

# Food, Aid and Relief Development Strategies \*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the usefulness and feasibility of using emergency aid and food aid to stimulate development processes during periods of famine in Africa. The proposition that relief aid can be utilised in creative ways that directly benefit individual households by increasing the value of their assets is made in a forceful way. Diversified sources of rural income resulting from this strategy reinforce the capacity of the most vulnerable households to protect themselves against the effects of future drought.

This may seem a somewhat ambitious objective. However, even under considerable personal stress people have a tremendous will to survive and to invest in their future if given the chance. If this is true, then the bulk of emergency food aid supplied to African countries is used inefficiently because it does not offer families this possibility.

## Introduction

The 1980's have tragically demonstrated the vulnerability of African families to famine. Indeed they may be more vulnerable now than they were 10 years ago, despite massive development efforts. The real tragedy is that Africa's food crisis was predicted and yet it was not prevented. Even after a massive injection of foreign emergency assistance, the conditions which generated it remain virtually unchanged. This being the case, the vast amount of emergency food aid that has been provided to African countries south of the Sahara is unlikely to have a significant beneficial effect on the long-term future of the families most at risk. Indeed it may well be that emergency food aid is keeping alive families that have little chance of an independent economic future. In this sense, emergency food aid may actually be increasing the future risk of famine.

This paper's point of departure is the assertion that the primary cause of famine is not drought. It suggests instead that the vulnerability of African families to famine lies primarily in their susceptibility to income collapse. This occurs when income fluctuations cannot be

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stabilised by inter-household transfers or the liquidation of household assets, and the ability to maintain an adequate level of demand for food is lost! Employment and income are therefore central issues in this analysis.

Furthermore, this paper argues that increasing agricultural labour productivity is not enough to provide adequate and stable levels of income for those families most at risk. The conclusion is therefore that international resource transfers must be directed at stimulating investment processes that lead to sustained rises in rural incomes, from non-agricultural as well as agricultural sources.

This implies a broadly based 'relief-development strategy' (RDS) that discriminates between the risks to income collapse which different groups of households face and which make the most of the energy and vitality of African peasant families to invest in their survival. The paper argues that this strategy should dominate the allocation of international emergency resources and that the provision of emergency food aid is a vital part of such a strategy.

The traditional 'relief', 'rehabilitation', 'development' sequence is an inadequate framework for these objectives because, in practice, the bulk of resources are absorbed by the 'relief' phase leaving little in the way of impetus or resources to do much more. The 'more' is essential if emergency aid is to have a beneficial impact on the future of African families. It should not only sustain and replace the stock of human and capital assets by stimulating investment processes likely to benefit those families most at risk, but actually expand it.

More specifically, its use should be directed towards four main goals which are entirely compatible with the objective to sustain life. There are as follows:

- Investment in economic assets at the household level. This will almost certainly include investment in diversifying household economic activities as well as increasing and stabilising household level food production.
- Investment in both new economic and social assets at the community level, of the kind which will generate flows of benefits to the most vulnerable families.
- Investment in the expansion of human capital in the form of new skills and in new possibilities for earning a living.

These goals are both necessary and, within certain constraints, feasible. However, the viability of the strategy proposed here rests on two critical assumptions. The first is that African families are willing to invest in their future and are able to make sensible choices. The second is that communities have the capacity to organise the implementation of projects which incorporate these objectives. What is required is a multitude of small-scale activities, of great range and diversity, spread throughout areas prone to drought. The scale required is well beyond the capacity of any government to implement by conventional means. The only feasible alternative is to make a 'leap of faith', which many will find difficult, and to place the resources required in the hands of communities themselves.

There are also a number of other issues which would have to be tackled if food aid could be used to support activities of this kind. These include the perceptions of food aid donors about the nature and causes of famine, which dictate the rules under which emergency food aid is distributed; the delays in having food aid and other resources on the ground in time to prevent widespread social and economic dislocation; and the willingness of government agencies to support community programmes which might utilise food aid to its best advantage.

## The argument for relief-development strategies

The argument for proposing a 'relief-development strategy' has four main strands. The first is that people who are prone to famine typically operate in an environment of uncertainty and the risks they face can be specified. The second is that, although this uncertainty shows up most obviously in unpredictable inter-seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations in agricultural output, it is actually fluctuations in household income which limit a household's ability to maintain a stable level of demand for food. If a downturn in income becomes irreversible, people die from starvation. The implication is that, while it is important to reduce the variations in household output, it is even more important to increase the level of household income and to reduce its instability. The third strand to the argument is that if the main goal is a reduction in the risk of famine, and if resources are scarce, then the expansion of household income, a reduction in its variability, or both, should absorb a substantial amount of time, effort and the resources available. The argument is completed by the assertion that this is a possible, indeed a necessary, use of emergency resources.

All households operate in an environment of uncertainty. Rural households, and people in the cities who have no formal employment, face greater risks than most because they operate a household economy in an environment of great uncertainty from which they have little protection - other than the obligation of kinship, which should not be underestimated. However, two main sets of conditions lie behind most famines - low average levels of household income and large variations in household income. Neither inter-seasonal nor inter-annual fluctuations in income would matter very much if a family had access to stocks on which they could draw in order to maintain a level of current household income sufficient for their necessities, including food.

### *Stock-income relationships*

Three elements can be seen to dominate household food security. The first is the average level of household income. The second is the magnitude and probability of seasonal and annual fluctuations around this average. The third is the value of stocks a household can maintain and the form in which they are held.

These three factors are inter-related. Low incomes not only endanger current food consumption but also reduce the possibility of accumulating food security stocks. As income rises, both the amount and the proportion of income available for savings also rise. Current consumption is thus assured and the possibility of building up food security stocks also increases. The value of stocks required to achieve food security depends on both the probability of variation and its magnitude. If income is stable, and assuming it is adequate, there is very little need to hold stocks. As the probability and the magnitude of fluctuations increase, the value of adequate stocks must also increase.

Low-income families therefore face a double jeopardy. First, low average household income, close to the 'famine level', does not allow the accumulation of a surplus in good years. Therefore, families who are unable to accumulate much from current output are at more risk than those who produce enough in most years to more than fulfil their consumption

requirements. Second, families whose income varies with large amplitudes from year to year in comparison with average income are more at risk than those whose income is relatively more stable.

Many families in Africa have a low long-term average income and face large inter-seasonal and inter-annual income fluctuations. These families are the most at risk to famine.

### *Off-farm employment and income*

Although the bulk of rural income in Africa is derived from farming, it would be a mistake to imagine that African families have no access to other sources of livelihood. Some family members may spend part of the year in wage labour, or petty trading and family-based industry such as beer brewing and food processing. In addition, many African families have a member employed in the city and depend to a large extent on this source of income to maintain food security. Furthermore, kinship ties frequently involve obligations to assist when times are hard. The importance of these intra- and inter-household transfers should not be underestimated. In Botswana, for example, one estimate<sup>2</sup> suggests that the demand for food in rural areas increases to replace lost 'food income' by 40 per cent during drought years. The main source of the 'new income' was remittances from family members working in the towns or, in the case of Botswana, in South Africa. However, comparatively speaking, rural African families are more dependent on farming income or income directly related to agriculture than some other geographical areas. Rural industries and services are poorly developed and offer little opportunity for employment. This increases the vulnerability of the rural economy as a whole to the effects of sharp declines in agricultural income and makes rural families more susceptible to irreversible income collapse.

### *Secular declines in income and employment*

There is considerable evidence to suggest that rural incomes in Africa are declining and the number of people who are unable to earn an adequate income is increasing. Although there has been a good deal of publicity recently about declining levels of per capita food production in Sub-Saharan Africa, the evidence for this is rather slight. Much less is said about secular declines in income and employment which is, by far, the more important issue.

Neither rising nor falling aggregate food output is necessarily significant with respect to household food security. Many, if not most, families, and indeed most countries, do not produce all the food their people eat. What matters most is whether or not people earn enough money to buy the food they need to eat but do not produce. It is therefore most significant that such circumstantial evidence as exists tends to suggest that there has been a decline in the value of incomes and that opportunities for alternative off-farm employment are contracting relative to population growth. If this is the case, it pinpoints precisely why the risk of famine in Africa may be increasing. Unfortunately, hard data is difficult to come by. However, there are at least three pieces of evidence which support the impression that both income and employment opportunities are declining in Africa.

The first is that population growth exceeds the capacity of any economic sector to provide work for new entrants to the labour force. If we assume that the potential labour force is

increasing by three per cent per annum, that the elasticity of demand for labour is around 0.5 for typical agricultural activities, farming and the like, and that (optimistically) there is equal access for everyone to new jobs, this would mean that a sustained increase in the value of agricultural output of six per cent per annum would be required just to absorb new labour force entrants. This is well above the most optimistic estimates of the performance of agricultural sectors in countries south of the Sahara.

The second piece of evidence comes from internal migration patterns. It is clear that many people in drought-prone areas of Africa do not see the future of their families to be in farming. The high premium placed on education to prepare children for wage and salaried employment suggests that people are prepared to take great risks and to live in appalling conditions around cities waiting for formal employment. Urban growth rates in Africa in the last decade or so are the highest in the world. All this suggests that people are 'voting with their feet' against farming as a viable means of earning a living and that they see the risks of seeking alternative employment to be less than the risks they face farming. Of course, they may be wrong, but it is hard to find convincing arguments that they are.

The third piece of evidence for declining rural incomes and employment opportunities comes from the relationship between land and the African rural population. The African countryside is commonly described as 'land abundant, labour abundant and capital scarce'. The last two features are undoubtedly correctly described. However, the first requires qualification and out of this qualification arises further evidence of secular declines in rural livelihoods.

In the first place, land of good quality, capable of producing reliably from rainfall is not as abundant as it is often thought to be. A major study of land capability (UN, 1982) suggests that, although the combined natural resources of the 51 countries in Africa could feed 50 per cent more than their population projected for the year 2000, the population of 22 of them had already exceeded the potential carrying capacity of the land at low (and probably existing) levels of technology in 1975, and 28 would be in this position in the year 2000 if the level of technology were not raised.

In the second place, even if land potential could be fully realised, the nature of African society means that people do not move freely. The assumption that they can and do is absolutely critical to a full utilisation of natural resource potential. The reality is more often that ethnic or other barriers confine people to over-populated areas where considerable inputs of labour and capital would be required to raise levels of land productivity to a point which would provide reasonable incomes for the people farming the land. There is an abundance of labour but a great scarcity of capital. In its absence, the capacity of the land to yield is eroded and exhausted. These over-populated areas of Africa in many cases are also those most prone to drought and to famine because the incomes of families who farm the land are too low to allow the necessary accumulation of stocks with which to buffer income fluctuations.

The magnitude of these problems has been masked by a series of good years enjoyed by many countries in Africa between 1977 and 1981. There is considerable evidence to suggest that the recent drought has resulted in a sharp increase in 'permanent' rural unemployment, in the worst affected areas and countries. Botswana and Northern Ethiopia come to mind as

examples. Although every recorded drought has resulted in migration to local towns and cities by a group of people who have been put out of farming permanently, the scale of the problem now is unprecedented and it is not unreasonable to suggest that there is increasing 'structural' unemployment in many parts of rural Africa which has been exacerbated by the recent drought.

For this reason it is not enough to assume that 'everything will go back to normal' when the rainy seasons have reestablished themselves. The 'crisis' (an employment crisis rather than a food crisis according to this analysis) will continue until households at risk find secure sources of employment and income.

The conclusion which must be drawn from this analysis is that incomes and employment must be at the centre of a 'relief-development strategy' and that, while investment directed at increasing agricultural land and labour productivity remains important, for many of the most vulnerable families a secure livelihood must be sought outside agriculture. This implies a radical shift in relief (and development) priorities. A major effort is urgently required to diversify sources of rural income and create rural economies in which agriculture is linked with rural services and industries.

### **The main elements of a relief-development strategy**

The general conclusions arising from this analysis suggest that a strategy that purports to address the causes and the effects of famine should attempt to achieve simultaneously a number of results. First, income is required urgently by families who face irreversible income collapse. Second, there is a need to pursue the following objectives:

- a sustained increase in average household income
- a decrease in inter-annual variations in household income
- an increase in the value of household stocks.

Therefore, emergency strategies which are designed to have a permanent effect will combine a transfer of income to families short of food for immediate needs with support for one or more of the following four elements:

- investment at the household level making it possible for vulnerable families to sustain more stable food consumption patterns within and between years
- investment in the provision of new and better skills to create greater opportunities for families to diversify their sources of income
- investment in both social and economic assets, at the community level, of a kind which will generate flows of benefits to the most vulnerable families.

It is possible to use international resources to address immediate needs and also and at the same time to further long-run objectives. The traditional 'relief-rehabilitation-development' sequence is not an appropriate framework to construct and implement a strategy of this kind. Firstly, it is wasteful of resources as the bulk are allocated to the 'relief' phase with little consideration for the underlying problems. Opportunities for preserving life while reducing the threat of future famine are thereby lost. Secondly, 'rehabilitation' generally means the replacement of lost household assets. The presumption is that the restoration of the ante status

quo is all that is required. This is not so. Thirdly, the 'relief-rehabilitation-development' strategy fails to utilise most effectively the single most abundant resource available during a famine, labour. Although the availability of surplus labour is both a consequence of famine and a reason for it, it is also an opportunity to be turned to the maximum use. The most graphic symbols of famine, relief camps, representing government and international impotence to prevent the worst of human suffering, also indicate the extent to which rural labour and skills become unemployed when household income collapses.

## **Development objectives in an emergency context**

### *A joint relief-development approach*

The joint relief-development strategy proposed here focuses on creating opportunities for unemployed labour to work in productive ways which result in the types of investment required to enhance household food security. The resources for this investment must come largely from the people themselves. The strength of the strategy is that it achieves more than one objective at the same time. It utilises the resource which is most abundant, ie household labour; it addresses the most immediate effect of famine, which is an overwhelming increase in the number of unemployed people; it creates the possibility of transferring income to support failing household food demand by payments made for the work done; and it prevents nutritional deterioration, if put in place early enough.

Moreover, if relief of this kind is provided in time and to people where they live, it should prevent the social and economic disintegration which accompanies mass migration for food, the dependence on emergency aid and the unacceptable conditions of relief camps, where all too frequently deterioration is so advanced that people are virtually unemployable.

Although this strategy depends on payment for work, it differs in a number of significant respects from conventional public works schemes. In the first place, to be effective in the long run, the work done must create productive or social assets whose benefits are enjoyed by the most vulnerable families. An example may help to clarify this point. The income paid to a person who works to clear the land of a large farm may prevent his family from starving, but the benefits derived from the cleared land will flow to the owner of the land, who is not likely to be most at risk to famine. Although the income from public works schemes will meet a very real need if it makes a significant contribution to maintaining food demand, the better effect will be derived if income transfers can be made efficiently to households most at risk and if the work they do makes a lasting contribution to their own household food security.

This raises a number of serious questions about the choice of projects which fulfil the criteria set out here. It is true that Africa needs more roads, water sources, markets and forests, but it is more difficult to decide who will benefit first and most from many of these amenities. It is unlikely that the resources available to pay for the work done will be sufficient to achieve everything and, in order to meet the criteria appropriate to emergency-development projects, some hard choices may have to be made.

A second way in which this strategy may differ from a conventional public works programme is that although some projects may be best organised at a community level, the criteria for maximum effectiveness in an emergency context admits to the possibility that people will be paid to improve their own assets - particularly land, but also personal skills - and that the most important contribution will be the mobilisation of community labour to get work done that a single family would be unable to do alone.

A third distinction is that a major part of the investment should be designed to yield rapid returns. This is essential if the investment is to result in immediate protection from future income collapse.

A fourth way in which this strategy differs from the usual public works scheme is that it should be designed to expand rural skills. We should not be under the impression that the only thing people in the African countryside know how to do is to farm. There is an enormous variety of skills available - masons, carpenters and artisans of every kind. Relief-development strategies should result in these skills being improved and transferred to others. If, sadly, relief camps are inevitable, they constitute an opportunity, which has been virtually ignored, for providing training (including improvements in literacy and numeracy) in skills which are economically and socially useful. This paper argues that a diversification of the rural economy is essential if the massive and increasing rural under-employment and unemployment that makes people vulnerable to famine is to be reduced. A relief-development strategy would be incomplete if it did not make a contribution to creating new, economically viable, opportunities for people to earn a living.

Fifth, therefore, relief-development strategies should result in new, economically viable, opportunities to earn a living in the countryside. The flow of emergency resources into an area affected by famine constitutes an important opportunity to provide capital for setting up new small-scale industrial activities. These are likely to be in the main related to agriculture and will supply wage goods and services for which there is reason to believe demand will increase rapidly as rural incomes rise.

Finally, the strategy proposed here differs from the conventional one in that the choice of activities and the organisation of the work will need to be primarily in the hands of the affected communities. There are reasons for this. The first is that the scale of the problem is so great that it is beyond the capacity of any government or voluntary or international agency to organise and manage. The second is that if one takes a broad view of the processes which bring about change (and here we are speaking of the fundamental changes in the structure of the rural economy required to generate protection against famine) then changes which are 'successful' generally arise from the initiative of the people facing the problem. It is true that they may need outside resources and outside ideas, but fundamentally solutions arise from within communities.

The strategy being proposed here is only valid if local wisdom, initiative and organisational skills exist and only feasible if they can be mobilised. It is based on the belief that they do and can. It proposes to hand over resources to communities with simple but minimum administrative control to use in the ways they think best.



### *Three caveats*

Emergency assistance which mobilises labour should not result in a diversion of labour from essential agricultural tasks. Projects should generally be sited within the communities where people live, particularly if the long-term benefits of the assets created by them are to be enjoyed by people at risk to famine. Moreover, the projects should either be completed before the season when people are fully occupied on their farms, or be organised so that they can be interrupted to allow people to work their land. If relief assistance results in new employment opportunities which are permanent, these should employ labour which is surplus to agricultural requirements, or people who are genuinely underemployed throughout the year.

Second, this strategy does not exclude entirely the need for income transfers by food grants. It is probable that labour scarce households (with large numbers of children) will need income supplements which could take the form of food supplements<sup>2</sup>.

Third, the strategy does not imply wholesale grants to local communities without control, nor that no attention will be given to sound design, technical feasibility and economic viability, nor that 'outsiders' have no place at all, although their role may be very different from that of a 'city-based' advisor or many expatriate emergency teams.

### *Priorities for relief-development activities*

The three technical objectives which dominate this discussion have already been specified: increased income, more stable income and increases in the value of the stock of household assets. It is, of course, not possible to specify every case for which activities are going to show the highest returns with respect to these objectives. However it is possible to suggest some guidelines.

Three common situations will be encountered. The first arises from a collapse in agricultural incomes in an area where it is feasible to increase or stabilise agricultural incomes by investment in land improvement and technological change. In this case the clear priority is to mobilise labour for land clearing, terracing, drainage, the construction of small-scale irrigation systems and the like.

The second arises from a collapse in agricultural incomes in an area where land is scarce and, despite improvements in land and labour productivity, it is unlikely that employment and incomes for the most vulnerable families can be secured from agriculture alone. The priority in this case is to identify families or individuals whose future can only be secured if they have access to alternative sources of income. While resources may usefully be employed in measures to improve land productivity, attention should be given to the provision of new skills and the start-up capital for new enterprises with strong links to agriculture.

The third poses the most problems. Here agriculture does not provide a stable source of income and employment for the majority of the people. This may have arisen as a result of poor land endowments, land degradation or increasing population pressure on scarce land resources. Many economists would argue that migration is the only and best answer. Others would propose resettlement programmes. The first may not be the answer because labour movements are constrained by ethnic boundaries. The second has an extremely poor record of success.

However a RDS must address the difficult issues involved. Retraining for non-agricultural employment may be possible in some cases and this may relieve the pressure on land resources sufficiently for sustained agricultural recovery to be initiated. However, in many cases the problems may be almost intractable.

### *Emergency food aid and a relief-development strategy*

Emergency food aid is, therefore, not the most important input required for a relief-development strategy, although it may have a place. A conventional relief strategy would be content to see that food transfers result in adequate food intake. A relief-development strategy has more ambitious objectives. It is concerned to see the extent to which income transfers permit households to invest. There is a growing evidence to suggest that they do - even out of income transfers provided for survival. A question of particular importance in the context of a 'relief-development' strategy is therefore whether cash or food transfers result in greater investment by recipient households.

As one might imagine, the evidence is sparse. However, data collected from evaluations of a 'cash-for-food' project in Ethiopia, suggest that cash income supplements result in higher rates of nutritional recovery than do cash supplements. If this is true it is explicable on the grounds that families (or the senior male in the family) decide to forgo current consumption even if it places the families' children at nutritional risk, in order to secure the families' long-term future.

Many people view the sales of emergency food aid with distaste - or even with alarm. This view tends to restrict the use of food aid as a general resource with broad applications and limits its support for the kinds of activities central to a RDS. There are situations where the sale of emergency food aid is most desirable. In some cases national food deficits may constitute a claim on food aid. In others, local shortages may need to be corrected, although in this case it is almost always better to sell imported food centrally and to provide an equivalent value of domestically produced food in local markets if possible. In other cases, food aid should not be supplied at all.

A particular consideration in this regard is to decide the extent to which supply failure or demand failure predominates. Most often, at least in Africa, both occur, as so many rural people are farmers who produce for themselves and for the market - so crop failure affects both household income and market supply. It is also important to try to establish whether or not the restoration of food demand can be met by local supply, and, in the case of supply failure, whether this affects the national market or local markets. In the case of supply failure, emergency food aid may be a valuable way of providing temporary support to ensure that the demand for food is satisfied.

Food aid has a more specific use in market exchanges when it is used to defend local terms of trade. The effect of drought on the rates at which products are exchanged in the countryside are profoundly important for both producer and consumer. It is most important that the income of producers is protected, in order to maintain stable food consumption, and also to protect the stock of household assets. For example, a drought which reduces the carrying capacity of the range, results in unusually large numbers of animals being sold, a sharp decline in animal prices and, frequently, a sharp increase in grain prices due to scarcities in nearby producing areas. This means that pastoralists' terms of trade are affected adversely by not one but two influences.

The provision of relief grain in exchange for animals at 'fair rates of exchange' achieves at least three objectives simultaneously<sup>4</sup>. It preserves the value of animals and thus the value of the pastoralists' income. Second, it accelerates the offtake of animals, so helping to preserve long run range carrying capacity. Third, if the animals can be slaughtered and the meat preserved, it transforms deteriorating food stocks into food stocks with an extended 'shelf-life'. In the case of the Kenya scheme, the meat was sundried and used in school feeding programmes, but equally the meat could have been retained as community food security stocks. Thus, the decline in pastoral income was reduced and the reduction in the value of the stocks being drawn down was minimised.

### *Some examples of activities of the 'relief-development' kind*

During the recent African 'food emergency' many people in national governments and international agencies were thinking along the lines set out in this paper. It is not possible to provide a complete inventory of recent experience. However, Table 2 offers a list of annotated examples to draw attention to interesting work which has been done and which deserves further assessment and analysis. It is vitally important that this experience is not lost. There can be nothing surer than the occurrence of continued periods of drought in Africa. Despite the lessons of the 1970's there was very little experience brought forward for application to the famines of the 1980's. This should not be allowed to happen again.

A full inventory of 'emergency' activities with development objectives would make a fascinating contribution to collective knowledge and experience. Although the list of activities in Table 2 is incomplete, it demonstrates some interesting points. For example, it is almost certain that not more than 10 per cent of the total emergency resources which have flowed into Africa in the last four years have been applied to activities designed to enhance household investment, to support declining rural-rural terms of trade, to enhance the value of household food security stocks, to increase the value of human skills, to increase the value of household assets, or even to increase the value of national investment. This being the case, the list of activities offered here, incomplete as it may be, points to ways in which emergency assistance has been used and could be more effective if applied on a larger scale.

It is possible to meet urgent human need and the underlying causes of famine at the same time, if transfers of income to households facing income collapse and starvation are made in ways which protect household assets, mobilise labour, enhance skills, create new employment possibilities and result in increased investment at the household and community level.

We turn now to examine a set of strategic and capacity issues which will help to determine the allocation of resources in particular circumstances.

### **Strategic and capacity issues**

There are four parameters which generally determine the broad shape of the appropriate 'relief-development' strategy, viz supply or demand failure, or both; rates of 'permanent' rural unemployment; the condition of the people; and capacity issues. Supply failure in a pure form is exceedingly rare as a cause of famine and is only likely to occur if there is complete interruption to international trade. Demand failure generally predominates. The remedy is income transfers and, if national food production is sufficient to meet the enhanced demand for food, food aid is not indicated. The conventional view of famine is that its effects are

temporary. This paper has suggested that this may not be the case and often is not. Drought generally reveals an increasing level of permanent under- and unemployment in the African countryside. The allocation of resources is also influenced by the extent to which hunger has already resulted in economic and social dislocation and a deterioration in health and nutrition.

The fourth parameter which determines a feasible strategy and therefore influences the allocation of emergency resources, is the complex of factors which come under the rubric of 'capacity'. This includes transport, organisation, management, technical skills and the like. Many would argue that famine relief, even in its simplest form, overwhelms the local capacity and more cannot be expected. It is true that famine relief imposes enormous additional burdens on a national civil service and the technical agencies of a government. Imports by volume may double; transport patterns are turned upside down, inefficiencies abound; new agencies are formed and reformed; more people are hired and still everything goes wrong.

However, there are three additional points to bear in mind. The first is that unless emergency resources are used more efficiently, Africa will become more and more vulnerable to famine on an increasing scale. The second is that 'famine relief' has caused considerable fragmentation of government capacity. This is not unconnected with the international view, current a few years ago, that a 'super-ministerial agency' should be established to deal with famine. This might be a rational strategy when skills and resources are relatively abundant as it provides a centre of power which can allocate resources without competition. It is less rational when skills are scarce and when famine relief is viewed as an attack on long-term problems. In this case, the allocation of institutional responsibility becomes very divisive. The third point to be made here is that a 'capacity' which exists has been almost entirely ignored. It is the capacity of people and small communities to organise themselves in their own interest. The fact is that country people are amazingly experienced in organising smallscale activities and managing their own affairs.

The plain truth is that the magnitude of the problem is so enormous that there is no government or international agency which could possibly implement, in conventional terms, the variety and number of smallscale activities which are required to impose a lasting change on the face of rural Africa. This does not mean that all control is abandoned. An accounting is required. Technical advice will be sought if there is justifiable faith in the quality of the advice offered. Progress can be monitored and problems discussed. Joint evaluations - 'joint' meaning the community, the government and the donor - are valuable for all concerned, not least the donor. They provide a potential instrument for transferring experience from one community to another and for allowing communities to compare their experience and progress.

#### *RDS and 'disaster preparedness'*

An integrated 'relief-development strategy' places 'disaster preparedness' in a new light. While it is true that information systems that provide advance warning of crop failure and income collapse need to be developed (with particular attention to the 'demand side'),

information was not a limiting constraint to relief action in Africa during the 1980's. However, it was a constraint to the implementation of activities which would have a developmental impact. It is not difficult to identify groups of people who face greater than usual threats to survival from famine.

The successful implementation of activities designed to expand employment potential in an emergency setting requires at least three major prior unconventional undertakings. First, contingency plans which identify potentially viable alternative employment opportunities for people in drought-prone areas should be costed and in place before famine causes major social and economic dislocation. These ideas cannot easily be grasped out of the air 'on the day', although many people living in threat of famine abound with ideas themselves. Second, therefore, extensive consultation is required with households likely to be affected by drought in order to establish their views of the future. Third, there needs to be a total integration of rural development strategies with 'disaster preparedness' as well as 'drought recovery' strategies. Famines result from low rural incomes and income instability. The objectives of rural development and 'relief-development' strategies, therefore, coincide. Attention to these three activities would transform the usefulness of 'disaster preparedness' and liberate additional resources for the prevention of future famine.

### **The assessment of emergency programmes**

One way of drawing together and summarising the issues covered in this paper is to consider the criteria by which the 'success' of famine relief might be judged. The criteria proposed here take into account the need to provide relief for human suffering and the need to contribute to household and community investment. The criteria are listed in Table 3.

#### *Nutrition and health objectives*

The objective is clearly to maintain the people affected by famine in good health and nutrition or to restore them to this condition as quickly as possible. There are a number of data sets available which document the nutritional recovery of people receiving relief assistance in a variety of forms. It would be of great value if these records could be compared as this analysis might suggest how the costs of these programmes (administrative as well as material) compared with the rapidity of nutritional recovery. The relative efficacy of food and cash transfers needs to be clarified.

#### *The prevention of income erosion*

The movement of rural terms of trade are measured rather simply by observing changes in the prices at which transactions occur in the countryside. Some data exist but their collection should be routine. Changes in the rates at which pastoralists exchange animals for grain are particularly important. It follows that the extent to which adverse price changes can be prevented is an important measure of the effectiveness of famine relief.

*The prevention of 'whole family' migration*

The search for work by adult family members may indicate stress on the family budget but may also indicate the effectiveness of household strategies to supplement income. The freedom with which this migration can occur and the availability of alternative employment are therefore important indicators of success. However, the migration of whole families in search of food is quite a different matter. Famine relief must seek to prevent this. A measure of its effectiveness is the extent to which it has succeeded.

*Consumption objectives*

A major objective is the maintenance of stable food consumption patterns. Income transfers, as we have seen, may be achieved as food grants, commodity wages or cash wages. The contribution that various elements of a relief programme make to the consumption of the families most in need, taking into account the different requirements and constraints facing families with high and low dependence ratios, is therefore an important indicator of the contribution famine relief has made to household income. Typically, the flows of new income are complex and varied. School feeding programmes, food ration distribution, clinic ration distribution and wages from public works schemes may all make varied contributions to the income of different family groups. It is worth working out which families are deriving the maximum benefit and from which sources.

*Employment objectives*

These fall into three main categories: temporary employment opportunities for those who will return to a previous occupation, new seasonal employment opportunities, and permanent fulltime employment opportunities. Until fairly recently there was little emphasis placed on this important aspect of famine relief and, even now, the resources allocated are pitifully small. Nevertheless there is some experience, eg in Ethiopia, Botswana and Mozambique, which deserves closer examination. It would be well worth investigating the extent to which participants in public works schemes gained new skills later used to generate income, or assessing more carefully the extent to which the recent drought resulted in permanent unemployment.

*Investment objectives*

This paper has repeatedly emphasised the need for local investment to result from famine relief. It has emphasised the need for investment in assets which will lead to higher and more stable incomes for those most vulnerable to drought. Investment at the household level is given pride of place as most likely to contribute to future household income. Remarkable as it may be, the evidence from Ethiopia quoted here suggests that families in the most straitened circumstances have a high propensity to invest in their future. Famine relief may also improve the value of household assets - either physical assets or human skills - through the work done. Third, investment may be achieved as a result of community work projects that improve land

or create new water sources, or the like, to which families most at risk have access. Investment of this kind might usefully be assessed according to whether it is likely to contribute to higher future incomes, more stable future incomes, a higher value of household food security stocks (physical or capital), or all three.

At the second (community) level, investment may be a result of work done to improve the economic infrastructure or social assets. This reasoning suggests that an assessment of this investment should include an examination of the extent to which the benefits are likely to flow to families most at risk of income instability and collapse.

At the third (national) level, stocks of national assets may be improved as a result of famine-related work projects. It is, therefore, important to examine the future benefits carefully before concluding that, in addition to contributing to current consumption, there has also been a contribution to future household food security.

## Conclusion

This paper has argued for a radically different approach to famine relief by drawing attention to the fact that famine is essentially a problem of incomes and employment, and that famine relief should be concerned with short and long-run solutions to low and unstable incomes and declining job prospects. The strategy proposed here has a number of institutional implications, both for governments and international donors.

First, no single relief input can stand alone. Food aid, by itself, is incomplete. There is need for much greater coordination of donor inputs. The most 'successful' famine relief programmes are coordinated by effective government control, and donors should support this development and not feel usurped.

Second, the arbitrary divisions between relief and development assistance are unhelpful in practice, although useful as ways of soliciting additional resources. When it comes to the use of the resources, great damage is done if donor rules are not flexible. This line of reasoning makes a case for considerable liberalisation of the rules under which food and other emergency aid is administered.

Third, the nature of the programming skills required for the administration of international assistance in support of a 'relief-development' strategy differ from convention. This is not to suggest that everyone involved needs to be a development economist, but they do need to understand the underlying processes which make people vulnerable to famine.

Fourth, 'disaster preparedness', if the logic of this paper is sound, has less to do with creating new institutional capacity which will stand idle for seven years out of ten, and more to do with identifying particular groups of people who have been declared by history to be vulnerable to repeated famines and by concentrating effort on investment strategies which will increase and stabilise their incomes. This, and not the capacity of a central government agency to predict their next misfortune, will make them 'drought-proof'.

Finally, the eradication of famine on other continents has been one of the remarkable achievements of the last two decades. Both China and India stand as notable examples of the effort. Poverty still exists but the cataclysmic periods of hunger which left thousands dead every few years appear to be a part of history. Africa has much to learn from this experience and there is very little sense that this is recognised in either national or international fora.

The task demands an alliance: an alliance of the will and resources of, first and foremost, the people, together with their governments, international donor agencies, and now a new partner, the people of industrialised countries who want to contribute to the solution of Africa's hunger. There is no longer room for insularity, irrational administrative divisions at either national or international levels, or sectoral bias. The problem will be solved by a combination of good policy at international levels, a better understanding of the nature of the problem, sustained flows of resources (as opposed to flamboyant temporary exhibitions of generosity) and most of all a sense of hope among the people most at risk which will free their initiative, imagination and effort to work their way out of trouble knowing they have the support they need.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. This assertion is closely related to Sen's analysis. Indeed it draws from it as does most of what follows. See for example Sen A K *Poverty and Famine: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1981.
2. 'Income' means both cash income derived from sales and the value of commodities retained for consumption by the farmer's family.
3. Recent experience in Botswana, where the government has mounted a most imaginative drought relief programme combining public works schemes with school and clinic based supplementary feeding programmes, has much to offer. A more thorough analysis of costs and benefits is required, but see Hay R W et al "A Socioeconomic Analysis of Drought Relief in Botswana", Inter-Ministerial Drought Coordinating Committee, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Government of Botswana, 1985.
4. The alpha-factor proposed by Shlomo Reutlinger does exactly this.

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Table 1

## Integrated Emergency-Development Objectives

Objectives	Some Means
<b>Immediate</b>	
Income transfers to households facing income collapse	Feeding Programmes Cash grants/Cash for work Temporary Employment
Defence of rural terms of trade	Animal-grain exchange Other support to peasant terms of trade
Support for market supply if nec	Food sales in local markets Food sales in national markets
<b>Long-term</b>	
Investment in household economic assets	Land improvement New storage facilities Training in new skills
Investment in community economic assets	Start-up capital for new enterprises New roads New markets New storage facilities New water sources
Investment in community social assets	New health facilities New schools

Table 2

## SOME EXAMPLES OF RDS-TYPE ACTIVITIES

**Support for declining rural terms of trade**

Animal-grain exchange: Kenya, Mali

Fish-grain exchange: Ethiopia

Commodity-grain exchange: Mozambique

**Restoration of household assets and agricultural inputs**

Seed distribution programmes: Ethiopia, Kenya, many more

Distribution of agricultural implements: Ethiopia, Mozambique

(These constitute income transfers as grants. Examples of income transfer by cash grants are not known.)

**Income Transfers**

Feeding programmes of many varieties in many countries.

(The effect of feeding programmes on household investment is not known, is worth investigating but is likely to be slight. The effect on human capital likely to be considerable. The comparative costs and benefits of these schemes, which are based on a variety of principles, deserve a more thorough analysis in the African context.)

**Cash for work projects**

'Cash for food' projects in Ethiopia

(The projects undertaken include feeder roads, improved water supply, land terracing, smallscale irrigation, construction of buildings, brick production, school construction, reafforestation, fish pond construction, flood protection.

The effect on household investment is likely to be considerable: the effect on community level investment is also likely to be considerable, and the effects of these projects, particularly over the next few years, would be worth monitoring.)

'Labour-based drought relief programme' in Botswana

(Projects undertaken include land clearing, development of new water sources, road building, airstrip construction, protection of crop land from animals, small building projects, brickmaking, grain milling.

The effect on household investment is not known but is likely to be slight; the effect on community and national level investment is likely to be considerable.)

'Cash for work' element in Mozambique resettlement support project (details not known).

**Food for work projects**

Expanded land improvement projects in Ethiopia

**Programmes to expand skills**

Incorporated into some 'cash for food' activities in Ethiopia

**Projects designed to create permanent new employment opportunities**

None known, except that some community work projects in Botswana may result in participants starting their own small enterprises.

**Table 3**

**CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING FAMINE RELIEF**

**Short-Term Objectives**

- Contribution to nutritional welfare
- Contribution to health
- Prevention of internal migration
- Defence of rural-rural and rural-urban terms of trade
- Support to household food security strategies
- Contribution to household consumption
- Contribution to employment

**Long-term objectives**

- Contribution to new employment opportunities
- Contribution to household investment
- Contribution to community investment
- Contribution to national investment