

T H E I M A G E O F A F R I C A

International Exchange on Communication and Development

between

Africa and Europe

(Rome, 1st - 5 February 1988)

SYNTHESIS OF THE

AFRICAN NATIONAL REPORTS

The "Image of Africa" project has been carried out with the contribution of the Commission of the European Communities (Direction VIII) and the Directorate for Development Cooperation, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

	<u>Page</u>
Preface	
1. NATURE AND CAUSES OF THE CRISIS	3
1.1 Crisis as a process, not an event	3
1.2 The roots of the crisis	3
1.3 Why was the crisis perceived as an event in Europe?	4
2. INTERNAL RESPONSES TO THE CRISIS	5
2.1 Responses by the people	5
2.1.1 Observing the build-up of the crisis	5
2.1.2 Internal solidarity	5
2.1.3 Self-help in rural areas: towards alternative development strategies	6
2.1.4 The growth of peasant associations	7
2.1.5 Conclusion	9
2.2 Responses by governments	9
2.2.1 Emergency responses	9
2.2.2 Long-term policy	10
2.3 Responses by NGOs: case studies	10
2.3.1 Burkina Faso	10
2.3.2 Ethiopia	11
2.3.3 Senegal	11
2.3.4 Zimbabwe	11
2.3.5 Conclusions	12
3. THE IMPACT OF AID	13
3.1 Emergency aid	13
3.1.1 Aid as an instrument of donor interests	13
3.1.2 Impact on self-image of recipients	14
3.1.3 Poor use of food aid	14
3.2 NGO development aid	14
3.2.1 Distortions operated by development aid	14
3.2.2 What kind of support is needed?	16
4. MEDIA IN AFRICA	17
4.1 Senegal	17
4.2 Zimbabwe	18
5. CONCLUSIONS	19
6. RECOMMENDATIONS	20
6.1 African NGOs	20
6.2 Relations between African and European NGOs	20
6.3 Governments	20
6.4 Media	20

## P R E F A C E

The 'Image of Africa' project was born from the preoccupation of many European NGOs with the distorted picture of Africa projected to the European public during the 1984/85 'crisis period'. Fully conscious that the collaboration of African NGOs was essential to improving the quality of European information about Africa, the initial promoters asked organizations in six African countries - Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and Zimbabwe - to study the problem from their viewpoint and meet together with their European counterparts to find solutions.

The African organizations met in Accra, Ghana, from 19 - 21 January 1987 to decide on their work plan, discuss the methodology and coordinate action. A second meeting took place from 22 - 26 May to compare initial results and set guidelines for the national reports.

The African organizations were willing to assist the European NGOs in their project. They noted, however, that misinformation about Africa in Europe was essentially a European problem, and since they were not familiar either with European mass media coverage or with the NGOs' information materials, they could not comment on these and offer suggestions for improving them prior to the final workshop, which would offer an opportunity for direct exchange. Because of this, and in order to ensure that the studies produced results which would also be useful for the African organizations themselves, it was decided to focus the research on the following areas:

- the nature and extent of the food crisis seen from the African point of view;
- the internal responses to the crisis, by the local population, governments, and national NGOs;
- the impact of aid, particularly on the self-image and self-help initiatives of affected groups;
- in two countries, Senegal and Zimbabwe, coverage of the food crisis by the national media.

The methodology was to include examination of relevant documents, interviews with NGOs, government officials, and local people, and discussion of findings with national NGOs. The time and resources allocated were, however, insufficient to carry out as in-depth a study as the African organizations would have desired.

This synthesis document covers four of the national reports: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Senegal and Zimbabwe. The Niger report, unfortunately, could not be completed since the researcher was seriously injured in an automobile accident. The Mozambique report did not reach the secretariat in time to be included in the synthesis.

It should be emphasized that this document has no pretensions to representing all of Africa; it is simply a juxtaposition of the findings of studies undertaken in four countries, similar in some ways but very different in others.



## 1. NATURE AND CAUSES OF THE CRISIS

### 1.1 CRISIS AS 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 emphasize 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 - 1984/85 - proved to be an artificial category to the rural people interviewed for the studies, who had been coping 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.

also  
recognised  
by Euro  
NGO's.

### 1.2 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 vis-à-vis the North, 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 concretized 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 I.M.F.

Crisis, too, in the relationship between man and his 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 preoccupied 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 years of sensitive adaptation to a difficult climate.

Finally, the crisis manifests itself in a loss of power by the peasantry, in all senses, usurped by the city, the State, foreign interests. The peasant farmer is no longer the master of his environment, his land, the

price of his 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 cooperatives 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 organization.

In some cases, political changes have mitigated the situation described above. The Burkina Faso report describes in positive terms the new philosophy of development introduced with the revolution of August 1983. In Zimbabwe post-independence efforts in the areas of land reform, access to credit, price incentives, changes in extension approaches and promoting participation by farmers in group extension activities have led to dramatic increases in small farmer productivity, demonstrating that, with the right incentives, assistance and technology, the communal farmers can produce even more than the commercial sector.

### 1.3 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 cooperate with the military regime thwarted plans to set up a Food Security Reserve, creating stockpiles of food which could have minimized loss of lives during the 1984-85 famine. Economic interests are also predominant. As a peasant animator in Burkina Faso puts it, "the donors want to keep us in a state of dependence up until the resurrection. By dealing in emergency aid the developed countries act in their own interests, encouraging their production, consolidating their relations with the so-called poor countries, discouraging production in the developing countries".

The interests involved may be psychological as well as economic. The mobilization 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 play 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?".

Once again, the African reports drive home the point that the question of famine is not considered within the wider issues of political and economic structures and international linkages. Global problems of power, control of means of production, inequitable distribution of resources are split artificially into a distorted image of Africa as an isolated hungry continent, on the one hand, and an equally distorted mirror image of Europe as a generous benefactor on the other.



## 2. INTERNAL RESPONSES 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, by national NGOs.

### 2.1 RESPONSES BY THE PEOPLE

#### 2.1.1 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 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 20, ranging from changes in the stars' position or shining pattern, to erratic rainy seasons, to 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.

#### 2.1.2 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, often, 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 mobilized 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 emphasize 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 idir 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.

### 2.1.3 Self-Help in Rural Areas: Towards Alternative Development Strategies

All of the African reports cite defense 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 farmers and herders to their animals. Groups in Burkina Faso report that they travelled as much as 30 km to collect edible leaves and wild grain to supplement scarce food supplies. Careful management of the family food rations is another strategy in which women play a crucial role. Artisanal 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, however, 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 of 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 equilibrium between man and his 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 practices and new food habits. Marketing capacity is evolving to deal with new products and to limit the profits of the traders. Savings, productive reinvestment of profits, and organization 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 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 the herds, new methods are being developed, often exploiting traditional plants and trees whose contribution to the ecological equilibrium 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. Farmers 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.

#### 2.1.4 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 organizational 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 organizations 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 organizations.

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 organize themselves autonomously, to undertake collective production, market their products and organize 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 of 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 organize services such as training, study visits, triangular aid, complementary exchanges of seeds, artisanal products, experiences. The general assemblies of these organizations 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 tentatives of negotiation with the State and technical services have begun, and more courageous and successful negotiations with Northern partners.

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

In Burkina Faso too the crisis provided a stimulus for organization. As in Senegal the Naam groups described in the report, precooperative associations which draw their inspiration from the traditions and social habits of the milieu, sprang up first at the village level and then began to federate at department level. Their activities, carried out mostly during the dry season, are aimed at helping rural people to remain on the land. Towards this goal, the groups organize to improve conditions in the village by constructing earth dams, routes, wells, undertaking reforestation and anti-erosion measures, cultivating collective fields. Social and cultural activities are also organized: functional literacy, theatre, improved stoves, training, village pharmacies. Finally, the Naam promote economic activities: cereal banks, mills, dry season agriculture, improved animal husbandry, artisanal production.

The declared philosophy of the Naam is to "develop without spoiling" and its methodology is to "take off from what the peasant is, what he lives, what he knows, what he knows how to do and what he wants" with a view to "making each man or community responsible for its own problems".

Ethiopia presents a different situation. There the peoples' organizations (including peasants' and women's associations and service cooperatives in rural areas) are organized by the party and operate under its very close supervision and control. Their formation is not the result of grassroots initiative and their functioning is not independent of official policy.

#### 2.1.5 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 fatalistic 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 organizations: 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.

### 2.2 RESPONSES BY GOVERNMENTS

#### 2.2.1 Emergency Responses

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 exist in both Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, enabling forward planning for an impending crisis. In Zimbabwe the responsible government unit, Agritex, carries out discussions with farmers during harvest on measures they could undertake to cope with drought. In Ethiopia, as noted in section 1.3 above, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's plan to establish a Food Security Reserve was thwarted by the reluctance of many donors to collaborate for political reasons.

National solidarity appeals were launched and well supported in all countries. National coordination mechanisms for relief measures were also provided by all governments, either through existing organizations like the RRC in Ethiopia or through specially created structures like the National Commission to Fight against the Effects of the Drought in Burkina Faso.

Another Government responsibility was that of organizing the 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 criticizes this policy which, in the absence of clear criteria and an effective mechanism for identifying the needy, "transformed the entire population into beggars". In Burkina Faso, government policy was to avoid



free distribution of food except to migrants and those who had really lost all of their resources. Food aid was used to develop rural infrastructure through the Popular Programme of Development, linking emergency relief to rehabilitation and development. In Zimbabwe some problems were encountered with the Government-operated Food For Work programme during the 1983/84 crisis: the people were not well organized, the rations were often insufficient to cover food needs, some people got diverted from their own self-help schemes. Lessons drawn from this experience are, however, being applied to FFW programmes during the current drought.

### 2.2.2 Long-Term Policy

Constructive government policies are clearly indispensable to finding long-term solutions to the food crisis. It is equally clear that the governments' autonomy to establish policy is severely limited by their dependence on Northern economic and political interests.

Two of the African reports devote some space to this issue. The Zimbabwe report assesses positively the post-independence government's policy towards small farmers, as described in section 1.2 above. The Senegal report analyses in some detail the government's New Agricultural Policy (NPA), whose official aim is to reduce government intervention and increase peasant responsibility. The instruments it uses, however, are inappropriate since they are determined by international financial institutions rather than by an analysis of what is required to strengthen peasant production and autonomy. The cooperatives created under the NPA are theoretically to be managed by the producers themselves, yet neither the form, nor the objectives nor even the members are determined by the peasants. Formed under the false hypothesis that the rural world is a homogeneous unity, the cooperatives have fallen under the control of local power structures, which constitute the principal hindrance to their development. Government measures to ensure timely supply of production factors are also ineffective, while the marketing policy, aimed at increasing sales of food crops, ignores the real relationships which are established during the marketing process and is thwarted by massive importation of cereals which compete with local production. The report concludes that while the declared aim of the NPA is to reinforce peasant initiative, the effect is to strengthen the hand of commercial capital and local power structures.

## 2.3 RESPONSES BY NGOs : CASE STUDIES

This section examines the responses of endogenous NGOs, some of which are directly representative of peasant associations such as those described in section 2.1.4 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.

### 2.3.1 Burkina Faso

The Naam groups described in section 2.1.4 above created a national Union of Federations of Naam Groups in 1978, which now covers 15 of the 30 provinces in the country and counts several thousand members. The Union constitutes a forum for exchange and cooperation among the federations and provides support of various kinds for the activities determined and initiated by Naam groups.



### 2.3.2 Ethiopia

In the Ethiopian context the role of national NGOs is limited because such organizations flourish only in societies which encourage, or at least tolerate, a pluralism of interests. In the whole area of relief and agricultural development there are only two organizations which could be termed NGOs. The Integrated Family Life Education project (IFLE) is sponsored and closely supervised by the Ministry of Labour, although it receives only minimum financial support from the Government. IFLE uses the vehicle of literacy-numeracy courses to conduct action-oriented, non-formal programmes related to health, nutrition, agriculture, household management, family planning, community development and income-generating activities, a total of 40 projects. IFLE is an example of a small organization trying to do its best despite the serious constraints under which it operates: short planning horizon and insecurity regarding continuity of funding, intervention by funding agencies in determining the type and sites of projects, pressure to spend funds rapidly.

The other NGO is Agri-Service Ethiopia, sponsored but not controlled by the Ministry of Agriculture. The organization was established to provide rural communities with non-formal education in agriculture, home sciences and health. Since 1986 it has embarked on a new orientation, which it sees as making its training programmes more action-oriented. The report suggests that an important consideration in deciding to become involved in relief and rehabilitation activities was pressure from outside donors, who provide all of Agri-Service's funding.

### 2.3.3 Senegal

As in Burkina Faso the regional federations of peasant associations have created their own national organization, the Federation of NGOs of Senegal (FONGS). Created in 1976, the FONGS now groups nine regional associations covering 7000 villages for a total of over 180 000 members. Drawing its resources from membership fees, charges for services, and subventions from donor partners, the FONGS undertakes four types of activities in support of its members: training in village animation, financial accounting, local development planning; project identification and formulation; concerted activities like food exchanges among peasant associations in zones of surplus and deficit cereal production; project monitoring and self-evaluation. The FONGS has strengthened and extended the network of communications among associations, has common and transparent rules for financial management, is helping the associations to move from isolated projects to longer-term development planning, and is opening new forms of negotiation with Northern partners.

The crisis period has served to underline the urgent necessity of this peasant organization in Senegal; the FONGS began to function effectively in 1983, when the effects of the food crisis were at their strongest.

### 2.3.4 Zimbabwe

Endogenous NGOs in Zimbabwe are usually community-based or located in specific geographic areas, although some are country-wide in their membership. Before independence, NGOs in Zimbabwe played a pioneering role by providing services to the majority black population. The long history

of local associations and involvement in NGO activities, coupled with a generally high level of community mobilization during the war of liberation, strongly characterizes the NGO sector, and provided a sound and well-organized basis for perceiving the food crisis and responding to it quickly and appropriately. NGO-perceived indicators of the food crisis, listed in the report, reveal a high degree of sensitivity to and knowledge of the local situation due to the fact that most NGOs working in Zimbabwe, whether of endogenous or foreign origin, operate at the grassroots level.

During the crisis period coordinating mechanisms among NGOs and between NGOs and government were established both at national level (the Drought Operations Committee) and regionally. The Joint NGO Committee formed in Matebeleland in 1983 in response to the crisis has continued in existence and is now launching joint permanent food production activities.

The NGO response included both immediate aid, aimed at the most vulnerable groups, and long-term aid. In fact, the biggest lesson learned during the 1984-85 period was that the problem of hunger cannot be solved by food aid alone. People need to be in control of water, land, seed and other agricultural assets. The report describes the work of two NGOs which are promoting this empowering process. In Buhera, Manicaland, Christian Care has moved from relief to analysing the causes of food shortages with the local people and dealing with these. As a result Christian Care has begun to loan cattle to poor farmers and has established a long-term water and farming project working through village water committees, most of which are led by women. Old irrigation schemes destroyed during the war of liberation are also being rehabilitated.

The Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP) is an example of an endogenous NGO which is providing support for the alternative development strategies evolved by the rural people themselves, as described in section 2.1.3 above. ORAP is assisting the Tsholotsho communities in developing an integrated food production/security programme in their groups and at a development centre which provides a place where farmers can come together to share and perfect their local knowledge and skills in areas like animal husbandry, gardening, growing indigenous crops and seeds, building grain banks. ORAP has also assisted local farmers in mobilizing for food distribution. Through lack of awareness, surplus producers had been selling food to the cities while other rural families in food-deficit areas went hungry. Once sensitized to this situation, most farmers worked through the ORAP network to sell their surplus grain to other villagers.

### 2.3.5 Conclusions

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 piece-meal 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 functioning of endogenous NGOs, which will be dealt with in section 3.2 below.

### 3. 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 NGO donors.

#### 3.1 EMERGENCY AID

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.

##### 3.1.1 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. The Ethiopian report denounces the political considerations which clearly influenced the international community's delay in providing emergency relief, the fact that the bulk of the assistance finally supplied was for relief rather than for development, and the relatively small amount of food aid provided in relation to needs, pointing out that Ethiopia receives less food aid pro capite than Egypt or Morocco.

More generally, food aid is seen as a means used by donors to perpetuate dependency. A Naam group in Burkina Faso reports that they refused an offer of aid which would have challenged the structures created by the peasants, commenting that "such aid is a conscious attempt to perpetuate dependency". Other voices from the Burkina Faso interviews point out that "donors often give what they have too much of", not what the people need, and criticize the quality of the food provided from the overflowing stockpiles of the North.



Nor are the motivations of NGO donors free from criticism. It is evident that many Northern NGOs used the suffering in Africa as an opportunity to build up their organizations and to open up interventionist programmes in African countries. As the Ethiopian report puts it, "perhaps one of the most visible consequences of the 1984 famine was the proliferation of foreign NGOs that made Ethiopia a base of operations".

### 3.1.2 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 longer-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 demobilizes 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.

The Burkina Faso interviews included an interesting question which invited respondents to state how they see the attitudes of donors and of beneficiaries. The replies indicate how strongly, and negatively, these two images are linked. Words commonly associated with donors were: superiority complex, pride, charity, pity, domination. Words associated with beneficiaries were: submission, assisted, resignation, subordination, demobilization.

### 3.1.3 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 aid was distributed is also criticized in some cases, as mentioned in section 2.2.1 above. Finally, the reports criticize 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.

## 3.2 NGO DEVELOPMENT AID

Development assistance as commonly practiced is also subjected to criticism in the national reports for failing to support, and in some ways actually hindering, the evolution of alternative development strategies. Recommendations are formulated regarding the type of aid needed, and the national reports document examples of positive relationships between Northern and African NGOs.

### 3.2.1 Distortions Operated by Development Aid

In an age in which 'partnership' is the universal key-word, donor preferences continue to distort the content of projects. The Ethiopian

report documents cases in which NGO donors have brought pressure to bear to ensure acceptance of projects of questionable value, with up to 50% of the budget dedicated to expatriate volunteers and vehicles. Peasants interviewed in Zimbabwe criticize aid received in the past, introducing foreign agricultural methods and inputs which have obstructed the development of rural peoples' body of knowledge of their ecosystems. The Senegal report notes a general tendency for intermediaries and peasant associations, knowing the preferences of donors through past experience and exchange of information, to present projects in conformity with the donors' desires rather than with locally perceived needs.

The modalities of project formulation and funding are also criticized. In Zimbabwe, grassroots movements get pushed into taking decisions quickly in order to meet funding schedules and deadlines. In most cases this pushes decisions to be made at top levels rather than at the base where they should be made. In Senegal a similar phenomenon is recorded: project procedures have contributed to reducing the peasant associations' responsibility and self-confidence. It is the NGOs or, in some cases, peasant leaders who plan, manage and evaluate the projects. The Ethiopian report draws attention to the problems created by donor pressure to spend money within a specified period of time, and by the short planning horizon imposed by insecurity regarding continuity of funding.

Deeper still, however, it is the very concept of project aid which is put into question. We have seen that African peasants have reacted to a difficult situation by grouping together to reflect on their problems and evolve alternative solutions. The Senegal report argues that, although in a first moment project aid constitutes a stimulus to this process by providing means required by the associations to put their ideas into action, it soon becomes evident that peasants are grouping together to receive aid, which becomes an end in itself rather than a means to attain self-determined objectives. Nascent peasant organizations cast themselves into the project mould. Projects are devised without examining their viability, since there is a tendency to shrug off responsibility for the management of gifts. The net result is to reinforce the idea that salvation comes from outside, and to block the reflection on causes which originally gave birth to the associations. In fact, inherent in project aid is a concept of development as a process of technological change aimed at increasing production. The project presupposes that underdevelopment is caused by the producers' ignorance and lack of financial means, and ignores necessary socio-political transformations. The negative socio-cultural impact of project aid is echoed in interviews carried out in the Burkina Faso study: "The beneficiaries believe that they can't live off their own work. They feel inadequate and they can't manage to create, to invent". Project aid most often does not involve the beneficiaries in formulation and management, and accords a predominant role to the 'expert'.

The situation in Zimbabwe would seem to be somewhat different, as indicated in section 2.3.4 above, since the history of NGO support for local associations under the colonial regime and the high level of community mobilization during the war of liberation have enabled local NGOs to adapt international aid to suit their conditions. Yet even here it is noted that some donors will sing the tune of participation and self-reliance but are often unwilling to fund peoples' participatory movements and large employment and economically self-reliant projects.



### 3.2.2 What Kind of Support is Needed?

All of the national reports offer suggestions as to what kind of support is needed to strengthen peasant alternatives and organizations, and cite examples of North/South NGO relations which divest the word 'partnership' of the hypocrisy enshrouding it.

The Union of Federations of Naam Groups in Burkina Faso is in the unusual and enviable situation of having an international NGO at its shoulders, the Six "S" Association (Se Servir de la Saison Sèche en Savane et au Sahel), created specifically to support the Naam and similar movements in other Sahelian countries. Supported financially by a consortium of donors who provide funds on a programme basis, the Six "S" subscribes to the objectives and methodology of the Naam and serves to provide the groups with the material, financial and technical assistance they require to carry out projects which the groups themselves determine and manage. The Naam/Six "S" operate through flexible funding which cultivates the local groups' sense of responsibility, initiative and management capacity. All of the activities undertaken take off from the socio-economic reality of the groups and respect their culture and mode of organization. All projects are directed towards becoming self-financing and generating resources to meet needs in other villages.

The Ethiopia report emphasizes that the supreme test by which all aid must be judged is its capacity to enhance local self-reliance. Key to this goal are full community participation in all phases of the development process and growth of a new awareness on the part of farmers. Efforts of this nature are being promoted by the NGO Liaison Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and the FFHC/AD programme of NGO support to agricultural rehabilitation projects formulated with and managed by service cooperatives in drought-prone areas, which offer a framework within which individual NGO donors can come together to support locally-determined development plans.

The Senegal report invites donors to think in terms of development strategies rather than projects. The challenge is to overcome the series of constraints which prevent popular initiatives from asserting themselves in the form of increased production of economic and social goods, to strengthen the capacity of the peasantry to participate in bringing about propitious conditions for development. Projects can contribute to this process only in the measure in which they constitute an element in the construction of an alternative development strategy. The report cites examples of relations between the FONGS and its regional federation members, on the one hand, and some Northern NGOs on the other, in which the former are developing a stronger mastery over the process of aid and the latter are accepting a relationship of partnership. Support is being provided by some Northern partners for the development plans of peasant organizations rather than for isolated projects, including the process of reflection among associations in Senegal and with peasant groups in other African countries.

The Zimbabwe report concludes that Africa has two different and conflicting images: the true image of a dynamic Africa struggling for self-reliant development, and the superficial image of an Africa dependent and vulnerable in terms of its relationship with the West. Some Africans have



been shaped by Western demands to fund the Africa which is hungry, powerless, underdeveloped and suffering. Others are working to create independent alternatives. The kind of assistance they require is flexible and untied funding with which they can create institutions and programmes not only to meet their hunger problems, but also to express their economic, social and political demands.

#### 4. MEDIA IN AFRICA

In two countries, Senegal and Zimbabwe, studies were undertaken to examine how the national media presented the food crisis.

##### 4.1 SENEGAL

The Senegal study examined coverage of the crisis during 1983-84 in the major national daily, 'Le Soleil'. The study notes that the concept of 'food crisis' is seldom discussed. The articles talk rather in terms of drought and desertification, confusing the two terms and presenting the latter as the inevitable consequence of the former. The martial language used tends to personify the drought as a monster bent on annihilating the human race. Hunger and malnutrition are also presented as the logical corollaries of drought, creating the illusion that economic policies play no role in the process and thus absolving the State. Finally, the drought is also described as the cause of the macro-economic unbalance of the country, thus ignoring the socio-economic mechanisms which regulate production in the South and North/South relations. Most of the few exceptions to this failure to analyse the causes of the crisis are contributions by the newspaper's readers.

Regarding emergence assistance, the study notes that, while extensive publicity was given to ceremonies marking the arrival of aid, there was little critical examination of the modalities by which this aid was distributed. Coverage both of international aid and of the national appeal aimed at encouraging a spirit of competition among donors.

Regarding coverage of national initiatives, much space was given to governmental conferences and seminars, reinforcing the idea that the crisis was due to natural causes and that the solution lay in better control of water resources through the large dams being erected on the Senegal river and in the Government's New Agricultural Policy. Initiatives undertaken by the peasants themselves received very little coverage. The study risks the hypothesis that the unconscious motivation of the journalists was to magnify the despair of the peasants in order to create a motivation for donors. The underlying concept of development is one based on aid and technocratic intervention.

The study concludes by noting that a period of crisis is an opportune moment to stimulate in-depth discussion of causes. NGOs and journalists have a particular role to play in this process. Although the margin of liberty to criticize national policy is limited in most African countries, raising the basic problem of political democracy, this margin was not sufficiently exploited during the recent crisis.

#### 4.2 ZIMBABWE

Despite the circulation of foreign newspapers in Zimbabwe, the two major national papers and their Sunday editions have a monopoly over daily news dissemination through the press. Newspapers are subject to government control through the Mass Media Trust and the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency. All media is censored, and all journalists, foreign and local, have to be accredited to the Ministry of Information. As for the broadcast media, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation is wholly owned by Government.

The report notes that the local press gave little coverage to the food crisis, to the point where, reading through the papers, it is difficult to say that there was a crisis.

The reporting of news generally, and that pertaining to the rural areas and the food shortage in particular, was influenced by a number of factors. On the one hand, the local media had to move cautiously and promote the good name of Zimbabwe in order to avoid being dubbed reactionary. General lack of basic skills of analysis has also limited the local journalists' capacity to educate and inform people about the food problem. Politics plays a major role in food shortages. The food crisis of 1984/85 happened at the same time as the curfew in Matebeleland and the dissident problem, diverting attention to news about the war and drawing a false connection of cause and relationship between the two events.

Local papers tend to be urban-biased, and since no thematic approach was adopted to reporting, news about the food crisis was not featured unless the specific items were 'newsworthy'. Local media, the report comments, appears to view the rural poor as a source of news, not as part of national development. They are responsible for creating a bad image abroad, and are best shut out - until they improve.

Finally, the role of the local press is weakened by the fact that it is used too much for personal gratification and as a vehicle for individual goals, exploited by political figures, the rich and the famous, who play to the gallery with no concern for the audience.

The difficulties of the local press are compounded by the competition of foreign newspapers. The British papers have the advantage of being believed and trusted. Their overseas correspondents tend to cover stories which they think are 'newsworthy' and their interpretations of events are taken as truth, whether they are or not. Taking advantage of the local media's preoccupation with political concerns (national unity, security, law and order, cultivating Government leaders, building up an image conducive to attracting international acceptance, etc.) the foreign media capitalizes on the local media's failure to cover situations of rural crisis and carves out for itself an unassailable position as champions of caring, concern and compassion by the North for the South. By default, the North thus becomes the image-makers and sets the parameters for response to the emergency.

Yet the overseas media has done little to educate its public about the real 'Africa'. One manifestation of this ignorance caused by bad reporting is the "Africa as one country" syndrome. The other extreme portrays Africa as made up of two types of people: a small educated rich ruling class, which



exploits the rest of their own population of jungle-people. 'Success stories' from Africa are said not to sell. But, the report comments, this profit motive is not the most important. Western media coverage of Africa is also influenced by considerations of national self-interest, preservation of cultural dominance, the persistence of neo-colonialism and outright racism as well as - particularly among the NGOs - those who hold that negative and sensational media coverage in the North is the only guarantee of successful fund-raising.

The study concludes that Southern media must wake up if Africans are to be their own image-makers and saviours; it must become analytical as well as informative, active rather than reactive. A post-script points out, however, that the study was completed in August 1987 against the background of another cycle of drought and food shortages. This time the Government is giving priority attention to the emergency and the local press and media have taken an independent initiative of focussing on the real issues of concern to the people.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The principal conclusions of the African national reports could be summarized as follows:

- 5.1 The crisis in Africa is not an event but a process which takes place within given economic, political and social power structures, nationally and internationally. Whether or not crisis becomes catastrophe depends on the reactions of various categories of internal and external actors.
- 5.2 The rural populations in the countries concerned have generally reacted in a positive and creative way to the crisis, calling on a variety of solidarity mechanisms, evolving alternative development strategies, and building up their organizations and the beginnings of a peasant movement.
- 5.3 Government policy vis-à-vis the agrarian crisis often does not provide sufficient support for - and in some cases constitutes a constraint to - popular strategies, limited as it is by international financial pressures and by power relations at the national level.
- 5.4 Emergency aid provided during the crisis, while it had the undeniable effect of saving lives and reducing suffering, was not sufficiently linked to rehabilitation and development. Its impact on the causes of the agrarian crisis has been limited - and in some cases negative - due to a series of factors ranging from donor interests to inequitable and inefficient distribution.
- 5.5 NGO development aid, in its present form and modalities, often tends to block social transformations necessary to development, rather than providing support for peasant strategies and movements.
- 5.6 The fact that it is 'hungry Africa' which attracts media publicity and funds reinforces this false image of Africa, to the detriment of a truer, dynamic image of Africa.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 AFRICAN NGOS

- 6.1.1 The most important role of endogenous NGOs in Africa is to help rural people evolve, articulate and apply alternative development strategies, overcoming the series of constraints which inhibit their capacity to participate in bringing about favorable conditions for development.
- 6.1.2 African NGOs should develop a capacity to direct aid to support these strategies, opposing forms of assistance which are detrimental to a process of empowering.
- 6.1.3 African NGOs should develop their capacity to analyse linkages between local, national and international situations and power structures, overcoming the barrier existing between African intellectuals and the rural milieu.
- 6.1.4 African NGOs should have a more active presence vis-à-vis the local media.

### 6.2 RELATIONS BETWEEN AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN NGOS

- 6.2.1 European NGOs concerned about partnership should review the form and modalities of their assistance and inhibit the tendency of donors to deform action through the intervention of their preferences and organizational interests, with a view to providing the kind of support required by people's movements.
- 6.2.2 More exchange should take place between African and European NGOs on images in Europe and initiatives in Africa, in order to build links between development education in Europe and the emergence of alternatives in Africa.

### 6.3 GOVERNMENTS

Governments should ensure accurate and timely systems to forecast impending food shortages and should organize distribution of food aid in an equitable and productive way. In the longer term, courageous and coherent government policy and a climate of political democracy are required to bring about the transformations necessary to resolve the agrarian crisis. Since rural women constitute a key instrument for solving food crises in Africa, provisions should be made to upgrade their status not only in rhetoric but also in committed action.

### 6.4 MEDIA

African media should play a leading role in using the food crisis as an opportune moment to launch debate on its causes. To do so, it must overcome its urban bias and take greater initiative in focussing on issues of concern to the people. The media should avoid giving exaggerated publicity to aid and, on the contrary, should report in detail on efforts made and initiatives taken by the people in response to the crisis.