

Band Aids and Beyond

Tackling disasters in Ethiopia 25 years after the famine

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Sarahaa Malmud Muhumed next to an Oxfam-built *birkhad*, a protected pond for collecting rainwater to use during the long dry season, Harshin, Somali region. Credit: Oxfam/Maite Alvarez

In 1984, a massive humanitarian operation was launched in response to famine in Ethiopia. Thousands of lives were saved. Twenty-five years on, as droughts become dangerously common, we have to look beyond the traditional ‘band-aid’ responses. For Ethiopians it is more sustainable and dignified to identify and tackle the *risk* of disaster rather than simply waiting for disaster to strike. This approach is also a more cost-effective way for Northern countries to meet their responsibilities.

However, Disaster Risk Management remains small-scale. This has to change. Ethiopians on the frontline of climate change cannot wait another 25 years for common sense to become common practice.

Foreword



Birhan Woldu

Credit: A-CET/A. Edwards

My name is Birhan Woldu. In 2005 I came to realise that I had become the face of the Ethiopian famine, although as a young child in 1984–5 I knew or understood little about this disaster. I was featured in a Canadian TV documentary as the ‘face of hope for Africa’ who survived the famine and that TV interviewer Brian Stewart became a friend of my family. Twenty years later, in 2005, I was on stage with Madonna and Bob Geldof for the Live8 concert in London. I have now graduated with a diploma in agriculture and a degree in nursing.

All of this has been possible because, 25 years ago, my life was saved by Irish nursing sisters who gave me an injection, and food aid from organisations like Band Aid. So it may seem strange for me to say now that to get food aid from overseas is not the best way. As well as being demeaning to our dignity, my education has taught me that constantly shipping food from places like the USA is costly, uneconomic, and can encourage dependency.

We are a big country and when there is famine in one part of the country there is plenty in another. So we need better infrastructure and communications to move food around to where it is needed. Above all we need education. We Ethiopians are an intelligent, tough, and hard-working people with a culture going back thousands of years, and all of us want education. For example, my father is a farmer but he is not educated. With my diploma I have been able to show him better ways to farm more efficiently and get better yields.

But until these longer-term programmes take effect we cannot simply rely on imported food aid. We know our vulnerabilities. We are a proud people. Let us grow our own food and help manage our own systems so we are not hit so hard when the next drought or flood comes. We need to approach disasters in a different way, that is more dignified and more sustainable than imported food aid. We can do this by building on communities’ own approaches.

I finish with a quote from Bob Geldof from when I was on his 2005 Live8 show in Hyde Park, London: ‘Band Aid was supposed to be just that – a “band-aid”. And it is a disgrace 20 years later we should be here today, with half the youngsters in Africa still going to bed hungry.’ What happened in 1984–5 was bad, and while we should not dwell on the past we should learn from our mistakes to ensure a better future and a country free from famine, starvation, and poverty.

Birhan Woldu

Survivor of the 1984–5 famine

Director of the local NGO Ethiopian Youth Educational Support (EYES), implementing partner of African Children’s Educational Trust (A-CET)

Summary

In 1984, one million Ethiopians died during a catastrophic famine. The government at the time hid the scale of hunger until a shocking BBC television report ignited a massive relief effort, supported by the Band Aid movement. Though this was too late for too many, thousands of lives were saved.

The severity of suffering seen 25 years ago has not returned to Ethiopia. But, as we are seeing again this year, drought still plagues the country. Oxfam estimates that drought costs Ethiopia roughly \$1.1bn a year – almost eclipsing the total annual overseas assistance to the country. The damage done by drought could increase too. Climatic projections predict that, by the 50th anniversary of the 1984 famine, what we now call drought will be the norm, hitting the region in three years out of four.

Each drought demands that the government co-ordinate timely humanitarian response, but we have to ask: what can be done to prevent the next drought from becoming a disaster? The humanitarian response to drought and other disasters is still dominated by ‘band-aids’ such as imported food aid. This saves lives now, but it does little to help communities withstand the next shock.

Seventy per cent of humanitarian aid to Ethiopia comes from the USA. Most of this is ‘in-kind’ food aid, subject to conditions which have nothing to do with development and mean that it costs up to \$2 of US taxpayers’ money to deliver \$1 of food aid. This begs a second question: are there any more cost-effective ways of dealing with disasters?

The Disaster Risk Management (DRM) approach goes a long way to answering both these questions. DRM means the government, non-government organisations (NGOs), and the UN working in partnership with communities to identify what the threats are, such as drought or flood; to analyse how vulnerable a community or country is to them; and to decide how best to reduce the risks posed by these events, before they happen.

DRM is not a new concept, but worldwide it remains an under-used idea: just 0.14 per cent of overseas assistance is allocated specifically to tackling disaster risk. Nor is DRM the whole answer: without longer-term development of livelihoods, for instance through improvements in natural resource management and farming practices, Ethiopians will still be vulnerable to shocks such as drought; and in the meantime emergency aid will still be required. But framing the response to disasters within DRM, as the Ethiopian government is now trying to do, compared with the current over-reliance on band-aid responses, is:

- More cost-effective: aiming to reduce the need for expensive emergency response; for instance, in a drought providing food in exchange for work on a water conservation project that increases farmers’ productivity;

- More sustainable: within DRM, immediate needs are met but there is greater focus on how communities can prepare for the next disaster. DRM gives communities, and especially women, the dignity of building on their assets, abilities, and practices;
- Better suited to the situation of Ethiopians: the DRM approach emphasises local capacity, where people are best placed to understand and address the risks.

Over the past 25 years, the advantages of this DRM approach have become so plain that the remaining question is: why it is not already the guiding approach to disasters in Ethiopia? Donors in particular have further to go to link humanitarian response to development, but all humanitarian stakeholders have a role in making DRM common practice:

- The Ethiopian government should bring together all relevant actors, including national civil society and donors, to lead a co-ordinated, ambitious approach to disasters that targets vulnerability and disaster risk, especially linked to climate change.
- The Ethiopian government should also ensure that all those affected by humanitarian disasters get the right aid at the right time.
- Donors should increase investment in building communities' resilience to disasters and alternatives to imported food aid, including investment in local and regional production.
- The World Food Programme (WFP) should make their emergency food aid programmes contribute more to sustainable development.

Introduction

Twenty-five years ago, the BBC broadcast a report that shocked the world. It showed the relief camp at Korem, Ethiopia. Now it is a bustling market town of 30,000 people. In October 1984, hunger was taking a life every 20 minutes. The government of the time was concentrating on fighting a civil war and so hid the extent of the suffering caused by its policies, and by a series of droughts. One million Ethiopians died as a result.

The famine sparked the Band Aid movement and the Live Aid concerts.¹ Media attention triggered food and medicine deliveries that saved thousands of lives. Still, by this stage most of the people who were at risk of dying had already died.² Since 1984, aid agencies have learned a great deal. Primarily, that needs must be recognised as they arise. This year (2009), after a series of failed rains, the Ethiopian government must shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that everyone who has been hit by drought gets the right aid at the right time.

A second lesson goes beyond the current situation: no longer should we be chasing each drought with food; we should be acting before the next drought comes. The Ethiopian government is heeding this lesson as part of what it calls a 'paradigm shift', putting Disaster Risk Management (DRM, explained below) at the centre of its approach to disasters. The international community can help make this shift happen.

Disaster Risk Management: an introduction

What does Disaster Risk Management (DRM) mean?

DRM is a system of policies, practices, and administrative processes intended to reduce the risk of disasters and their impact.³ In general, this means working in partnership with countries and communities to:

- Identify all potential *threats* to lives and livelihoods (not just one threat, such as drought) and people's *vulnerabilities* to these threats;
- Build their *resilience* – their ability to withstand shocks without jeopardising their ways of working and living.

Women have a crucial role in the response of communities to shocks such as drought, but they are too often marginalised in decision-making. To be effective, DRM must involve women and men equally.

What does DRM look like?

DRM practices and policies necessarily vary according to vulnerabilities and threats that people experience. Here are just some of the forms that DRM takes:

- Providing micro-insurance for farmers to help with rapid recovery from the most severe climatic shocks, such as prolonged drought;
- Giving communities cash in exchange for work to reduce the risk of flooding. The cash can be used to buy food locally, which also helps local markets;
- Buying food for emergency reserves from small-scale farmers in the

country or region, which provides a boost for agriculture *and* a meal for those facing hunger;

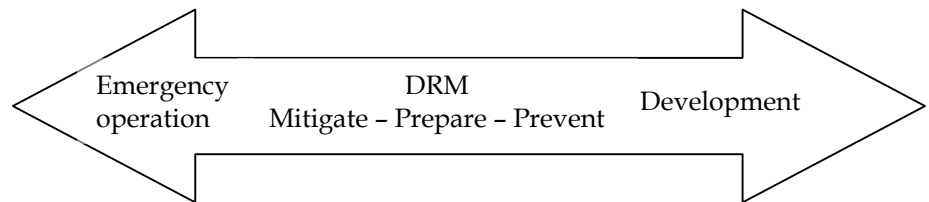
- Establishing early warning systems and standby stocks to facilitate a timely response to impending food shortages or other disasters.

The government has the primary responsibility to establish appropriate policies and to co-ordinate DRM programmes by other actors. This responsibility – and the resources to fulfil it – have to reach down to local government level, where most DRM activities take place.

Is DRM new?

It has long been recognised that in situations such as those experienced in Ethiopia, humanitarian responses are saving people's lives but not addressing the fundamental causes of the disasters. The Ethiopian government's new emphasis on DRM is an attempt to link the humanitarian and the development approaches (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: DRM in context



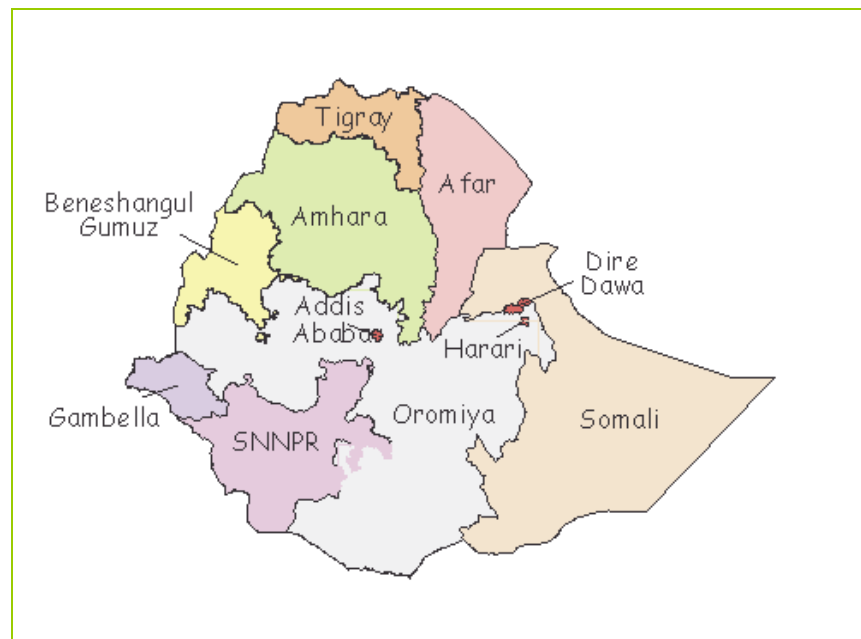
Urgently needed: change

'We can't live forever with aid, we need something more.'

Aoreden Mhaline, mother of eight, from Meremedebis, Somali region.⁴

There are already many programmes that demonstrate the value of the DRM approach, as Chapter 2 sets out. But these programmes generally remain pilot schemes, not matching the scale of the challenge.

Figure 2: Map of Ethiopia's regions



Source: ReliefWeb⁵

Chapter 3 demonstrates the economic and social costs of disastrous droughts.⁶ It is more cost-effective for Northern treasuries in the midst of economic crisis to support DRM rather than react to each drought as it happens. By supporting Ethiopians in deciding how best to respond to threats of droughts, floods, disease, or conflict, DRM responses are more sustainable and better adapted to communities' own situations.

Despite its common-sense advantages, DRM is still not the leading approach to disasters in Ethiopia. Chapter 4 asks why, in particular looking at the dominance of imported 'in-kind' food aid (i.e. food brought in from outside the region for aid). Chapter 5 sets out what all stakeholders can and should do to help communities break out of the cycle of disastrous drought in Ethiopia, and elsewhere.

2

Looking beyond band-aids

Since 1984, Ethiopia has endured six national droughts.⁷ None has caused a famine as severe as the one 25 years ago, but climate change threatens a tougher future. Average temperatures in Ethiopia are predicted to rise by 3.9°C by 2080.⁸ What we now call a drought will soon be the norm, hitting the region in up to three in every four years in the next 25 years.⁹

'We used to have six months of rainy season and six months of sunshine with small rains in between. Now apart from the small showers we receive now and then, we don't have a proper rainy season.'

Adam Fayehe, 50, Meremedebis, Somali region.¹⁰

These long-term climate changes threaten to undermine the livelihoods of millions of people. Four Ethiopians in five rely on rain for their crops and livestock – this is their food and their income. Only 1.6 per cent of Ethiopian farmland is irrigated, and even in a good year domestic production does not meet demand.¹¹

Given this vulnerability, even a small climate shock can mean months without enough food for millions of people, and such shocks are becoming increasingly frequent. Overall rainfall may increase, but it will come in short, sharp, stormy bursts that can cause flash flooding or let crops dry out with a long, uncertain wait until the next rains.¹² Faced with hunger, some fare worse than others: women are the last to eat, and younger generations migrate to seek work, leaving the elderly behind.

Drought is not a one-off occurrence, or a surprise to be reacted to as best we can. Furthermore, a drought need not mean a disaster if people are ready for it. The Ethiopian government now recognises that it needs to tackle the real and growing *risk* of disaster, and not simply wait for the disaster to strike. This should not mean abandoning 'band-aids' such as food relief, but we can look beyond these to support what Ethiopian women and men are doing to prepare for disasters and to deal with them.

The prudence of forward planning

Already many donors support DRM initiatives in Ethiopia. The table below gives just a few examples.

Examples of donor support for measures to reduce the risk of disaster

Donor	Initiative
European Community Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Drought Decision: from drought early warning systems to helping communities protect their assets, such as livestock and rangeland.
Multiple, including: Canada, European Commission (EC), Sweden, UK, USA, World Food Programme (WFP), and World Bank, plus substantial Ethiopian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Ethiopian government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) regularly gives people cash or food in exchange for work on public projects that improve their community's productivity. The programme also ensures that families whose members cannot work, for instance those led by children or elderly people, are given cash

'The past three years the rain has come late, and stopped early...The problems of people accumulate, they pile up year after year.'

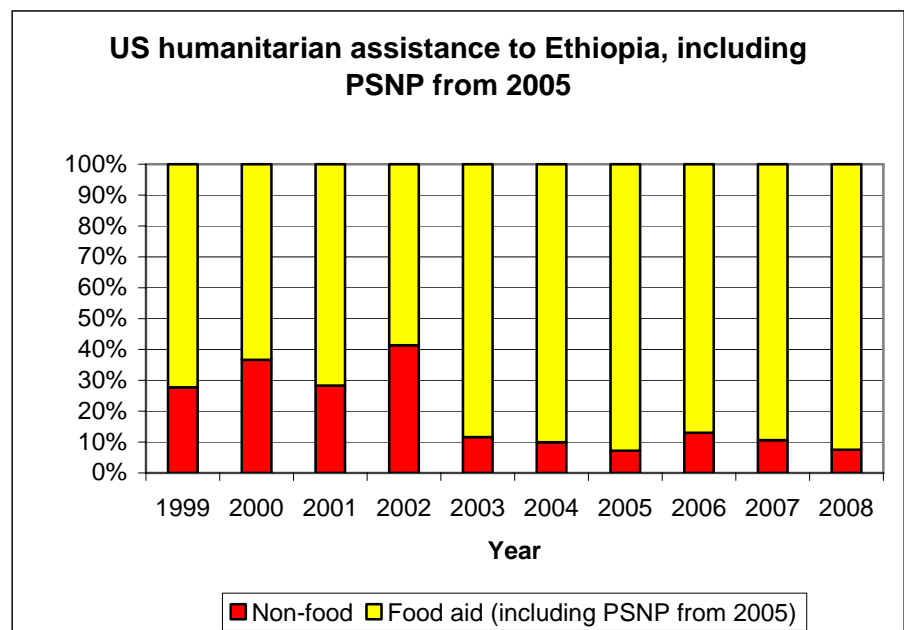
Heymanot Araya, woman farmer from Adiha, Tigray.¹³

resources	or food.
USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Famine Early Warning System Network: tracks weather patterns and food availability to predict droughts. • Pastoralist Livelihood Initiative (PLI): helps communities build their resilience to drought as a foundation for sustainable livelihoods.

Size matters

The problem is not one of understanding, but of scale. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), just 0.14 per cent of total overseas aid globally went specifically to DRM in 2007, the latest year for which data are available.¹⁴ In Ethiopia, the US government is the source of 70 per cent of humanitarian assistance, giving it a leading role in shaping the international response to disasters in Ethiopia.¹⁵ The US aid agency, USAID, officially claims to have made ‘a shift towards more sustainable solutions’, supporting livelihoods and economic resilience.¹⁶ Yet the facts tell another story, as Figure 3 shows. Last year \$561m of US relief aid, 92 per cent of the total, went on in-kind food aid (including for the Productive Safety Net Programme, PSNP – see the table, above).¹⁷ Food aid saves lives, but it crowds out other US initiatives that support communities’ strategies to prevent the next drought from becoming a disaster. One example is the Pastoralist Livelihood Initiative (PLI), which receives just \$10m a year.¹⁸ One PLI project increased the survival rate of livestock through drought by 10 per cent, leaving pastoralists in a much stronger position once the drought had passed.¹⁹

Figure 3: A food-dominated approach



Source: Oxfam chart, based on USAID data.

The European Community Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO)’s Regional Drought Decision programme, started in the period 2006–07,

was another progressive initiative (see the table, above). But the programme never grew from being a €40m pilot initiative spread across six countries and it will likely have ended by 2011. Meanwhile, ECHO is trying to integrate DRM into all of its emergency work. However, it is bound to one-year limits for its projects – not enough to help communities build their disaster resilience – and there is no system in place for linking with medium-term DRM projects.

A safety net – with holes

As a move towards prioritising DRM in Ethiopia, the PSNP was a groundbreaking initiative.²⁰ Since 2005, this government-led programme has grown to \$500m a year, reaching nearly eight million chronically food-insecure people. But four years into the programme, participants are still struggling to get reliable access to food.

Delayed distributions and rising food prices have hindered progress. More profoundly than this, too much is expected of the PSNP. If the food or cash deliveries are made on time, and if the public works they support are durable and designed by the community, then the PSNP can help households get through this ‘hunger season’ and be better prepared for the next one. But the PSNP cannot also be expected to end food shortages in Ethiopia. This requires more investment in complementary programmes such as credit and insurance, and in broader agricultural development, for instance improving farming practices and management of natural resources. Otherwise food production will not increase, generally food-secure farmers could join the millions of Ethiopians facing food shortages, and the PSNP will have to deal with more people, not fewer.

3

Doing aid better

The risk of disasters such as drought and flood is growing for Ethiopians. Equitable development is needed to help Ethiopians out of poverty and vulnerability, but in the meantime disasters will still strike. Preventing and preparing for them makes sense both for Ethiopian communities, and for donor treasuries.

Disastrous for the struggle against poverty

Using World Bank data and analysis, Oxfam estimates that drought cut \$1.1bn a year from Ethiopia's GDP between 1997 and 2007.²¹ This kind of estimate is never exact, so we have been conservative; using other models the estimated cost is ten times as high.

Such a massive effect on Ethiopian GDP has a double impact on levels of poverty. Firstly, disasters counteract efforts to help people get out of poverty. Even as the economy has consistently grown, drought has meant that there is \$1.1bn less money in the economy each year, which almost eclipses the \$1.3bn that Ethiopia received each year (averaged over the same 11-year period) in international assistance to tackle poverty, including humanitarian aid.²² Put another way, the \$1.1bn lost to drought is two-thirds more than the amount Ethiopia invests in agriculture, a sector that is clearly crucial for ending food shortages.²³

Secondly, beyond the impact on development *programmes*, drought itself pushes people into poverty. Over half of Ethiopia's farmers are 'severely or extremely risk averse' to making investments or to taking on new technologies – the kind of behaviour that fuels development.²⁴ This is because to do so ties up assets that communities may need if a drought hits. One study looked at how such risk attached to investment affects poverty levels. If families were guaranteed not to face food shortages over a five-year period, say due to social protection programmes like the PSNP or micro-insurance projects like those Oxfam is helping to develop in Tigray, then communities would have felt able to build up their assets and increase their income. This would then translate into 11 million fewer people being below the poverty line.²⁵

Breaking the vicious cycle

Drought is disastrous for efforts to overcome poverty. This feeds a vicious cycle: disasters push people into poverty, which makes them more vulnerable to future disasters. Northern countries have a responsibility to help Ethiopia reverse this cycle, a responsibility sharpened by climate change: rich countries got rich on carbon-intensive industries, and they must use this wealth to help countries like Ethiopia deal with the fall-out.

For the past 25 years, the international community has tended to interpret this responsibility as reacting to emergencies and supporting longer-term development, while neglecting the link between the two. Imported food aid has been the stock response to disasters, rather than an intervention for specific, urgent situations. Of the \$3.2bn of US humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia since 1991, 94 per cent has been in the form of food aid.²⁶ Last year, 99 per cent of this food aid came from within the USA. This illustrates what is known as ‘tied aid’, prioritising narrow commercial interests over effectiveness in tackling disasters. Tied aid does little to help develop agriculture, even as the US government calls agriculture Ethiopia’s ‘most promising resource’, in the long run the best means of preventing widespread food shortages in the country.²⁷ Ethiopia-based USAID staff have asked to buy more food locally, but US law stands in the way, and the US farming lobby continues to block revision of this law.²⁸

‘Yes, we need the aid for our immediate needs but we want the government, and NGOs like you, Oxfam, to help us be self-sufficient again so we can live a decent life.’

Breket Tader, chairman for Eleheley community, Somali region.²⁹

Tied aid is expensive too. Most US food aid has conditions applied to transport and packaging that mean it costs up to \$2 of US taxpayers’ money to deliver \$1 of food aid.³⁰

The bridge to development

Examples from other countries show that preparing for disasters can cost as little as 2 per cent of post-disaster relief.³¹ Band-aids like food aid will continue to be necessary in some cases to respond to hunger and disease. But all stakeholders can refocus our collective efforts to meet the immediate needs, while also trying to reverse this vicious cycle whereby disasters deepen vulnerability.

For example, farmers in the midst of food shortages in Adiha, Tigray region, received food for their work on an irrigation project supported by one of Oxfam’s partners, REST.³² As a result of this ‘food for work’ project, 500 households can now rely on a more regular supply of water and can diversify their crops. One of the farmers, Kiros Tikure, told Oxfam how his family used to have enough food for only nine months in a year. ‘Now we are happy because we can make enough food for the whole year. We can sell some to pay for clinics, school, and other things. There’s been a real change’.³³



Men clearing a road in Delenta, Amhara region, as part of an Oxfam 'cash for work' project. Credit: Oxfam/Crispin Hughes

A community near the Dawa river, Oromiya region, used a 'food for work' project to clear an access road to the local town. The food got its members through the hunger season and the road cut the time it takes to get goods to market from nearly three days to just half a day. For farmers like Huka Balambal, 'the road is everything.'³⁵

'Now we have seen it work, we can change things. Instead of waiting for aid or assistance, we should take an aggressive approach to making our community even stronger.'

Debibo Nengego, an elder in Burkitu, Oromiya.³⁴

These are just a couple of examples among many. National-level changes such as buying food aid locally or regionally can also make a huge difference. Making DRM common practice nationally can then ensure that the approach to disasters also provides a solid base for development.

Building on dignity

Beyond its efficiency and contribution to development, a DRM-centred approach allows people, especially women, the dignity of realising their own ways of dealing with disaster risk. Conversely, a 2008 study by the ODI among pastoralists in Ethiopia pointed out that food aid was in fact the *least* preferred response to drought.³⁶

The dignity to decide means that DRM projects are better suited to the local situation than if the decision is made in a distant capital. In Kanbi, Oromiya region, when a family's animals die because of drought or disease, others in the community who are better off give the destitute family animals from their own herds, helping that family recover their losses. Oxfam provides more goats to support this practice, known as *hirba dabare*. In arid Harshin, Somali region, instead of straightforward emergency relief Oxfam gives struggling communities cash or food for building *birkhads*, protected ponds that capture rain and reduce the time women have to spend fetching water.

Striking before disaster does

By helping communities prepare for disasters before they strike, DRM also mitigates against the challenges of getting humanitarian aid in the right place at the right time.

'We select what we want to do – we decide...it's our development.'

Farmer in Kolla Tembien, Tigray.³⁷

Tekian Aebera, a farmer in Central Tigray, sees for herself why being in the right place is increasingly difficult. '[Drought] comes in pockets, not everywhere at once: we might be affected here, but beyond that hill they might be fine.' Climate change is making rains unpredictable and patchy, causing localised droughts that do not fit the traditional, large-scale humanitarian responses like the one Ethiopia saw in 1984. Strengthening what communities and local government are doing to identify and manage risk, on the other hand, is a more cost-effective way of meeting disasters wherever they hit.³⁸

'We live with the food aid we receive. [But] it can stop anytime. We need something that is sustainable.'

Hasena, a woman from Eleheley, Somali region.³⁹

On top of the challenge of being in the right place, emergency distributions of imported food often arrive months late. Women are generally the primary care-givers in Ethiopian households, but when food is short they feel the impact first – which then has a lasting impact on the whole family. This is just one way in which communities' resilience to future disasters is eroded during delays in food relief. An Oxfam study found that in the face of drought and other shocks 42 per cent of people in rural areas sell their livestock – one of their most important productive assets.⁴⁰ The price they get from these 'distress sales' is often less than half the normal price.⁴¹

Food shortages affect children the most. They may be taken out of school to work or be deprived of food at a crucial stage in their development. Children born to the families hit hardest by the 1984 famine were on average 3cm shorter than other children, signifying reduced learning and earning potential for the rest of their lives.⁴² In sum, the result of emergency aid coming late is that the most vulnerable families become even more vulnerable.

Obstacles to the obvious

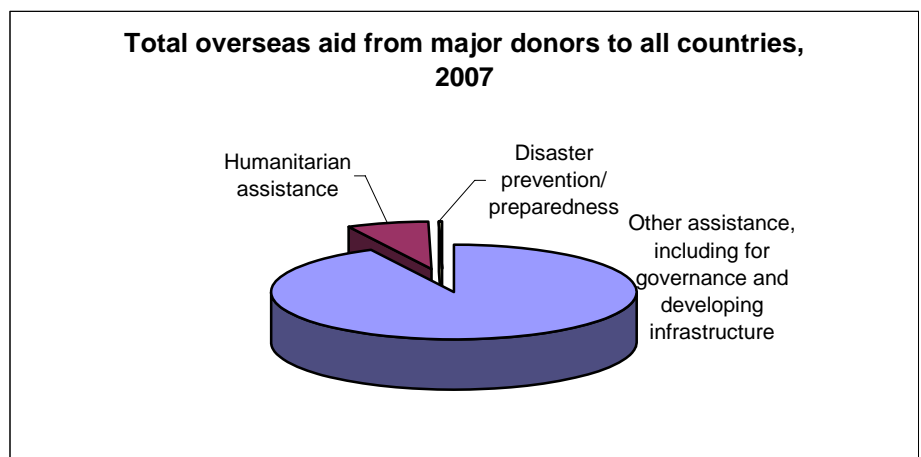
In the past 25 years, the common-sense advantages of addressing disaster *risk* have become increasingly clear. But the application of DRM remains far too limited given the scale of chronic disaster in Ethiopia. This chapter tries to explain why.

Donor approaches

Reliance on tied food aid is sustained by narrow commercial interests. The Food Aid Convention, a treaty first signed in 1967, favours the use of donor countries' harvests over supporting local production.⁴³ Under US legislation, almost all US food aid must be purchased in the USA and 75 per cent must be shipped on US vessels.⁴⁴ Moreover, donor governments may be tempted by TV images of branded bags of grain to rely too heavily on food aid, even where preventing the crisis would have been cheaper.

Self-interest translates into technical obstacles to DRM. Broadly speaking, donor support for Ethiopia is split between two 'pots'. Emergency funding is short-term in implementation and impact. The second pot is longer-term development, which generally goes to government services such as education, health, and infrastructure development. DRM falls between the two, a problem not unique to Ethiopia: worldwide, 7.5 per cent of all aid goes to humanitarian relief. Of this, less than 2 per cent goes to DRM.⁴⁵

Figure 4: Disaster risk – the missing link



Source: Oxfam chart, using OECD data.

Without dedicated funding to DRM, money has to be squeezed out of emergency pots. This has a number of consequences. Firstly, disaster response and DRM are too often not linked with development projects, even when humanitarian needs and chronic poverty are intertwined. Secondly, agencies are reluctant to invest in DRM with only the short-term funding that humanitarian donors provide. Finally, accountability to Northern taxpayers suffers because excessively tight humanitarian

mandates have to be stretched to fit the situation. Donors could give Ethiopian communities and Northern taxpayers much better value.

Divided nations

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), under the leadership in Ethiopia of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), is responsible for linking relief, recovery, and development operations. But from the top down this has not yet translated into an organisational priority. On the humanitarian side, co-ordination is organised around sectors, like water and nutrition, which does not match cross-sectoral approaches such as DRM.

Food aid in Ethiopia is particularly important for the World Food Programme (WFP): although some WFP activities in the country support community-based agricultural development, the overwhelming majority are emergency-oriented – and Ethiopia is the WFP's second largest programme worldwide. The programme also has significant weight within the UN: donors' humanitarian contributions to the WFP in Ethiopia in 2008 were over four times as large as those to the three next largest UN programmes combined.⁴⁶ However, the WFP has yet to use this weight fully to help leverage a shift away from imported food aid.

Resources and priorities

The shift to DRM has been attempted in the past. But a lack – or insufficient decentralisation – of resources has meant the approach has defaulted back to repeated disaster responses.⁴⁷ For local authorities and communities to be able to lead on DRM, their responsibility has to be backed by enough resources at the local level.

Recognising urgent humanitarian needs is a sign of responsive governance and tackles the slide from vulnerability to disastrous loss of life. The government in 1984, known as the Derg, faced a civil war and prioritised political control over the lives of Ethiopians. Some groups were denied life-saving aid for political reasons. Humanitarian agencies were strictly controlled and hunger was kept hidden until the sheer scale of the suffering made this impossible. Failing to acknowledge and respond to the famine contributed to the Derg's eventual downfall: not addressing the immediate needs backfired. Today, not recognising the needs would lead to lives being lost, vulnerability getting deeper, and development being slowed.

Recommendations

It makes economic, practical, and moral sense to put DRM at the centre of the international approach to disasters in Ethiopia. This chapter sets out the practical steps that all the main stakeholders can take to move to an approach better suited to the country's climatic and financial challenges, present and future.

The government's lead

The Ethiopian government is renewing efforts to strengthen communities' resilience to disasters. To consolidate this shift, the government should:

- Establish a National Platform for DRM under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. This should be a forum for developing policies and mobilising funds for DRM programmes that cohere with humanitarian and development initiatives, with particular attention given to the most vulnerable groups, such as female-headed households. The Platform should be a partnership with local authorities, major donors, the UN, NGOs, and local civil society, notably women's groups.
- Link this platform to the National Climate Change Forum and the National Adaptation Plan of Action.
- Direct greater support to initiatives complementary to the PSNP, while continuing to improve the targeting, reliability, and inclusiveness of the programme.
- Co-ordinate timely, appropriate, and sufficient response to early warning signals and emergencies, taking measures to address the specific needs of women, children, and elderly people.

The role of donors

Rich countries have the twin responsibilities of ensuring cost-effectiveness for their own citizens while supporting development in the face of more frequent climate-related disasters. Accordingly, to back the shift to DRM, donors should:

- Break out of the development/humanitarian divide by investing in responses to emergency needs that contribute to communities' resilience to disasters, with particular focus on local government and building on women's assets and capabilities.
- Increase support for alternatives to imported food aid that bolster local markets, such as cash for work, micro-insurance, and local or regional purchase of food aid.
- Reform the Food Aid Convention to tackle food insecurity and improve the way that procurement of food aid supports

development.

There are other things that specific donors can do:

- The USA should further untie aid from US producers to make it more cost-effective and should adhere to its Good Humanitarian Donorship commitment to ‘provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development.’⁴⁸
- Other significant donors such as the European Commission (EC), the UK, the Netherlands, and Canada have moved away from using their own food surpluses as food aid towards a policy of cash-based food aid. They should encourage the USA to follow suit.
- The EC should seek means of financing DRM projects beyond the PSNP. In the meantime, as part of its DRM mainstreaming, ECHO should systematically facilitate links between emergency projects and medium-term projects.

United against disasters

The UN needs to adapt to the Ethiopian context of chronic disasters. Specifically:

- The RC/HC must lead efforts to bridge humanitarian and development work, including strengthening the UNDP’s capacity on DRM. This should not jeopardise the independence of humanitarian action.
- The WFP should ensure that procurement of emergency food aid supports local and regional development, and ensure that it benefits marginal farmers.

NGOs and civil society

Although NGOs are often associated with the band-aid approach, increasingly they are working alongside the government to support communities in risk management. NGOs – national and international, including women’s federations and local co-operatives – need to find ways to consolidate their experiences to contribute to the shift to DRM most effectively.

Notes

- ¹ In response to the famine in 1984, the musicians Bob Geldof and Midge Ure established Band Aid, a 'super group' whose title was a play on words on the American term for a sticking plaster that is applied to a wound. Band Aid recorded the song 'Do They Know it's Christmas?' to raise money for those affected by famine. The song became the fastest- and biggest-selling record of all time in the UK. The following year, Geldof and Ure organised simultaneous live concerts in London and Philadelphia, which were seen on television by an estimated 400 million people. These concerts – Live Aid – were also to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia.
- ² A. Natsios, quoted in S. Moeller (1999), *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death*, New York: Routledge, p.112.
- ³ DRM is closely related to Community-Based Risk Management, Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR, the term Oxfam generally uses). However, the Ethiopian government is using the DRM terminology, so this is what we use throughout this report. For more detail on these definitions, see D. Maxwell, P. Webb, J. Coates, and J. Wirth (2008) 'Rethinking Food Security in Humanitarian Response', Rome: Tufts University; or Oxfam International (2009) 'Disaster Risk Reduction', Oxfam International humanitarian policy note, Oxford: Oxfam.
- ⁴ Interview with Oxfam, July 2009, Aisha, Somali region.
- ⁵ Adapted from Relief Web (2000) 'Administrative Regions and Zones of Ethiopia', www.reliefweb.int/mapc/afr_ne/cnt/eth/ethiopia_zones.html (last checked by the author 13 September 2009).
- ⁶ Although DRM has to have a multi-hazard approach, more attention is given to drought because it affects the largest number of people. According to Prevention Web, 9.3 million people face the threat of to drought each year, compared with 1.06 million people threatened by earthquake, flood, and landslide combined. Prevention Web (2009) 'Ethiopia – risk profile', www.preventionweb.net/english/countries/statistics/risk.php?iso=eth (last checked by the author 13 September 2009).
- ⁷ Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster (CRED) (2009) 'EM-DAT Emergency Events Database', www.emdat.be (last checked by the author 2 July 2009).
- ⁸ Department for International Development (2009) 'Climate Change Facts – Ethiopia', London: DFID, p.1.
- ⁹ M. Webster, J. Ginnette, P. Walker, D. Coppard, and R. Kent (2008) 'The Humanitarian Costs of Climate Change', Medford: Feinstein International Center, p.16.
- ¹⁰ Interview with Oxfam, July 2009, Aisha, Somali region.
- ¹¹ FAO, WFP (2009) 'Special Report: Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to Ethiopia', Rome: FAO, p.13, p.33.
- ¹² O. Brown and A. Crawford (2009) 'Climate Change and Security in Africa', Manitoba: IISD, p.8.
- ¹³ Interview with Oxfam, July 2009, Adiha, Tigray region.
- ¹⁴ Figures are not available for Ethiopia specifically or for the region. According to the OECD, the main donors (the 22 members of the Development Assistance Committee) gave \$92.8bn in overseas aid in 2007, of which \$131.36m was for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness (DPP). The proportions given in the report are actually understated: commodity aid for emergencies is not accounted for in humanitarian aid. If it were, this would further decrease the proportion of total humanitarian assistance that goes to DPP. However, this has been left out because the definitions are not clear as to what is humanitarian commodity aid and what is commodity aid for development. OECD (2009) 'Query Wizard for International Development Statistics', <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/> (last checked by the author 10 September 2009).
- ¹⁵ OCHA (2009) 'Financial Tracking Service', <http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/pageloader.aspx> (last checked by the author 21 July 2009).
- ¹⁶ USAID (2009) 'Ethiopia: USAID Humanitarian Assistance in Review, 1991 – Present', updated January 2009, Washington, D.C.: USAID, p.1.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.1; Save the Children US (2009) 'Modernizing Foreign Assistance: Insights from the Field: Ethiopia', Washington: SC US, p.8; OCHA, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁸ Save the Children US, *op. cit.*, p.13.
- ¹⁹ A.M. del Castilo and J. Graham (2008) 'Aiding pastoralists in the Horn of Africa', www.america.gov/st/develop-english/2008/June/20080616000549xjyrrep3.794497e-02.html (last checked by the author 13 September 2009).
- ²⁰ While the PSNP is not seen as a DRM project, it does follow similar principles. The PSNP is a form of social protection, a means of ensuring that people who face food shortages year in, year out can be assured of a reliable food supply. In this sense, the PSNP can be included in discussion of DRM, because it aims to prevent food shortages from becoming disastrous in terms of lost lives and livestock.

²¹ According to the World Bank, one drought hitting Ethiopia once in a 12-year period will knock 7–10 per cent off GDP growth over that period. According to CRED data, drought has struck five times in the past 12 years. Oxfam took Ethiopia's GDP data from the World Development Indicators (GDP, PPP, constant prices) and applied the loss to a 7 per cent reduction in GDP growth every year from 1997–2007 (the latest year for which figures are available, and therefore making the analysis span 11 years, within the span of the World Bank estimate). Between 1997 and 2007, the result was that Ethiopia's cumulative actual GDP over this period was \$11.82bn below what it would have been without drought, or \$1.07bn less per year. (More information on the methodology is available on request.) C. Sadoff (2006) 'Can Water Undermine Growth? Evidence from Ethiopia', Agricultural and Rural Development Note 18, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, p.3; Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster (CRED), *op. cit.*

Oxfam believes this to be a conservative estimate, for a number of reasons:

- We took the 7 per cent figure – the bottom of the estimated range.
- The World Bank deems the assumption that one drought hits Ethiopia in 12 years to be 'a very conservative estimate'.
- According to CRED, drought has hit Ethiopia five times in the past 12 years. We only applied the 7 per cent figure to the 1997 drought, rather than knocking a further 5 per cent off growth after each subsequent drought.
- Rainfall variability, which is a better approximation of the situation in Ethiopia but which includes the effects of both drought and flood, cuts GDP growth rates by 38 per cent. If historical levels of variability and the partial impacts of floods are incorporated, GDP growth rates fall by 20–43 per cent.
- We conducted a sensitivity analysis using another model, and our estimate fell towards the lower end of the range given by this second model.

²² According to the international development statistics database of OECD-DAC, Ethiopia received \$14.6bn in overseas development assistance from all donors from 1997 to 2007. See OECD, *op. cit.*

²³ According to the article 'The 10 percent that could change Africa,' published in October 2008 in the IFPRI Forum online magazine, measuring national budget expenditures to agriculture has been difficult, and findings vary widely. 'Due to a lack of clear criteria for evaluation and different sources of data, reporting results tend to vary based on who is doing the calculating and how, and on how "agricultural spending" is defined.' With this caveat, according to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in 2005 Ethiopia invested between 11 and 12 per cent of government expenditure in agriculture. Assuming this remained the same until 2008, when the CIA Factbook records government expenditure as \$5.34bn, this means that investment in agriculture is between \$0.59bn and \$0.64bn, or between 67 per cent and 80 per cent of \$1.07bn. NEPAD (2008) 'April–June 2008 NEPAD Agriculture Unit Quarterly Report', South Africa: NEPAD, p.5; CIA (2009) 'World Factbook: Ethiopia'. www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/et.html (last checked by the author 9 September 2009).

²⁴ M. Yesuf and R. Bluffstone (2007) 'Risk Aversion in Low Income Countries: Experimental Evidence from Ethiopia', IFPRI discussion paper 00715, Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, p.vi.

²⁵ S. Dercon (2004) 'Growth and shocks: Evidence from rural Ethiopia', *Journal of Development Economics*, 74: 309-29, quoted in UNDP (2008) 'Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World', <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/chapters/>, pp.84-5 (last checked by the author 11 September 2009). The project referred to here is providing insurance to farmers against poor rainfall affecting their *teff* crops. The project combines social protection, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation approaches and is being implemented with the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and Swiss Re, the re-insurance company.

²⁶ USAID (2009) 'Ethiopia: USAID Humanitarian Assistance in Review, 1991 – Present', http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACN199.pdf (last checked by the author 11 September 2009), p.2.

²⁷ US State Department (2009) 'Background note: Ethiopia', www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2859.htm (last checked by the author 31 July 2009).

²⁸ ActionAid International (2005) 'Real Aid: An Agenda for Making Aid Work', Johannesburg: AAI, p.26.

²⁹ Interview with Oxfam, July 2009, Aisha, Somali region.

³⁰ USAID (2008) 'Ethiopia – Complex Emergency: Situation Report #2 Fiscal Year (FY) 2009', Washington, D.C.: USAID, p.2; IRIN (2009) 'Winds of change in US food aid policy?', http://aem.cornell.edu/faculty_sites/cbb2/Media/IRIN4Mar09.pdf (last checked by the author August 2009). Between October 2007 and December 2008, the USA provided \$621m of in-kind food assistance (roughly half for food aid and half for PSNP) plus \$3.9m for the local purchase in Ethiopia of food assistance. This means that 1.3 per cent of emergency food aid (\$300m) was provided for in-country purchase.

³¹ Oxfam (2008) 'Rethinking Disasters: Why Death and Destruction Is Not Nature's Fault but Human Failure', Oxford: Oxfam, p.20.

³² The Relief Society of Tigray (REST) is an Ethiopian NGO and a longtime Oxfam partner. It was established in 1978 by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF, now the leading party in Ethiopia's governing coalition) to carry out relief, rehabilitation, and development programmes in the liberated areas of Tigray during the 1975-1991 civil war. Today it is the largest operational NGO in the Tigray Regional State.

³³ Interview with Oxfam, July 2009, Adiha, Central Tigray.

³⁴ Interview with Oxfam, Dugda Dawa, Oromiya, June 2009.

³⁵ Interview with Oxfam, August 2009, Liben zone, Oromiya region.

³⁶ S. Pantuliano and M. Wekesa (2008) 'Improving Drought Response in Pastoral Areas of Ethiopia: Somali and

Afar regions and Borena zone of Oromiya region', London: ODI, p.14.

³⁷ Group discussion with farmers in Kolla Tembien, Central Tigray, July 2009.

³⁸ United Nations (2009) '2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and poverty in a changing climate: invest today for a safer tomorrow', Geneva: United Nations, p.177.

³⁹ Interview with Oxfam, Eleheley, Somali region, July 2009.

⁴⁰ Oxfam America (2009) 'Climate Change Impacts and Resilience Responses', Addis Ababa: Oxfam America, p.8.

⁴¹ United Nations, *op. cit.*, p.81.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.83.

⁴³ Through the Food Aid Convention (FAC), all main donors are committed to provide annual resources to developing countries for the provision of food aid. The current rules and procedures of the FAC discourage more appropriate forms of assistance, and in particular 'twinning': country A providing cash to finance transport and distribution costs of food aid where food is provided by country B (e.g. Ethiopia) cannot be accounted for as a contribution against one's commitment. This limits local procurement options despite existing potential.

⁴⁴ For more detail on this, please see the following articles: IRIN (2009) 'Winds of change in US food aid policy?', http://aem.cornell.edu/faculty_sites/cbb2/Media/IRIN4Mar09.pdf (last checked by the author July 2009); Oxfam America (2009) 'The Tied Aid "Round Trip"', Boston: Oxfam America, p.1; General Accounting Office (1990) 'Cargo Preference Requirements: Their impact on US food aid programs and the US Merchant Marine', NSIAD-90-174, Washington, D.C.: GAO, p.1.

⁴⁵ See endnote 14.

⁴⁶ OCHA, *op. cit.* The three other agencies referred to are UNICEF (received \$35.7m), FAO (\$7.8m), and the World Health Organization (\$7.5m). WFP received \$225m, which is 4.4 times as much as the others put together. This only counts the contributions registered on ReliefWeb as contributions to the national programmes; it does not include contributions from central agency funding or some in-kind contributions that are not registered with ReliefWeb.

⁴⁷ For one perspective on this, see S. Lautze, A. Raven-Roberts, and T. Erkinch (2009) 'Humanitarian Governance in the New Millennium: An Ethiopian case study', London: ODI.

⁴⁸ Good Humanitarian Donorship (2003) 'Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship', www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/background.asp (last checked by the author 12 September 2009). The principle referred to is number 9.

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