

# Humanitarian governance in the new millennium: an Ethiopian case study

Sue Lautze, Angela Raven-Roberts and Teshome Erkinch

**HPG Working Paper**

February 2009



## **About the author:**

Sue Lautze is the founder of The Livelihoods Program, a US-based disaster management consultancy firm that is, among other activities, leading the revision of Ethiopia's national disaster policy.

Angela Raven-Roberts is Emergency Regional Advisor, Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States, UNICEF, Geneva, and has a long history of engagement with Ethiopia including serving as director of Save the Children/USA and Oxfam/USA in Ethiopia in the 1980s.

Teshome Erkinch is the Policy Advisor of The Livelihoods Program and formerly headed the Ethiopian government's Early Warning Department.

## **About the Humanitarian Policy Group:**

The Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI is one of the world's leading teams of independent researchers and information professionals working on humanitarian issues. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high-quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

HPG Working Papers present case studies or background notes that support key aspects of the Group's research projects. This HPG Working Paper is part of a programme of research looking at the role of the affected state in crisis. For more information, see [http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/affected\\_state.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/affected_state.html).

Humanitarian Policy Group  
Overseas Development Institute  
111 Westminster Bridge Road  
London  
SE1 7JD  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44(0) 20 7922 0300  
Fax: +44(0) 20 7922 0399

Website: [www.odi.org.uk/hpg](http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg)  
Email: [hpgadmin@odi.org.uk](mailto:hpgadmin@odi.org.uk)

© Overseas Development Institute, 2009

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce materials from this publication but, as copyright holders, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. This and other HPG Reports are available from [www.odi.org.uk/hpg](http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg).

This report was commissioned by HPG. The opinions expressed herein are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or of the Overseas Development Institute.

# Contents

Acronyms .....	4
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Humanitarian Governance in Ethiopia .....</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 The Modern Imperial Era .....	10
2.1.1 Discussion.....	13
2.2 Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) Era (the “Derg”, 1974-1991).....	14
2.2.1 Discussion.....	19
2.3 Transitional Government Era (the “TGE”, 1991-1995).....	20
2.3.1 Discussion.....	23
2.4 The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Era (the “FDRE”, 1995-present) .....	23
2.4.1 Discussion.....	29
<b>Conclusions and Implications .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>36</b>



## Acronyms

ASG	Assistant Secretary General
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
BPR	Business Process Re-engineering
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CEVO	Consortium of Ethiopian Voluntary Organisations
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRDA	Christian Relief and Development Association
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSA	Central Statistics Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DA	Development Agent
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs
DM/FSS	Disaster Management/Food Security Sector
DPPA	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency
DPPC	Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
DROCO	Drought Relief Operations Coordination Office
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
EFSR	Emergency Food Security Reserve
EPID	Extension and Project Implementation Department
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ERA	Eritrean Relief Agency
ERD	Emergency Relief Desk
EUE	Emergency Unit for Ethiopia
EWS	Early Warning System
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FSCB	Food Security Coordination Bureau
FSS	Food Security Sector
KG	Kilogram
GoE	Government of Ethiopia
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDA	International Development Assistance
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
JRP	Joint Relief Program
MOEAFR	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Foreign Relations
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
MT	Metric Ton
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMSA	National Meteorological Service Agency
NPDPM	National Policy in Disaster Prevention and Management
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OEOA	UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
ONCCP	Office of National Committee for Central Planning
ORA	Oromo Relief Agency
PASDEP	Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty
PM	Prime Minister

PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
PSNP	Productive Safety Net Program
REST	Relief Society of Tigray
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SDPRP	Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program
SERA	Strengthening of Emergency Response Abilities
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SNNPR	Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
TB	Tuberculosis
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
TGE	Transitional Government of Ethiopia
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSO	United Nations Sahelian Office
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFP	World Food Program
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

# 1. Introduction

This case study on Ethiopia forms part of the ODI research series on the role of the state in ‘humanitarian governance’. This series considers such topics as:

- Governmental legislation and registration of humanitarian organisations
- State-led coordination *vis a vis* international arrangements
- Donor efforts to strengthen state capacities
- Assessments of state capacities and organisations’ related strategies to supplant state responsibilities and role
- NGO advocacy with states for protection and assistance in times of disasters
- Government perceptions of international humanitarian actors, and vice versa

Ethiopia, with its long history of exposure to and responses to crises as well as its extensive engagements with the international community, is a prime case for consideration of these lines of inquiry. In this paper, we review strands of humanitarianism that have characterised the organised management of risk and vulnerability during myriad crises across a range of populations. We focus on the various regimes of the Ethiopian state since the 1970s and their roles in and capacities for disaster risk management writ large – prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery, and rehabilitation. State capacity for humanitarian governance is analysed from three perspectives: the role of the state in direct service provision, its ability to mobilise and facilitate resources, and its ability to build an enabling environment to promote individual, household and community resilience.

The case study was developed based on literature and interviews with specialists with historical knowledge of the evolution of disaster management within successive Ethiopian governments. In addition, the authors are supporting the revision of Ethiopia’s 1993 National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM), a process that has included two years of in-depth stakeholder consultations with government officials, community leaders and Ethiopian academics. Many of the observations made in this paper reflect these stakeholder discussions as well as challenges the government has encountered in accessing NGO and UN agency records regarding

historical patterns of humanitarian interventions in order to provide an evidence base for the new policy.

Two of the authors are native to Ethiopia and all three have extensive experience in disaster management in Ethiopia and elsewhere. We have relied on our combined 80-plus years of humanitarian experience in NGOs, government, UN agencies, donors, the private sector and academia to spell out what some may find to be controversial perspectives. Erkinch had a long career as a civil servant in Ethiopia’s disaster management institutions, including managing the Early Warning System for more than 10 years. Raven-Roberts was raised in Ethiopia and served as the head of a major international NGO (INGO) throughout the 1980s in Ethiopia before working for the UN and in academia, including conducting in-depth research on Ethiopia and establishing the academic programs on humanitarian assistance at Tufts University. Lautze has led multi-disciplinary teams on risk and vulnerability in Ethiopia (and elsewhere in Africa and Asia), was a co-founder of the Feinstein International Famine Centre at Tufts, has worked for WFP as well as USAID, and currently owns a private consulting firm (The Livelihoods Program) that is providing technical assistance to the government of Ethiopia for reform of the nation’s disaster management systems.

With local and national engagements pre-dating international humanitarian interventions in Ethiopia by *hundreds* of years, this case study takes the long view of trends in how crises have been defined and how interventions have been justified and managed. Building on de Waal’s earlier writings on political contracts against famine (de Waal 1997), this study of “humanitarian governance” explores both continuity and change in the relationships of rights, roles, and responsibilities between the state and citizen in times of famine, conflict, and disaster throughout a series of regimes: imperial, military, transitional, and emerging democracy. Parallel trends in international humanitarian approaches to disasters, a feature of crisis management in Ethiopia only since the 1970s, are set against crises and political dynamics in order to demonstrate collaboration and conflict between international and national worldviews. It is hoped that this case study will provoke an alternative discourse on humanitarianism, from the

perspective of an affected government, and will also prompt reflection by the study's wider audience within the international humanitarian community.<sup>1</sup>

This paper on the nature of humanitarian governance in Ethiopia is informed by developments primarily since the great Sahelian drought of the 1970s because government structures for disaster management trace their origins to that crisis. The ensuing three-plus decades were not part of some long ago, distant past, but rather entail events that have occurred in the authors' lifetimes – and presumably those of many current officials, farmers and politicians in Ethiopia as well. Importantly, though, they are not part of the landscape of experience and knowledge of the majority of expatriate humanitarian workers in Ethiopia, several generations of which have cycled – but seldom recycled - through that country. Over this period there has been extensive variation in government policies for addressing disaster vulnerability just as there have been sea changes in international humanitarian organisation discourse about understanding and addressing that vulnerability. Nonetheless, there is a remarkable lack of variance in the media discourse about crises in Ethiopia, discourses that the government suspects are if not fuelled by then at least served by the fundraising needs of international humanitarian organisations. Time and again, the country is characterised as dependent on foreign aid, its people lazy, and its government obstructionist, as a recent quote from Time Magazine typifies.

*Ethiopian farmers can't compete with free food, so they stop trying. Over time, there's a loss of key skills, and a country that doesn't have to feed itself soon becomes a country that can't. All too often, its rulers use resources elsewhere — Ethiopia has one of Africa's largest armies (Perry 2008).*

Humanitarian organisations tend to ignore history. This is not accidental but rather is instrumental, as Mark Duffield observed, labelling this a form of “functional ignorance” (Duffield 1996). A focus on the present minimises accountability. Uncomfortable questions do not arise about the impact of NGOs that have worked in country for *decades* while famine returns again and again to their privileged enclaves of operations despite

---

<sup>1</sup> While we have tried to portray various regimes' perspective, the views expressed in this paper are those of the authors, in their private capacities.

millions of dollars in support from international donors and well-meaning people all over the world. While NGOs working in the current emergency in Ethiopia might not reflect on this history as they submit fresh rounds of proposals with attendant budgets for new vehicles, computers, and office support in country and at headquarters, it is rarely far from the minds of government officials. Understanding this is important for partially unravelling some of the tensions between foreign organisations and the Ethiopian government. It is also important to consider these issues from the perspective of the government of a country that is prone to recurrent crises - one that must mobilise and rationalise resources to address related vulnerabilities that directly affect upwards of 15 million people and indirectly affect the nation as a whole.

The seeds of tension between Ethiopian regimes and international humanitarian actors, especially international NGOs (INGOs), can be traced to the Imperial era (i.e., prior to the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974) when several INGOs first established operations in Ethiopia during the famine of the early 1970s. The domestic, revolutionary, anti-Imperial movements that followed blamed the country's vulnerabilities on Imperial policies including its high dependence on donor funds from Western countries. The return of famine in the 1980s under the revolutionary Derg regime (1974-1991) wrought deep divisions within the Ethiopian government between those who feared that the West would use the crisis as an opportunity for Western penetration of Ethiopia<sup>2</sup> and those who believed that without foreign aid many would die.

In the end, both sides were justified. International humanitarian actions mitigated some of the worst impacts of the famine. At the same time, however, the 1980s saw the beginning of a flood of NGOs seeking to operate with minimal control by successive Ethiopian regimes and who subsequently retained primary accountability to their largely Western donors. What has resulted is a *catch-22* of sorts with various Ethiopian governments using their tools of legislation, registration, project agreements, coordination mechanisms, and, at times, bureaucratic inaccessibility as devices to not only retain a degree of control over humanitarian actors but

---

<sup>2</sup> On the global history of disasters as opportunities for imperial/colonial expansion, see Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001).

also to induce a level of transparency by humanitarian organisations. Meanwhile, international humanitarian organisations have leveraged their growing influence with donor nations to protest or circumvent such control. Neither group is particularly enamoured of the other, a fact exacerbated by the interdependence that underpins their relationship. At the centre of this conflict lie the government's institutions for dealing with disasters. Successive governments' disaster management staff have juggled the competing demands of government, humanitarian organisations, and disaster-affected communities under the critical eye of (especially foreign) media, not to mention various regimes' internal security staff. It has been – and remains today - an unenviable task.

In the view of some of the most powerful Ethiopian authorities and other prominent individuals in the country, the very existence of government's disaster management institutions represents a failure of the state. Some consider them a form of institutionalised beggary within the government system and dependency on foreign aid as a permanent phenomenon, a perspective hardened by the government's unflinching, annual appeals for international assistance. Others believe the institutions had developed a "dependency syndrome" upon the international community that contributed to – rather than resolved - recurrent food shortages in key rural areas. Repeated efforts to weaken, undermine and ultimately abolish Ethiopian national disaster management institutions characterise their history. Time and again, such institutions have been 'saved' by the development of a major crisis requiring their logistical, managerial and mobilisation capacities. This is true as ever today. Even as a proclamation to abolish the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA) and transfer its responsibilities to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) was issued on 11 August 2008, the new Disaster Management and Food Security Sector (DMFSS) continued to work and manage the ongoing crisis in a similar manner to the DPPA, albeit with a staff reduced by at least 400 civil servants (out of 700) at the federal level alone. The most recent developments have yet to demonstrate their intended major shifts in disaster risk management practice. In the short run, they have confused humanitarian actors and civil servants alike, a development that only serves to deepen the cynicism of NGOs (and to a certain degree, UN agencies and donors as well) towards the government.

This paper interprets the current state of affairs by considering the past four decades or so of history. The first mistake newly arrived expatriate relief workers (including heads of agencies and senior staff) make - especially those coming from war-torn states in Africa - is to try to use their last posting as a point of reference on how to operate in Ethiopia. The head of the former DPPC, Ato Simon Mechale, recently remarked with genuine concern that "Those first few months for a new NGO director are really horrible."<sup>3</sup> It is our hope in writing this paper to shorten this period for those who assume that anyone who questions the work of an NGO in Ethiopia (especially a government official) must be anti-humanitarian. In this case study we try to demonstrate, warts and all, that there is a state in Ethiopia that is deeply concerned and highly engaged in issues of disaster risk management. There are genuine areas of technical disagreement about how disaster risks can be reduced and managed, but one cannot argue that political will is lacking. Indeed, these issues are at the very heart of Ethiopian politics and all who engage in them from outside the country go through an often-painful period before realizing this. We posit that this may be in contrast to other countries where permanent emergencies have led to long-term residency by international humanitarian organisations that operate best (from their own perspectives) in an environment relatively free from the interference of host states but nevertheless highly constrained by the interests of foreign donors. As perhaps is the case in other countries, there is resistance to this state of humanitarian affairs in Ethiopia, resistance born of decades of both conflict and cooperation between the state and international humanitarian actors.

Following this introduction, the paper is organised in four chronological sections beginning with the Imperial regime. Ethiopia's claim to sovereignty lies in its historical legacy of self-consciousness as a state. Recognition by others of its internal governance systems and national frontiers has had to be vigorously defended against invasions and foreign domination. A discussion of governance issues must therefore be cognizant of the long lineages and the changes in administrative systems and structures that have evolved over time. Important as well is the history of its engagement and contacts with the outside world. Successive Ethiopian rulers have sought a relationship with foreign countries in order to

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Simon Mechale by Sue Lautze, 5 September 2008, Addis Ababa.

develop and modernise their country whilst outsiders have tried to influence the course of development within Ethiopia itself. Ethiopian government and donor/UN/NGO engagements over humanitarian issues are but one aspect of a long history of Ethiopia's international relations as well as its development efforts.

The history of the relationship between ruler and citizen with respect to disaster management pre-dates Emperor Haile Selassie, but the paper begins with his regime because current government structures trace their origins to his era. The paper then considers the revolutionary regime of the Provisional Military Administrative Council (1974–1991) and the post-Derg Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991-1995) before reviewing the current administration, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 1995-present. The disaster management policies, institutions, and practices of each regime are examined as are other initiatives that are relevant

to the way that local, federal, and international actors have engaged in the broader management of disaster risk and vulnerability. The paper ends with a discussion of the conclusions that may be reached based on this stroll through history. This is not a theoretical section. Rather, the implications of the analysis are central to understanding a range of current issues and reforms and their opportunities, constraints and potentials.

We are grateful to ODI and Paul Harvey for the opportunity to write this paper as well to all those who reviewed earlier drafts: Yacob Aklilu, Melaku Ayelew, Getachew Diriba, Kate Farnsworth, Patrick Gilkes, Saifu Hailemariam, Tempa Lautze, Getachew Tesfaye, and Sarah Vaughan. We have tried to reconcile the views of our reviewers but the debates continue. All errors are attributed to us, the authors. None of the views expressed here represent any UN or government agency.

## 2. Humanitarian Governance in Ethiopia

### 2.1 The Modern Imperial Era

When Ethiopia's Imperial regime fell in 1974, the country was in the grip of the Sahelian famine, an event that affected numerous countries but none more so than Ethiopia where an estimated 200,000 people died (RRC 1985:77). The September 1973 ITV programme on "The Hidden Famine" (named for the Imperial regime's perceived slowness in recognizing and responding) brought the world's attention to - famine in Ethiopia. The inextricability of Ethiopia from that enduring media image of famine was - and remains today - a source of deep national shame, frustration, and impetus for the (at times) extreme reform of the country's political systems.

Following droughts in 1964-65, Korem, in north Wollo, was the site of a famine in 1966 that had gone almost entirely undocumented and unnoticed (RRC 1985:77). One author has argued that this was truly the silent famine (Azbite 1981). Climatic conditions again became unfavourable starting in 1968 and continued into 1974 (Penrose 1987:93). Rainfall alone did not account for the extent of famine vulnerability. Feudal policies and practices regarding taxes, rents, debt payments, outright bribery, and extortion, as well as unpaid administrators whose income depended upon production quotas (and hence had limited incentives to report falling production in key rural areas) all compounded the climatic shocks (Penrose 1987:89). Some 35 people were indicted by special courts for failing to report the famine, but the damage had already been done. Conflict, such as inter-ethnic fighting in the lowlands of Wollo, further exacerbated famine risks (Africa Watch Committee 1991:10).

Incidents of violence increased in the latter decades of Haile Selassie's regime. Eritrea was re-incorporated into Ethiopia in 1952, laying the foundation for the Eritrean succession movement that became quite active by the 1960s. The Imperial regime was dealing with a range of violent insurgencies in the 1960s including the revolt in Gojjam, the 1963-1970 Oromo revolt, and increasing instability in Somalia with the rise of the West Somalia Liberation Front. In Addis Ababa, the failed coup of 1960 was followed by student campaigns that centred on land reform - campaigns that began with student activism to raise money for local disaster relief. This mobilisation radicalised the students' growing

awareness and appreciation for the interconnectedness of the *dual* strands of the root causes of life *in extremis* (i.e., environmental *and* political) that were driving various peasant revolts elsewhere in Ethiopia. Students were killed in 1969, 1971, and 1973 in Addis Ababa as opposition to the monarchy deepened (Penrose 1987:104). Writing in 1985, the RRC asserted that:

*[T]he roots of the 1974 Revolution go deep into Ethiopia's history and into the class nature of society, it was the famine in Wollo that finally opened the eyes of the people and exposed the corruption of the rulers. The latter's final blunders were to suppress news of the people's hardship and suffering and their reluctance to do anything constructive to help the victims (RRC 1985:89).*

This, however, is where the history of Imperial engagement with disasters and humanitarians ends, not begins. Historical accounts dating from the medieval period and the better documented accounts from 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries suggest that famine in Ethiopia has been a frequent outcome of natural and socio-economic factors for centuries (Lautze et al. 2003:35).<sup>4</sup> Accounts and records left by contemporary palace chroniclers, clergy, residents (including missionaries) and foreign travellers show that disasters such as famines and plagues are often believed to be punishments from God for failing the true faith.

Prior to the 1970s crisis, there were no official governmental disaster relief organisations, but the necessity of responding to disasters had been a long-standing theme in Ethiopian governance and a concern to officials. Examples of humanitarian assistance and protection by the state of Ethiopia are found in records from the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. The Emperor welcomed Armenians fleeing the genocide in Turkey in 1915. The Ethiopian Red Cross provided assistance, in collaboration with the ICRC, to victims of Italian mustard gas bombings in Ethiopia in 1936, one year after the founding of the Ethiopian Red Cross (Moorehead 1998:305).<sup>5</sup> Instrumental in the

---

<sup>4</sup> For a complete account, see Richard Pankhurst, *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the 20th Century* (Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society held annual, three-day long

eradication of small pox from Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Red Cross also founded the nation's first nursing school in 1949, just one year after the Ministry of Public Health was established (Stommes and Sisaye 1980:487). In 1961, a series of severe earthquakes in Kara Kore prompted a relief response by the Ethiopian Red Cross, including the participation of one of our authors as a young girl assisting her mother, an Ethiopian Red Cross official (Anne Roberts), with a vaccination campaign for earthquake victims. While the earthquake damage was extensive, mortality was limited by the actions of an Ethiopian official. The *Ethiopian Herald* newspaper reported:

*Under the command of Sergeant Haile Mariam Wolde Maskal at the Kara Kore police station, the inhabitants had been evacuated by midnight of the 1st of June. Over 5,000 people were made homeless in the whole area of Kara Kore-Majete, so a relief campaign was started by the Red Cross of Ethiopia and others, and donations were collected and listed in the newspapers. The Emperor inspected the relief work on site around 20 June and said that 16,000 metal sheets would be made available for constructing new villages. Collection of donations was continued through July (cited in Lindahl 2005).*

The reactions of the Imperial government to the Sahelian drought in the 1970s, however, were too limited to avert massive displacement and widespread mortality. Initiatives were undertaken even prior to the establishment of the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) in 1974. The first formal government disaster management institution (prior to the establishment of the RRC) was the Drought Relief Operations Coordination Office (DROCO) established by the Ministry of National Community Development and Social Affairs with a mandate to supply relief to drought victims with Ato Shimelis Adugna as head (Penrose 1987:99, 101).<sup>6,7</sup> In the lowland areas, the Awash Valley

---

fundraising fairs. They mobilised the entire diplomatic community to raise thousands of dollars for local humanitarian and community development activities

<sup>6</sup> Ato Shimelis later went on to head the RRC and, under the current regime, has led the Ethiopian Red Cross Society. He is a classic example of the stability – and the living memory – in Ethiopia disaster management institutions.

<sup>7</sup> The successors to this office have been reorganised at least six times over the last three decades: three times during the Provisional Military Administration and three

Authority established Nomad Aid in mid-1973 for assistance especially to Afar pastoralists while the Haile Selassie Foundation opened an Office for the Rehabilitation of Children in Wollo.

The government commissioned investigations into the crisis but even quality reports, such as those produced by the Ministry of Interior, failed to mobilise adequate resources and erect the structures necessary to manage them. (RRC 1985:86) In November 1971, five months after the *meher* crop season failed, the government established the inter-ministerial Grain Deficit Study Committee (later renamed the National Emergency Committee). Representing the subsequent Derg regime, the RRC was sharply critical of the work of this committee in its retrospective analysis:

*First, the financial and material resources at the disposal of the Committee were negligible in relation to the extent of the disaster. The government was not ready to allocate funds commensurate with the enormity of the problem and the operations that needed to be mounted. Second, the terms of reference were vague and loose...emphasis was given to the study of the problem rather than to the launching of immediate relief operations (emphasis in the original RRC 1985:86).*

One of the first calls for central government assistance in October 1971 was not met with a grant of aid until November 1972. Of the original 6,393 MT of food aid requested, the Council of Ministers authorised only 200 MT – and stipulated that the affected administration had to pay the transportation costs (RRC 1985:82-83). The RRC was not impressed by its predecessors' efforts:

*One year, two months and seven days after (relief) was first requested, the grain finally reached the place where it was needed. But even then it was not immediately distributed to the people because there was*

---

times again under the current regime. The RRC supplanted DROCO with particular focus on emergency response (1974–78). Later (1979–92), the RRC's mandate was extended to include rehabilitation measures through settling people from the badly eroded highland areas to “virgin” lands in the lower altitudes. The RRC was replaced by the DPPC (1993–2005), followed by the DPPA (2005–08) and, now, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development's (MoARD) Disaster Management and Food Security Sector (DM/FSS, 2008-present).

*no office stationery on which to register how the relief was actually distributed (RRC 1985:83).*

By 1973, extensive distress migration meant that towns were filling with famine victims who could no longer survive in rural areas. By September, the government had distributed 14,600 MT but its relief efforts were hindered by major transportation shortages (RRC 1985:85). Logistical problems would continue to plague Ethiopia into the 1990s despite donations of trucks, airplanes and direct logistical support from Ethiopian Airlines as well as various international institutions, e.g., the Mercy Airlift, Swedish Air Relief, French Air Contingent, Transaal, etc. (RRC 1985:98).

Although the Ministry of Information did all it could to hide the desperate conditions prevailing in the countryside, there were remarkable outpourings of spontaneous assistance by citizens and students.<sup>8</sup> This was in keeping with the nation's long history of voluntary, professional, religious, and other aid associations that were present across a wide spectrum of Ethiopian society. Their activities ranged from enabling households to respond and cope with crisis, accumulate savings and manage risks to, at the wider level, enabling communities to contribute to the development of schools, markets and other social services (Aredo 1991; Hamer 1967). Many of these were precursors to current regional/ethnic-based parties and organisations and pre-dated international charitable organisations.

The World Food Programme, USAID, and the Red Cross became increasingly engaged in food aid relief and were credited as having “a limiting effect on the overall drought” (RRC 1985:89). There was no registration of charitable organisations working in Ethiopia in 1973–74 but there were an estimated 23 international organisations (mostly local missions and a few NGOs) operating in

---

<sup>8</sup> Although blamed for hiding the famine, Emperor Haile Selassie was initially unaware of the famine, in part because government officials were reluctant to pass on bad news. Upon discovering the famine in 1973, the Emperor rebuked Crown Prince Asfa Wossen (the Duke of Wollo) for not informing him of the famine earlier, to which the prince replied that the Emperor only listened to his officials and not to him (the Prince). The prince was so stressed by this allegation that he had a stroke that evening and was hospitalised in the UK. Personal communication, Yacob Aklilu, 15 October 2008, Addis Ababa.

country by the end of the Imperial regime: all viewed relief as an interruption to their normal development work.<sup>9</sup> The Christian Relief Committee (renamed as the Christian Relief and Development Association, CRDA) was organised in 1973 and included international organisations such as Oxfam, Save the Children/Sweden and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), organisations that remain active in Ethiopia. International expertise in issues of drought and famine was scarce: the United Nations Sahelian Office (UNSO, renamed the Office to Combat Drought and Desertification) was not established until 1971 and the global UN Disaster Relief Office not until 1973. A range of young relief workers, such as John Seaman and Julius Holt (two key architects of what has become “Household Economy Analysis” nearly three decades later), began their careers in Ethiopia at this time (Rivers. et al. 1976; Seaman et al. 1974; Seaman and Holt 1975).

The RRC, established in March 1974 with six staff quartered in two offices, grew to 30 employees by mid-June and was augmented by several foreign experts including Peace Corps Volunteers (RRC 1985:94, 100). Government orders expanded the RRC's duties and rights, increasing its power to call on the resources of ministries and governmental departments and to provide tax exemptions for relief operations. It authorised the RRC to collect one month's salary from every government employee who earned more than 250 Birr/month. This became an important source of domestic revenue for relief operations (RRC 1985:28). A national early warning system (the Emergency Operation Centre) was established in 1974, the same year that the RRC medical coordinator established an emergency health information system in collaboration with the Ethiopian Nutrition Institute, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture with support from UNICEF.

These actions clearly fall within the realm of humanitarian governance, but they represent only one aspect of the Imperial regime's engagement with what can be more broadly considered disaster risk management. Haile Selassie's regime

---

<sup>9</sup> At the time, civil society organizations were governed by the “Regulations Issued Pursuant to the Control of Associations Provision of the Civil Code of 1960” detailed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1966, Satishkumar, et al, (ND), “Civil Society Participation in International Environmental Governance: Ethiopia” [http://www.yale.edu/envirocenter/envdem/docs/OTHE\\_RS/BELLIETHATHAN/Belliethathan%20Paper.doc](http://www.yale.edu/envirocenter/envdem/docs/OTHE_RS/BELLIETHATHAN/Belliethathan%20Paper.doc), accessed 20 September 2008.

was characterised by initiatives to modernise Ethiopia not only to address the grinding poverty that affected so many citizens but also to assert Ethiopia's status as a global leader with a modern society, army and navy, education systems, shipping capacities, etc. The first and second five-year-plans (1957-1962; 1963-1967) emphasised the development of infrastructure, supported by the US' Point Four Programme for Technical Assistance initiated in June 1951 (United States of American and Ethiopia 1951). Government strategies were re-directed towards agriculture in the third five-year-plan in order to speed the pace of development, including strengthening the Ministry of Land Tenure Improvement Administration (Cliffe 2003:191).

The third five-year-plan can be considered the beginning of four decades of agriculture reforms and policies in Ethiopia. The reforms foresaw the transformation of agriculture through the establishment of various research institutions and large commercial farms privatised under foreign management or ownership.<sup>10</sup> In 1968, the Ministry of Agriculture initiated the Extension and Project Implementation Department (EPID) which engaged in a variety of programs of credit, storage, marketing, extension, price stabilisation, and mechanisation (Penrose 1987:91) until it was abolished in 1984.<sup>11</sup> The Settlement Authority was established in 1968 (Piguet and Lemessa 2003:139). The country's first resettlement policy was drafted but not pursued due to a lack of funds (Cliffe 2003:192). In addition to an IDA-financed

---

<sup>10</sup> For example, Handels Verenignens Amsterdam, Wanji Sugar Estate, Awassa Yugoslavs, Tendaho Plantation Share Company, Tendaho Agriculture Plantation, Shola Milk Industry, Ethio-Japan Textiles Company etc. Of note, many of these companies donated relief goods to famine relief operations in the 1970s, RRC, *The Challenges of Drought: Ethiopia's Decade of Struggle in Relief and Rehabilitation* (London: H&L Communications Ltd., 1985). One author argues that investment in agriculture was comparatively limited, with agriculture claiming just over 4% of the national budget in the period 1963-1973, while foreign agriculture firms received investment incentives and the right to expatriate their profits Angela Penrose, 'Section 2: Before and After', in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose (eds.), *The Ethiopian Famine: The Story of the Emergency Relief Operation* (London: Zed Books, 1987), pp. 79-189.

<sup>11</sup> In addition, at the time of the revolution, some EPID officials diverted agriculture development funds to the EPRP ironically taking farmers' entitlements to foment revolt in the name of the peasantry. Personal communication, Yacob Aklilu, 15 October 2008, Addis Ababa.

"Minimum Package Project" of agriculture inputs, resettlement was recommended by the World Bank in 1971 to increase agriculture production (Jansson 1987:64; Penrose 1987:119). Other Imperial initiatives included forestry and water resource management measures, e.g., irrigation systems, water conservation, erosion control, wells, dams, tanks, ponds, the opening of the Koka Dam in 1960, etc. (Penrose 1987:120-121). With two-thirds of capital expenditures financed by foreign sources in the last decades of the Haile Selassie regime, at least one author blames the lack of adequately effective reforms in Imperial Ethiopia on the ease with which government could access foreign (especially US) aid (Penrose 1987:106).

### 2.1.1 Discussion

It is important to note that these governmental reforms were intended to address the structural, economic, and political inequality that the Haile Selassie regime inherited from previous, less reform-minded Ethiopian Emperors. The peasants were poor long before the humanitarian community labelled them vulnerable, excluded and disempowered. Haile Selassie's regime took notice of this and, in its own way, engaged in a wide range of initiatives to address these problems. A listing of these initiatives should bring a wry smile of familiarity to those who are aware of agriculture policy reforms in more recent eras, including the current agenda of the Food Security Sector (FSS): extension, minimum packages, water conservation, credit, resettlement, etc. An important legacy begins in Haile Selassie's reforms, one wherein agriculture policies are criticised for not directly addressing such structural inequalities.

The reforms could not stave off the coming revolution. Famine dethroned the Emperor and served as a powerful metaphor for the impetus for revolutionary change. The seeds of radicalism can be traced to the end of Haile Selassie's regime as the haunting spectre of famine – which many Ethiopian students saw for the first time – highlighted all that was wrong with feudal absolutism. The impetus for revolution and the subsequent military takeover intensified due to sharp increases in fuel prices as well as the public exposure of the 1970s famine. Students and radicals used the government's attempts to deny the existence of the famine and its consequences to urge the urban working classes to agitate for reform. Famine became central to Ethiopian politics, a historical fact of which subsequent

officials and politicians have remained intensely aware.

Successive Ethiopian governments' anti-famine measures have been fuelled by the pervasive conviction that ideology can conquer nature. At the end of the Imperial era, famine became an object to be defeated through revolution (not through charity, not by God) grounded in the sheer physicality of effort by "the people" and their government. For the military government that took power in late 1974, the issue of food shortages became a potent symbol of the former system of injustices and disparities in rural relations. It not only defined the generals' *raison d'être* but also shaped their relationship to the outside world, including the need to be recognised as tackling the causes of food crises. In short, the socialism that followed feudalism was intended to be a political contract against famine – with a vengeance.

## 2.2 Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) Era (the "Derg", 1974-1991)

When the PMAC (the Derg) assumed power in September 1974, the Sahelian drought was still affecting much of Ethiopia, especially the lowlands of Hararghe (particularly the Ogaden), Sidamo, Bale, and Gamo Gafo as well as pastoralist areas of Wello, Tigray and Eritrea (RRC 1985:93). Official discourse regarding responsibility for the famine centred on the failures of the Imperial regime, a theme that continued until the complex emergency brought by war, drought, and aid politics in the 1980s. In 1985, the RRC blamed the then-current crisis on the poor rains as well as "a great deal of past damage [that] remains to be put right" (RRC 1985:29).

The PMAC broke ties with the US and realigned the country with the USSR along socialist principals. International assistance levels dropped sharply. The US suspended almost all aid to Ethiopia in 1977 and only gradually relaxed some of the prohibitions on humanitarian assistance over time. In 1979, USAID and the UK suspended their programs for capacity-building support for the EWS at the RRC (Penrose 1987:138) (although support from UNICEF continued – as it does to this day). In November 1984, USAID permitted some of its food aid to be provided to the RRC but general economic assistance was still banned (Penrose 1987:148). Notwithstanding, USAID provided a great deal of relief assistance to Ethiopia through NGOs in these years, in part due to the unprecedented awareness of the crisis generated

by Western media and in part to shore up America's image as a giving, caring, merciful country – a ballast against the steely coldness of godless Communism (Lautze 2004; Raven-Roberts 1994).

In addition to residual famine and precipitous declines in foreign aid, the Derg faced continuing and imminent military threats. To deal with internal dissent, it used violent means enabled by campaigns of conscription and extensive enlargements of the army, expenditures for which had risen from 14% in 1970 to 45% of total government spending in the fiscal year 1983/84 (Penrose 1987:127). A revolt in Afar was brutally suppressed in 1975. Somalia's invasion of the Ogaden in the drought year of 1977 and its defeat in 1978 were followed by six years of "intense counter-insurgency warfare" in the Ogaden (Africa Watch Committee 1991:11-12). These and other conflicts led to high prices and food shortages in urban areas between 1976 and 1979 (Penrose 1987:117) exacerbated by developments in the global economy: high international inflation and rising oil prices followed by a recession that sharply depressed coffee prices. As war resumed in 1979 in southern Sudan, refugees fled to Ethiopia and the SPLA was welcomed to establish rear bases in refugee camps close to the Sudan border. The Derg's "Red Terror" purges of the opposition and the educated classes of 1977-78 crushed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party with leaders, members, and supporters killed or imprisoned. Many others fled the country, found refuge abroad, began new lives, became successful, and are now – 20 years later – being courted to return as investors in their homeland.

The greatest of all crises, however, was the famine of 1983-1985 that once again was exposed to the world by the international media, this time the BBC. On the heels of some and in the midst of other conflicts, drought had returned to Ethiopia in the 1980-81 and 1981-82 seasons while a particularly severe meningitis epidemic raged (Ayalew 1997:4), just as in 1977. War and famine left 18% of the total population (eight million people) in need of emergency assistance (Ayalew 1997:2), figures that were not surpassed until the crisis of 2003.

As civil war split the country in the 1980s, NGOs faced a clear dilemma of either engaging in solidarity with rebel forces in the north or remaining neutral in operations administered under Derg control. Humanitarian assistance became deeply integrated into the logic of war on

both sides. Relationships among international NGOs deteriorated into acrimonious, public infighting over this dilemma in international fora. Those that opted for solidarity with the rebels formed the Emergency Relief Desk (ERD), established in 1981 in Sudan to provide unsanctioned cross-border assistance to TPLF, EPLF and OLF rebel areas of northern Ethiopia (Duffield and Prendergast 1994). From Sudan, the ERD channelled increasing amounts of aid through the “humanitarian wings” of rebel movements (i.e., REST, ERA and ORA) with minimal oversight and limited accountability. The complex logistical and management requirements effectively forced internal capacity building and self-reliance upon these groups at a critical early stage in their development (Clark 2000:5). REST initiated land reforms, soil and water conservation measures, and irrigation projects, and developed a model of disaster relief coupled with a strong ideology of political contract against famine.

The cross-border operation was instrumental in sustaining the rebels by facilitating assistance to war-affected populations and by precluding the need to engage in violent predation against civilians, a characteristic of so many other African conflicts. The ERD NGOs were publicly thanked by the victorious rebel leaders for their support, causing some discomfort to NGOs (Duffield and Prendergast 1994:162). Writing retrospectively of this era, the RRC observed:

*[I]n the TPLF controlled areas there were few but effective NGOs without the involvement of international organizations. Some NGOs clearly supported the Government Policy while others gave unreserved support for the TPLF. There were still other groups who wanted to remain neutral though they provided aid secretly. (RRC 1995:13)*

Under pressure from humanitarian organisations, the Derg was obliged to open a corridor for the passage of relief into the north. Led by faith-based groups, the Joint Relief Program (JRP) skilfully coordinated relief assistance for conflict-affected populations in government-controlled areas of northern Ethiopia. These efforts were met with criticism by human rights advocates. Alex de Waal, writing for the Africa Watch Committee asserted:

*In Eritrea, aid was used as part of a military pacification strategy, with aid agencies moving behind the military to secure newly-occupied areas. This allowed the government to score significant military*

*successes in 1985, and to control areas it had been unable to hold on to before (Africa Watch Committee 1991:13)*

Controlled, constrained, and suspected of serving as agents of Western imperialism, humanitarian actors working with government approval inside Ethiopia faced a markedly different operating environment which they tried to counter, in part, through the NGO network, CRDA. The Derg was compelled to allow more and more agencies into Ethiopia “to curb the spread of the famine (and) to retain a semblance of legitimacy and order at a time when it was under increasing pressure from armed resistance groups” (Clark, 2000 #67:4, see also Campbell 1996:13). This came at a cost both to state and society. NGOs increasingly spoke in the global media as if on behalf of Ethiopia and portrayed themselves as able to supplant an intransigent Ethiopian state in “fixing” Ethiopia’s problems. Especially after 1984, foreign NGO directors gained the status of celebrities and political analysts, escorting donor emissaries and film stars on highly publicised tours of famine areas. Sitting literally at the right hand of ambassadors at formal briefings, their views were diligently reported in confidential cables to Western capitals. Some (especially WPE officials, government administrators, and security staff) thought this NGO behaviour not only contradicted Ethiopia’s official image of self-sufficiency but also affronted its sense of common decency. Yet the humanitarian organisations also provided a rare opportunity for patronage. Favoured government officials were allowed temporary releases to take up considerably better paying jobs with NGOs. Others skilfully managed NGOs to the benefit of their communities. Nonetheless, a highly respected Ethiopian scholar concluded of this time:

*[T]he continued association of international NGOs with disaster and disaster relief have, I believe, tarnished their image and left a residue of resentment in government circles and sections of the informed public. It is as if Ethiopians, or rather the urban elite, never forgave these organizations for forcing their way into the country at a time when both state and society were overwhelmed by tragedy (Rahmato 2002:106).*

The humanitarian organisations (including many with no previous experience in Ethiopia) appeared to be awash with money. Ethiopia presented the international NGOs with an unprecedented

opportunity for expansion, not only for their operations in country but also for their work elsewhere in the world. But their new equipment and vehicles and generous budgets made them a source of envy for government officials who had to manage ministerial departments with a fraction of the resources available to NGOs. NGOs employed the surfeit of educated Ethiopians who found themselves redundant in the revolutionary government. The discrimination inherent in the policy of organisations which had a different salary scale for 'local' hire caused justifiable resentment and unease among the often highly qualified Ethiopian staff.

The government, NGOs, and UN agencies all continued to face extensive logistical challenges because of insufficient port infrastructure, inadequate storage, limited transport capacities, and poor roads. Various agencies established their own logistics capacities, including WFP and the NGOs' Joint Relief Program. Combined with the high international profile of the crisis and their own distrust of the government, humanitarian organisations generated their own impetus for coordination. In November 1984, the UN announced the appointment of a UN Assistant Secretary General (ASG) for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, the first time such a position had been used in an emergency (Jansson 1987:1). Soon after, the UN established the regional UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa. Also in November 1984, the ASG, Kurt Jansson, set up the Office for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia (OEOE). Later, the UN Secretary General dismantled the OEOE and incorporated many of its functions into UNDP. In January 1987, the UN Emergency Prevention and Preparedness Group (EPPG) was formed, implemented as a UNDP project and reporting directly to the ASG (UNDP-EUE). These offices were the precursor to UNDP's Emergency Unit for Ethiopia (UN-EUE, as of January 1994) and the current OCHA office, each of which has been based in the ECA building. The ASG developed systems of monitoring and reporting, functions the UN had not adopted in previous emergencies. In so doing, the UN established ad hoc structures that ultimately undermined the one agency with a rational mandate for coordinating UN agencies: UNDP (Jansson 1987:13).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> It did this with little or no specialised disaster management expertise at the time, especially when compared to the RRC's decade of collective experience. To the displeasure of the government, the UN employed mostly Western monitors, adding to Politburo concerns that UN coordination bodies would be "a (negative)

Such a litany of crises and international action gives the impression of a state that cared little about food security and famine prevention. The PMAC, however, pursued radical reforms. Some had deadly effect, but most were driven by a worldview, however controversial, that prioritised addressing Ethiopia's deep rural vulnerability. The overthrow of Haile Selassie was fuelled by critiques from radical sections of the Ethiopian intelligentsia of the Imperial regime's failure both to harness the productivity of the nation and protect the vulnerability of the rural masses. Implementing the then highly popular socialist agenda, the Derg delivered the revolution that many had called for as an alternative to the quasi-feudal Imperial state. Although many suffered, were tortured, killed, and became refugees elsewhere in the decade that followed, it can be argued that, initially, the PMAC leadership was trying to be responsive to the demands of the population. The RRC argued:

*Indeed, the arrival on the political scene of the Revolution Government [in 1974] marked a totally different approach to the problem. For the first time in our long history, anti-drought measures became systematic...There was an awareness that Ethiopia's continued existence and honour depended on lifting the suffering people from their long-standing degradation and restoring to them their humanity and self-esteem (RRC 1985:106).*

This was more than just propaganda. Land reform was the Derg's very first policy act ("Land to the Tiller" Penrose 1987:117). It extended entitlements of up to 10 hectares of land for every citizen, to be accessed through the newly created Peasant Associations (Provisional Military Administrative Council 1975, 1976). The Agriculture Marketing Corporation, Agriculture Service and Agriculture Producer Cooperatives, collective farming, and Development (Extension) Agents were established to guarantee producer prices, increase production, and abolish the remaining agricultural structures of the Imperial regime. All commercial farms were nationalised and state farms established. In addition to forestry projects, between 1977 and 1984 the Soil and

---

reflection on the ability of the Marxist regime to handle its internal problems." See Kurt Jansson, 'Section 1: The Emergency Relief Operation - an inside View', in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose (eds.), *The Ethiopian Famine: The Story of the Emergency Relief Operation* (London: Zed Books, 1987), xxv-78.

Water Conservation Service oversaw one of the most ambitious anti-erosion and food-for-work projects ever undertaken internationally, dedicating over 30 million workdays to an intensive programme of planting seedlings and constructing terraces (Penrose 1987:121). These agricultural initiatives were complemented by health programmes. Several state enterprises were unusually successful in this era including Ethiopian Airlines and the Ethiopian Maritime Shipping Agency. Ethiopia was not a “failed state”.

Ato Shimelis Adugna, still at the helm of the RRC, established relief committees at the municipal, zone and district (*kiflehager*, *awraja* and *woreda*) levels in 14 regions between 1974 and 1977. Ethiopia remained active in its relationships with multilateral and bilateral organisations, received assistance (despite protests from the US government) from the World Bank, and engaged in international diplomacy. The Ethiopian state, already known for hierarchy, developed one of the largest bureaucracies in Africa. Government staff in general remained (as in previous and subsequent eras) underpaid, under-trained, and subject to myriad rules and regulations. The new state bureaucracy generated a culture of its own, characterised by excessive secrecy, authoritarianism and nepotism (Gebregziabhere 1992; Raven-Roberts 1994). In an attempt to engender real “ownership” of the development process, the government ordered students to travel to remote rural areas to work and attempt to understand the peasantry (Donham 1999). The new socialist bureaucracy penetrated deep into Ethiopian society with unprecedented measures of organisation – and surveillance – that led eventually to the formation of the Workers’ Party of Ethiopia (WPE).

Article 10 of the new constitution envisioned resettlement and villagisation as central to agrarian transformation.<sup>13</sup> Resettlement programs, argued by some to be another mechanism of government control (Piguet and Lemessa 2003:141), were initiated in 1976. Villagisation was seen as key to the establishment of agrarian socialism and was intended to radically alter – in a positive manner – the social, economic, and political life of communities by organizing them into centralised locations with access to schools,

---

<sup>13</sup> “The state shall encourage the scattered and rural population to aggregate in order to change their backward living conditions and enable them to lead a better social life” Angela Penrose, 'Section 2: Before and After', *Ibid.*, 79-189.

health centres, water points, and government facilities. Resettlement began relatively soon after the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie with “thousands” of people relocated to “dozens” of resettlement areas in the south of the country (Piguet and Lemessa 2003:137-138).

Resettlement efforts were revisited in the influential FAO/MoA “Ethiopian Highlands Reclamation Study” in 1983-1984. Some resettlement efforts were supported by NGOs, UN agencies, private companies, and foreign donors, but others were decried as gross violations of human rights. The government denied MSF/France’s claims of high levels of resettlement deaths in 1984 (Jansson 1987:25) and expelled the organisation (Piguet and Lemessa 2003:140).<sup>14</sup> But settlers did die in the process of unplanned and often involuntary resettlement, especially as the 1983-85 crisis deepened, and the controversy about resettlement raised suspicions in the international community about the political functions of the RRC – especially as it also was suspected of obstructing relief to areas where rebel movements were active (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:123).

The RRC was re-organised for a second time in 1978 and merged with the Settlement and Awash Valley Development Authorities, mandated to provide relief supplies to victims of natural and manmade disasters and to implement programmes to rehabilitate them. The RRC was not focused on resettlement alone. Order 93/1974 expanded the organisation from its modest beginnings to include the implementation, coordination and resource of mobilisation of a wide range of disaster relief and rehabilitation activities (RRC 1985:106-107). Many of its efforts were focused on “drought-affected areas” because drought was (and to an extent, still is) synonymous with disaster in the minds of government officials.

In 1976, the RRC began to invest in understanding patterns of disaster vulnerability, including a flood

---

<sup>14</sup> There was extensive disagreement within the international NGO community regarding the implications of the settlement program, including the number of deaths. Mortality figures remain disputed to this day. There was an informal consensus among NGOs that MSF, as the most vocal of the organizations, could speak out and, if necessary, leave the country as a point of principle. Other NGOs elected to remain in country and work to ameliorate the worst of the problems in the settlement areas.

risk vulnerability map and related analysis that were published in 1978 (DPPC 1997:6). With consistent support from UNICEF and in conjunction with the CSA, the NMSA, and the MoA, the RRC's Early Warning and Planning Services was responsible for disaster assessment, data collection, and analysis of price trends, rainfall, and pasture and crop conditions, among other indicators. In the early 1980s, its monthly bulletins warned of a deepening crisis even when reports of the famine were banned in the Ethiopian media as the Derg prepared to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Africa Watch Committee 1991:169). Though accurate and timely, the RRC alerts failed to generate a serious response. That only came with the next BBC broadcast.

Within government, the deteriorating situation prompted the creation of a high-level inter-ministerial committee in March 1984. None of the members were Politburo (Penrose 1987:152). On 3 October, just prior to the BBC broadcast, the Politburo announced that famine relief was a priority and it was undertaking a number of domestic initiatives to raise money. The following year, luxury good imports were banned, petrol was rationed, driving was forbidden on Sundays (except for those with certain number plates, including key NGO staff), farmers were compelled to contribute 100 kg of grain to relief efforts, etc. (Penrose 1987:155; RRC 1985:26). By Order 36/75, the surtax of one month's salary on government employees continued and generated nearly 35 million Birr for the RRC between 1975 and 1977.

The Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR) was established in 1979 with support from FAO and became fully functional in 1982 (Ayalew 1997:5). Even as the RRC grew stronger (and hence politically threatening), it was able to retain a relative degree of autonomy within an otherwise restrictive government bureaucracy. Because of restrictions by Western donors, the RRC suffered from a lack of funds for internal capacity building, was subject to interference and manipulation by other parts of government – especially the Party – and, importantly, lacked specific policy directives regarding clear lines of responsibility and authority for its work. It had been undermined by donor earmarks that deprived it of the resources necessary to coordinate by command (Jansson 1987:23). Nevertheless, the RRC served as a model for other developing countries seeking to establish national capacities for relief

management (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:123). De Waal noted:

*The behaviour of the RRC is a warning to those who would wish to see the Ethiopian government as wholly monolithic and dedicated solely to the single-minded destruction of internal opposition (Africa Watch Committee 1991:169)*

By 1985, as UN programs expanded and the number of NGOs proliferated (even beyond the figure of 63), the RRC was staffed by at least 1,200 people (Jansson 1987:46). Donors increasingly channelled their aid through NGOs instead of the RRC, although as of November 1985 the RRC was still managing 30% of all food aid (Jansson 1987:23). Donor earmarks made it nearly impossible for the RRC to ensure equitable geographic distributions of relief resources (Wolde-Giorgis 1989). It is safe to conclude that the RRC had adequate capacity to manage a greater proportion of donated aid, that donor earmarking was purely a political manoeuvre by Western – most especially US – governments (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:123), and that earmarks served to undermine the RRC (Jansson 1987:23).

After the crisis, the RRC (with support from the World Bank) turned its attention to rehabilitation, managing projects to provide seeds, oxen, and fertilizer to farmers made destitute by the famine. The ambitious soil and water food-for-work conservation measures resumed as did efforts to improve the rural road network, forest coverage, and availability of water for agriculture and consumption purposes. A number of grain storage facilities were constructed (RRC 1985:102). Combined with the pre-positioning of stocks and improved planning, these efforts were credited with minimizing the impact of the drought that returned to Ethiopia in 1987 and 1988 and affected eight million people (Ayalew 1997:5)<sup>15</sup>. These drought years coincided with major locust infestations in the Horn of Africa. Another major meningitis epidemic followed the drought, lasting from 1988–1999 (Ayalew 1997:4) while the war

---

<sup>15</sup> The EWS identified eight million people in need but this was arbitrarily reduced to five million due to a weak response by donors to the crisis. The Livelihoods Program, 'Stakeholder Consultation Round I: Revision of the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM)', <<http://www.livesandlivelihoods.com/files/25944504.pdf>>, accessed 20 September 2008

continued. As the RRC expanded its rehabilitation and development activities, tensions rose with the various line departments who saw this as their role (The Livelihoods Program 2007). Others in government also took a dim view of the commission, considering that the mere fact of its existence embodied dependency and the accommodation of disasters. Some ranking officials considered its relations with NGOs in the 1980s famine to have been unnecessarily liberal (a view not softened by the eventual move of the then-RRC Commissioner Wolde-Giorgis to the United States) A struggle for responsibility for NGOs ensued in government departments who accused the RRC of having pro-Western tendencies,. The MOA established a coordination unit for NGOs as did the Ministry Economic Affairs and Foreign Relations. As a result, some NGOs reported to RRC, some to MOA, and others to MOEAFF, a time-consuming exercise for NGOs and one that still left the government with a largely incomplete picture of NGO activities in country.

In 1988, the RRC and UNDP started to bring together the many layers of the disaster response system. UNDP organised visits to India and China for the exchange of lessons and comparative analysis of disaster relief systems for government agencies including the Office of the National Committee for Central Planning (ONCCP), RRC, Water Resource Commission, MOA, and MOH (The Livelihoods Program 2007). An international conference in which 30 papers were presented was convened in Addis Ababa. Based on these initiatives, a National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Strategy was drafted with the involvement of 26 agencies. With the intention of further improving the Strategy, fourteen SIDA-funded studies were carried out (some after EPRDF took over).

The Strategy evolved into the “Emergency Code for Ethiopia,” with the title of “Code” clearly implying legal accountability for its provisions (not unlike the Indian Famine Codes). The strategy included a range of disaster management initiatives, many of which survive in some form to this day: logistics contingency plans (e.g., the Logistics Master Plan), the disaster prevention and preparedness fund, employment generating schemes, relief management manuals, emergency relief services, seed banks, secondary economic activities, tax and debt relief, training, and water supply systems (Caldwell 1992:156-157). Donors and UN agencies were receptive but several international NGOs saw it as being overly restrictive: they felt

they were being “reduced” to mere “funding agencies”, and argued that the proposed registration procedures were cumbersome (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:128).

With support from UNDP and UNICEF, the government established the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Unit in the ONCCP to further develop the strategy and facilitate its implementation. While the draft Code was on the President’s desk awaiting approval, the progress of rebel forces towards Addis Ababa shifted focus and priorities. The Derg fell before the Code became either policy or law.

### *2.2.1 Discussion*

Many of the officials who were engaged in the early days of the RRC continued with that institution under the Derg. Those who left the RRC (or, later, the DPPC/DPPA) followed varied career paths, but many remain engaged in the management of risk and vulnerability - as private consultants, UN and NGO staff, and government officials in other departments. They remember well the political, social, and human cost of failed famine measures, the lack of international expertise to assist the government in the management of the terrible crises of the 1960s and 1970s, and the meteoric growth of UN and NGO disaster relief institutions in the 1980s.

The Derg was vitriolic in its appraisal of Imperial humanitarian governance. It is in this light that its own motivations, policies and practices should be understood. Its leaders were convinced that Marxism-Leninism was the key to defeating famine and eradicating poverty. Collectivisation and villagisation were not merely means of social control, but were believed to be central for transforming society and reviving the economy. During this period, though replete with crises, wars and human rights violations, the Ethiopian state nevertheless remained coherent and strong. Indeed, in the areas under its control, state structures penetrated ever more profoundly into all levels of society.

There can be no understanding of the role of the Ethiopian state in disasters without understanding the dilemmas and strategies of a range of actors in a period in which famine became synonymous with Ethiopia in the eyes of the world. A government relief institution emerged that had the power to command the direction and resources of other ministries. Donors began to flex their influence through earmarking relief resources

away from government. UN agencies and NGOs reached the apogee of what Duffield has called “petty contingent sovereignty” (Duffield 2007). Despite this complexity, the famine was portrayed by international actors as a technical problem that could be fixed by well-meaning charities, heroic white nurses saving babies in supplementary feeding tents, and Western housewives giving a few pence each day to a (any?) cause. Famine became a spectacle in which the main performers were expatriate NGO directors, rock bands and movie stars. In such productions, the only roles afforded Ethiopians were those of starving child, despairing mother, grieving father, and uncaring, menacing government official.

The narrative of famine returning to Ethiopia every ten years was born with crisis of 1983-85. The media fuelled a notion that neither the government nor the populace had been doing anything to prevent its recurrence. The Ethiopian government was doubly tarred as having caused the famine and as being, as a Communist regime, inherently bad. International humanitarian institutions (and through their media strategies, the Western public as well) appeared to some to hijack Ethiopians’ own sense of compassion - as if compassion were the prerogative of Europeans and Americans. There was no recognition of the fundraising efforts of Ethiopians - not only domestically, but in virtually every foreign university and overseas community where Ethiopian student organisations, refugees or supporters of the various Ethiopian liberation movements could be found. Adding insult to injury was the perceived racist depiction of Ethiopians as heartless and uncaring, inhabiting a country of emaciated people without culture, history, context or dignity. Not lost on Ethiopians was the irony of the Band Aid/Live Aid song “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” being sung about a country with one of the oldest forms of Christianity.

The simplified, construct of bad government, helpless people and gallant foreign humanitarians created a deep sense of shame, frustration, and anger among Ethiopians. The point of contention, we argue, was not against the *value* of the services and resources of international humanitarians, but rather against the crisis-induced *media road shows* that served NGO coffers and UN agency budgets and galvanised their donor constituencies. The resentment generated by these fund-raising strategies should not be underestimated either historically or currently. Articulating the views of many Ethiopians, Professor Mesfin Wolde-Mariam has argued that

“We must pledge as a people never again to use the skeletal bodies of famine victims to elicit charity from Europe and America” (Wolde-Mariam 1988:34).

### 2.3 Transitional Government Era (the “TGE”, 1991-1995)

Several RRC staff who survived the Derg stayed on in their posts in the new regime, their memories still fresh of donor, NGO, and UN agency positioning in the 1980s. Distrust between NGOs and government was deep and cut both ways. At the same time, rebel forces which had seen NGOs operate with minimal concern for accountability and maximum trust in the rebels’ humanitarian wings (now transformed into local NGOs) arrived in Addis Ababa bringing their own experiences. One wonders what conclusions these rebels drew about both the role of the state and of humanitarian actors. They had used international aid to sustain a base of popular support while fighting a bitter and protracted war to overthrow a strong government with significant military resources. While grateful to the humanitarian organisations, they were keen that history not repeat itself. As an astute observer of Ethiopian politics observed recently: “The TPLF knew exactly how effectively subversive humanitarian assistance can be.”<sup>16</sup> The new government assumed that those organisations that had elected to work in Ethiopia under the Derg were somehow aligned against them. They had seen the country humiliated in the international media and had observed foreigners speaking with assumed authority on behalf of the people of Ethiopia – in language that smacked to them of racism and that, certainly in the mouth of Bob Geldof, was peppered with offending expletives. They knew that supposedly non-governmental organisations had served as influential political advisors to foreign governments. These same organisations experienced exponential growth while millions of dollars poured into the country without apparent oversight or accountability. Importantly, they concluded that the RRC had facilitated all of this and therefore had to be radically reformed. The experience, they said, would not be allowed to happen again.

Once again a change of government introduced radical reforms to tackle age-old problems and the new challenges arising from the nature of the rebels’ assumption of power. From a humanitarian

---

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, Patrick Gilkes, 26 August 2008, Addis Ababa.

governance perspective, the TGE was immediately faced with a broad array of NGOs, UN agencies, and donor governments with different approaches to addressing risk and vulnerability in Ethiopia. These organisations' worldviews ranged from what might be termed turn-a-blind-eye solidarity to one of de facto political neutrality. This latter, although designed to enable them to survive in country, resulted in their being viewed with suspicion on all sides. Ethiopian organisations, meanwhile, had flourished (especially REST and ERA), struggled, or folded altogether. Some donors had geo-political rationales for providing official assistance to government areas and covert aid to rebel-controlled territory. The UN had followed its mandate and worked with the sitting government, damaging its credibility in some eyes but more importantly driving home the message that the UN's primary client should be government (as opposed to, for example, NGOs). The RRC was large, powerful, and envied by the line departments. Importantly, the Derg's economic policies had fared no better than the Imperial regime's reforms in overcoming Ethiopia's seemingly perpetual crises of deep poverty, economic underperformance, and disaster vulnerability. It was a disconcerting combination that generated, to put it mildly, an undercurrent of unease.

The government quickly produced a dazzling array of policies and strategies oriented towards addressing the underlying causes of disasters. In so doing, it signalled the role it foresaw for government with respect to disaster risk and vulnerability. Echoing the RRC's earlier proclamation, Article 89/3 of the 1995 constitution stated: "The government shall take measures to avert any natural or manmade disasters and, in the event of disasters, to provide timely assistance to the victims." The Economic Development Strategy (August 1993) mandated terracing, check dams, forestation, irrigation, fodder/pasture improvement, etc., "to attain food self-sufficiency in those areas vulnerable to drought and affected by other disasters" (DPPC 1997:4). The Emergency Food Security Reserve Administration was reorganised in 1992 and was soon credited for averting famine in the 1993/94 drought years (Ayalew 1997:5). The September 1993 Health Policy dictated that "Special attention shall be given to the health needs of victims to man-made and natural disasters" (DPPC 1997:5). The 1993 National Population Policy sought to ensure balanced population distribution patterns (Piguet and Lemessa 2003:142), and the 1993 National Science and Technology policy was

intended to support efforts to forecast, prevent, and minimise the effects of natural disasters (DPPC 1997:4). Other policies included the National Agriculture Research Policy and Strategy (October 1993) and the Social Policy (March 1994) that aimed to "prevent and eliminate the causes of natural and man-made disasters" (DPPC 1997:4). Gender-specific vulnerabilities were to be addressed through the National Policy on Ethiopian Women (September 1993) that recognised that "women who have particular problems as a result of natural and made man disasters shall be given special aid promptly. Women are key actors in development and relief activities" (DPPC 1997:4).

Once the TGE came to power, a number of RRC officials left their jobs, with the immediate effect of reducing the capacity of the institution (Caldwell 1992:156-157). Some key players stayed, however, among them Ato Berhane Gizaw.<sup>17</sup> REST leadership assumed temporary control of the RRC to institutionalise the model developed in Tigray, but subsequently separated from the RRC and was registered as an indigenous NGO (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:129). (The)

The TGE adopted the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM) in 1993. Accompanying NPDPM directives were issued in the same year and policy implementation guidelines were developed in 1995. Both stressed the development of a range of disaster preparedness modalities. The 1993 NPDPM is based on the key principle that "no human life shall perish for want of relief assistance in times of disaster". This statement is all the more remarkable for substantially pre-dating the humanitarian imperative in the Sphere Standards. The major objective of the policy is to save lives, integrate relief assistance with development efforts in order to mitigate the impacts of disasters, and enhance the coping capacities of affected populations through the creation of assets in affected areas. Over the past fifteen years, the NPDPM has guided relief management policies, institutions and processes whereby drought disasters have been detected and resources, especially food aid, have been mobilised and prioritised for at risk areas.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ato Berhane later became the deputy of the RRC and went on to head the government's Food Security Coordination Bureau (FSCB, now the FSS) from its creation in 2003 until his death in 2008.

Relations between government and humanitarian actors improved after the adoption of the NPDPM. A range of humanitarian organisations and financial institutions such as the World Bank supported capacity building at all levels for disaster management structures. Nine joint government, UN, donor, and NGO technical task forces were established for policy familiarisation, logistics capacity building, resource mobilisation, early warning, etc. Innovations in joint needs assessment, resource mobilisation, and allocation mechanisms furthered narrowed the gap between government and the humanitarian community. Donors and agencies including UNDP, CIDA and USAID supported these efforts financially and technically.

Despite these innovations, the relationship and status of international NGOs once again became an issue. The TGE sought not only to control NGOs but to ensure that their work did not threaten the legitimacy of the state (Clark 2000:15). There was a commonly accepted narrative in government that international NGOs perpetuated an unhealthy dependence on relief, undermining the country's efforts to break the cycles of famine (Clark 2000:6). The government had additional concerns that some international NGOs were "spending too much on overhead, that their efficiency was overrated, and that they were bloated and out of control" (Villumstad and Hendrie 1993:130).

The NPDPM 1995 Directives entailed 41 pages of detailed instructions regarding NGO registration, financial reports and project authorisations. NGO activities in project areas were to be limited to a maximum five years, and NGOs were to be reviewed at least once every eight years. The RRC was to ensure that NGOs were audited. The Directives entailed a routine reporting requirement to the RRC on a monthly and quarterly basis in addition to detailed annual "status reports", fixed assets reports, resource utilisation reports and end of project reports. The TGE wanted to know what NGOs were up to, how much money was raised in the name of Ethiopia, and how it was spent. This was not merely excessive bureaucratisation: there was some evidence of misuse of resources by some NGOs and these measures were intended to avoid malpractice.<sup>18</sup> The Directives were clear on this point: "The [RRC], as a government agency responsible to legalise NGOs in the country, needs to know the NGO resources, operations and other related matters on

a regular basis" (DPPC 1995:73). NGOs found to be in "serious default" risked investigation, auditing, suspension of registration, court action, cancellation of registration and general agreements, annulment of expatriate staff work permits, and/or expulsion of expatriates (DPPC 1995:80 - 81). The government, in turn, offered a number of services: duty-free importation of project materials, facilitation of a limited number of expatriate visas (usually three per NGO), work permits and registration, a guarantee that government would not misuse relief commodities, and tax-free NGO property and operations (DPPC 1995:119-120).

A reading of the Directives provides a useful reflection on how government saw its role and the roles of others in disaster risk management. The government reaffirmed its primary responsibilities while encouraging NGOs to augment government efforts (DPPC 1995:59). In times of disaster, relief and rehabilitation assistance was welcomed and NGOs were urged to undertake DRR development activities "as a matter of priority" (DPPC 1995:61). In addition to development work, the list of relief activities included emergency public health interventions, maintenance of cattle camps, veterinary services, distribution of fodder, supplementary nutrition centres, and provision of donated goods (DPPC 1995:61-62) This mirrored the government's understanding of what NGOs should do in Ethiopia as well as what they should not. The list of prohibitions can be read as a reflection of the TGE's impressions of what had gone wrong with relief operations under previous regimes.

*In their operations NGOs should: incur minimum expenditure for over head cost; notify the RRC the resources they generate; utilize resources effectively and efficiently; reduce the number of expatriate staff; avoid duplication of work and operate in uncovered areas; work with the community; give priority to remote areas, and forgotten and back ward (sic) people; enhance capacity building of the community and the Government; target at eliminating the root causes of disasters; have transparency in all their activities; report the progress of their activities, and give due attention to gender issues. (DPPC 1995:78)*

While the complex geographies of multiple hazards continued to characterise the country, Ethiopia was spared extensive natural disasters during the TGE years and benefitted from a sharp

---

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication, Melaku Ayelew, 2 November 2008, Addis Ababa.

decrease in civil conflict. A badly damaged economy began to recover, albeit from a very weak base. As the coalition of rebels that formed the TGE began to disintegrate, regional and national elections were held, leading to the formation of the current government in 1995.

### *2.3.1 Discussion*

The 1993 NPDPM still is an inspiring document to read. It recognises the multi-sectoral nature of disaster management and emphasises the need to involve various government ministries. The head of government was designated as the chair of the national committee for disaster management; the role of the RRC was to provide logistical support and overall coordination as the secretariat of the NPDPM. Implementation of the strategies was to be the responsibility of the sectoral ministries. The Employment Generation Schemes (EGS, now modified and implemented as the productive safety net program, PSNP), the primary strategy for linking relief and development, failed because relevant ministries did not assume their responsibilities as stipulated by the NPDPM Directives. Disaster management basically fell to one agency (RRC/DPPC/DPPA) which tried to uphold the policy directions but lacked adequate authority. Without legal accountability, the full range of responsible actors across government could not be forced to implement the directives, and the NPDPM fell short of its intended objectives.

Some NGOs complained that the TGE was even more restrictive than its predecessors (Clark 2000:6). Through CRDA, they delegated some of their country directors to discuss the guidelines, opposing some and convincing the government to change others. RCC technicians felt detailed guidelines were needed to resolve the problems they perceived in the humanitarian community and to uphold the humanitarian principles of impartiality (hence the limits on how much time an NGO could remain in an area before being reviewed) and accountability for domestic humanitarians as well as international organisations. Suspicion of NGOs also drove the restrictive nature of some of the guidelines. Ultimately, the guidelines created a further problem in that the government was unable to manage the mass of reports generated by its own regulations. This in turn led to delays, increasing frustration among NGOs and a stronger belief that the bureaucratic regulations were political in nature.

There is some irony in the NGO reaction to the policy directives, especially given that the rise of the NGO sector and its claims to legitimacy and rationale throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s rested on the articulation of these very same issues, e.g., engaging at the community level, emphasizing capacity building, operating with financial efficiency and accountability, and promoting issues of gender. The NGOs that the TGE inherited were by then international institutions commanding enormous resources. At the same time, key Ethiopian humanitarian and development organisations had gained competency and strength. They attempted to challenge the dominance – and the funding base – of the more powerful international NGOs, but like the RRC lost out. Local organisations sought to establish their own umbrella organisation (the Consortium of Ethiopian Voluntary Organisations, CEVO), but this failed due to internal tensions based on party affiliations (e.g., REST or ORDA). To crowd the field further, those NGOs that quietly had supported the ERD wanted to become more public in their work and set up new centres of operations in Addis Ababa to work with “their” new government. The TGE was confronted with all these organisations (solidarity, neutral, national, international) sitting around the same proverbial table and all in need of government direction. Its response was the NPDPM and its 41 pages of directives for NGOs.

## **2.4 The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Era (the “FDRE”, 1995-present)**

From 25 February to 25 March 1995, the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great famine was marked by redoubled efforts to publicise the NPDPM as well as by marches, memorial services, sporting events, exhibitions and other festivities (RRC 1995:i). Workshops and conferences were organised, and some meetings revealed how contentious the famine remained in the mindset of government officials and others who had been engaged in or were affected by the disaster (Inter Africa Group 1995). The FDRE re-organised the government’s disaster management structure for the third time. On 24 August 1995, the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC) was established by proclamation, officially replacing the RRC. On the same day, the Environmental Protection Authority was created, charged with studying and implementing strategies to combat desertification (DPPC 1997:4).

The years 1992-1998 were marked by optimism that historical patterns of crises would not continue into the future. 1996 saw bumper crops in Ethiopia and, for the first time since the early 1980s, the US provided no emergency food aid. Despite extensive floods in 1996 that caused an estimated 47 million birr in property damage, requiring emergency aid for nearly 112,000 people (Ayalew 1997:4, 11), many in government expressed confidence that the scourge of famine had been defeated. During this period, important national capacities for responding to disaster risks and vulnerabilities were reorganised or dismantled. Some hoped that the DPPC could be abolished and with it the national shame that it and its predecessors had represented, inasmuch as they fuelled the world's conflation of the notion of famine with the nation of Ethiopia. In these relatively quiet years, the DPPC began to gain a deeper knowledge of the underlying causes and patterns of vulnerability in the country through such initiatives as the Strengthening Emergency Response Abilities (SERA, 1997-2003) project funded by USAID (DPPC/SERA 2000:1).

The optimism was short-lived. Drought returned in 1997. War between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the obscure and disputed territory of Badme broke out in May 1998 and continued until an uneasy truce was agreed in June 2000. Although warnings about the drought crisis of 1999-2000 had been sounded as early as February 1999 (Erkineh 2002), donors were reluctant to respond to government appeals in a timely fashion because of donor concerns over the prosecution of war. The government, for its part, was unable to contain the deepening drought crisis due to its own capacity limitations and the demands of other national priorities, especially the war. The result was a major crisis in 1999-2000 that once again induced a large, food-aid dominated humanitarian response, despite concerns about the war: the many lives lost, the resulting fractures in the ruling party, and the damage to the economy (for more on the conflict see, for example, Lata 2003). The crisis coincided with diminished disaster response capacities in not only government but also in an NGO community that had focused increasingly on development rather than relief work, often with strong encouragement from government. As a consequence, when crisis came round again, NGOs with long experience in disaster relief did not have the capacity they needed to respond adequately (Lautze et al. 2003:111).

Emergency responses were once again compromised by domestic and international

humanitarian politics, with direct implications for at risk populations. Humanitarian operations in 1999-2000 were sharply criticised with a particular focus on problems of coordination and the inappropriateness of a "food first bias" as the primary (and at times, lone) response to public health, complex malnutrition, and other manifestations of acute livelihood crises (Clay 2000; Hammond and Maxwell 2002; Jayne et al. 2000; Salama et al. 2001; Sandford and Habtu 2000). Government's management of logistics, however, was praised (Anderson and Choularton 2004:25). Hammond and Maxwell concluded:

*Ethiopia was brought to the edge of a major disaster, with some 10 million people estimated to be in need of food assistance at the height of the crisis. A repeat of the catastrophic famine of 1984/85 was avoided, but the numbers of people affected, the loss of life and the destruction of livelihoods made this one of the most serious crises in the Horn of Africa in the past 15 years (Hammond 2001:262)*

There was little time for major reform before the next severe drought was ringing alarm bells in various EWS, starting with the DPPC's June-July 2002 assessment of *belg* production that indicated serious food shortages in south Tigray, the lowlands of Oromiya, SNNPR, northern Somali Region and Afar, where the February-May rains had failed completely. The 2002-2003 crisis deepened from month to month. The DPPC's January 2002 appeal estimated that 3.6 million people would be at risk. This was revised upward to 5.7 million in August, and then to a peak of 6.3 million people in the fall. Based on the DPPC-led multi-agency assessments of the 2002 mid-*Meher* crop season, a contingency plan for 2003 was issued in late September 2002 that warned (accurately) that the drought would extend (and worsen) into 2003. The contingency plan's best-case scenario still required emergency food assistance for 6.8 million people. The middle-case (10.2 million) and worst-case (14.3 million) scenarios were expected to become more likely. These estimates were confirmed by the 2002-03 government-led multi-agency pre-harvest annual assessment conducted in November 2002 (DPPC 2002). Both regional and the federal government provided resources towards the initial response (Anderson and Choularton 2004:25), a factor missing – or at least not reported by government – in most earlier crises. It was impossible for domestic resources alone to manage the crisis which quickly gained unprecedented proportions,

affecting nearly two-thirds of all *woredas* (381 out of 575) at its height.

By January 2003, the government estimated that 14.5 million people were at risk, representing some 21% of the population. In January 2003, in the largest appeal in its history, it requested 1.4 *million* MT of emergency food aid and over 121 million US dollars for the “non-food” sectors. Based on the lessons learned from 1999-2000, the government organised technical emergency task forces to increase attention to the “non-food aid” aspects of disasters. Task forces were created for Health and Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, and Agriculture and Livestock, led by the respective ministries, Although headed by technical personnel and without apparent accountability within the ministries’ bureaucracies, this signalled the beginnings of a much-needed shift of responsibility for disaster management from an exclusive reliance on the DPPC’s leadership to increased engagement by line ministries. Due to a common acceptance of the scale of the crisis, as forecast in the contingency plan, the government’s request for emergency assistance was fully resourced by itself and the humanitarian communities (unlike in previous years). The impact of the crisis was less than it might have been. This was due not only to changes in disaster management coordination but also to the fact that the very highest level of government was engaged. Among internationals, key diplomats and technical officers in the donor community worked harmoniously while large NGOs worked in concert with overall disaster management strategies and contingency plans.

The 2003 crisis was still raging at a critical stage when the government organised the New Coalition for Food Security, calling for high-level meetings in June 2003 and again in September. These were attended by the Prime Minister and other senior government officials, ambassadors, heads of UN agencies, NGO representatives, the private sector and civil society (New Coalition for Food Security in Ethiopia Technical Group 2003:1), with the prime minister stressing the recurrent theme - the need to end reliance on foreign aid (Hammond and Dessalegn 2003:10). The resulting food security strategy began as a five-year, three billion US dollar package of initiatives (TANGO International 2007:2). The aim was to “attain food security for 5 million chronically food insecure people, while, at the same time, improving and sustaining the overall food security of an additional ten million people” (New Coalition for Food Security in Ethiopia Technical Group 2003:3). The “chronically

food insecure” populations were identified based on historical, recurrent receipts of “emergency” food assistance. Donors especially had advocated for some time for the removal from the annual humanitarian appeal process of the recurrent resource request that this population represented.

The strategy sought to increase food availability through improved crop and livestock production (water harvesting, soil conservation, extension service, credit, etc.), to improve access to food through expanded agriculture and non-agriculture income (productive safety net programs (PSNP), community development funds, micro-enterprise development, etc.), to promote preventative and curative health services (malaria prevention, environmental sanitation, safe water, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and TB control, etc.), and, lastly, to provide access to land through voluntary resettlement for up to 440,000 chronically food insecure households (New Coalition for Food Security in Ethiopia Technical Group 2003). Resettlement was back on the disaster risk reduction agenda. At the June workshop, the Prime Minister identified resettlement as the fastest and most cost-effective strategy for increasing production (Hammond and Dessalegn 2003:8). The coalition documents argued that, in recent decades, various populations had settled spontaneously in forests and national parks, moves that did “not improve either their own welfare nor promote the national good” (New Coalition for Food Security in Ethiopia Technical Group 2003:1). The government and some analysts agreed that destitute farmers had asked for assistance to settle to areas with more land (Hammond and Dessalegn 2003:6). Some government officials who had worked on the often failed resettlement campaigns of the 1980s were once again involved in the post-2003 resettlement efforts (Hammond and Dessalegn 2003:16). An array of analyses had the aim of not repeating the mistakes of the past (e.g., A. Pankhurst and Piguet 2004; Rahmato 2004; UN-EUE 2003).

Inspired in part by the need to disaggregate long-term critical food insecurity (termed in Ethiopia as chronic or predictable food security) from short-term emergency needs, the New Coalition’s resulting food security strategy entailed the re-organisation of the national disaster management structure for a fourth time. A new Food Security Coordination Bureau (FSCB) was established and would oversee the Productive Safety Net Program, among other initiatives. Simultaneously, the DPPC’s mandate was downgraded. USAID staff, during interviews in 2005, described the DPPC as

being “cut off at the knees” by government proclamation 383/2004 which had changed its name to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA). Although prevention was still reflected in its new name, the order removed responsibility for preventing crisis from the DPPC, leaving it with a mandate only for disaster preparedness and response. The proclamation specified that the head of the DPPA would be accountable to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) rather than the more powerful Council of Ministers. It weakened the nature of the inter-ministerial committee responsible for overseeing crisis work, specifying that the committee would be “designated by the Government and their numbers shall be determined as necessary”.

The FSCB was seen by some as a further weakening of the DPPC. Its primary mandate was to address long-term chronic vulnerability (and attendant dependency on recurrent distributions of emergency food aid) through different disaster prevention measures and asset-building strategies. Central to this was the Productive Safety Net Program. The PSNP was established as a way of providing a predictable supply of food aid to the chronically food insecure until their “graduation” into food security through self-sufficiency. Responsibility for food aid logistics for the FSCB remained with the DPPA. The DPPA managed the logistics of PSNP rations to the upwards of 8 million (as of 2008) people in the program. Previously, these millions of beneficiaries had been included in the government’s annual humanitarian appeals for disaster relief.

The New Coalition for Food Security was not the only attempt to redress disaster vulnerability in Ethiopia. Decentralisation, national capacity building, and civil service reform were seen as key to improving the effectiveness of the state’s human, institutional, and financial resources. The Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP) provided the overall policy framework for government, including a Rural Development Strategy. The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) built on the SDPRP and was intended to promote “rapid and sustained growth primarily through scaled-up development assistance and large domestic investments targeted at eliminating the poverty traps that have hindered the development of the country” (The World Bank 2008:4). Among other initiatives, the PASDEP spelled out a strategy for pastoralist areas, areas

that did not usually receive high accord in Ethiopian development priorities. The joint GoE/World Bank/IFAD “Pastoral Community Development Project” aims to inject 180 million US dollars into development as well as disaster risk management in pastoralist areas (The World Bank 2008:6). The range of government policies has been credited for “a strong spell of economic growth” of over 11% per annum since 2004, but deep poverty still persists and the inflation rate stands only second to Zimbabwe in Africa (The World Bank 2008:32). The World Bank in Ethiopia recently summarised the positive impacts of the current government’s policies, including a tripling of road length, a quadrupling of community-based development agents (DAs), a near tripling of primary school enrolment, and a “radically changed” investor climate in strategic industries (The World Bank 2008:32). To this it could have added a marked decline in the national average of stunted children, an accomplishment that can be credited to a particularly dynamic trio: Minister of Health Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, UNICEF Country Representative Bjorn Ljungqvist, and a focused and coordinated group of health sector donors. Another source of optimism for the future can be found in the younger generations of ambitious, well-educated Ethiopian entrepreneurs who are taking bold risks to establish domestic and international businesses.

Parallel to these events were measures by the government to update regulations governing NGOs, a responsibility that the government reassigned from the DPPC to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The MoJ tabled draft NGO legislation in June 2002 and invited NGO comment on it and subsequent drafts.<sup>19</sup> By the end of 2003, the Ministry was on its third draft and CRDA, representing all NGOs, was upbeat – at least officially – about how the process was being handled:

*The NGO community would like to express its appreciation of the Ministry’s willingness*

---

<sup>19</sup> Following a lively debate in the House of the People’s Representatives, the CSO legislation passed Parliament on 6 January 2009 by a margin of 327 in favor and 79 against. A history of the forms and functions of civil society organizations is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an understanding of their origins and of the issues to be addressed by the legislation must be set within the context of a wider national debate that is underway concerning the roles, limitations, and contributions of Ethiopian civil organizations to development and political life. The factors driving the CSO legislation are primarily domestic in nature.

*to entertain and accommodate its views and concerns. The Minister's disposition in this respect in particular reflects the current democratic renewal spirit and the government's commitment to involve popular and stakeholder participation in the evolution of important policies and legislation (CRDA 2003).*

Comparing earlier drafts, however, the NGOs voiced concern over what they deemed increasing government “intrusions” as well as “more onerous and time consuming” registration procedures and more severe sanctions for violations of procedures (CRDA 2003). They took exception to the tone of the government document, which they read as meaning that “NGOs have an obligation to assist the ‘government’” to which they countered “nothing that appears as an obligation to assist the government of the day should be suggested” (CRDA 2003). The Ministry continued to invite comments from the NGO community which, in turn, drafted various analytical documents and made specific suggestions for improvements to the text. By June 2004, the tone of the NGO documents was negative:

*It is regrettable that despite our repeated and persistent protestation and prolonged discussion and discourse, the Ministry of Justice codification team had been unable or unwilling to consider these very critical issues...it is indeed regrettable to note that all our endeavors and deliberation on these issues has all been in vain and to say the least, it has been nothing but a futile exercise (Herouy 2004:16).*

The aspects identified by NGOs as major areas of difference concerned the definition of NGOs or Associations, the status of property for organisations denied registration, a lack of clarity over key terms (“public security”, “national unity” and “public interest”) that could be used to deny registration and the dissolution, cancellation, and suspension of organisations (Herouy 2004:16 - 17). The balance focussed on issues of accountability and the related right of government to seek accountability from organisations:

- The need for the Ministry to request recommendations prior to registration
- The power of the Ministry (for) sudden audit[s] of the accounts of NGOs or associations and suspension of bank accounts

- Investigation of NGOs or associations. Particularly article 43(2) deals with suspension of elected or employed personnel of NGOs or associations and suspensions of the NGO or association itself
- The powers of inspectors and auditors...allow inspectors and auditors to conduct regular or sudden inspection or audit of accounts of NGOs or associations, enquire any person alone or before a witness and copy or record any writing, or record, or other documents found in an NGO or association office (Herouy 2004:16 - 17)

The NGOs’ analysis ended with a statement that more work was needed “in order to arrive at an acceptable and workable NGO/CSO legislation” (Herouy 2004:17). More work did indeed ensue and the legislation was revised again, reflecting in part – much to the consternation of NGOs - government concerns about the post-election riots of 2005 as well as the perceived lack of accountability of international organisations.<sup>20</sup> The government inserted language into the subsequent draft that banned domestic organisations from receiving more than 10% of their income from foreign sources if they were to be considered as Ethiopian (as opposed to foreign) organisations. Only Ethiopian organisations that observed these rules would be allowed to “actively participate in the process of strengthening democratisation and elections”. The Prime Minister met twice with NGOs to discuss the proposed legislation, in May and June 2008. He reiterated the government’s view that NGOs and civil society organisations were needed to fill gaps in services and functions left by the government, and claimed that the legislation should not affect the vast majority of NGOs engaged in development activities<sup>21</sup> (Refera 2008:3-4) or humanitarian interventions.

---

<sup>20</sup> Part of the preamble states: “Whereas the registration, licensing and regulation of charities and societies has been found necessary for the prevention of the illegal acts that are perpetrated in the name of serving it, and for the fulfillment of the government’s duty to protect the public against illegal activities contrary to peace, order and morality”. Copies of the draft legislation and various analyses can be found at CRDA’s website: [www.crdaethiopia.org](http://www.crdaethiopia.org).

<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding this view, the CSO legislation is expected to have a strong impact on development activities, especially those pertaining to democracy, governance and rights work.

In these meetings, the prime minister expressed concern that NGOs were fuelling an international diplomatic and media campaign, a point that has received some attention by pro-government websites (see, for example, eprdf-sf.org). International NGOs have worked to galvanise diplomatic pressure against the legislation, asserting that it would affect even humanitarian efforts. A consortium of seven INGOs presented UN ERC John Holmes with a strongly worded *demarche* that included an appeal for a delay in the introduction of the legislation claiming “the proposed law threatens the very existence of NGOs and civil society organisations in Ethiopia” while complaining that:

*To date, the United Nations has been disappointingly silent on the threat that this draft legislation poses - despite the patently devastating impact that the bill's implementation in its current form could have on the operations of virtually all of the UN's national and international partners in Ethiopia (Oxfam/GB 2008:3).*

Government officials, such as those at the DPPA, were surprised by the reaction of organisations working in humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia to the draft legislation, asserting that the legislation should be of no concern to humanitarian institutions since the humanitarian principle of neutrality prohibits humanitarian organisations from engaging – or appearing to be engaging - in political matters. They were likely surprised by NGO resistance to bureaucratic issues pertaining to registration and accountability issues such as audits. These were, after all, spelled out in the 1993 NPDP and 1995 NPDP Directives. The situation is more complicated than this, however. In the ensuing decade, many NGOs have adopted “rights-based approaches” and have engaged in advocacy around issues such as “traditional harmful practices”, children’s rights, women’s status, etc. NGO practices have adopted models that envision their engagements with communities evolving from participation to empowerment and emancipation. By contrast, the government views participation as a means to a different end: the provision of labour, finances, or other resources for direct community investment.<sup>22</sup> The changing NGO approaches have required a transformation in the relationship between NGOs and constituencies, i.e., from service providers to advocates. As a reading of the text of policies,

---

<sup>22</sup> We are grateful to Ato Melaku Ayelew for these observations.

directives, and draft proclamations indicates, government does not share this view of the NGOs’ role in Ethiopian society. It equates policy advocacy with politics and is particularly suspicious of the role of international interests in the NGO sector. The government strongly prefers NGOs with international backing to remain strictly engaged in service provision, a view hardened by the involvement of some NGOs in the 2005 election and the growing criticism by international human rights organisations of its military strategies in Somali Region (Human Rights Watch 2008). By contrast, the government does not feel overly threatened by the weaker domestic NGO sector which generally lacks strong constituencies. Among the strongest domestic NGOs, there is close political coherence with the ruling party.

By fall 2008, humanitarian agencies (particularly UN agencies and NGOs) were engaged in yet another struggle with the Ethiopian government over the definition of the crisis and the numbers affected. Official appeals requested emergency aid for 2.2 million people in April, 4.6 million in June, and 6.4 million people in October. These populations had been rendered vulnerable by adverse weather, rising global commodity and agriculture input prices, and deepening conflict and limited access to the Somali region. Meanwhile, on 11 August 2008, the government issued a short proclamation (593/2008) that effectively disbanded the DPPA and transferred its “rights and obligations” (but few of its staff) to the MoARD. The slow and deliberate emasculation of the RRC-DPPC-DPPA ended in that institution’s death. What once was an admired, studied, and internationally acclaimed body faded with a whimper, its long-serving head ungraciously removed.

Initial meetings with the MoARD officials who are now charged with food security, early warning, and disaster response gave the impression that the future focus will be increasingly on decentralisation of the state’s responsibilities for disaster risk management writ large, including markedly increased capacities for surveillance and response at the district and regional levels. There is as well a renewed commitment for a revised national policy on disaster risk management, an initiative started by the DPPA in 2005.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> For further information on the policy revision, visit [www.livesandlivelihoods.com](http://www.livesandlivelihoods.com)



#### 2.4.1 Discussion

Two decades after the famine of the mid-1980s and myriad radically different policies, institutions and approaches to combat vulnerability, the current government is unable to shake the nation's image as perpetually famine stricken. Two covers of Time Magazine, separated by two decades (December 1987 and August 2008, inset), drive this home: the same despairing mother seemingly offering her same starving child to the mercy of the world.

There are two stories of Ethiopia: one of increasing grain production and sustained economic growth underpinned by an ever-strengthening infrastructure, and another wherein between eight and fifteen million people require regular or extraordinary food assistance just to survive. The state believes it is introducing radical measures to reduce this latter undercurrent of vulnerability. In this effort, the state is not ambivalent about the role of foreign institutions and foreigners alike.

Ever mindful of the way the ruling party came to power through the strategic and subversive deployment of humanitarian assistance, the state views with caution certain INGO "demands" that they perceive could engender a repeat of history (e.g., an apparent unwillingness to be transparent and accountable to the state, an assertion of their "right" to provide assistance in contested conflict zones, etc.) The strong INGO reaction to the CSO legislation only serves to confirm these suspicions, i.e., that international organisations

and foreign governments *are* working through indigenous institutions to foment unrest and, ultimately, regime change. The INGO strategy, as in the past, has been to come together as a single community to issue protests about government policies or *demarches* to UN agencies without attribution of authorship or naming the NGOs involved. Although the NGOs view themselves as representing sharp differences across agencies, this strategy erodes any notion of distinction between agencies on the most controversial of humanitarian issues in Ethiopia and leads to sweeping generalisations (as well as concrete policy measures) about the international NGO community.

Much of the INGO resistance to the CSO bill has raised suspicions by many in government that some INGO are seeking to operate in the context of a weak state with limited (if any) accountability to any actor other than their principle donors. The government fears that this is the model that (especially large) INGOs want to import to Ethiopia. It is meeting with resistance and gaining few friends as a pro-government website recently observed:

*The sad fact is that, with the exception of Africa, nowhere in the world do we find foreign nationals serving as head of NGOs and demanding constitutions to change, laws to be broken, auditing revenue and aid a government gets from China, criticizing trade policy and insisting on economic reform. And when African governments refuse these demands by NGOs, they are certified as non-democratic, get designated as a failed state and a coordinated global blackmailing campaign is unleashed against them (EPRDF-SF 2008).*

Dismissed as mere propaganda, such statements are not often enough taken seriously. Therein lies a critical mistake for one must always consider government statements at their face value before deconstructing them further. Such statements reflect genuine – and often valid – concerns about how foreign actors may undermine the government's role in disaster risk management. The 41 pages of text in the guidelines of the NPDPM that delimit the boundaries of NGO activities in disasters, the current prohibitions in the draft CSO legislation, and the various statements by high-ranking government officials have been consistent: the state sees the international humanitarian enterprise as a

necessary but costly player in Ethiopia. Such costs include the obvious (and to many in government, the grating) outlays in the perceived inefficiencies of NGO overheads, the rapid turn-over of highly paid expatriate staff, and the plethora of new vehicles, computers and personal goods that arrive duty free into the country with each major crisis. The perception persists within government, as well among as many in civil society, that INGOs in Ethiopia benefit extensively from each successive crisis, to the detriment of Ethiopian institutions in and out of government. For example, CRS was granted \$53 million from USAID in September 2008 for 75,000 MT of food aid.

Such massive grants are now seen as commonplace for humanitarian INGOs, including the high proportion that goes to fund expatriate staff, modern equipment and buildings, and generous overhead rates that support the costs of overseas offices and staff. Many INGOs, in Ethiopia at least, are now the size of major corporations.

Globally, some organisations' budgets surpass major operational UN Agencies. Their best-paid governmental counterparts, by contrast, earn less than \$200/month.

The costs also include the political risk – the still persistent narrative that many INGOs present to the world about their role in “saving” Ethiopia, the use of the image of starving mothers and children, and the liberties that some take while in country, including operating unregistered. At heart, though, there persists a strongly held perception in government that INGOs are perpetuating vulnerability and dependency for their own good. The historical record is uneasy on this: successive regimes have tried everything from feudalism, socialism and capitalism to Imperialism, dictatorship, and emerging democracy to drive the scourge of famine from Ethiopia, yet in every crisis the INGO calculus for generating and spending foreign humanitarian aid resources appears to government as static and self-serving.



## Conclusions and Implications

This paper forms part of a series of ODI case studies that seek to address the overarching question: “What would good humanitarian governance look like?” We believe that, at least in the case of Ethiopia, the answer depends entirely upon one’s institutional affiliation. The state has produced radically differing models of what it perceives to be responsible governance to uphold a uniquely Ethiopian-style political contract against famine. The international humanitarian community has evolved in its own direction, following a path that has seen it engage in advocacy and lobbying without perhaps thinking of the political consequences of such internal shifts in the way it defines its role in foreign societies. Government and international organisations each have their own narratives about what might be termed humanitarian governance, but neither has appeared overly interested in listening to the other.

Taking up ODI’s challenge of exploring the role of the state in disaster management, we have articulated various Ethiopian government regimes’ systems, ideologies, and approaches. While at times patently wrong-headed and misguided, one cannot dispute their humanitarian underpinnings. Many have not been popular with foreign humanitarians, so one response by the international community has been to pretend that these systems, ideologies and approaches do not exist. Ethiopia has been incorrectly but instrumentally labelled a “fragile state” (USAID 2005:3).<sup>24</sup> This is typical of the hegemonic project (to borrow liberally from Bayart) of the international humanitarian community: to assume a totalizing role for itself for all aspects of humanitarian governance. Not only is the state under attack in this project, but also the UN as NGOs “demand” to be treated on equal (or greater) footing with states in terms of representation at UN fora (and the all-consuming quest for ever more resources, e.g., through NGO access to the CERF).

This arguably differs from the approach of the development community in Ethiopia, where donors, NGOs, and UN agencies work more closely in concert with government priorities and directions. By contrast, the international

humanitarian conglomerate employs a new(ish) *modus operandi* that is anti-statist to the point of invisibility, focusing exclusively on “local communities” and international actors as though there was nothing in between. That many NGOs, UN agencies and donors straddle these two communities is a testament to a schizophrenic’s capacity for simultaneously pursuing dual realities.

The resulting clash of visions is if not unique then at least rare on the African continent: a strong state that is unwilling to mould itself to a model of humanitarian *government* that the international community finds best suited to serve its own interests. Instead, it is the INGOs especially that are under pressure to adapt to government’s vision of a system of humanitarianism. The INGOs protest mightily that their work must be independent. The question must then be asked “independent from whom?” The INGOs are hopelessly entangled in a web of foreign donor government sub-contracting. If INGOs were in their infancy in the crises of the 1970s and 1980s, they now seem to have entered into a grim period of adolescence: they think, perhaps, that they know it all and don’t intend to be supervised. Meanwhile, the quasi-parental state is frustrated and has responded with increasingly harsh sanctions, such as those spelled out in the CSO legislation. This is a relationship badly in need of renegotiation – and soon.

The answer to ODI’s question about good humanitarian governance varies as well from disaster-affected community to community as successive regimes’ political contracts against famine have been unevenly upheld across geographies. For example, the crop-dependent highland areas have always enjoyed an advantage in surveillance in the national EWS while investments in early warning, appropriate disaster responses and safety nets have lagged in the more politically marginalised and often highly remote lowland communities on Ethiopia’s periphery. On these margins, important humanitarian work is carried out by NGOs both domestic and international. For government, this is a double-edged sword: the organisations fill important gaps in the state’s reach but also operate beyond the state’s capacity for close surveillance.

ODI has asked, “How do international humanitarian actors assess the capacity of the

---

<sup>24</sup> See also the “Failed States 2008 Index” [http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140](http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=99&Itemid=140)

state to respond to disasters and make decisions about when it is or is not appropriate to substitute for the state?" This case study has revealed that such decisions are not based on state capacity but rather are highly political in nature. In the 1980s, key Western donors decided to begin the long, slow strangulation of the RRC and to channel resources instead to NGOs, each of which had to build capacity in order to meet donor needs. This has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. As of 2008, state institutions for disaster management lay in ruins as the government tore down the last vestiges of the RRC's heritage, not wanting to leave any traces behind – even the bulk of experience gained over time. Government has immediately begun the task of building anew a national disaster risk management structure, the DM/FSS. This approach is in keeping with all modern Ethiopian governments' practices of boldly forging ahead, disregarding the potential value of incremental adjustments to bureaucracies, and often doing so in the midst of major disasters. This is grounded on a belief in the strength of the state to continue in the midst of reform. While the transition is painful and its impact uncertain for the over 11 million people in Ethiopia who are in need of emergency assistance through safety nets and extraordinary relief, the state continues to function in its disaster management responsibilities. NGOs, meanwhile, continue to expand with each new disaster opportunity and remain so preoccupied with the present as to be unable to offer an alternative vision for the future. At this rate, the twain shall never meet. It is likely that relations will worsen as the gap between the vision of a disaster risk management system and the reality of the pressures of relief responses continues to define the environment for humanitarian governance in Ethiopia.

The patterns of risk and vulnerability in Ethiopia are humbling to all who work there. The potential for disasters to affect millions of people is all too real and its realisation is all too frequent. Even more radical approaches are needed to address the depth of the fragility of Ethiopia's vulnerable livelihood system and of those in abject destitution. Arguably, however, the strongest impetus for reform has come from that most unexpected corner: the state. Most state-led innovations have been greeted with scepticism by the international humanitarian community which appears to favour the *status quo* over bold new directions. From the perspective of government, the battle to set the agenda of humanitarian governance in Ethiopia is one being waged

between their own courage and the international community's conservatism. From the perspective of the international community, the government is seen to be rash in the nature of its policy directions, disregarding the lives that are at stake in the present in order to set a new course for the management of risk and vulnerability in the future. The firing of 400 of the DPPA's 700 staff as part of the government's reorganisation in the same month that government sharply increased its appeals for international emergency assistance is given as one example.

The Ethiopian disaster management system is in need of reform in line with both domestic realities and international trends. Ethiopia has yet to sign the Hyogo Framework for Action despite a domestic policy direction calling for a "paradigm shift" from disaster relief to disaster risk management. The government now believes that the current reforms that have followed the extended Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) exercise affecting a range of ministries have overcome the weaknesses of the RRC-DPPC-DPPA legacy. It is premature to judge the validity of government restructuring against the exigencies of the current crises, but one can question the timing of the transition given prevailing conditions of vulnerability nationally in both rural and urban areas where drought, a global economic crisis, and Africa's second highest inflation rate are wreaking havoc on the poor and the unfortunate. Perhaps the biggest risk of all lies in reforms that cannot be recognised as flawed. This has been the Achilles heel of all Ethiopian regimes: the absolute belief that the prevailing ideology is *the* solution has left no room for critique. Time will tell. The next, inevitable crisis will reveal the true mettle of the post-BPR system of humanitarian governance in Ethiopia.

As noted at the outset of this paper, Ethiopia's 1993 National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management is under revision. The new policy directly addresses the types of issues raised in ODI's research agenda on humanitarian governance. The draft National Policy on Disaster Risk Management enforces a political contract between the state and its citizens in times of disasters through not only policy but also mandated legislation with envisioned penal measures for malpractice by governmental officials. Since the first draft of the policy was written two years ago, the government has focussed the revision process on its domestic constituencies because the policy asserts new and largely decentralised *domestic* roles, rights,

responsibilities and resources in the management of the country's complex and multifarious disaster risks. The government appears serious about breaking its perpetual dependence on international humanitarian aid for *the management of crisis* in favour of transitioning to a system of domestic mobilisation of efforts for *risk management*. New forms of partnerships with the international community are envisioned (including with NGOs) that promote a rational, prioritised impartial and accountable use of the extensive,

resources mobilised in the name of Ethiopia. How the international community will respond to the content of the draft policy remains to be seen. It is safe to conclude that both the draft policy and the issues raised in this research series come at a pertinent time in the evolution of the humanitarian arena, i.e., when governments and national and international organisations are reviewing their definitions, aims and motivations for partnership and modes of engagement in disasters.



## Bibliography

Africa Watch Committee (1991), *Evil Days: 30 years of war and famine in Ethiopia* (Africa Watch report; New York: Human Rights Watch).

Anderson, Stephen and Choularton, Richard (2004), 'Retrospective Analysis: 2002/3 crisis in Ethiopia - early warning and response', (USAID Regional Economic Development Services Office for East and Southern Africa: Nairobi).

Aredo, Dejene (1991), 'The Iqqub: A potential means for the mobilization of domestic resources for the capital formation in Ethiopia', paper given at Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, 1-6 April 1991.

Ayalew, Melaku (1997), 'National Non-Food Emergency Contingency Stocks Study', (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission: Addis Ababa).

Azbite, Mogues (1981), 'A Famine Relief Operation at Qorem, Ethiopia, in 1966', *Disasters*, 5 (1), 6-18.

Caldwell, Richard M. (1992), 'Ethiopia: A country profile for famine mitigation', (USAID Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance: Washington).

Campbell, Will (1996), 'The Potential for Donor Mediation in NGO-State Relations: An Ethiopian case study (Working Paper 33)', (Institute of Development Studies: Sussex).

Clark, Jeffrey (2000), 'NGOs, Civil Society and Development in Ethiopia: A snapshot view', (The World Bank: Washington).

Clay, Edward (2000), 'Reforming Food Aid: Time to grasp the nettle', (Overseas Development Institute: London).

Cliffe, Lionel (2003), 'International and Ethiopian Resettlement Experiences', paper given at People, Space and the State: Migration, resettlement and displacement in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 28-30 January 2003.

CRDA (2003), 'Observations and Recommendations of the NGO Community on the Ministry of Justice's Current (Third) Draft NGO Registration and Regulation Proclamation', (Christian Relief and Development Association Addis Ababa).

Davis, Mike (2001), *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino famines and the making of the Third World* (London: Verso).

de Waal, Alex (1997), 'Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa', (African Rights and the International African Institute, James Currey, Indiana University Press).

Donham, Donald (1999), *Marxist Modern: An ethnographic history of the Ethiopian revolution* (Oxford: James Currey Press).

DPPC (1995), 'General Guidelines for the Implementation of the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and management (NPDPM)', (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission: Addis Ababa).

--- (1997), 'Vulnerability Assessment in Ethiopia: The process and the concept', paper given at Vulnerability in Ethiopia: From disaster to development, Addis Ababa, 23 - 25 June 1997.

--- (2002), 'Appeal for Immediate Food Needs and Scenarios of Likely Emergency Needs in 2003', (Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Commission: Addis Ababa).

DPPC/SERA (2000), 'Vulnerability Profile: Saesi Tsaedaemba, Eastern Zone, Tigray Region', (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission Strengthening Emergency Response Abilities: Addis Ababa).

Duffield, Mark (1996), 'The Symphony of the Damned: Racial discourse, complex political emergencies and humanitarian aid', *Disasters*, 20 (3), 173-93.

--- (2007), *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the world of peoples* (Cambridge: Polity).

Duffield, Mark and Prendergast, John (1994), *Without Troops and Tanks: Humanitarian intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press).

EPRDF-SF 'The Changing Role of NGOs and US-China Rivalry for Africa', <[eprdf-sf.org/uploads/changing\\_NGO\\_US\\_China.pdf](http://eprdf-sf.org/uploads/changing_NGO_US_China.pdf)>, accessed 29 September 2008.

Erkineh, Teshome (2002), 'The Ethiopian Early Warning System and its Experience in the Pastoral Areas', (DPPC: Addis Ababa).

Gebregziabhere, Seyoum (1992), 'Changing Leaders, Ethiopia's Unchanging Bureaucracy', in Harold Marcus (ed.), *6th Michigan State Conference on Northeast Africa* (East Lansing: Michigan State).

Hamer, John (1967), 'Voluntary Associations as Structures of Change among the Sidamo of Southwest Ethiopia', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 40 (2), 80-81.

Hammond, Laura (2001), 'Ethiopia Drought Emergency 1999 - 2000', (USAID/Ethiopia (FHA office): Addis Ababa).

Hammond, Laura and Maxwell, Daniel (2002), 'The Ethiopian Crisis of 1999-2000: Lessons learned, questions unanswered', *Disasters*, 26 (3), 262-79.

Hammond, Laura and Dessalegn, Bezaeit (2003), 'Safara: An assessment of current and future voluntary resettlement in Ethiopia (Draft)', (USAID: Addis Ababa).

Herouy, Bekure (2004), 'Commentary and Observations on the Current - Latest NGO/CSO Draft Legislation prepared by Ministry of Justice, June 2004', (Christian Relief and Development Agency: Addis Ababa).

Human Rights Watch (2008), 'Collective Punishment: War crimes and crimes against humanity in the Ogaden area of Ethiopia's Somali Region', (Human Rights Watch: New York).

Inter Africa Group 'Famine: Ten years after', <[http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ben\\_InterA F.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/Ben_InterA F.html)>, accessed 20 September 2008.

Jansson, Kurt (1987), 'Section 1: The Emergency Relief Operation - An inside view', in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose (eds.), *The Ethiopian Famine: The story of the emergency relief operation* (London: Zed Books), xxv-78.

Jayne, T.S., et al. (2000), 'Targeting of Food Aid in Rural Ethiopia: Chronic need or inertia?' 23, (Michigan State University: East Lansing).

Lata, Leenco (2003), 'The Ethiopia-Eritrea War', *Review of African Political Economy* 30 (97), 369-88.

Lautze, Sue (2004), 'Loaves and Fishes: Famine challenges in the new millennium', paper given at Sixth Annual Conference, Global Disaster Information Network, Session on Challenges of Contemporary Famine, US Department of State, Washington, DC, 26 March 2004.

Lautze, Sue, et al. (2003), 'Risk and Vulnerability in Ethiopia: Learning from the past, responding to the present, preparing for the future', (United States Agency for International Development: Addis Ababa).

Lindahl, Bernhard (2008), 'Local History in Ethiopia', [http://www.nai.uu.se/library/resources/dossiers/local\\_history\\_of\\_ethiopia/](http://www.nai.uu.se/library/resources/dossiers/local_history_of_ethiopia/), accessed 19 September 2008.

Moorehead, Carolyn (1998), *Dunant's Dream: War, Switzerland and the history of the Red Cross* (London: HarperCollins).

New Coalition for Food Security in Ethiopia Technical Group (2003), 'Food Security Program: Executive summary', (New Coalition for Food Security: Addis Ababa).

Oxfam/GB (2008), *NGOs Call for Action on Humanitarian Accountability in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Oxfam/GB).

Pankhurst, Alula and Piguet, François (2004), 'People, Space and the State: Migration, resettlement and displacement in Ethiopia', *People, Space and the State: Migration, resettlement and displacement in Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Society of Sociologists Social Workers and Anthropologists).

Pankhurst, Richard (1984), *The History of Famine and Epidemics in Ethiopia Prior to the 20th Century* (Addis Ababa: Relief and Rehabilitation Commission).

Penrose, Angela (1987), 'Section 2: Before and After', in Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, and Angela Penrose (eds.), *The Ethiopian Famine: The story of the emergency relief operation* (London: Zed Books), 79 - 189.

Perry, Alex (2008), 'Why Africa is Still Starving', *Time Magazine*, 6 August 2008.

Piguet, François and Lemessa, Dechassa (2003), 'Review of Voluntary Migration and Resettlement Programmes up to the End of 2001', paper given at People, Space and the State: Migration,

resettlement and displacement in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 28-30 January 2003.

Provisional Military Administrative Council (1975), 'Programme of the National Democratic Revolution', (PMAC: Addis Ababa).

--- (1976), 'Declaration on Economic Policy of Ethiopia', (PMAC: Addis Ababa).

Rahmato, Dessalegn (2002), 'Civil society organisations in Ethiopia', in Bahru Zewdu and Siegfried Pausewang (eds.), *Ethiopia, the challenge of democracy from below* (Addis Ababa: Forum for Social Studies), 103-19.

--- (2004), 'Large-Scale Resettlement in Ethiopia: Is it a viable option', (Forum for Social Studies: Addis Ababa).

Raven-Roberts, Angela (1994), 'Decrees, Dictators and Development: Relief and politics in Ethiopia 1985-1989', in Harold Marcus (ed.), *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press), 538-49.

Refera, Tafese (2008), 'Notes on the Second Round Prime Minister and Civil Society Representatives Discussion', (Christian Relief and Development Association: Addis Ababa).

Rivers., J.P.W., et al. (1976), 'Lessons for epidemiology from the Ethiopian Famines', *Annales de la Societe Belge de Medecine Tropicale*, 56 (4-5), 345-57.

RRC (1985), *The Challenges of Drought: Ethiopia's decade of struggle in relief and rehabilitation* (London: H&L Communications Ltd.).

--- (1995), 'Ten Years After the 1984/85 Famine: Lessons learnt and future development priorities and strategies', (RRC and CRDA: Addis Ababa).

Salama, Peter, et al. (2001), 'Malnutrition, Measles, Mortality, and the Humanitarian Response during a Famine in Ethiopia', *American Medical Association*, 286 (5), 563-71.

Sandford, Stephen and Habtu, Yohannes (2000), 'Emergency Response Interventions in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia', (UK Department for International Development (DfID): Addis Ababa).

Seaman, John and Holt, Julius (1975), 'The Ethiopian Famine of 1973-74, Wollo Province', *Proceedings of the Nutritional Society*, 34 (114A).

Seaman, John, Holt, Julius, and Rivers, John (1974), 'Harerghe under Drought', (Relief and Rehabilitation Commission: Addis Ababa).

Stommes, Eileen and Sisaye, Seleshi (1980), 'The Development and Distribution of Health Care Services in Ethiopia: A preliminary review', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 13 (3), 487-95.

TANGO International (2007), 'Ethiopia: The path to self-resiliency (Volume IV: Literature Review)', (Technical Assistance to NGOs: Tuscon).

The Livelihoods Program 'Stakeholder Consultation Round I: Revision of the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM)', [http://www.livesandlivelihoods.com/files/25944\\_504.pdf](http://www.livesandlivelihoods.com/files/25944_504.pdf), accessed 20 September 2008.

The World Bank (2008), 'Pastoral Community Development Project II (Project Appraisal Department)', (Ministry of Federal Affairs and The World Bank: Addis Ababa).

UN-EUE (2003), 'Intra-regional Voluntary Resettlement in Amhara: A possible way out of the chronic food trap?' (UN Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia: Addis Ababa).

UNDP-EUE (2008), 'Brief Overview of the UNDP Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia', [http://www.africa.upenn.edu/eue\\_web/Eue\\_98.htm](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/eue_web/Eue_98.htm), accessed 4 November 2008.

United States of American and Ethiopia (1951), 'Point Four General Agreement for Technical Cooperation', (No. 1933: United Nations Treaty Series).

USAID (2005), *USAID/Ethiopia Annual Report FY 2005* (Addis Ababa: United States Agency for International Development).

Villumstad, S. and Hendrie, B. (1993), 'New Policy Directions in Disaster Preparedness and Response in Ethiopia', *Disasters*, 17 (2), 122-32.

Wolde-Giorgis, Dawit (1989), *Red Tears: War, famine, and revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press).

Wolde-Mariam, Mesfin (1988), 'Dimensions of Vulnerability to Famine', paper given at The National Conference on a Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Strategy for Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, 5-8 December 1988.





Overseas Development Institute  
111 Westminster Bridge Road  
London SE1 7JD  
UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email: [publications@odi.org.uk](mailto:publications@odi.org.uk)

Website: [www.odi.org.uk](http://www.odi.org.uk)