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# Images of Africa

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## *Special Report*

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*The Image of Africa* project studied perceptions of the 1984/85 hunger crisis. The project was funded by the EEC, the Director General for Development Co-operation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Non-governmental organisations who took part in the project. The participating groups were: Cornite Francais Contre la Faim, Danchurchard (Denmark), Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (FKG), Oxfam (U.K.), SOS-Faim (Belgium), Trocaire (Ireland), CRIC, Crocevia and Terra Nouvli, Association des Six S (Burkina Faso), ENDA-TM (Senegal), Gabinete de Comunicacao Social (Mozambique), Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress (Zimbabwe), also consultants from Ethiopia and Niger.

The European group and the African group produced separate reports.

Through the courtesy of IFDA Dossier, we present below, excerpts of the synthesis of each of these reports.

*Editor*

## **A. The Image of Africa in the Western Media**

Research on the press and television drew attention to the way in which the famine was presented: the causes advanced, the space allotted to a description of African efforts to overcome the crisis and the space allotted to the African point of view.

The analysis covered periods when the activities of aid campaigns in the various European countries were most significant. The research analysed a period around the end of 1984 in which there was maximum information coverage in all the countries. The research also analysed one or more previous and subsequent periods, taking into consideration a sample of the most widely read daily and weekly papers and national television.

In each country the research concentrated on several major initiatives for the provision of aid which succeeded in attracting the attention of the public and of the media; this was mainly around the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985.

On 23 October, English television transmitted the reportage by M. Buerk that marked the start of the intensive information campaign by the English and Irish press and television, and the humanitarian initiatives. In October the

"African sulter" campaign was launched in Denmark. On 22 December, the Italian government passed a decree allocating Lit. 1 900 thousand million for emergency aid, which after a few months became an 'ad hoc' law. In the Federal Republic of Germany, 23 January was "Africa Day".

A quantitative analysis shows how in the period October-December 1984 there was an appreciable increase in news about Africa, particularly on the dramatic famine situation, which reached its peak on the days on which, in each country, the most important initiatives were taken.

The quality of the reporting was not, unfortunately, as satisfactory as the quantity. Researchers in all the countries are unanimous on this point. Looking at the subject matter in terms of percentages, it may be observed that for the most part (63% in Italy, 74% in FRG), it consisted in a description of local events, without linking them to underlying causes. Only a small percentage of the news was based on surveys or interviews intended to go deeper into the problems. Most of the reports simply provided empirical data without supporting background.

As regards the type of news published, pride of place in all countries went to:

- The 'famine' and the delivery of aid, almost always with reference to Ethiopia (in all countries, and in Italy also for Sahel zone).
- The internal political tensions in some African countries (particularly when European citizens were involved, or kidnapped, as in Mozambique and Ethiopia).
- Exchanges of official visits between European and African authorities.

Broadly speaking, there was no continuity in the information on Africa and news came out intermittently, when anything exceptional happened.

With regard to the subject matter, this was often African political institutions (government bodies, military groups, institutional summits) or European political institutions (parliament, governments, parties): The dominant news items covered legislation with regard to the dispatch of aid [IT], the delivery of emergency aid [BEL, and, to a considerable extent, all European countries], coups d'état, revolts, struggles between military groups. The base groups, the non-governmental or international organisations, on the other hand, were seldom the main news item. In particular, the impact of international organisations on the media was reduced to that of "reliable sources" for statistical and quantitative data only [BEL, IT]; the programmes [IT] and their view of interdependence [BEL] were not used as sources of information. There was practically no reference to African government or community initiatives to weather the crisis; if there was any mention of local communities it was only to highlight the precarious conditions of survival, or to provide a background for the dispatch of 'aid' from the donor country [IT, IK, BEL]. The subject of self-development was almost totally ignored.

One distortion noted everywhere in the information sprang from concentration on a few subjects and countries: the food shortage in Ethiopia

and, to a lesser extent, in the Sudan. There was little or no mention of other countries: only in the case of South Africa was the information sufficiently systematic as regards both time and subject matter to provide the public with the rational elements to situate and understand the underlying causes of events [IT].

In many cases (60% in FRG) there was talk in general terms of a crisis 'in Africa' without further specification. The prevailing images were those of an apathetic Africa, full of problems and crises; of an exotic and dangerous Africa, in which very different laws were in force from those in 'civilised' countries, ravaged by revolts and disturbances; of a hungry and thirsty Africa, without hope; lastly, of an Africa inhabited almost exclusively by Ethiopians and Sudanese.

The same conclusions were reached by an English research on 'keywords' and photographs. The word most often used was 'rebel' in reporting the news on insurgency and coups d'état. In a series of reports from Zimbabwe the words were 'homicide', 'atrocities', 'kidnapping' and 'dissidents'. More generally, an emotive terminology tended to show Africa and the Africans as extreme stereotypes: the 'rebels' had no voice, were represented as 'uncivilised' or 'primitive warriors', while the Europeans involved in the disturbances were 'innocent victims' or 'hostages'. The campaign conducted by the *Daily Mirror* to raise funds for Burkina Faso showed the same dichotomy in its approach: the African country was the 'poorest and hungriest', inhabited by desperate, suffering families, by children dying of hunger; the response of the 'dear readers' was 'magnificent' and 'generous'.

From Belgian studies it emerged that in the construction of the phenomenon 'famine' there were two systematic identifications: generalisation and naturalisation of the phenomenon..

The same sensation was transmitted with the photographs accompanying the services, which usually showed people as pitiful victims of uncontrollable events. This effect was achieved through pictures taken out of context, close-up, emphasising body language and facial expression. The photos seemed to be taken from above, without any eye contact, so as to give an impression of apathy and despair, contrasting with European ability to take action. The photograph of the "mother and child" was used for explicitly emotive purposes, as were those of starving children or old people. Other pictures showed camps built with aid, or the arrival of food commodities.

These are images that have the power to obscure any positive aspect of life; and when this *does* appear in the photo (peasants or families at work), the commentary highlights the negative aspects: 'poor things', 'a miserable life' ... [UK].

As regards the causes of the food shortage, even when they were not mentioned, the impression was given that they consisted in bad harvests and drought; that these countries had been struck by natural events over which they had no control. In some cases the media drew attention to the EEC cereals surplus, implying that the problem consisted in unequal distribution

of commodities and in the need for redistribution of surpluses [IRE]. Apart from the most obvious causes (drought and food shortage), the commonest explanations, in the few cases where some attempt was made to give any, emphasised excessive military expenditure (particularly in Ethiopia) and inadequate local administrations. All this leads to the conclusion that the prevailing image of Africa in the media during and after the 1984 crisis was that of a continent in permanent need of assistance, of salvation from outside. The Africans were reduced to the level of consumer apprentices, incapable of analysing their own problems or becoming the protagonists of their own development.

It would be a mistake to limit discussion of the role played by the media to these aspects alone. Although it is indeed true that the image described so far is the one put across most frequently and therefore most strongly, research has also revealed the existence of attempts to go deeper into the problems and escape from a stereotyped image. This was usually information material directed to a more qualified and restricted public, only occasionally appearing in the papers and specialised press, or else it took the form of television or filmed documentaries seeking the underlying causes of famine or tackling the problem of long-term development [IT, IRE]. Research shows that these messages were "reserved" for a selected portion of the public, because of the style of their headlines or the time slots they received on television [IT, IRE, BEL].

The exceptional prominence given to the famine meant that a space was created for African questions in sectors of the media that would not previously have been interested: music, children's press, fashion weeklies, etc. [UK]. Nevertheless, national research shows how marginal African culture is on the European scene.

Lastly, it emerged that some journalists and photographers tried to introduce a more radical approach in their work, becoming aware that, if they could not change the rules of the game, they could at least contribute to opening a debate [IRE, UK]. A debate that in the English case took the form of self-analysis, of articles and television programmes discussing the approach of the media to the famine. Such a process of reflection will be valuable if it leads to a different image of Africa, one that takes into account of Africans, of the reality and diversity of their conditions in countries that have a past, a present and a future [UK].

### **The Image of Africa Put Out by the NGOs**

NGO activities during the African crisis were analysed through the dispatch of questionnaires [UK, IT], interviews [UK, FRG], and a study of materials published by them [UK, DEN, FRG, IRE, BEL].

The NGO messages coming across in information on the African crisis varied considerably and depended to a certain extent on the different ideological orientations. In most cases the declared objectives were to

highlight the less obvious causes of the famine (70% in UK), to analyse the role of European governments, and to provide information on long-term development policies and self-sufficiency (50% in UK.) The keywords of their action show that they were obliged to drop this type of structured information and use the same biased, stereotyped but effective images as the press and television. Linguistically, most of the NGO messages fell into the category, 'underdevelopment/aid' [BEL].

This contradiction in NGO information during the crisis springs from the material conditions in which they work. On the one hand, for many of them survival is closely linked to collecting money from the public, which obliges them to operate in an undiscerning information market, on the basis of the stereotypes already familiar, to appeal to emotions, since "people give with their hearts rather than with their heads": in that short period, people were far more generous when faced with photographs of famine victims [UK]. On the other hand, NGOs are usually involved in long-term programmes and in 'development education' intended to provide a more complex and realistic view of problems and to challenge these very stereotypes. The contradiction emerges also from the analysis of published materials: in that intended for aid campaigns there is a large percentage of photographs of victims, mostly women and children (60% in the UK), and attention is focused on very few realities: Ethiopia (50%), Sudan (20%); the same image of the Africans as passive receivers of aid is put forward again. In the educational material, on the other hand, the opposite prevails: the Africans are shown as active and participating in the development process (95% of the photos in the UK), attempts are made to understand what lies behind the food shortage and the operations of European and African politicians are analysed.

All this leads to some considerations on the NGOs' ability to influence public opinion positively with regard to problems of underdevelopment in Africa.

In fact it is considered that the latter type of a more structured image is intended for a restricted public whereas the stereotype information is directed to a far vaster public, and if it is also borne in mind that the NGOs, information resources are not comparable with those available to major newspapers and television, it may be concluded that the NGOs' role in providing a less biased and false image is very limited. In many cases NGOs have admitted finding themselves saddled with a large-scale publicity campaign whose contents were not programmed by them; having served rather as a channel for enthusiasm generated by the media than as producers of independent responses; not having been able – or perhaps not even having tried – to carry people beyond the initial enthusiasm by raising some basic questions [UK].

Many European NGOs say that, during the period analysed, they lived with two contradictions: first, the contradiction between fund-raising based on emotive themes and the conduct of complex long-term projects; and secondly, the attempt to harness the 'emergency' for development.

Reconciling the contradictions took various forms: in some cases, fund-raising was on the basis of requests that had nothing to do with NGO programmes, or development education activities; in the Italian and Irish cases, there was a form of specialisation among NGOs, who were divided into one group concerned with humanitarian aid and other mainly concerned with development projects.

In many cases attempts were made to link aid to more broadly-based projects; there emerged, however, a widespread mistrust of the use of the 'emergency' category in launching new programmes [IT].

More generally, short and long-term strategies co-existed dramatically within the same NGOs; the methods of conducting the emergency campaign came dangerously near to thwarting the objectives of correct development education, while the long-term work consisted in dismantling the stereotypes thus disseminated.

### **The Image of Africa in the Public Mind**

This part of the research was conducted in four countries [DEN, UK, FRG, IRE] with various methodologies: free association hinging on the word 'Africa' [DEN, UK], asking for a description of photographic images previously selected [DEN] or their classification according to how 'typical' they were considered in describing the African situation [UK, FRG, DEN], and through written interviews [FRG]. German researchers also made an analysis of school textbooks to check the content of one of the principal sources of information about Africa for young people.

In some cases the sample was chosen with the criterion of the representativity of the whole population (IRE: 1400 adults in 50 different places); others covered particular sectors of public opinion: 'donors' previously reached through the solidarity campaign (FRG, 112 interviewed; DEN, 84) and secondary school pupils (FRG, 732; DEN, 54; UK, 75).

The findings of national research in each country are surprisingly similar and – if we must limit ourselves to considering the general trend – undoubtedly discouraging for anyone who really cares about mass understanding of African problems. Asked to associate freely ideas that sprang to mind in connection with the word 'Africa', many (85% of young people in DEN) said 'hunger', 'famine', or (75%) 'poverty', 'underdevelopment' or, to a lesser extent, 'apartheid' (30%), 'war', 'dictatorship' (15%) [DEN]. For four-fifths of Irish public opinion, Africa was identified with Ethiopia and to a lesser extent (two-fifths) with Sudan [IRE]. With regard to the assessment of the photographs showing various aspects of the African reality, the ones universally accepted as 'most typical' were those of the mother with a sick child. Other pictures picked out were the arrival of aid for need populations: a white nurse among black refugees, trees planted in the desert. At the other end of the scale, images considered 'less typical' reflected the cultural and

political life of African countries: political rallies, street scenes in a town [DEN, FRG, UK].

It emerged that there was greater diversity in the image held by educated adults, while adolescents were more conventional and rejected any aspect indicating self-organisation on the part of African peoples [DEN]. Paradoxically, the latter fact was accompanied by a generally higher response by young people to appeals for aid and solidarity [FRG] and this could be a confirmation of the bias in the content of aid campaigns, and of the distortions these could lead to in the common mentality. Distortions confirmed by the German survey on what lingered in the memories of young people and donors of the "Africa Day" campaign of January 1985, at one and two years' distance. Fifty-six percent of students still remembered it after two years; but among these only a small proportion (16%) could indicate the specific problems or the crisis areas. Most of them remembered only the internal aspects of solidarity: the concert, the fund-raising. The same concentration on internal aspects appeared in Ireland, where 76% of the sample considered Bob Geldof, the Irish organiser of the Live Aid concert, the person who had contributed more than anyone else to solving African problems.

As regards the causes, the great majority did not go beyond the most obvious aspects: the drought, the poor harvest (90%), or bad government and local incompetence (60%) [IRE].

In public opinion, the prevailing image of Africa did not, therefore, differ from the one constantly put out by the media: the commonest models were those of an Africa dying of hunger, a primitive and dangerous Africa. All this was often accompanied by an extremely scanty knowledge of geography. Even for Ethiopia, the country most frequently in the news, the only facts known were about the aid supplied [UK]. These biased and distorted images are largely due to the role played by the media, and in many cases the NGOs themselves, in providing information during the crisis. As mentioned above, most of these pictures of the famine were completely out of context, without any reference to African history, culture or economic life. Political analysis was conducted solely in terms of alliances between African countries and western countries. North-South relations were seldom mentioned and South-South relations considered non-existent. The difficulties of colonial relations with Europe were completely ignored, except by the specialised press and an occasional article here and there.

This amazing uniformity between the image put out and the one received prompts a few questions. Why did the public seem so ready to absorb such misleading ideas? Why did some pictures, such as that of the mother and child, have such a huge success as to blot out any other aspect or reality? Why did many people find it natural to identify Africa with Ethiopia? This leads to another basic question: Does the public like a mirror, reflecting whatever image comes its way?

The fact that Africans have no say in information about Africa – a fact that emerges from the European research as a whole – minimises the chances of



arriving at an image of Africa closer to reality and consonant with interdependence. If Africa is newsworthy only insofar as it concerns Europe; if its public and political vitality is reduced to coups d'état, to external co-operation activities or the holding of political summits; if only westerners and expatriates are invited to talk about Africa, the image we shall have of it will be only our own, further and further away from the real Africa, a continent brimming with life and culture.

## **B. Africa's Perception of the 1984/85 Food Crisis**

### **Nature and Causes of the Crisis**

#### *Crisis is a process, not an event*

The European public perceived the food crisis in Africa as a dramatic and catastrophic event. On the contrary the African reports emphasise that, viewed from their perspective, the crisis was a process over an extended period of time, not an immediate happening. The time period easily identified in Europe as the peak of consciousness of the African crisis – 1984/5 – proved to be an artificial category to the rural people interviewed for the studies, who had been with droughts and food shortages for as long as they could remember.

A crisis, the African reports point out, need not necessarily have an undesirable outcome. The Zimbabwe paper, in fact, describes a case in which the crisis was not allowed to reach catastrophic proportions. The process takes place within given economic, political and social power structures, nationally and internationally. The outcome depends on the responses of various categories of people. To view the food crisis as an event precludes finding long-term solutions to fundamental problems.

#### *The Roots of the Crisis*

The food crisis was only the visible part of a deeper phenomenon. Its roots are to be traced to the dependence of Africa, a dependence initiated in the colonial period and perpetuated today, to a greater or lesser degree, in political, economic and cultural structures which propagate models most often unsuited to endogenous development.

This deeper crisis has various facets. There is a *political and cultural dimension* of dependence on foreign models, born from the colonial experience, the apparent supremacy of northern civilization and imported techniques. This cultural dependency, diffused through the schools and the media, is concretised in political institutions, administrative structures, the dominant concept of development and of relations between citizens and the

state, the dispossession of social groups of their claim to the common good and their power over their own environment. The *economic dimension* of the crisis originated with the introduction of export crops, which provoked the disruption and external orientation of traditionally self-centred economies, and is represented today in the indebtedness of African states and the dictates of the IMF.

Crisis, too, in the *relationship between human beings and their environment*. Pressure on the land has increased, due not only to demographic growth but also to the attribution of large areas to "the white man's crops", most massively in Zimbabwe where 80% of the population was confined to unproductive regions under the colonial regime. With the Europeans came the introduction of 'mining agriculture', more pre-occupied with what can be extracted from the soil than with what should be restored to it and contemptuous of indigenous crops and agricultural practises developed over centuries of sensitive adaptation to a difficult climate.

Finally, the crisis manifests in a *loss of power by the peasantry*, in all senses, usurped by the city, the state, foreign interests. The peasant is no longer the master of his/her environment, the land, the price of the produce. It is the state, to the degree to which it enjoys a margin of autonomy, which imposes a concept of development and a planning process. This relationship is mirrored in the attitude of government structures and agents towards the peasants. The history of co-operatives and parastatal societies in Senegal is illustrative of this process. Conceived as instruments of government policy, their effect was to practically annihilate the peasants' margin of reflection and organisation.

### **Why was the Crisis Perceived as an Event in Europe?**

By the time the food crisis in Africa was brought dramatically to the attention of the European public by the media, the process had so affected the people that their dynamism was exhausted and the image projected was that of poor, helpless people.

But why was the crisis allowed to reach this peak? Why were the warning signs ignored? The African reports speculate on these questions and offer some possible replies. Political considerations loom large, particularly in the Ethiopian context, in which the reluctance of northern governments to co-operate with the military regime thwarted plans to set up a Food Security Reserve, creating stockpiles of food which could have minimised loss of lives during the 1984-85 famine. Economic interests are also predominant.

The interests involved may be psychological as well as economic. The mobilisation of emergency relief for starving Africans serves to reinforce the Europeans' self-image as saviours and heroes. The media's criteria of what is newsworthy also plays a role. As the Ethiopian report comments, After all, what can beat in terms of spectacle the scene of thousands of people holding to their lives by a very precarious margin, obviously doomed to extinction, only to be saved miraculously by plane-ful loads of food brought by generous donors

only too eager to be filmed among the starving multitudes, thereby driving home the point that, were it not for their benevolent intervention, those thousands would have perished?"

## Africa's Response to the Crisis

The missing perspective in the European vision of the food crisis was the efforts made by the Africans themselves to deal with the situation. The African reports devote considerable space to describing these efforts, undertaken by the rural people directly affected, by the governments and by national NGOs.

### Responses by the People

#### *Observing the Build-up of the Crisis*

The fact that ordinary people are able to articulate valid indicators of an impending food crisis is important because it contradicts popular western media images of peasants as poor, helpless people caught by the surprise of a drastic food shortage. The peasants' "early warning systems" are based on observation of indicators related to natural phenomena, to agriculture and to human behaviour. Peasants interviewed for the Zimbabwe study enumerated as many as twenty, ranging from changes in the stars' position or shining pattern to erratic rainy seasons, to an increase in the number of people looking for jobs. Once the possibility of drought is recognized it quickly becomes the object of discussion particularly, the Ethiopian report points out, among women, who are the most sensitive observers of such phenomena. Emergency talk then serves as a springboard for action.

#### *Internal Solidarity*

In a food crisis the impression is given that most, if not all, the food which local families need is provided by the outside. This, of course, is not the case. The Zimbabwe report quotes figures demonstrating that families on food aid after total crop failure received only 10-30% of their food requirements from outside aid. According to peasants interviewed in the context of the Senegal study, "if we had to count only on the aid given by the Government and NGOs we wouldn't be here today. Too much noise is often made about official aid. In fact, it's thanks to ourselves and to our relatives in the city that we manage to survive". The mass media magnified the international solidarity mobilised in response to the crisis, but passed over in silence the strong mechanisms of internal solidarity which were brought to play, at different levels.

All of the African reports emphasise the importance of solidarity *within villages*, not only as a pragmatic reaction to crisis but, above all, as a deep social value. A peasant group in Burkina Faso notes that "solidarity is the rule in the village. Those who had sufficient stocks offered them spontaneously to those who suffered." More formally, there are a variety of social institutions designed precisely as mechanisms for mutual help in times of need. In Ethiopia the *idär* acts in situations of famine by providing a modality for sharing whatever is

available among its members. The Senegal report describes various systems of mutual support evolved by different ethnic groups, involving collective fields and stocks, supplemented by crops grown by the women to help meet the group's needs in lean periods.

Solidarity also operates strongly in the form of exchanges *between the villages and the cities* in the context of extended families. These mechanisms, including support in the form of cash, food or providing hospitality for relatives from the villages, are cited in all of the reports. They are studied in detail in the Senegal paper, which concludes that their deepest motivation is the sense of belonging to the same group and the consciousness of interdependence.

#### *Self-help in Rural Areas: Towards Alternative Development Strategies*

All of the African reports cite defence mechanisms traditionally used in times of food shortage. Alerted by their observation of signs of impending drought, rural families prepare for hard times by building up reserves of the staple crop. Selling stock for cash to purchase food is another widespread reaction, despite the attachment of African peasants and herders to their animals. Groups in Burkina Faso report that they travelled as much as thirty kilometres to collect edible leaves and wild grain to supplement scarce food supplies. Careful management of family food rations is another strategy in which women play a crucial role. Artisan activities are also cited as a fallback resource. Migration to urban areas is a final solution, when all else fails, but it is no longer much of an option given the scarcity of jobs in African cities and the barriers to immigration imposed by European countries.

Beyond these mechanisms, what emerges most strongly from the reports is the creative elaboration by African peasants of *alternative development strategies* more adapted to their situation and environment than the models proposed by national and foreign 'developers'. Their elaboration is a process, one of learning, applying and building on lessons from past droughts, and in some cases, de-learning lessons taught by official agronomic approaches and returning to sounder indigenous practices.

The elements of these strategies vary from area to area, but common to all are an effort to make better use of local resources and knowledge to exploit seasons and potentialities which had previously been under-used, greater attention to re-establishing the disrupted balance between society and its natural environment, the development of new capacities, and a growing awareness of the need to work and plan together in order to defend common interests.

In the Sahelian countries, Senegal and Burkina Faso, a major innovation is the valorisation of the dry season. Horticultural production is now practised wherever water can be found, above all by the young people who, in the past, would have deserted the countryside in times of difficulty. The peasants' capacity to undertake intensive irrigated agriculture is being developed, along with improved agronomic practises and new food habits. Marketing capacity is evolving to deal with new products and to limit the profits of the traders.

Savings, productive re-investment of profits and organisation of credit are being stimulated.

The scarcity of water in itself has promoted creative reactions in rural areas. Techniques of well digging have improved, as have the water-lifting devices including manual pumps built and maintained by the peasants. Throughout the rural areas people have again become conscious of the need to fertilize the earth and to protect it from erosion by wind and rain. Since the land is no longer nourished by fallow periods and plants and trees whose contribution to the ecological balance had been ignored by colonial and post-colonial agronomists. The women are the most vigorous advocates of reforestation and the creation of village woods. Even grass is becoming an object of attention and cultivation. Forage crops are grown and stored, and intensive cattle production begins to replace extensive herding.

The Zimbabwe paper reports that rural people have formulated food production and development strategies which reveal their level of understanding of hunger as a symptom of powerlessness and poverty, and which aim at eliminating not only hunger but also underdevelopment and dependency. Elements of this strategy emerge from the interviews conducted in rural areas. Peasants demonstrate good understanding of their soils and use each type appropriately. Land is prepared well in advance, and trees, leaves and grasses are used to retain soil moisture and to fertilize the soil, countervailing the advice which had been given by colonial extension agents. Many farmers are turning to intensive animal production as a supplement or alternative to crop production. Horticultural production has also been introduced wherever water is available. Most families have gone back to growing indigenous drought-resistant crops, abandoning hybrid seeds which require expensive fertilizer and reliable rainfall or irrigation. Methods of growing these grains have been perfected by the local communities through their own initiatives. Families are also using indigenous, non-toxic methods to preserve vegetables and grain. Improved granaries built of traditional materials are being developed. Wells have multiplied and groups of families are working together to build tanks to collect rain water.

#### *The Growth of Peasant Associations*

The African reports note an intimate relationship between the evolution of alternative development strategies and the growth of peasant associations. On the one hand, the existence of community-based groups has provided a forum for collective reflection on and reaction to environmental, political and socio-economic changes. On the other hand, the crisis itself and the innovative activities described in the above section have led to the emergence of new organisational needs and capacities which have promoted the growth and strengthening of peasant associations.

Although Zimbabwe, unlike some African countries, does not have a tradition of village organisations based on age groups, community-based associations are to be found throughout the rural areas. The struggle for independence from the colonial regime has marked the consciousness and

coherence of these rural groups, which have been meeting since independence to discuss their overall situation of underdevelopment, poverty and hunger and to try to find solutions to these problems. The elaboration and implementation of alternative development strategies are serving to heighten their consciousness and strengthen their organisations.

In Senegal, traditional forms of association of all types have existed in the villages since time immemorial, intimately integrated into the social system and catering not only to ensuring food security and solidarity but also to savings and to social and cultural needs. A new type of village group has begun to develop over the past decade, stimulated by the drought and the food crisis and by young people, the subjects of earlier rural exodus, who have returned to the villages with new ideas and a broadened vision of development. These groups sprung up at first at the local level, with leaders who are themselves sons of the village. They represent a new power, which the traditional powers accept only gradually as the new groups provide services for the village. The women often organise themselves autonomously, to undertake collective production, market their products and organise credit. They manage their savings themselves, accustomed as they are to taking responsibility for the ever more difficult tasks of procuring and preparing the family's food.

The groups are concerned not only with production but with all the related operations, from procurement of inputs to processing and marketing. The greater complexity of their activities stimulates a consciousness different from that of the traditional powers, and a different stance vis-à-vis the traders.

Many activities outstrip the capacities of individual associations and require exchange among villages and a concerted approach. The associations thus began to federate at the district and regional levels, to organise services such as training, study visits, triangular aid, complementary exchanges of seeds, artisanal products, experiences. The general assemblies of these organisations provide them not only with a juridical existence but also with a feeling that, together, the members will be able to take charge of their own development. Timid tentative negotiations with the state and technical services have begun, and more courageous and successful negotiations with northern partners.

The future of these peasant organisations is still indefinite, but a process of self-promotion is undoubtedly underway, whereby the organisations themselves identify their needs, define priorities, decide on initiatives to be undertaken. Above all, the regional organisations have stimulated reflection on the *causes* of the food crisis and responses to its consequences. Study and action commissions have examined problems such as the causes of agrarian imbalance, the impoverishment of the soil, the disappearance of plant cover and have identified remedial action. The drought and the food crisis signalled a challenging of the entire agrarian system. The regional peasant organisations which developed during this period have stimulated this questioning, the evolution of new strategies and the expansion and strengthening of village associations.

## Conclusion

In concluding the synthesis of this key section of the African reports, it should be reiterated that the true image of the people affected by the food crisis is in diametric opposition to the passive and fatalist picture diffused by the European mass media. Rural people reacted to the crisis by using it as an impetus for developing new solutions and alternative systems for combating hunger and its causes, helping to bring traditional methods back to life and what was latent back into the open. The promotion of new productive activities and of actions aimed at restoring the environmental equilibrium, the growth of peasant organisations: these are some of the positive results of a creative reaction to a situation of crisis. The following sections will explore the extent to which these popular strategies have received support from the governments and NGOs of their countries, and from outside aid.

### *Responses by Governments*

The western media underplayed not only the self-help efforts of the people affected by the crisis, but also those of the African governments concerned. The reports describe a series of measures implemented with greater or lesser success: early warning systems, national solidarity appeals, national co-ordination mechanisms, distribution of food aid. In Senegal part of the food aid was sold to raise funds for development projects, and the rest was distributed free of charge. The report criticises this policy which, in the absence of clear criteria and an effective mechanism for identifying the needy, "transformed the entire population into beggars". In Zimbabwe some problems were encountered with the Government-operated Food For Work Programme: the people were not well organised, the rations were often insufficient to cover food needs, some people got diverted from their own self-help schemes.

### *Responses by NGOs*

This section examines the responses of endogenous NGOs, some of which are directly representative of peasant associations such as those described above, while others are not representative but attempt to provide services and support to rural initiatives. Each national report includes one or more case studies of endogenous NGOs.

Despite the variety of situations in the four countries covered by the reports, certain conclusions regarding endogenous NGOs can be drawn. Firstly, it would seem that the crisis has acted in many cases as a stimulus to the formation and good functioning of the NGOs described in the reports, and has provoked reflection which has deepened their understanding of the structural causes of food shortages.

Secondly, it emerges clearly from the reports that the most important role of endogenous NGOs is to move from alleviating hunger and promoting piecemeal projects to helping rural people evolve, articulate and apply alternative development strategies. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the

NGOs which seem to be most successfully engaged in this process – the Naam in Burkina Faso, ORAP in Zimbabwe, the FONGS and its regional members in Senegal – are themselves expressions of and accountable to base-level peasant associations.

Regarding relations with governments, it is evident that NGOs function better in societies which recognize their role and leave them space to operate. The degree to which endogenous NGOs are acquiring a capacity to negotiate with government, representing the interests of the peasants, however, does not emerge clearly from the national reports.

The nature of relations with northern NGOs is another important factor conditioning the effective function of endogenous NGOs.

## The Impact of Aid

The national reports discuss the impact both of emergency aid and of longer-term development aid in the form in which it is most commonly provided by northern NGOs donors.

The reports are unanimous in welcoming and accepting the legitimacy of emergency aid in that it saves human lives and alleviates suffering. Departing from this basic premise, however, the reports discuss a number of problems encountered with a view to improving the impact of such aid in future crisis. The criticisms raised regarding the way emergency aid operated during the food crisis in Africa can be grouped under three headings.

*Aid as an instrument of donor interests* – Although the humanitarian feelings which motivated the massive response of the European public to images of the crisis in Africa are appreciated, the African reports react strongly to the fact that many northern donors used the response to the famine in Africa as a way of furthering their own political, economic and institutional interests. More generally, food aid is seen as a means used by donors to perpetuate dependency.

*Impact on the self-image of recipients* – The Zimbabwe report points out that, since emergency aid alleviates hardships, this can tend to make rural people insufficiently critical of its long-term impact. Despite this, however, interviews conducted in the countries concerned indicate a high level of awareness of the negative impact of food aid on the self-image and initiatives of the recipients. In a material sense, it is observed that the emphasis on emergency assistance had the effect, in many cases, of diverting support from long-term self-help initiatives. Psychologically, food aid tends to "turn people into beggars". "The beneficiaries feel that it is always necessary to wait for external aid to resolve their problems and that makes them lazy and demobilises them." Cases are reported in which food aid, even in the form of Food For Work programmes, has had the effect of distracting people from their own self-help efforts and making them feel they should be 'paid' even to undertake their own initiatives.



*Poor use of food aid* – Two of the reports, from Burkina Faso and Senegal, note that food aid has continued to arrive after the emergency came to an end, discouraging local production in normal years. The way in which food was distributed is also criticised in some cases, as mentioned above. Finally, the reports criticise the fact that emergency aid is insufficiently linked with food production and development aid. Even Food For Work programmes can make only a limited contribution to reducing the vulnerability of rural communities in the absence of other key factors such as access to inputs, credit, extension and supportive policy incentives.