. Monsoon rains which were supposed to end in July continued throughout the Fall due to a series of tropical storms. Originally, the government relied on Cambodian military forces and the Cambodian Red Cross. A November 6 press report indicated that 45,000 had been driven from their homes by flooding and up to 100,000 were in danger of disease from contaminated drinking water. The United States contributed \$25,000. UNOCHA reports international contributions of \$60,000, in addition to the U.S. contribution.

Vietnam. Flooding began in November and worsened considerably in December. The United States declared the disaster on November 4 and again on December 8. As of mid December, the number of deaths from both disasters was 742 with over 1.5 million people in need of assistance. The government of Vietnam estimated damages to the

country at \$488 million. The U.S. contribution of about \$900,000 is included in the international contribution of \$7.577 million reported by UNOCHA.

Venezuela. A month of heavy rainfall led to flash flooding and mud slides in northern coastal Venezuela during December, 1999. The government of Venezuela declared a state of emergency on December 16 and the United States responded on the same day. The U.S. contribution so far is estimated at \$8,269,897. UNOCHA reports that \$27.98 million has been contributed, including the U.S. aid.

U.S. Disaster Response Mechanism

The President has wide authority to provide emergency assistance for foreign disasters and the U.S. government uses several channels to provide disaster assistance. When the U.S. ambassador to a country declares a disaster (usually in response to a request from the host government) he can authorize the transfer of \$25,000 in grants, usually available within 24 hours. The USAID Administrator is the President's Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance. The Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) within USAID can respond immediately with relief materials and personnel (including some already located in various countries around the world)². OFDA has emergency response teams of experts (DARTS) which can be put together quickly to respond to each particular disaster. They provide expertise in disaster response as well as an assessment of what assistance is needed from donors, including the United States. OFDA has wide authority to borrow funds, equipment and personnel from other parts of USAID and other federal agencies. OFDA also provides assistance as grants to governmental and nongovernmental agencies in the disaster area. USAID administers Title II of the Food for Peace program which provides food aid to victims of disasters. The Department of Defense also has a humanitarian assistance program that is sometimes involved in disaster response. In addition, the President has the authority to draw down defense equipment and direct military personnel to respond to disasters³. The President may also use the Denton program⁴ to provide space available transportation on military aircraft and ships to private donors who wish to transport humanitarian goods and equipment in response to a disaster.

Assistance for the long term recovery of a nation after a disaster can also be provided in a variety of ways. Foreign aid programs may be reprogrammed or the President may ask Congress for a Supplemental Appropriation. In the aftermath of the Hurricane Mitch disaster affecting six countries in Central America, the Administration used both reprogramming and a supplemental appropriation as well as debt forgiveness. For information on that disaster, see CRS report 98-1030 F, Central America: Reconstruction after Hurricane Mitch, and CRS Report RL30083, Supplemental Appropriations for FY1999: Central America Disaster Aid, Middle East Peace, and Other Initiatives.

² Authorized in sec. 491-493 of P.L. 87-195, the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.

³ Sec. 506 of P.L. 87-195 authorizes the President to draw down articles and services from any U.S. agency. Title 10, sec. 2551 authorizes the use of DOD funds to transport humanitarian relief items and provide other humanitarian assistance to the extent authorized annually by Congress.

⁴ Title 10, section 402 authorizes the shipment of privately donated humanitarian goods on U.S. military aircraft on a space available basis.

International Disaster Response

The United States provides disaster assistance as one of many donors. In the U.N. system, UNICEF, UN Development Program, World Health Organization, and the World Food Program all respond to natural disasters. Information sharing and technical assistance is provided by the Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Activities under the U.N. Secretary General. Many countries besides the United States provide bilateral disaster assistance. ECHO, the humanitarian response agency of the European Union provides assistance in addition to the contributions made by European Union members. Private voluntary agencies, including the Red Cross affiliates, provide assistance using government funds as well as their own.

U.S. Disaster Assistance in FY2000

The United States has declared 43 disasters since FY2000 began on October 1, 1999. The declaration of a disaster means that the ambassador may request \$25,000 for immediate release to a local relief organization and that the United States will respond to requests for further humanitarian assistance. Sixteen of the disasters declared were man made disasters caused by warfare or political activities resulting in flows of refugees. Thirteen of the disasters were floods, including the southern Africa floods. The declaration is generally made when the host government declares a disaster and asks for assistance. Aid is provided for varying lengths of time.

It is difficult to compare disasters and the U.S. response to them. First, there are different humanitarian needs in an earthquake, a war, a flood, or an environmental accident. Second, while some governments have little capability to handle domestic disasters, many have competent staff with long experience in disaster response who need only modest help. Third, in providing aid, the United States takes into account the humanitarian aid provided by other governments and international organizations as well. Some countries have special relations (such as France with its former colonies) or common borders which result in high levels of governmental or private response to disasters. Fourth, disasters last for varying lengths of time. Earthquakes are over quickly but droughts may last much longer. Aid in an earthquake situation must be quick and specific to find and help people trapped by the quake. A drought develops over months and aid may be most needed toward the end of the disaster. When the disaster occurs is also important. A drought or flood in a time when fields are fallow is less damaging to a country than the same problem at harvest or planting time.

The following table compares the thirteen floods for which the U.S. has provided assistance so far in FY2000, including the current one in southern Africa. The number of killed, displaced, and affected are only estimates. In disasters, people flee to safe havens and are considered missing or dead until they show up. In other cases, people who are listed as missing may never be found and never added to the death toll. The terms displaced and affected are often used interchangeably by governments and humanitarian workers, making it difficult to tell whether people have fled their homes and are in danger, or are safe but can't get to markets or jobs until the water level goes down or can't afford to buy goods at the inflated prices caused by the flood. The column listing U.S. spending gives the amounts collected and totaled by USAID OFDA to date from all the agencies and programs involved. It generally takes many months and sometimes years for the

actual totals to be determined and reported. Finally, the column which includes all international aid reported to UNOCHA for a particular disaster is incomplete. First, there is no requirement that a country or organization report aid provided in a disaster, so UNOCHA can include only the information which it receives. Second, UNOCHA statistics do not include aid in kind (blankets, for example) or services (helicopters and crews, for example) if a country doesn't provide UNOCHA with a monetary value. Finally, countries place their own value on their assistance, and may also include assistance which they plan to provide or hope to provide, but have not yet provided.s.

U.S. and International Humanitarian Aid to Flood Victims, FY2000

Country/Date of U.S. disaster declaration	Killed/affected	U.S. Aid (estimate)	All aid reported to UNOCHA
Honduras 10/5/99	35 dead/ 18,000 displaced	\$381,600	no information
Mexico 10/13/99	416dead/ 530,000 displaced	\$100,000	\$1, 583,503
Ghana 10/26/99	50 dead/ 55,000 displaced/ 291,500 affected	\$25,000	\$1,317,525 (includes U.S. contribution)
Mauritania 11/18/99	30,000 displaced	\$25,000	no information
Dem. Rep. Congo 12/1/99	78,000 est.	\$25,000	\$1,270,850 (includes U.S. contribution)
Cambodia 11/99	100,000+ displaced	\$25,000	\$60,000.
Vietnam 11/4/99,12/8/99	742 dead/ 1 million+ affected	\$900,000	\$7,577,000 (including U.S. contributions)
Venezuela 12/16/99	30,000-50,000 dead 200,000-600,000 affected	\$8,269,897	\$27,987,520 (including U.S. contributions)
Mozambique 2/7/00	652 dead (est) 2 million affected.	\$32,059,555	\$134,428,084 (including some U.S. contribution)
Botswana 2/16/00	94,000 affected	\$54,000	\$293,720
South Africa 2/16/00	100 dead, 1.5 million affected	\$25,000	no information
Zimbabwe	100 dead, 96,000 affected	\$169,780	\$2,081,364 (including some U.S. contribution)

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