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JPRS L/10237

5 January 1982

# Worldwide Report

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

(FOUO 1/82)

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INTER-AFRICAN AFFAIRS

BRIEFS

WATER POLLUTION SEMINAR--At a seminar in Yaounde, beginning 11 November, 25 nations, mainly African and Asian French-speaking, met to examine water pollution. The seminar organized by the Swedish Office for International Development and the FAO fell within the scope of the 8th International Seminar on Water Pollution. [Text] [Paris MARCHES TROPICAUX ET MEDITERRANEENS in French No 1880, 20 Nov 81 p 2953] [COPYRIGHT: Rene Moreux et Cie Paris 1981]

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SOMALIA

REFUGEES SAID TO BE CAUSING DETERIORATION OF ENVIRONMENT

London NEW AFRICAN in English No 169 Oct 81 p 24

[Article by Nigel Walsh]

[Text]

HUGE CAMPS housing most of Somalia's one-million refugees are rapidly destroying the surrounding countryside.

The floods which struck the camps and many cities here in late April and early May, re-focussing world attention on Somalia's plight, were part of an environmental crisis which is making it more difficult for this country to cope with its human crisis.

As the ethnic Somalis began fleeing across the border from the Ogaden and Western Haud regions of Ethiopia in 1979 and 1980, they congregated on some of the best watered land the fragile countryside had to offer.

In the northwest, camps were established on the banks of the seasonal rivers which run through the region. Because of sub-surface waters, these spots were also the most heavily wooded.

### Clinics, shops

In the south, camps were set up along the Wabe Shabelle and Juba rivers, areas where nomads traditionally brought their herds for dry-season grazing when vegetation was scarce elsewhere.

Many of the 35 refugee camps in Somalia by the end of 1980 were built almost overnight. In the northwest region two large camps - Las Durhe and Daray Ma'ane near Boramo - grew in a matter of days from scrubland to townships of 75,000 people, some 10,000 family dwellings.

Only a few of the refugees came with their traditional house frames on their camels' backs; most walked in with nothing. Trees and bushes had to be gathered to build shelters and the larger camp structures such as food stores, clinics and feeding centres.

Even small saplings and limbs were used in the mud-and-wattle designs which require rows of branches tied with bark of sisal string and plastered with mud or dung. Roofs, too, are made of interwoven branches covered with a tarpaulin or plastic sheet.

Thorn branches were gathered to make the traditional barriers around each household, despite the fact that families had no livestock to protect.

The only bigger trees spared in the camps were left to serve as shade for the Koranic schools in which the children learn reading and scripture. The school leaders organise the children into parties to cut more thorn branches to make a barrier around the school and to gather branches for school bonfires for night classes.

In addition 10,000 families need wood for 10,000 nightly cooking fires.

When the camps were first established, women and children could collect their firewood during a 10-minute walk. Now, a visitor often finds young children and old women searching for wood 10 to 15 kms from their camps. They trudge back in the deepening twilight, bowed down by the bundles on their backs.

The destruction of all trees around the

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camps has left no shade for the smaller vegetation. This dies. The sun then bakes the unprotected soil, and winds whip it up into clouds of dust.

The sterile subsoil is unable to absorb the rain when it does fall, so crops cannot be grown.

### Burst banks

Most of the rainwater runs down the bare slopes into the valleys, where it causes severe flash floods. Very little has time to soak into the ground before it is carried away into the flat, empty coastal plains and out to sea.

The Wabe Shabelle, which had almost run dry after three years of drought, burst its banks in places in early May, causing the evacuation of many towns and camps. Belet Uen, the capital of Hiran province, was reachable only by boat.

The waters will recede as the rains stop. The ephemeral annual grasses which appear with the rains will quickly dry out and vanish. The countryside will be bare again.

These lands were under pressure before the refugees came. For the past 50 years they have been fighting a losing battle against increasing human and livestock pressure.

The average nomad family, free to move where it must, needs a minimum of 35 adult animals, mostly camels and goats, to survive. As human numbers increase, the animal numbers increase faster.

Yet the refugee camps have created their own ever-widening bowls of desert.

which will in turn create tremendous problems for the future.

The camp commanders are aware of the danger and request other types of fuel and building materials. But government officials and aid agencies have found it hard enough to keep food coming in.

### Setbacks

OXFAM and the other agencies working in the area are seeking ways to provide the camps with wood, and the area with vegetation, to keep the underground water table from falling further.

Three nurseries are being developed. First reports are that fast-growing tree species, such as *Leucaena*, are doing well.

A Somali volunteer at Amalow Camp along the Wabe Shabelle has been organising the distribution of seedlings to camp families. He said he gets good response from the people, who are intrigued by the rapid growth of the trees.

But the nurseries were set up near the river, and many of these have been flooded, causing at least a temporary setback to the programme.

Small solar cookers are being tried out, along with improved versions of simple cooking stoves, to save firewood.

The agencies are considering systems of earthen banks to spread the rainwater and slow its flow to reduce flash run-off after storms, to conserve water in the ground and to encourage the regrowth of vegetation and stabilisation of the soil.

If such efforts do not succeed, entire camps will have to be moved, undoubtedly creating new deserts elsewhere.

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FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

PRESSURE FROM GREENS WINS BAN ON HERBICIDE

Hamburg CAPITAL in German Now 81 pp 28, 29

[Article by Hans-Josef Joest: "Poisoning the Well"]

[Text] Bonn wants to pacify the "Greens" by banning the 2,4,5-T herbicide; it is said to be carcinogenic. But the expert specially hired in the matter denies that it is health-threatening.

Germany's "Greens" can cross one item off their protest list: the herbicide 2,4,5-T. Spectacular protest actions such as the siege of the chimneys in the factory of the only German 2,4,5-T manufacturer, C.H. Boehringer Sohn in Hamburg and massive lobbying with coalition politicians have shown results. The Federal Health Office (BGA) and the Federal Biological Institute for Agriculture and Forestry (BBA) have cancelled their permit to manufacture the herbicide as of October 1982 because it is strongly suspected of being a carcinogen.

This total prohibition came as a shock to the manufacturers who had counted on no more than mandatory instructions for use of the compound, such as protective clothing. The Celamerck Plant Protection Corp. in Ingelheim (jointly owned by C.H. Boehringer Sohn and by E. Merck) and other manufacturers have protested the ban. Celamerck considers the revocation of the permit for the manufacture and use of the 2,4,5-T trichlorophenoxy acetic acid to be "unequivocally politically motivated and scientifically unjustified."

As recently as last spring the Bonn government considered the herbicide spray for eradicating dead-nettle, bindweed and broomweed to be harmless. In reply to an inquiry by SPD and FDP Bundestag delegates (reference 9/379), the Ministry of Agriculture stated that "the most recent comprehensive scientific test of all currently available data was made by 15 independent scientists in Great Britain. The results show that with careful use of these compounds according to directions there is no danger to humans, animals and the environment."

Nor did Prof Dr Ulrich Mohr, expert on carcinogenic chemicals at the Hannover Medical School, who retested a study of 2,4,5-T, produced by the Dow Chemical Company for the U.S. National Institutes of Health, find any significant suspicion of carcinogenicity. But the BGA chose to ignore the judgment of the scientist whom it has itself hired at the taxpayers' expense. In a hearing about health hazards of 2,4,5-T it allowed the professor only a few minutes in which to run

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through his results in a bare outline. Mohr did his duty. His favorable judgment of 2,4,5-T no longer fitted the political equation.

In an interview with CAPITAL, Mohr pointed out that his results were no justification for the BGA judgment that 2,4,5-T causes cancer: "From the toxicological aspect I was greatly surprised by this decision." The expert's bottom line: "In my opinion 2,4,5-T is not as dangerous as it is said to be." Mohr's opinion confirms the manufacturers' worry that 2,4,5-T is being used by former BGA president and present state secretary in Bonn's health ministry, Prof Dr Georges Fuelgraff as a test case in the power struggle between politicians, scientists and industrialists over the evaluation of hazards of environmental chemicals.

During the past year Fuelgraff said at a meeting of the Industrial Association for Plant Protection and Pesticides that in the future expert opinions would have to be subordinated to the politicians' common sense. Intoned the political professor: "Health hazard evaluation (the probability and severity of possible damage) is a scientific undertaking. However, the judgment of whether a hazard can be tolerated from a socially adequate standpoint is a purely political function."

For several reasons, 2,4,5-T was eminently suitable as an illustration for this political hazard scale. This herbicide:

--is burdened by a tarnished past as a defoliant in Vietnam (code name: Agent Orange); however, it was sprayed there in a 5,000-fold concentration;

--it contains a non-removable residue of TCDD (Dioxin), a poison known to cause cancer, 2,000 grams of which suddenly appeared in an area of 300 hectares in Seveso, compared with 1 gram TCDD per year out of the herbicide 2,4,5-T on the 580,000 hectares of German soil;

--is manufactured by only one German firm, C.H. Boehringer Sohn, though the leading Boehringer chemical enterprises process 2,4,5-T in 70 herbicide compounds;

--is on the prohibited list in Sweden, Holland and Italy due to political pressure;

--may, since March 1979, be used in the United States only on open prairie lands and in rice planting--for political reasons. Said Fuelgraff at the time: "I consider this decision by the U.S. authorities to be primarily a political one, which was made by giving in to public pressure." However, when protests started to swell in the FRG, Fuelgraff remembered his concept that "normal consensus in society is subject to change." 2,4,5-T seemed ready to be sacrificed to the "Greens" as a peace offering. BGA and BBA called a meeting and engaged Mohr to put the Dow experiments in the United States to the test. This member of the German research community found there what he described as "surely the most comprehensive study of 2,4,5-T which has been done anywhere." At the highest test concentration the U.S. scientists had found a tongue tumor in a rat--a result, says Mohr, which they "openly presented to the public." But, agreeing with the authors of the study, Mohr arrived at the conclusion that this tumor was "not unequivocally caused by 2,4,5-T." Says Mohr about the difference between the feeding experiment and practical use of the herbicide: "After all, we do not eat it 24 hours later." That is why he does not see any "great hazard with proper use."



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But the FRG Health Agency interprets the study differently. It considers a cancer hazard through use of 2,4,5-T to be confirmed. BGA director Prof Dr Wolfgang Link sees a "differential interpretation of test results." Apart from a different interpretation of the same test results, the ban is further based on an epidemiological expert opinion about increased cancer risk for agricultural workers engaged in spraying 2,4,5-T--a study which even Link considers "methodologically questionable." Nevertheless, Fuelgraff's ministry promises the "green" public that 2,4,5-T is being ousted as a result of "the most recent scientific findings." The Dow study was made in 1979.

Announcing its intention to "use all legally available resources, as Celamerck's Dr Georg Leber puts it, the chemical industry appears determined to enter the power struggle between science and politics in hazard evaluation. Prof Mohr urges his political employers: "There really should be an end to this hysteria."

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