

BRITISH HUMANITARIAN NGOs
AND THE DISASTER RELIEF INDUSTRY,
1942-1985

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a history of humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Britain, between 1942 and 1985. Specifically, it is focused upon the group of leading agencies linked to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), an umbrella body for joint emergency fundraising established in the 1960s. The thesis explores the role of these NGOs in building up an expansive and technocratic disaster relief industry in Britain, in which they were embedded as instruments for the delivery of humanitarian aid. This was problematic, as many principal aid agencies also wished to move away from short-term disaster relief, to focus upon political advocacy connected to international development instead. It is argued that, despite this increasing political focus, humanitarian NGOs were consistently brought back to emergency relief by the power of television, the lack of public support for development, and the interventions of the British government. Aid agencies also actively contributed to this process, as they used apolitical disaster relief to generate public support and drive institutional growth in a crowded marketplace. This analysis complicates linear narratives of a transition from emergency relief to development aid in post-war British humanitarianism, instead presenting the period as characterised by competing and contradictory trajectories. This challenges conceptions of NGOs as bottom-up agents of civil society, by highlighting their competitive tendencies and complex interconnections with the mass media and the state. The rise of NGO humanitarianism also sheds light on broader trends in contemporary British history, such as changing patterns of political engagement, the character of modern activism, and the legacies of empire in the post-imperial period.

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Abbreviations

<i>ATV</i>	Associated Television
<i>AWP</i>	Association for World Peace
<i>BBC</i>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<i>BCC</i>	British Council of Churches
<i>BRCS</i>	British Red Cross Society
<i>CAAC</i>	Central Appeals Advisory Committee
<i>CAFOD</i>	Catholic Agency For Overseas Development
<i>CARE</i>	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
<i>CIIR</i>	Catholic Institute for International Relations
<i>COBSRA</i>	Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad
<i>CRDA</i>	Christian Relief and Development Association
<i>CRE</i>	Christian Reconstruction in Europe
<i>CRS</i>	Catholic Relief Services
<i>DEC</i>	Disasters Emergency Committee
<i>DFID</i>	Department for International Development
<i>EEC</i>	European Economic Community
<i>FAO</i>	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
<i>FCO</i>	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
<i>FFHC</i>	United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign
<i>FMG</i>	Federal Military Government of Nigeria
<i>FO</i>	Foreign Office
<i>GNP</i>	Gross National Product
<i>JCA</i>	Joint Church Aid
<i>JFS</i>	Joint Funding Scheme
<i>ICARS</i>	Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service Department
<i>ICRC</i>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<i>IBA</i>	Independent Broadcasting Authority
<i>ITA</i>	Independent Television Authority
<i>ITN</i>	Independent Television News
<i>ITV</i>	Independent Television

<i>MSF</i>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<i>NGO</i>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<i>NSM</i>	New Social Movement
<i>NSPCC</i>	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
<i>ODA</i>	Overseas Development Administration
<i>ODI</i>	Overseas Development Institute
<i>ODM</i>	Ministry of Overseas Development
<i>OXFAM</i>	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
<i>RAF</i>	Royal Air Force
<i>SCF</i>	Save The Children Fund
<i>TNA</i>	The National Archives
<i>UN</i>	United Nations
<i>UNDRO</i>	United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator
<i>UNHCR</i>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<i>UNICEF</i>	United Nations Children's Fund
<i>UNKRA</i>	United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency
<i>UNRISD</i>	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
<i>UNRRA</i>	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
<i>VCOAD</i>	Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development
<i>WCC</i>	World Council of Churches
<i>WDM</i>	World Development Movement
<i>WFP</i>	United Nations World Food Programme
<i>WOW</i>	War on Want
<i>WRY</i>	United Nations World Refugee Year

Introduction

Humanitarianism is big business in contemporary Britain. Within the international aid and development sector, the leading non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are all household names, characterised by massive resources, professionalised bureaucracies, and global reach. In 2012, the five largest British aid agencies generated a combined income of over £1 billion, with Oxfam alone raising £385.5 million.¹ The British public donates ever-increasing amounts to international aid, moved by emotional fundraising appeals and powerful media reports of distant suffering. Substantial funding also flows into the sector from government and other official donors, reflecting the close relationship that has developed between aid agencies and the state. The sheer size and professionalism of humanitarian NGOs today represents a significant departure from how these organisations started out many decades earlier, as small amateur bodies staffed by volunteers, dwarfed by official actors in size and relevance.

The massive scale of the humanitarian sector is particularly evident in the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), an umbrella body currently comprised of 13 leading humanitarian NGOs. The DEC functions as a co-ordinating mechanism for disaster fundraising, making joint appeals to the public through the mass media for donations to support relief work. The DEC is supported in this task by close relations with the television broadcasters (in particular the BBC and ITV), the press, high-street banks, British Telecom, the Post Office, and a range of corporate entities that provide facilities

¹ The five agencies referred to for their 2012 incomes are the British Red Cross (£200.1 million), Christian Aid (£95.5 million), Islamic Relief UK (£132 million), Oxfam (£385.5 million), and Save the Children (£283.7 million), for a combined income of £1.097 billion. See: British Red Cross Society, *Trustees' Report and Accounts 2012* (London: British Red Cross, 2012), p.26; Christian Aid, *Annual Report and Accounts 2011/12* (London: Christian Aid, 2012), p.34; Islamic Relief, *2012 Annual Report and Financial Statements* (Birmingham: Islamic Relief, 2012), p.20; Oxfam, *Annual Report & Accounts 2011/12* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2012), p.44; Save the Children Fund, *Changing the World for Children: Annual Report 2012* (London: Save the Children Fund, 2012), p.30.

and services without charge. Founded in 1963, the DEC has expanded and professionalised over time, and its fundraising power is impressive. The Committee's status was emphatically demonstrated by an appeal for the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, which raised a remarkable £392 million in public donations to be shared among the DEC members.²

This thesis explores this impressive rise of the British humanitarian NGO sector in the period between 1942 and 1985, specifically focusing upon the involvement of leading aid agencies in responding to major overseas emergencies. While this was not the starting point in the history of non-state humanitarianism, it was in the 1940s that the modern aid regime is widely seen as beginning to take shape. The devastation caused by the Second World War gave rise to a new generation of humanitarian organisations, including Christian Aid and Oxfam in Britain. The rate at which international NGOs were founded dramatically increased in the aftermath of the war, and continued to rise in the decades that followed.³ The conflict also resulted in Western governments assuming authority for co-ordinating humanitarian aid, reflecting the broader enthusiasm for state planning which characterised the period. As a result, humanitarianism entered a new phase of governance, in which aid agencies formed one part of a larger apparatus.

It will be shown that the expansion and rise to prominence of the sector over the decades that followed was driven by a perpetual cycle of major disasters in the global South. Responding to these humanitarian crises granted the leading NGOs access to the media, legitimacy, infrastructure, and a popular fundraising base. This process was

² As of April 2014, the DEC has made a total of 63 broadcast appeals since its first appeal in 1966, and is comprised of 13 member agencies: Action Aid, Age International, the British Red Cross, CAFOD, Care International, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Islamic Relief, Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children, Tearfund, and World Vision. For more on the contemporary DEC, see: <http://www.dec.org.uk/> [accessed 31 March 2014].

³ Colette Chabbott, 'Development INGOs', in John Boli and George M. Thomas (eds.), *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations since 1875* (Stamford, CA: Stamford University Press, 1999, pp.222-248), p.227.

embodied by the Disasters Emergency Committee. Created by the five largest organisations as a means to harness the power of television and dampen inter-agency competition, the DEC generated ever-increasing amounts of income and publicity for its members from 1966 onwards. The fundraising success of the Committee also helped shape popular conceptions of humanitarian NGOs, as emergency appeals in the media relied upon simplistic accounts of humanitarian philanthropy and provocative images of human suffering as a means to engage the public. The role of NGOs in responding to disasters was reinforced by the building up of a more complex and technocratic humanitarian infrastructure by the British government from the 1970s onwards, in which the DEC members were embedded as instruments for the delivery of relief. This also marked a closer integration of aid agencies with the state, paving the way for dramatic increases in official funding of NGOs in subsequent decades. This investigation ends with the substantial humanitarian response to famine in Ethiopia in 1984-85, which includes the iconic Band Aid and Live Aid fundraising events. Ethiopia has been presented as a major epochal event in the history of humanitarian action. The intensive media coverage and massive public donations generated by television images of famine is widely seen as a turning point for charitable fundraising, resulting in the rise of the professionalised and competitive aid industry we recognise today.

This growth of NGOs on the basis of emergency also overlapped with the sector taking up the cause of long-term economic and political development in the global South. This began in the early 1960s with organisations such as Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want recasting themselves as ‘development agencies’. Taking up the international development agenda also prompted a realisation that facilitating long-term change would require tackling the broader structural processes that created and perpetuated global poverty and injustice. Development-oriented NGOs thus gradually became more

committed to a political advocacy role from the 1960s onwards, which aimed to mobilise public opinion in support of lobbying against the structural causes of distant suffering. As this advocacy agenda evolved and became more sophisticated, major goals included lobbying for increases in official aid, cancelling Third World debt, highlighting the unethical practices of multinational corporations, and reforming structural inequalities in the global economic system. Growing emphasis on advocacy also encouraged the voicing of a critique of humanitarian aid from within the NGO community. This critique argued that short-term disaster relief did not contribute to these political goals, did not educate the public on the real causes of distant suffering, and arguably undermined this kind of campaigning altogether by perpetuating reductionist and problematic stereotypes of disaster victims.

This thesis thus explores how and why the sector came to be characterised by a significant paradox. Although many of the principal agencies self-identified with long-term development and advocacy, their continued growth and popularity was due to a public association with apolitical disaster relief. It will be argued that this apparent contradiction can be attributed to a number of key, interconnected factors. The institutional and technological development of television brought a new immediacy to distant suffering, stimulating public empathy and generating donations to aid agencies. By contrast, the public was far less responsive to the undramatic complexities of long-term development, and aid agencies consistently struggled in their attempts to mobilise popular support for political advocacy work. The British government also played a crucial role in this process, politically containing and co-opting aid agencies through co-funding arrangements and charitable regulations. While these forces all worked to restrict the advocacy ambitions of the sector, it will also be shown that the leading NGOs were themselves actively complicit in this process. Despite an increasing political focus, NGOs

were consistently driven by short-term institutional impulses, returning to short-term charitable relief as an effective way to maintain public support and drive fundraising in a crowded humanitarian marketplace.

This introduction will elaborate these key issues in greater detail. It begins by setting out how this investigation fits into a broader literature relating to NGOs and international aid. Of particular importance is the relationship between aid agencies and emergency relief; the taking up by NGOs of long-term development and political advocacy; and the importance of the mass media to humanitarian action. It also discusses how a historical investigation of the humanitarian sector contributes towards understanding broader trends in contemporary British history.

The approach taken in this thesis is influenced by a burgeoning field of international history, which explores how non-state actors have contributed to transnational movements and networks, interacting with official institutions to shape new forms of governance. This literature, and the issues it raises for a study of national NGO sector, is also surveyed and placed into context. This discussion is also supplemented by a historical overview of the emergence of modern humanitarian NGOs, from their origins in colonial missionary activity to the rise of the modern aid regime in the 1940s, to provide a historical background for the central investigation.

NGOs and Disaster Relief

The historical development of humanitarian NGOs is deeply intertwined with large-scale emergencies. Many prominent international aid agencies were created in response to the two World Wars, including Save the Children (1919), Oxfam (1942), and Christian Aid (1944). David Korten's famous typology of NGOs refers to 'first generation' organisations

as geared towards helping people in crisis through the provision of immediate first aid, food and shelter.⁴ NGOs have progressed significantly in their philosophies and programming over time, in Korten's terms passing through successive 'generations' of evolution to become more advocacy-oriented. However, the sheer scale of the contemporary humanitarian system attests to the continuing relevance of emergencies to aid and development organisations. Mark Duffield refers to the modern NGO movement expanding on the basis of the state of 'permanent emergency' which exists among the world's most vulnerable populations.⁵

However, there is also a long-standing critique which calls into question the entire practice of humanitarian aid as advanced by NGOs. This critique has been articulated from within the sector since the 1960s, although it has become more populist in recent years. Much of this literature focuses upon the unintended and harmful consequences that can arise from NGOs providing emergency relief, despite their benevolent intentions. This critique began after the involvement of NGOs in the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s, as the channelling of assistance into the secessionist state of Biafra also arguably prolonged the conflict by sustaining the Biafran military effort.⁶ This critique has continued to develop as NGOs have responded to successive complex emergencies. More recently, Fiona Terry (associated with Médecins Sans Frontières) speaks of a 'paradox of humanitarian action'. That is, while humanitarianism aims to alleviate suffering, it can inadvertently sustain conflict, and thus prolong the suffering it claims to address. Terry's

⁴ David Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1990); John Degenbol-Martinussen and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation* (London: Zed, 2003), pp.144-146.

⁵ Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp.74-75.

⁶ Alan R. Booth, 'The Churches in the Nigerian War', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 12:6 (April 1970, pp.184-188), p.188; see also: Ian Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar: Altruism under fire - non-profit organizations and international development* (Ottawa: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995), pp.102-106; Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London: Villiers, 1997, pp.72-77).

analysis is heavily influenced by the experiences of aid agencies in Rwanda in 1994, where thousands of *génocidaires* crossed the border to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and become refugees and beneficiaries of humanitarian aid.⁷

The longevity of this critique renders the continued involvement of NGOs in relief operations problematic. The underlying implication is that there are deeper, institutional impulses that have driven aid agencies towards their current prominence in the humanitarian aid system. A number of commentators have highlighted the financial and organisational benefits made available to NGOs by continued involvement in major emergencies. Indeed, many observers refer to the existence of an aid ‘industry’, deliberately evoking notions of commercial activity and market dynamics which would appear opposed to traditional ideals of humanitarian altruism. For instance, Thomas G. Weiss argues that ‘like entrepreneurs’, humanitarian NGOs are ‘concerned with image and marketing strategies in an expanding global business’ that ‘over the past two decades has become increasingly competitive with a glut of suppliers vying for their share of the market’.⁸ Fiona Terry similarly depicts this development as a phenomenon of the post-Cold War period:

‘The expansion of humanitarian activity at the end of the Cold War and the proliferation of NGOs has created a veritable ‘aid industry’. Larger global budgets for humanitarian aid... and the readiness of aid organisations to expand the notion of ‘humanitarian’ activity beyond the provision of life-saving relief into areas of postconflict peace-building and reconstruction have opened up new markets for Western commercial interest, and aid is becoming an enterprise’.⁹

A number of authors, many of whom have been employed within the humanitarian sector, depict contemporary NGOs along these lines, suggesting that they are motivated by

⁷ Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁸ Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Business* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p.3.

⁹ Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?*, p.236.

organisational self-interest and power as much as they are by altruistic impulses.¹⁰ Alexander Cooley and James Ron refer to the ‘NGO scramble’, to describe how the competitive pressures and marketisation inherent to the transnational humanitarian sector negatively impacts upon the work of NGOs. For Cooley and Ron, these forces work to prolong ineffective aid projects, subvert the long-term goals of NGOs, and create an over-reliance on official aid donors.¹¹ A particularly visceral critique has been made by Linda Polman, a former NGO field worker. A polemical attack upon the aid industry as a whole, Polman argues that the rapid expansion of non-governmental humanitarianism in recent years has also permitted a proliferation of unqualified, unprofessional and unethical aid agencies. The pressures of increased competition between organisations leads them to exaggerate and manipulate the media as they compete for contracts and donations.¹²

This populist critique also chimes somewhat with academic scholarship on the prominence of NGOs in the contemporary aid industry. For instance, James Fearon argues that an ongoing rise in the number of reported disasters can be at least partly attributed to an expansive and competitive global humanitarian sector. For Fearon, this sector has engaged in successful ‘task expansion’ by conceptualising more emergencies as warranting increased humanitarian assistance.¹³ What this all points to is that the phenomenal growth of humanitarian NGOs cannot be attributed solely to benevolent intentions. David Rieff captures this complexity neatly, stating that:

‘Anyone who saw, as I did, the grotesque display of humanitarian agencies’ flags flapping alongside each other in eastern Zaire like so many corporate flags in some business park in Purchase, New York, or San Jose, California, realized there was more going on than the

¹⁰ See, for instance: Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997); Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London: Earthscan, 2001).

¹¹ Alexander Cooley and James Ron, ‘The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action’, *International Security*, 27:1 (Summer 2002, pp.5-39).

¹² Linda Polman, *War Games: The Story of Aid and War in Modern Times* (London: Viking, 2010).

¹³ James D. Fearon, ‘The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid’, in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.49-72).

simple desire to help. The struggle to stamp out cholera, get the shelters built, and dig the pit latrines was simultaneously a struggle for market share'.¹⁴

This notion that 'there was more going on than the simple desire to help' is a phenomenon that should be interrogated further. Portraying humanitarian organisations in this light renders accounts of international NGOs as value-driven harbingers of global civil society problematic.¹⁵ Instead it raises pressing questions concerning how the financial and institutional expansion of NGOs has been driven by competitive rivalries and material incentives. Despite a long-standing critique of humanitarian aid, aid agencies may have continued to respond to overseas emergencies as a means to mobilise the public and generate funding. This in turn suggests that the relationship between NGOs and their supporters has been constructed and sustained through simplistic media representations of disasters. The depiction of humanitarian organisations as overly-reliant on official funding also raises challenging implications for how NGOs have contributed to, and been incorporated into, broader systems of governance. These issues all require sustained historical analysis. As the substantial literature on contemporary humanitarianism makes clear, a complex and expansive aid industry has come to the fore in the post-Cold War era. However, there is still much that we do not know about how this apparatus emerged and took shape historically, and the extent to which humanitarian NGOs actively shaped it.

These lines of inquiry build on theoretical insights advanced by a number of prominent scholars. A particularly influential and widely-cited account of NGOs and emergency aid has been put forward by Alex de Waal, who probes why famine in Africa persists despite decades of humanitarian relief operations. For de Waal, the only lasting

¹⁴ David Rieff, 'Charity on the Rampage: The Business of Foreign Aid', *Foreign Affairs* (February 1997), available at: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/52653/david-rieff/charity-on-the-rampage-the-business-of-foreign-aid> [accessed 31 March 2014].

¹⁵ A well-known example of this approach is Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

solution to famine is a political contract between governments and populations, as successfully implemented in India. However, he argues that a ‘humanitarian international’ of NGOs, academics, consultants, and lobbyists has instead systematically intervened in a non-political, philanthropic manner which has prevented such political solutions from being realised:

‘...the struggle against famine has become professionalized and institutionalized. Technical mastery - especially in public health - is important. But these processes represent a leaching of power from those who suffer famine. Generalized, internationalized responsibility for fighting famine is far less valuable than specific, local political accountability. The struggle against famine cannot be the moral property of humanitarian institutions’.¹⁶

For de Waal, the ‘humanitarian international’ therefore resembles a technocratic elite, in which NGOs are directly implicated as part of a self-perpetuating disaster relief industry concerned primarily with its own expansion. Furthermore, by intervening in a systematically non-political manner, NGOs have also depoliticised emergencies, by reconceptualising their political causes as technical problems requiring technical solutions. This image of NGO humanitarianism as a depoliticising force is a powerful critique, as it would also suggest that NGOs are actively preventing more structural solutions to global suffering from being realised.

A number of authors have presented similar arguments. John Hannigan writes that disasters and disaster response have a long history as being treated as non-political in nature, an ‘illusion’ which has been promoted and reinforced by UN agencies, the International Red Cross movement, and NGOs.¹⁷ Craig Calhoun argues that a discourse of ‘emergencies’ has become central to international affairs, which is fundamentally

¹⁶ de Waal, *Famine Crimes*, p.5.

¹⁷ John Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders: The International Politics of Natural Disasters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.9-11.

managerial and depoliticising as it situates disasters outside of ‘normal’ politics. This managerial perspective skirts democratic decision-making and promotes an apolitical form of humanitarian response.¹⁸ The humanitarian community therefore continues to have an aversion to political involvement, which is equated with ‘nonfeasance, malfeasance, incompetence, corruption and/or obstructionism’.¹⁹

Similar accusations have been targeted at the entire international aid system. A particularly influential critique of the ‘development industry’ has been made by James Ferguson, an anthropologist of development projects. Ferguson uses a case study of official aid in Lesotho to argue that the ‘development apparatus’ functions as not simply a ‘machine for eliminating poverty’, but as a ‘machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power which incidentally takes “poverty” as its point of entry’. Alongside this institutional effect is a ‘conceptual or ideological effect of depoliticising both poverty and the state’.²⁰ Poverty is subsequently reduced to a technical problem requiring technical solutions, negating calls for structural change. For Ferguson, the development apparatus therefore functions as an ‘*anti-politics machine*... depoliticising everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power’.²¹

For Ferguson, the logic and rationale of ‘development’ instinctively functions to fulfil its ‘instrument-effect’ of depoliticising poverty, creating a certain type of consciousness and style of intervention regarding the ‘underdeveloped’ world. This

¹⁸ Craig Calhoun, ‘A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order’, *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 41:4 (November 2004), pp.373-395.

¹⁹ A. Cooper Drury *et al.*, ‘The Politics of Humanitarian Aid: U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, 1964–1995’, *The Journal of Politics*, 67:2 (May 2005), pp.454-473), p.454.

²⁰ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development”, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1990), pp.255-256.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.xv (emphasis added).

permits the perpetuation of certain bureaucratic interests, which veil their agenda behind a technocratic language of expertise. Heavily influenced by Foucauldian notions of governmentality, Ferguson's critique is of crucial importance. Yet it is restricted to official aid agencies, and largely avoids the non-governmental sector. Indeed, writing in 1990, Ferguson reflects the spirit of the times when he implies that non-state actors may prove to be a viable solution to the dilemmas of official development:

‘The state is not the only game in town. The more interesting, and less explored, possibility is to seek out the typically non-state forces and organizations that challenge the existing dominant order and to see if links can be found between our expertise and their practical needs as they determine them.’²²

If NGOs have also been incorporated into the broader governmentality of this ‘development apparatus’, then it is reasonable to argue that NGOs reproduce this ‘anti-politics machine’ and the relations of power it conceals. Janet Townsend conceptualises development NGOs in this way, arguing that these organisations have come to form a coherent ‘transnational community’. The knowledge economy of this community is largely top-down, with governability functioning as a greater priority to donors than effective poverty reduction. This ‘new managerialism’ and accompanying audit culture imposes demands on NGOs that work against them ‘listening’ to the very populations they aim to assist.²³ There are clear parallels between this ‘transnational community’ and de Waal's depiction of a ‘humanitarian international’. Indeed, de Waal emphasises that the collective he is referring to ‘is a sub-group of the larger aid and development industry’.²⁴

There is a need to uncover and demonstrate this depoliticising process in action. Humanitarian NGOs have a long history of deliberately presenting themselves as

²² *Ibid.*, pp.286-287.

²³ Janet G. Townsend *et al.*, ‘The Role of the Transnational Community of Development Non-governmental Organizations: Governance or Poverty Reduction?’, *Journal of International Development*, 14:6 (August 2002, pp.829-839).

²⁴ de Waal, *Famine Crimes*, p.65.

apolitical, which dates back to the founding principles of the Red Cross movement. It will be argued that the creation of the Disasters Emergency Committee in 1963 consolidated and institutionalised this approach to humanitarianism in Britain, and through its publicity the DEC deliberately and consistently presented itself as a non-political actor. This was an image primarily constructed for the public, but it was also presented to the television broadcasters who provided the DEC with airtime, and the British government, who often worked closely with the Committee. For instance, a 1967 DEC appeal for the Middle East urged viewers to ‘forget politics’, and instead ‘help the tired, hungry, homeless, torn victims of the six-day war’.²⁵ This is inherently problematic, as over the same period, the majority of the DEC members were also aspiring to become more overtly political in their development campaigning and advocacy work. This study examines this contradictory tension at length, and what this reveals about the nature of non-governmental humanitarianism.

This issue of political engagement is crucial, as at the same time that NGOs were becoming more radical in their developmental campaigns, they were also co-ordinating more closely with the state to implement relief. A wide body of literature has argued that in the contemporary period NGOs have become deeply entwined with state institutions, as a result of an over-reliance on official financing to implement aid and development programmes. The amounts of humanitarian assistance channelled from official sources through NGOs today are substantial. In 2009, 17 percent of the funds channelled into the humanitarian system by donor governments went directly to NGOs. Furthermore, NGOs also receive substantial amounts of this funding indirectly via the specialist UN agencies.²⁶

²⁵ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Middle East appeal’, *The Guardian*, 27 June 1967, p.14.

²⁶ Weiss, *Humanitarian Business*, p.72.

In Britain, there is a well-established relationship between the NGO sector and the government, and the Department for International Development (DFID) now routinely delivers significant amounts of its substantial overseas aid budget through leading aid agencies.²⁷ Reliance on official funding has been interpreted by commentators as evidence that NGOs have effectively become subcontractors for neoliberal governments, who have privatised out their responsibilities for relief and poverty reduction to non-state actors.²⁸ This in turn has raised concerns about the potentially negative impact of official support upon the accountability, independence, legitimacy and performance of NGOs.²⁹ Mark Duffield argues that while NGOs define themselves as ‘non-governmental’, since the 1990s they have increasingly been absorbed into a ‘mutual web of overlapping objectives’ which connects them with donor governments, recipient states, intergovernmental agencies and Western militaries. For Duffield, the NGO community is no longer external to the state, but has instead ‘reinvented itself as intrinsic to its reconstruction and power projection’.³⁰

While the enmeshing of NGOs with the state appears self-evident today (in 2013 Oxfam received almost half of its annual income from ‘government and other public

²⁷ Department for International Development (DFID), *Statistics on International Development 2013* (London: DFID, 2013), available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/254277/Statistics_on_International_Development_2013a.pdf [accessed 31 March 2014].

²⁸ Larry Minear *et al.*, *News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996), p.27; Giorgio Ausenda, ‘Current issues in the study of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and humanitarian intervention, and questions for future research’, in David Turton (ed.), *War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1997, pp.217-252); Thomas G. Weiss, *Thinking about Global Governance: Why people and ideas matter* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

²⁹ Michael Edwards and David Hulme, ‘Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on non-governmental organisations’, *World Development*, 24:6 (June 1996, pp.961-973); David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, pp.167-180; Catherine Agg, ‘Trends in Government Support for Non-Governmental Organizations: Is the “Golden Age” of the NGO Behind Us?’, *UNRISD Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 23* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2006).

³⁰ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, pp.28-29.

authorities'³¹), there has been little published on how this took root historically. The relationship between the DEC members and the state is an important theme throughout this investigation, which is analysed systematically in chapters 3 and 4. Particular attention is paid to the 1970s, as it was during this decade that the government initiated a radical overhaul of its machinery for disaster relief, accepting new responsibilities for a more effective humanitarian response. A specialist Disaster Unit was subsequently created within the Ministry of Overseas Development (a predecessor to DFID), to provide a 'focal point' for all issues connected to humanitarian aid.³² The Disaster Unit pioneered a more professionalised and technocratic approach to emergency relief within Whitehall. Crucially, the Unit also deliberately targeted closer integration of its work with the NGO sector, using the DEC as a vehicle. This drive to draw upon the capacity of the sector reflected a broader official recognition of non-state actors, and the Unit increasingly utilised the DEC agencies as instruments to deliver humanitarian aid in a variety of contexts. This co-ordination raised the legitimacy of the DEC members, and provided them with a further source of income. It also effectively contained and co-opted the development NGOs, as they were enrolled into an emerging technocratic relief system and directed away from non-relief activities.

NGOs and the Politics of Long-Term Development

The growth and expansion of an NGO disaster relief industry suggests a problematic relationship between emergency work, and the broader involvement of the majority of the sector in long-term development. The evolution of NGOs towards taking up international

³¹ Oxfam, *Annual Report & Accounts 2012/13* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2013), p.5.

³² The National Archives of the UK, Kew (hereafter TNA): Foreign and Commonwealth Office Papers: FCO 59/1237: 'Disaster Unit', June 1974.

development is commonly located in the 1960s, as a series of UN-led initiatives influenced the philosophy and approach of a number of organisations.³³ Becoming ‘development agencies’ also drew NGOs further into the international aid system, as they co-ordinated more closely with UN institutions and donor governments. In Britain, the trio of Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want all became leading proponents of development in the 1960s, increasingly committing to solving the root causes of global hunger and poverty. In the process, these organisations also began a process of gradual internal politicisation, as they realised that rural development projects alone would not bring about lasting change. Instead, there was also a need for policy change by governments and multilateral institutions, to provide increased opportunities to developing nations within the international economic and political system.

Taking up international development hence also led to the emergence of a political advocacy agenda for NGOs. As Barbara Rugendyke summarises, the term ‘advocacy’ is generally used by NGOs to refer to campaigning designed to change public opinion, and lobbying which targets the ‘structures, policies and practices which institutionalise poverty and related injustice’. In practice campaigning encourages public support for lobbying, and all advocacy work is therefore geared towards bringing about positive and permanent change in the global South.³⁴ Furthermore, advocacy is generally taken to be ‘self-evidently of a political nature’, in that it is targeted at the root causes of overseas hunger, poverty, and suffering.³⁵ David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji define advocacy as specifically working towards long-term policy change to address these structural causes,

³³ See, for instance: Clare Saunders, ‘British Humanitarian, Aid and Development NGOs, 1949-Present’, in Nick Crowson *et al.* (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society and Politics Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.38-58), pp.43-44.

³⁴ Barbara Rugendyke, ‘Lilliputians or leviathans? NGOs as advocates’, in Barbara Rugendyke (ed.), *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp.1-14), p.7.

³⁵ Deborah Eade, ‘Preface’, in Deborah Eade (ed.), *Development and Advocacy* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2002, pp.ix-xvi), p.x.

rather than simply ‘speaking out to alert people of a problem in order to raise funds to support operational work’.³⁶

The evolution of NGO advocacy work over time has been documented, beginning with relatively untargeted campaigning in the 1960s. This has developed into a more sophisticated and professionalised approach in recent years, that focuses on specific issues and actors, such as debt relief, international finance, trade, and multinational corporations.³⁷ Kevin Watkins states that the goal of ending poverty requires a ‘fundamental redirection of policy on the part of other foci of power, including the UN, international financial and trade organisations, transnational corporations, official aid donors, and NGOs’.³⁸ In working towards these goals, NGOs have increasingly engaged in global alliances and transnational advocacy networks which mobilise a multitude of actors in pursuit of common objectives. A prominent example of this type of advocacy was the Jubilee 2000 campaign, a transnational coalition of churches, NGOs, trade unions and other civil society actors which aimed to raise awareness of Third World debt. Jubilee 2000 has been described as ‘the most successful industrial-country movement aimed at combating world poverty for many years, perhaps in all recorded history’.³⁹ This momentum later resulted in the Make Poverty History campaign of 2005, which also mass mobilised transnational civil society in support of global justice. Specifically, Make Poverty History aimed to secure policy commitments from the G8 governments for debt relief, increased aid, and international trade reforms. In Britain alone, the Make Poverty

³⁶ David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.99.

³⁷ Rugendyke, ‘Lilliputians or leviathans?’; Ian Anderson, ‘Global action: International NGOs and Advocacy’, in Rugendyke (ed.), *NGOs as Advocates for Development* (pp.71-95).

³⁸ Kevin Watkins, *The Oxfam Poverty Report* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1995), p.217.

³⁹ Nancy Birdsall and John Williamson, *Delivering on Debt Relief: From IMF Gold to a New Aid Architecture* (Washington, DC: Centre for Global Development, 2002), p.1.

History Campaign had 540 organisations connected to it, and development NGOs such as Christian Aid and Oxfam played a leading role.⁴⁰

The massive scale of the contemporary relief industry thus appears problematic in the context of this distinct NGO advocacy agenda, as the latter implies a shift in focus away from traditional emergency aid. As Deborah Eade summarises, advocacy is driven by ‘the realisation that development and humanitarian relief projects will never, in and of themselves, bring about lasting changes in the structures which create and perpetuate poverty and injustice’.⁴¹ This study therefore seeks to explore why the British humanitarian NGO sector built up a substantial apparatus for apolitical disaster relief, when many principal aid agencies wanted to de-emphasise this kind of work and focus on political advocacy instead. This is a key problem that drives this study, and to unpick it requires systematic analysis of these two distinct trajectories, and how they have co-existed in practice.

The relationship between NGO disaster relief and advocacy has not been systematically covered from a historical perspective. However, a number of authors do highlight a series of practical constraints on the effectiveness of campaigning and lobbying which may explain why NGOs have been unable to shift away from traditional humanitarian aid. Writing in 1993, Michael Edwards highlighted a lack of strategic direction, a lack of co-ordination between agencies, and the pressures of maintaining good relations with government as key barriers preventing the realisation of NGO advocacy goals.⁴² Edwards has also highlighted how NGOs have found certain issues more straightforward to present to the public and policymakers, such as landmines and sex

⁴⁰ Rugendyke, ‘Lilliputians or leviathans?’, p.2; Nicolas Sireau, *Make Poverty History: Political Communication in Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Simon Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2009), pp.157-160.

⁴¹ Eade, ‘Preface’, p.ix.

⁴² Michael Edwards, “Does the doormat influence the boot?”: critical thoughts on UK NGOs and international advocacy’, *Development in Practice*, 3:3 (1993, pp.163-175).

tourism. By contrast, more complex and structural forces such as international trade have proved more difficult to effectively mobilise around.⁴³ Larry Minear similarly speaks of a preference for direct action (by both agencies and the public), the sheer complexity of global poverty, and a reluctance to divert too much funding to educational and lobbying, as working against advocacy ambitions. Crucially, Minear also identifies a deep-rooted concern among humanitarians that campaigning and lobbying would ‘draw NGOs into the forbidden political arena’, which he argues has been a ‘formidable constraint’ on their advocacy ambitions.⁴⁴

This depiction of a problematic relationship between NGOs and politics raises fundamental questions. It suggests that moving into more radical educational and lobbying work has not been a smooth or organic process for aid agencies, but has instead been undertaken with difficulty and hesitation. This thesis explores at length the supposed politicisation of the British NGO sector that took place from the 1960s onwards, and how the leading NGOs approached and traversed this new path in practice. Becoming more overtly political was hazardous for aid agencies, as to do so was forbidden by British charity law. Legally, this was enforced by the Charity Commissioners, the non-ministerial body responsible for monitoring and regulating the voluntary sector. The Charity Commissioners tended to take a conservative view of charitable action and political lobbying, and their interventions often impacted directly upon the sector. However, charity law was not the only rationale for NGOs to hesitate about political engagement. Privately, the leading NGOs were also concerned that to become too closely associated with politics would also alienate their supporters, who it was believed supported them primarily because of charitable relief. As one of the more conservative agencies, Save the

⁴³ Michael Edwards, *Future Positive: International Co-operation in the 21st Century* (2nd ed.: London: Earthscan, 2004), p.197.

⁴⁴ Larry Minear, ‘The Other Missions of NGOs: Education and Advocacy’, *World Development*, 15 (1987, pp.204-208).

Children fretted throughout the 1960s that to be associated with the political activities of other NGOs in the sector could cause ‘disillusionment amongst many of its supporters, to the serious detriment of their fund-raising’.⁴⁵ The constraints of public opinion, and its impact on the sector during this period, is another crucial issue that requires further historical examination.

Humanitarianism and the Media

If public opinion was oriented primarily to apolitical disaster relief, it stands to reason that the media played a crucial role in shaping it. The history of non-governmental humanitarianism is padded with major emergency operations that were sparked by television coverage of distant suffering, which in turn galvanised popular compassion and massive donations to aid agencies. The huge public response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami indicates how this trend has both continued and extended in the contemporary period. There is a significant body of literature which explores the fundamental linkage between emergency interventions and the media; a recent publication begins from the position that ‘it is through media that most of us encounter disaster and bear witness to suffering around the world’.⁴⁶ Indeed, the mass media is widely understood as a critical force in the contemporary aid industry, due to its central role in publicising distant suffering and mobilising responses.⁴⁷

A historical analysis of the British humanitarian sector is therefore incomplete without an understanding of the role played by the mass media, especially television.

⁴⁵ The Save the Children Fund Archive, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham (hereafter SCFA): Box A421: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 271st Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 19 November 1968: Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development (E.4248).

⁴⁶ Mervi Pantti *et al.*, *Disasters and the Media* (NY: Peter Lang, 2012), p.1.

⁴⁷ Simon Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2009); Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders*, p.35.

Indeed, it was during the period under examination here that television suddenly emerged as the dominant form of British broadcasting. The 1950s witnessed a rapid spread of television ownership, especially after the Queen's coronation in 1953 and the introduction of commercial television (ITV) in 1955. By 1960 over 70 percent of the population had access to both channels, as television firmly supplanted radio as the leading medium.⁴⁸ Mark Donnelly describes the phenomenal rise of television as 'the most important cultural transformation of the sixties', as television was transformed from a luxury item into a social necessity. By 1975, more than 90 percent of all Britons possessed a television set, an emphatic demonstration of how the technology had become the lens through which the British public viewed and understood the wider world.⁴⁹

The institutional and technological development of television also helped fuel the growth of humanitarian NGOs. News footage of overseas emergencies publicised distant suffering to large audiences, which in turn encouraged donations to aid agencies. Technological advances in communications and filming reduced the delay between capturing and broadcasting footage, bringing a new level of immediacy to overseas events.⁵⁰ Michel Ogrizek writes that the twentieth century information revolution 'paved the way for contemporary humanitarian aid', by 'exposing to the whole world the misfortunes of people living in areas never seen and sharing their suffering in real time with an affluent protected public'.⁵¹ While the central importance of television to the rise

⁴⁸ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), pp.383-408; see also: Jack Williams, *Entertaining the Nation: A Social History of British Television* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2004), p.14.

⁴⁹ Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), p.77.

⁵⁰ Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986), pp.68-78; Edward Bliss, *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.444-445; Edward S. Herman and Robert McChesney, 'The Rise of the Global Media', in Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (eds.), *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader* (NY: New York University Press, 2003, pp.21-39); Jonathan Higgins, *Satellite Newsgathering* (2nd ed.: Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2007), pp.13-20.

⁵¹ Michel Ogrizek, 'The Media-Driven Humanitarian Response: Public perceptions and humanitarian realities as two faces of the same coin', in Augusto López-Claros and Silvia Hidalgo (eds.), *Humanitarian*

of NGOs is widely acknowledged, there has been little historical analysis of how the media and the humanitarian sector have interacted and shaped one another over time. This thesis does so through a focus upon the Disasters Emergency Committee, which offers unique insights into the intricate relationship between NGOs, disasters and the media.

Chapters one and two set out the creation and internal workings of the DEC at length. In short, the DEC was set up in 1963 as an umbrella body for the ‘big five’ aid agencies; the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, and War on Want. In the early 1960s, a series of disaster appeals on television raised record sums for individual agencies, which also intensified inter-agency competition within the sector. The DEC was intended to facilitate closer co-ordination between its members, and dampen this competition by making joint emergency appeals to the public on television after major disasters. The Committee was granted special arrangements with the BBC to make these appeals, the proceeds of which would then be shared between the members.⁵² The appeals were also broadcast simultaneously on ITV, as the body responsible for regulating commercial television (the Independent Television Authority, or ITA⁵³) used the same appeals machinery as the BBC.⁵⁴

From the outset, the BBC played an integral role in setting up the DEC, providing the facilities to produce appeals, and drawing up its guidelines and procedures. This reflected a longer history of the BBC providing services and airtime to charitable

Response Index 2007: Measuring Commitment to Best Practice (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp.65-73), p.65.

⁵² Christian Aid Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London (hereafter CAA): Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of a meeting’, 1 November 1965.

⁵³ The Independent Television Authority (ITA) was set up as part of the 1954 Television Act, to oversee and regulate commercial television. In 1972 the ITA was replaced by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). Today these regulatory powers are held by the Office of Communications, commonly known as Ofcom. See: Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock, ‘From start-up to consolidation: institutions, regions and regulation over the history of ITV’, in Catherine Johnson and Rob Turnock (eds.), *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005, pp.15-35).

⁵⁴ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the 8th meeting’, 23 August 1966.

organisations; for instance, in 1927 the Corporation had introduced its popular *Week's Good Cause* programme, which broadcast weekly charitable appeals on wireless radio.⁵⁵ In the 1950s the BBC began broadcasting similar charitable appeals on television. To be eligible for such appeals, organisations had to satisfy a variety of criteria, and were restricted to an interval of two years between requests.⁵⁶ This meant that in practice the presence of British NGOs on television was tightly restricted, as charities were not permitted to purchase advertising airtime on commercial television until 1989.⁵⁷ The DEC arrangements therefore represented an exclusive level of access to television for voluntary organisations, as the Committee members could collectively request a broadcast appeal for any disaster they considered to be of sufficient magnitude.

However, while the television broadcasting authorities granted this access, they also regulated the content of DEC appeals. Eve Colpus has set out persuasively how, in the interwar period, the BBC policed the political boundaries of British philanthropy through its *Week's Good Cause* programme. The Corporation did so by rejecting requests for broadcast appeals from any charitable organisations deemed to be implicitly or explicitly ideological or political.⁵⁸ This reflected the BBC's wider ethos of public service broadcasting, which emphasised impartiality and political neutrality.⁵⁹ In the same tradition, the television broadcasters insisted that all DEC appeals were to be explicitly non-political in character, which reinforced the Committee's stance of depoliticised

⁵⁵ Eve Colpus, 'The *Week's Good Cause*: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-War BBC', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:3 (2011, pp.305-329), p.306; see also: Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.47.

⁵⁶ BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC): file R7/283/1: 'Appeals Policy and Practice', January 1961.

⁵⁷ Independent Television Authority (ITA)/Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA)/Cable Authority Archive, University of Bournemouth Library, Poole (hereafter ITA/IBAA): Box IBA/00943, file 8072 (vol. 1): Independent Broadcasting Authority, 'Charities given the right to advertise on independent television and radio', 4 September 1989.

⁵⁸ Colpus, 'The *Week's Good Cause*', p.314.

⁵⁹ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: Press, broadcasting and the internet in Britain* (7th ed: Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

humanitarianism. As chapter four explores, in the early 1980s the broadcasters were also prepared to directly intervene to prevent any ‘political’ activities by the DEC members. Historical analysis of the DEC therefore sheds light on how television broadcasters stimulated the growth of humanitarian NGOs, while also shaping and containing them.

Television also shaped the humanitarian sector more generally, due to the particular way in which overseas disasters were constructed and presented in news and current affairs programmes. Scholars have consistently shown that the mass media is highly selective in its coverage of such emergencies, with only visible large-scale crises receiving significant attention and news time. These tendencies are attributed to the news values and judgements institutionalised within the globalised media industry, which foster a professional bias to not seriously cover overseas disasters until they have become large in scale, visually dramatic and negative, and can be presented in simplistic and unambiguous terms. Geopolitics also contributes to this process, as events become less visible the farther they occur away from home, leading to a distinct lack of coverage for African nations.⁶⁰

Furthermore, it has been argued that the media frames all disasters within a consistent and simplistic framework. Jonathan Benthall refers to a ‘well established narrative convention’ for disasters, characterised by familiar tropes and symbols, such as heroic Western aid workers rushing to save starving African children. In the process, emergencies are heavily simplified, and their complex causes are reduced to unambiguous

⁶⁰ Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:1 (1965, pp.64-91); Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*; Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Greg Philo, ‘From Buerk to Band Aid: the Media and the 1984 Ethiopian Famine’, in John Eldridge (ed.), *Getting the Message: News, Truth and Power* (London: Routledge, 1993, pp.104-125); Minear *et al.*, *The News Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action*; Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (eds.), *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London: Zed, 1999); Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999); CARMA International, *The CARMA Report on Western Media Coverage of Humanitarian Disasters* (Washington, DC: CARMA, 2006); Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting*; Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013).

explanations (often presenting complex man-made crises as sudden natural disasters).⁶¹

Stanley Cohen similarly writes of a 'required template for famine reporting':

'People must already be starving to death; the causes and solutions must be simplified; and the language of a morality play must be used. Mothers and children are ideal victims; men are associated with violent 'factions' or 'war-lords', and seldom appear to be hungry (they are too busy being photographed brandishing guns). And so on.'⁶²

The media's perceived orientation toward simplification, distortion, and a narrow focus upon physical suffering would feasibly reinforce public support for apolitical disaster relief by NGOs, rather than complex and less dramatic advocacy. The leading NGOs have long understood this problem; for instance, the first ever DEC appeal in 1966 (for an earthquake in Turkey) coincided with Oxfam undertaking a major development programme in India, and the organisation observed the contrasting responses to the two initiatives. While the public had donated a record sum to the 'brilliant' DEC television appeal, they had also been 'stolidly unmoved and apparently unconvinced by the Indian famine'.⁶³

However, there is also a need to explore how NGOs have themselves been implicated in this process. A recent study argues that contemporary aid agencies have assimilated a prevailing 'media logic', effectively pitching and packaging stories of humanitarian crises in simplistic ways which conform with established news values.⁶⁴ More broadly, the publicity produced by humanitarian organisations is the subject of a long-standing critique, which challenges the use of simplistic narratives and provocative images of starving children in NGO appeals. The processes by which audiences receive

⁶¹ Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, pp.188-191.

⁶² Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p.176.

⁶³ Oxfam, *The Sibford Papers: Discussion Week for Young People* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1966), p.48.

⁶⁴ Simon Cottle and David Nolan, 'Global Humanitarianism and the Changing Aid-Media Field: "Everyone was Dying for Footage"', *Journalism Studies*, 8:6 (2007), pp.862-878).

and respond to media messages are complex, and debates continue over the extent to which audiences have agency to interpret and shape messages or ‘codes’ promoted by television and the media.⁶⁵ While the nature of audience reception for charitable advertising is also contested⁶⁶, there is a general consensus among commentators that this style of representation negatively impacts upon public perceptions of the developing world. It is argued that these appeals reproduce colonial ideas and stereotypes, by presenting the global South as helpless, passive, and dependent upon foreign assistance and guidance. Negative images of vulnerable children have attracted especially strong criticism, for allegedly infantilising the developing world and attributing to it an ignorant and child-like state. While these images have a track record of provoking an emotional response from viewers, they have also been implicated in reinforcing patronising stereotypes of the Third World, while obscuring the more complex political causes of global poverty and suffering.⁶⁷

There therefore appears to be an inherent contradiction between the use of these images by NGOs to raise funds, and the stated commitment of the same agencies to

⁶⁵ Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’, *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Occasional Paper* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973); Ronald Lemboa and Kenneth H. Tucker, ‘Culture, television, and opposition: Rethinking cultural studies’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 7:2 (1990, pp.97-116); Lawrence Black, ‘Whose finger on the button? British television and the politics of cultural control’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25:4 (October 2005, pp.547-575); David E. Morrison, ‘Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 625:1 (September 2009, pp.116-127).

⁶⁶ Magdalini Tsoutsoumpi, ‘Audience Reception of Charity Advertising: Making Sense, Interpreting and Decoding Advertisements That Focus on Human Suffering’ (MSc thesis: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012).

⁶⁷ Jørgen Lissner, ‘Merchants of Misery’, *New Internationalist*, 100 (June 1981); Henrietta Josephine Lidchi, ‘“All in the choosing eye”: Charity, Representation and the Developing World’ (Unpublished PhD thesis: Open University, 1993); Voluntary Service Overseas, *The Live Aid Legacy: The developing world through British eyes – A research report* (London: VSO, 2001); Kate Manzo, ‘An extension of colonialism? Development education, images and the media’, *The Development Education Journal*, 12:2 (2006, pp.9-12); Kate Manzo, ‘Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood’, *Antipode*, 40:4 (2008, pp.632-657); Lisa Rideout, ‘Representations of the “Third World” in NGO advertising: practicalities, colonial discourse and western understandings of development’, *Journal of African Media Studies*, 3:1 (March 2011, pp.25-41); Nandita Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

promoting development and advocating for long-term change. This tension is particularly significant to the time period in question here, as it was during the 1960s that the stereotypical image of a starving African child was elevated into a ‘universal icon of human suffering’. This was due largely to the intensive dissemination of such images in television news and NGO fundraising appeals.⁶⁸ Unpicking this contradiction feeds back into broader questions concerning the institutional impulses that have driven the growth of NGOs, and the extent of their own political engagement. This also reinforces the crucial importance of the mass media to understanding the British humanitarian industry, given the central place of mediation in shaping public responses to distant suffering (and indeed, the wider world in general), and the complex relationship between the NGO sector and television.

Humanitarian NGOs and contemporary British history

A historical investigation of the British humanitarian sector clearly raises important questions about the politics, dynamics and practices of aid agencies. It also contributes towards understanding broader debates and processes in contemporary British history as a whole. A growing body of scholarship now analyses non-state actors as a way to open up familiar terrains of British political and social history to new approaches and perspectives. A recent edited collection begins from the position that ‘contemporary Britain can only be properly understood with reference to the phenomenon of non-governmental organisations... their influence can be detected at the heart of every major socio-political initiative of the post-war period’.⁶⁹ Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas Crowson,

⁶⁸ Cohen, *States of Denial*, p.178.

⁶⁹ James McKay and Matthew Hilton, ‘Introduction’, in Nick Crowson *et al.* (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain* (pp.1-20), p.1.

and Jean-François Mouhot argue that the impressive growth of the voluntary sector as a whole in the twentieth century reflects a broader professionalisation of British society, which has granted increased authority to expert elites. For Hilton *et al.*, rising public support for NGOs therefore points to a transformation in the nature of socio-political engagement in modern Britain, as politics has been both professionalised and personalised.⁷⁰

In a similar vein, the historical rise of the British humanitarian sector in the post-war period can also be expected to shed light on wider issues in British society. Firstly, there is a need to unpick what the growth of public support for aid agencies since the 1940s reveals about civic and political engagement in Britain. There is a long lineage of accounts which portray such participation as having fundamentally declined in the contemporary period. Robert Putnam famously argued that ‘social capital’ (the connections between individuals) had declined in the United States after 1950, which contributed to citizens disengaging from politics. For Putnam, this disengagement correlated directly with a decline in the membership of civic organisations, weakening the social bonds required for an effective democracy.⁷¹ While Putnam's methodology and interpretations have been questioned⁷², his findings also fit into a broader body of literature which connects social capital and civic engagement to a vibrant voluntary sector.⁷³ In Britain, historian Frank Prochaska depicts this decline as having onset ever since the end of the Victorian era, which marked a high point of Christian-inspired

⁷⁰ Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁷¹ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

⁷² For a useful summary of critiques of Putnam, see: John Field, *Social Capital* (2nd ed.: London: Routledge, 2008), pp.41-43.

⁷³ For instance, see: William A. Maloney *et al.*, ‘Social Capital and Associational Life’, in Stephen Baron *et al.* (eds.), *Social Capital: Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.212-225); Jose Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Field, *Social Capital*.

philanthropy. For Prochaska, the emergence of the modern welfare state displaced this dynamic voluntary action with the detached authority of secular experts.⁷⁴

However, such declinist accounts do not correlate with the phenomenal rise of public support for NGOs in the post-1945 period, most obviously expressed in financial contributions. This is especially apparent for the leading humanitarian organisations, which have experienced a phenomenal rate of growth since the 1940s. Putnam notably dismissed the contribution of major campaigning NGOs such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace to social capital, referring to them as ‘tertiary’ organisations in which membership is restricted to the passive, individual act of donating money (‘chequebook activism’).⁷⁵ Establishing to what extent this is an accurate depiction of the humanitarian NGO sector requires further research. In a case study of the relationship between British development NGOs and the public, Luke Desforges makes similar arguments to Putnam, concluding that these organisations are ‘inimical to global citizenship’. For Desforges, this is because they are by nature professional expert bodies which are geared towards the ‘marketing driven recruitment of support which enables the continuation of their organisation’.⁷⁶ This depiction of international aid organisations broadly correlates with the notion of a professionalised and self-interested aid industry put forward by contemporary critics.

The issue of public engagement is complicated for international aid NGOs by the problematic relationship between their emergency relief work, and their political advocacy activities on the causes of underdevelopment. While the former tends to be characterised by simplistic appeals to the public for donations to support immediate

⁷⁴ Frank Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, pp.153-160.

⁷⁶ Luke Desforges, ‘The formation of global citizenship: international non-governmental organisations in Britain’, *Political Geography*, 23 (2004, pp.549-569), p.565.

assistance, the latter explicitly aims to educate and mobilise the public in support of long-term change in the global South. The two would therefore appear to be promoting very different kinds of public engagement. What this suggests is a need for sustained historical research into the nature of popular support for humanitarian NGOs, examined in tandem with the types of publicity produced by aid agencies. It is well established that simplified narratives and negative imagery of starving children have been a mainstay of the international aid sector. This raises a question whether this imagery has directly increased the tendency of the public to support emergency relief at the expense of development. This in turn would imply that declinist narratives of contemporary civic participation may be accurate, in relation to how the British public engages with the developing world via NGOs.

There is also a need to interrogate the forms of activism facilitated by humanitarian NGOs, and how this fits into a broader history of social movements. There is a voluminous literature which argues that a wave of ‘new social movements’ emerged in the 1960s, which were fundamentally different in character from those that had come before. This scholarship argues that increased post-war affluence and education precipitated a shift in the individual values of citizens, from the material concerns of previous movements to post-material issues such as the environment and human rights.⁷⁷ New social movements literature tends to privilege the 1960s as a key historical juncture when post-material concerns first became evident in young, affluent and educated groups in North America and Western Europe.⁷⁸ However, this approach appears problematic

⁷⁷ For more on post-materialism, see: Ronald Inglehart, ‘The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies’, *The American Political Science Review*, 65:4 (December 1971, pp.991-1017); Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977); Kenneth Newton and Jan W. Van Deth, *Foundations of Comparative Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.141-146.

⁷⁸ Paul Byrne, *Social Movements in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp.47-49; Adam Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945: Sex, Colour, Peace and Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp.30-56; Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements 1768-2012* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012).

when applied to the growth of the humanitarian sector. As discussed further in chapter two, the 1960s was indeed an important period for aid agencies. Prominent organisations such as Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want took up the cause of international development and gradually embarked on a more overtly political path. These agencies also attracted support from younger and more radical activists, who pushed for their organisations to take up a more confrontational stance on the political causes of global poverty.

However, approaching humanitarian NGOs from a social movement perspective also fails to capture their complexity. Despite this influx of younger and more radical elements, moderate and conservative voices have always been influential within the sector. Many of the principal NGOs were founded and shaped by religious inspiration and middle-class professionals. The social movements approach also fails to account for the close relationship that has always existed between the sector and government. As will be explored further in chapter three, humanitarian NGOs have long looked to the state for approval and legitimacy, and worked closely with government to implement disaster relief. These bonds were consolidated with the creation of the DEC, paving the way for a closer integration of the work of the leading NGOs and the Ministry of Overseas Development in the 1970s. This thesis therefore takes an approach distinct to the sociological literature on social movements, and instead looks toward a more complex and nuanced analysis of the politics of activism which can account for the diversity, professionalism and interconnections with governance which characterises the humanitarian sector.

Furthermore, the transnational character of humanitarian NGOs provides insights into the relationship between Britain and the wider world. This is important, as the period under examination in this study also overlapped with the end of empire, and the

emergence of the Third World as a distinct entity. While historians have long debated the extent of the impact of empire on British society⁷⁹, an impressive body of scholarship has argued persuasively for the prevalence of colonial legacies in the post-imperial period.⁸⁰ The growth of public support for NGO humanitarianism should therefore shed light on how engagement with the former colonial territories after decolonisation helped shape notions of citizenship, culture and identity within Britain itself.

Scholars have often presented contemporary aid agencies as heirs to colonial discourses of benevolence and paternalism.⁸¹ James Vernon states that in the post-war period, British humanitarian NGOs ‘neatly repackaged the old imperial conceits of the civilizing mission, by leading the now global war against hunger’.⁸² Anna Bocking-Welch details how, through involvement in the 1960s UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign (which as discussed in chapter one, influenced many NGOs to become more development-oriented), imperial ideas of British philanthropy and trusteeship were extended after decolonisation, co-existing with newer discourses of humanitarian aid and development.⁸³ The enduring relevance of these colonial outlooks in contemporary Britain may, therefore, suggest that humanitarian philanthropy has blossomed in the void created by the collapse of the imperial project. Decolonisation generated considerable public anxiety and debate concerning the relevance of Britain in a post-imperial world, neatly captured in Dean Acheson's oft-quoted 1962 remark that Britain had ‘lost an empire and... not yet found a

⁷⁹ For a useful summary of this debate, see: Simon J. Potter, ‘Empire, Cultures and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain’, *History Compass*, 5:1 (2007, pp.51-70).

⁸⁰ For recent examples of this scholarship, see: Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Andrew Thompson (ed.), *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸¹ Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill, ‘The Missionary Position: NGOs and development in Africa’, *International Affairs*, 78:3 (2002, pp.567-583).

⁸² James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), p.272.

⁸³ Anna Bocking-Welch, ‘Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960–70’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.879-896).

role'.⁸⁴ Indeed, Acheson's famous remark serves as the starting point for Brian Harrison's recent, comprehensive history of postwar Britain.⁸⁵ The growth of public support for humanitarian aid may reflect one potential vision of this role, repackaging what Rob Skinner and Alan Lester termed the colonial 'concern for distant strangers' for a post-imperial age.⁸⁶ Such a line of analysis also feeds back into broader debates about the nature of citizenship, civic engagement and identity in contemporary Britain.

NGO History

There is a broad and diverse body of literature which addresses international aid and development NGOs, much of which originates in the social sciences and is ahistorical in character. Historians have traditionally paid less attention to these actors, although important and original scholarship is now emerging. A number of historians have explored the history of the Save the Children Fund, much of which focuses on their activities in the interwar years.⁸⁷ Rebecca Gill looks at the early years of the British Red Cross, as part of a study into the historical origins of organised British emergency relief.⁸⁸ Matthew Hilton has recently problematised the history of British development NGOs and

⁸⁴ Douglas Brinkley, 'Dean Acheson and the "Special Relationship": The West Point Speech of December 1962', *The Historical Journal*, 33:3 (September 1990, pp.599-608).

⁸⁵ Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Brian Harrison, *Finding a Role?: The United Kingdom 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸⁶ Rob Skinner and Alan Lester, 'Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.729-747).

⁸⁷ Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!'" Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 86:231 (February 2013, pp.116-137); Ellen Boucher, 'Cultivating Internationalism: Save the Children Fund, Public Opinion and the meaning of Child Relief, 1919-1924', in Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (eds.), *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars* (London: IHR, 2012, pp.169-188); Matthew Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Paternalism and Colonialism', *The Journal of Modern History* (forthcoming, 2015).

⁸⁸ Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion: Humanity and Relief in War, Britain 1870-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

human rights.⁸⁹ Hilton has also examined the British humanitarian sector as a whole, as a case study in a broader historical account of NGOs in Britain in the twentieth century.⁹⁰ There have also been authorised histories published on Oxfam and War on Want, which despite their limitations are very useful. Maggie Black's historical account of Oxfam's first fifty years is particularly impressive in its scholarly detail.⁹¹ This investigation adds to this emerging body of work. Outside of studies of specific NGOs, there is a burgeoning field of international history which examines the contributions of non-state actors to transnational movements and global governance. This thesis takes its cue from this scholarship, and the approach taken to NGOs in subsequent chapters is broadly inspired by the themes it raises.

Much of this literature has been influenced by the work of Akira Iriye. Iriye explores the historical evolution of international organisations (intergovernmental and non-governmental) since the nineteenth century, and how they have contributed to the making of the contemporary world. Iriye argues that these organisations have been the principal promoters of a 'global consciousness', an alternate global community that has 'tended to develop with its own momentum, on a separate level of existence from the international system defined by sovereign states or from the business world'.⁹² For Iriye, studying international non-state actors therefore permits a fresh perspective on globalisation, and a potential reconceptualisation of contemporary international history in non-state centric terms. These ambitions have helped stimulate a literature on international history and global governance which 'sees beyond the state' to emphasise the importance

⁸⁹ Matthew Hilton, 'International Aid and Development NGOs in Britain and Human Rights since 1945', *Humanity*, 3:3 (Winter 2012, pp.449-472).

⁹⁰ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*.

⁹¹ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992); Mark Luetchford and Peter Burns, *Waging the War on Want: 50 Years of Campaigning against World Poverty* (London: War on Want, 2003).

⁹² Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Los Angeles, CA: California University Press, 2002), p.209.

of NGOs and other non-state actors.⁹³ This scholarship aims to account for how, in our global epoch, ‘power is shifting increasingly to amorphous forces, such as environmental, or to communications networks, or to new, less fixed sorts of institutions, such as multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations’.⁹⁴

This approach is apparent in Matthew Connelly's recent history of the global population control movement, which he charts from its imperial origins, to its peak in the 1970s and 1980s. The depiction of population control as a ‘global movement’ permits Connelly to move beyond monolithic geopolitics. Instead, Connelly examine how a wide range of actors interacted in complex ways, yet produced a discernible direction and momentum. As Connelly summarises:

‘Scientists and activists organized across borders to press for common norms of reproductive behaviour. International and nongovernmental organizations spearheaded a worldwide campaign to reduce fertility. Together they created a new kind of global governance, in which proponents tried to control the population of the world without having to answer to anyone in particular.’⁹⁵

For Connelly, this represents a new phase in international history, as ‘a transnational network of population experts took up where empires left off’.⁹⁶ Connelly's account therefore moves away from viewing the twentieth century through the ideological prism of the Cold War. Instead it brings to the fore questions about governance, the consequences of expertise, and the web of interactions between the modern technocratic state, its intergovernmental equivalents, and non-state actors. These questions could

⁹³ Matthew Connelly, ‘Seeing Beyond the State: The Population Control Movement and the Problem of Sovereignty’ *Past & Present*, 193 (November 2006, pp.197-233).

⁹⁴ Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (NY: Routledge, 2006), p.17.

⁹⁵ Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2008), pp.6-7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10.

conceivably be applied to a wide variety of case studies; Connelly himself concludes that his investigation into population control can be adapted to other transnational networks:

‘The world is now full of transnational movements responding to a range of different ‘crises’ including epidemic disease, refugee flows, and climate change. Many see global governance as the hope of the future. It appears to be a welcome alternative to the sovereign state at a time in which the most important problems cannot be contained by national borders’.⁹⁷

Matthew Hilton's history of the global consumer movement adopts a similar approach, charting its expansion in the post-1945 period. Hilton argues that consumer activism was not confined to affluent capitalist society, but was instead a global phenomenon, as activists emerged across the global South in the 1960s and 1970s. Like Connelly, Hilton depicts a global alliance of NGOs and non-state actors, interacting to influence and shape governance at the international level. Indeed, Hilton argues that the consumer movement played a crucial role in pioneering these transnational networks, through famous and influential campaigns such as those targeting the sale of infant formula in the developing world.⁹⁸ Through a focus on the advocacy activities of the movement, such as in its relations with the UN, Hilton also raises questions of expertise and governance in a similar vein to Connelly.

Peter Gatrell's recent study of the 1959-60 World Refugee Year (WRY) campaign is also framed in a similar manner, examining how WRY was the product of interactions between the UN, national governments and NGOs in conceptualising and addressing displaced populations around the world. Gatrell's focus is the ‘national and transnational networks that were created to meet the perceived needs of refugees, and how refugees in

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.380.

⁹⁸ Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity For All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalisation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press).

turn engaged with external agencies'.⁹⁹ For Gatrell, WRY was also associated with the consolidation and extension of the NGO sector, as 'the number of NGOs has since multiplied enormously and their universe has changed out of all recognition'.¹⁰⁰

What such work reflects is the emergence of a literature inspired by Foucauldian notions of governmentality, which presents a broader analytical approach to NGOs. The big themes raised in this literature, such as advocacy, expertise, governance, and technopolitics, can be all be directly applied to a case study of the humanitarian NGO sector. What they would indicate is a need to capture not only the growth of aid agencies, but also their professionalisation, their complex interactions with the state, and their contribution to shaping and promoting new forms of humanitarian governance. As an approach, this is also quite distinctive from accounts which cast NGOs as bottom-up social movements.

The major distinction between this thesis, and the international literature discussed here, is that it focuses on a specific national NGO sector, rather than a transnational movement (although in practice humanitarian NGOs are self-evidently transnational actors). It therefore looks to apply these themes and questions within a national context. A similar approach can be seen in James Vernon's modern history of hunger. Vernon charts how conceptualisations of hunger in Britain evolved over time as a result of the interactions within a diffuse network of experts, humanitarians, philanthropists and scientists, who worked to construct and shape modern social democracy. Vernon thus avoids a clean narrative of the state directing food policy from above, and points to multiple sites of governance and power in modern Britain.¹⁰¹ As historians increasingly acknowledge the important contributions of non-state actors in making contemporary Britain, more studies like these can be expected to emerge.

⁹⁹ Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-63* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.246.

¹⁰¹ Vernon, *Hunger*.

The Historical Origins of Modern Humanitarian NGOs

This thesis charts the history of the British humanitarian NGO sector, between 1942 and 1985. While this represents an important period for non-state humanitarianism, NGOs have a much longer lineage than the 1940s. What follows therefore is a brief historical overview of the origins and emergence of humanitarian organisations, up to the period focused upon in this study. While the term ‘NGO’ is itself a product of the 1940s and the United Nations¹⁰², the antecedents of modern aid agencies can be traced back much further.

The emergence of the humanitarian concern for distant strangers is usually located in the late eighteenth century. This was a crucial period for the emergence of modern transnational organisations more generally, driven by the impact of Enlightenment thought, the societal transformations brought about by industrialisation, and the spread of empire overseas.¹⁰³ These forces stimulated humanitarian notions of compassion, while also making people more aware of their presence in ‘a new global assemblage of empire’.¹⁰⁴ In this context, the forerunners to modern aid agencies were the missionary societies that operated in the imperial territories, reflecting a migration of evangelicals from industrial cities to colonial outposts.

While these organisations aimed to evangelise native populations, they also engaged in practical work aimed at improving the living standards of the communities in which they operated, such as through the construction of schools. In Britain, some of the earliest of these groups were the London Missionary Society (founded in 1795) and the

¹⁰² Kerstin Martens, ‘Mission Impossible? Defining Nongovernmental Organizations’, *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organisations*, 13:3 (September 2002, pp.271-285).

¹⁰³ Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), p.4; Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (London: Hurst & Co., 2013), pp.23-24; Peter Stamatov, *The Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empires, and Advocacy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁰⁴ Skinner and Lester, ‘Humanitarianism and Empire’, p.732.

Church Missionary Society (founded in 1799). British Quakers established the Friends Foreign Missionary Association in 1868, which worked at improving schools and hospitals across Africa and Asia.¹⁰⁵ Missionaries and Quakers were also key actors in the development of the anti-slavery movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which has been presented in some accounts as the beginning of modern British humanitarian thought and action.¹⁰⁶

These organisations tended to be entangled with the practices and discourses of colonial governance.¹⁰⁷ As Michael Barnett argues, while early humanitarianism contained discourses of equality, it also promoted discourses of ‘Christianity, colonialism and commerce’. These were paternalistic in nature, as indigenous populations were considered to be primitive and backwards in relation to the civilised colonisers. Humanitarianism was therefore coloured from the outset by colonial notions of the ‘civilising mission’, and early humanitarian organisations operated within the parameters of the imperial state.¹⁰⁸ For instance, Harald Fischer-Tiné documents how the Salvation Army's early development activities in India worked to reinforce British colonial rule, as it increasingly took on subcontracting work for the imperial authorities.¹⁰⁹

As the nineteenth century progressed, emergency humanitarianism became more prominent, as new organisations appeared following the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1859. Famously created by Henry Dunant in

¹⁰⁵ Saunders, ‘British Humanitarian, Aid and Development NGOs’, pp.40-41; Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi, *The NGO Factor in Africa: The Case of Arrested Development in Kenya* (NY: Routledge, 2006), pp.60-61.

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance: Vanessa Pupavac, ‘Between Compassion and Conservatism: A Genealogy of Humanitarian Sensibilities’, in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions* (NY: Zone, 2010, pp.129-149), p.130.

¹⁰⁷ Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp.54-55.

¹⁰⁹ Harald Fischer-Tiné, ‘Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism, and the “Prehistory” of NGOs (ca. 1880–1920)’, in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.29-67).

response to suffering he witnessed at the Battle of Solferino, the ICRC aimed to save lives and provide neutral care for wounded soldiers. The Red Cross's founding principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality would later gain widespread acceptance as the core principles of international humanitarianism as a whole. The creation of the ICRC also led to various national Red Cross societies being set up, expanding the emerging Red Cross movement.¹¹⁰ The British Red Cross originated as the British National Society for Aid to the Sick and Wounded, founded in 1870 in response to the Franco-Prussian War and under the patronage of Queen Victoria. British surgeons and nurses from the Society served in both the French and German armies during the conflict.¹¹¹ It later adopted the Red Cross emblem and became the British Red Cross in 1905, receiving a royal charter in 1908.¹¹² British Quakers also established the Friends War Victims Relief Committee in 1870, to provide relief for those affected by conflict in Europe.¹¹³

In the early twentieth century, the First World War and subsequent creation of the League of Nations acted as significant drivers for the further growth of humanitarian organisations. Bruno Cabanes argues that the outbreak of the First World War led to significant changes in international humanitarian action, as relief work became more secular and organised around transnational networks of experts, such as physicians, engineers, and social workers. Humanitarian action on the ground was professionalised as a result.¹¹⁴ The war gave rise to a renewed sense of internationalism, and a new generation of international NGOs larger in scale and more geared for practical action than their

¹¹⁰ David P. Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹¹¹ John S. Haller Jr., *Battlefield Medicine: A History of the Military Ambulance from the Napoleonic Wars through World War I* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), pp.67-68; Rebecca Gill, *Calculating Compassion*.

¹¹² Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *A Historical Guide to NGOs in Britain: Charities, Civil Society and the Voluntary Sector since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.192.

¹¹³ Saunders, 'British Humanitarian, Aid and Development NGOs', p.41.

¹¹⁴ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.4.

predecessors. For instance, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was founded in 1919 as the League of Red Cross Societies. The Federation was intended to bring together the existing national Red Cross entities, and promote the creation of new branches across the globe.¹¹⁵ The Federation also prompted an expansion of the activities of the Red Cross movement, beyond strictly wartime assistance to include public health and disaster relief.¹¹⁶

In Britain, the Save the Children Fund (SCF) was founded in 1919 by sisters Eglantyne Jebb and Dorothy Buxton, to provide aid to civilians suffering as a result of the Allied blockade of Germany. SCF quickly established itself as a leading humanitarian agency in Britain, a position it still maintains almost a century later. Save the Children's success was largely the result of its innovative and professionalised fundraising style, which utilised graphic images of suffering children to capture the attention of the public, and maximise the impact of its humanitarian rhetoric. However, the Fund's publicity also worked to obscure the radical internationalism of SCF's founders, who had intended the provision of humanitarian aid to children to be an act of civil diplomacy which would rebuild the bonds between European nations broken by war.¹¹⁷ Instead, SCF's publicity fostered a one-sided relationship between the Fund and its supporters, presenting children as universal figures who lacked any distinct national or political context. The success of SCF embedded this publicity style within the British humanitarian sector, and many modern NGOs would later adopt similar fundraising techniques.¹¹⁸

The emergence of Save the Children reflected both changes and continuities in the character of early twentieth century humanitarianism. SCF promoted itself as non-political

¹¹⁵ Davies, *NGOs*, pp.85-86.

¹¹⁶ Julia F. Irwin, *Making the World Safe: The American Red Cross and a Nation's Humanitarian Awakening* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.194-196.

¹¹⁷ Baughan, 'Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain', pp.123-127.

¹¹⁸ Boucher, 'Cultivating Internationalism'; Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film'.

and impartial, which would become increasingly important characteristics of modern NGOs. In doing so, Save the Children was able to make potentially controversial appeals for former enemies and communist nations in a politically neutral way. Helen McCarthy has also argued that the designation of being ‘non-party’ or ‘non-political’ was a broader characteristic of pressure groups in the interwar period. For McCarthy, this reflected a wider response to the destabilising effects of class conflict and ideological struggle.¹¹⁹

SCF was also an explicitly secular organisation, appealing to universalist discourses of ‘humanity’ rather than religious inspiration. In this regard, SCF represented a departure from the humanitarian missionaries of the nineteenth century. However, SCF also actively promoted imperial discourses of British superiority and trusteeship, as the Fund's appeals deliberately linked humanitarian assistance with colonial traditions.¹²⁰ Emily Baughan argues that SCF was engaged in a broader project of reimagining the empire during the interwar period, which emphasised imperial morality and benevolence as a way to cast Britain as an ‘inherently international power’.¹²¹ The early years of SCF thus also demonstrate how internationalism and imperialism have not been mutually incompatible discourses in modern British humanitarianism.¹²²

During the 1920s, the development of international NGOs was further stimulated by the League of Nations. The League apparatus offered substantial opportunities for the participation of NGOs in a diverse range of fields, including humanitarian assistance. For instance, the Red Cross movement worked closely with the League of Nations High

¹¹⁹ Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *The Historical Journal*, 50:4 (2007, pp.891-912), p.893.

¹²⁰ Baughan, ‘Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain’, pp.128-137.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.129.

¹²² For more on the links between internationalism and imperialism in the interwar period, see: Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, C.1918-45* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Emily Baughan, ‘The Imperial War Relief Fund and the All British Appeal: Commonwealth, Conflict and Conservatism within the British Humanitarian Movement, 1920–25’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.845-861).

Commissioner for Refugees to respond to famine in Russia in the early 1920s, in which the Save the Children Fund was also involved.¹²³ Collaboration between the League of Nations and NGOs during this period also reflected an increasing legitimacy of non-governmental experts in international forums and global governance in the twentieth century.¹²⁴

While the geopolitical tensions of the 1930s constrained the development of transnational civil society, the Second World War acted as a further catalyst for the growth of humanitarian NGOs. Many principal contemporary aid agencies were founded during this period in response to the conflict, including Christian Aid and Oxfam in Britain.¹²⁵ The 1940s relief efforts have been widely depicted as representing a fundamental transformation in humanitarian action. This shift is generally attributed to the sheer scale of the operations, and the assumption of authority for co-ordinating humanitarian aid by Allied armies and governments.¹²⁶ This new involvement of official actors reflected a broader enthusiasm for state planning which characterised the period, as well as a shared viewpoint by Allied planners that the humanitarian consequences of the conflict would have to be addressed before the post-war era could be inaugurated.¹²⁷ Gerard Daniel Cohen argues that the massive intergovernmental relief and rehabilitation programme undertaken in the 1940s resulted in the end of ‘the charitable phase of modern humanitarianism’, as a more integrated and official system of humanitarian governance took shape.¹²⁸ In Britain, state intervention also resulted in a new level of co-ordination

¹²³ Davies, *NGOs*, pp.90-94.

¹²⁴ Davies, *NGOs*, p.106; Lewis and Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development*, pp.32-33.

¹²⁵ See, for instance: Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.1-21.

¹²⁶ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp.107-131; Jessica Reinisch, ‘Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA’, *Past & Present*, supplement 6 (2011, pp.258-289).

¹²⁷ Reinisch, ‘Internationalism in Relief’; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

¹²⁸ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.59-61.

within the NGO sector, as the government intentionally sought to mesh the leading international aid agencies with their own plans for post-war relief from 1942 onwards.¹²⁹ It is this moment which this thesis takes as its starting point, as the humanitarian sector was reshaped and set to be enrolled into a new era of professionalised, co-ordinated emergency relief.

Sources and Methodology

This thesis examines the British humanitarian NGO sector and emergency relief, over the period 1942-85. It focuses upon the largest and most influential humanitarian NGOs of the period, all of whom were members of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). The DEC was created in 1963 by the ‘big five’ organisations who had come to form the nucleus of the sector; these were the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, and War on Want. The only change to DEC membership that took place during this period was the admission of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) in 1973, and the exit of War on Want in 1979, ostensibly to focus solely on long-term development. The DEC members represent the central focus of this study, both individually, and as a collective. Particular attention is paid to the quartet of Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, and War on Want. This is in part a pragmatic choice, reflecting the availability of archival sources. Focusing upon these organisations also illuminates the complex relationship between humanitarian aid and political advocacy. All four NGOs engaged with the politics of long-term development from the early 1960s onwards, but with varying levels of enthusiasm - from the overtly radical War on Want, to the more conservative SCF. Given the large number of organisations active in the British

¹²⁹ Johannes-Dieter Steinert, ‘British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43:3 (2008, pp.421-435).

humanitarian industry today, it may appear restrictive to focus on this particular grouping of agencies. However, it will be shown that in practice the DEC members dominated the sector throughout the period in question, and used their access to television to sustain what amounted to a humanitarian oligarchy in Britain.

The DEC mechanism itself is also a key focus of this study. As the Committee was designed to co-ordinate the major disaster appeals of its members, it enjoyed unique arrangements with the television broadcasting authorities (especially the BBC). The DEC therefore provides a way in to assess the relationship between the NGOs and the media, as well as the NGOs and the public (through exploring the characteristics of DEC publicity). The inter-agency discussions that took place within the DEC also provide insights into the internal politics of the sector and the nature of NGO co-ordination.

This study draws upon substantial primary research, the majority of which was conducted in the archives of specific NGOs (Christian Aid, Save the Children, and War on Want).¹³⁰ Many of these sources have only been made publicly available recently, and are largely untapped by historians. There are methodological issues associated with such archives, as they tend to be smaller in scale and less comprehensive than the state resources which historians has traditionally drawn upon. The thoroughness of NGO archives can vary greatly, correlating with the nature and size of specific organisations. For instance, the archives of War on Want are relatively disorganised in comparison to other agencies, which is perhaps a reflection of the organisation's volatile history. Furthermore, there has been no research undertaken for this study in the archives of

¹³⁰ As of April 2014, the Christian Aid and War on Want archives are deposited at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, London. The Save the Children Fund archive is held at the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham.

Oxfam, which have been closed off to researchers for a number of years.¹³¹ However, the organisation's published material has been drawn upon when relevant. Save the Children has a substantial archive, although it does not currently permit researchers to view post-1972 material. For both Oxfam and Save the Children, these limitations are somewhat mitigated by the long-standing dissemination of correspondence, information and publications between NGOs, which leads to significant material from each organisation being found in the archives of others. All of these organisations were also involved in any discussions or exchanges which took place within the DEC, captured in Committee minutes and records compiled from a number of archives.

These archives are supplemented with state and media sources. Substantial research has been undertaken in The National Archives (TNA). These largely relate to the government's response to specific humanitarian crises, the evolution of official relief and development policy, and the relations between the state and NGOs. Indeed, aid agencies feature prominently in these official sources, in direct correspondence with officials, as well as in copies of NGO reports and minutes retained in government files. These sources are an essential aspect of this investigation, providing a more comprehensive picture of British humanitarianism and the role played by the state. Finally, extensive use is also made of written and visual sources from the archives of the television broadcasting authorities (the BBC and the ITA/IBA). These sources largely relate to the DEC and broadcast emergency appeals policy, and are essential to understanding the relationship between the NGOs and the media. A number of sources also relate to specific programmes and news reports of disasters which sparked major humanitarian responses.

¹³¹ Oxfam has deposited its substantial archives in the Bodleian library, University of Oxford. The first selection of this material is currently scheduled to become accessible in August 2014, with the entire archive due to be opened to researchers in June 2017.

These media sources are further supplemented by a diverse range of press articles and images from throughout the period.

Thesis Outline

This study charts the growth of the humanitarian NGO sector and emergence of a disaster relief industry in Britain in the decades after the Second World War. Chapter one begins by focusing upon the period between the start of NGO co-ordination during the Second World War in 1942, and the creation of the Disasters Emergency Committee in 1963. It shows that the DEC was the culmination of two decades of co-operation between NGOs in the field of emergency relief, which was apolitical and military-driven in character. However, the DEC was created at a time when the majority of its members were beginning to look beyond this approach, to a more expansive vision of addressing the root causes of global hunger and suffering. The stimulus for this was the involvement of NGOs in UN-led initiatives in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This enrolled aid agencies into a new era of development, while also fuelling their growth and inaugurating a new phase of more competitive and professionalised fundraising. The creation of the DEC therefore pointed to a problematic relationship between charitable relief and long-term development, and should be viewed as a reaction to the growing power of television, and competition between insecure NGOs for publicity and resources.

Setting up the DEC provided its members with an exclusive level of access to television for voluntary organisations. As chapter two explores, they were therefore well positioned for the events of the following decade, as a series of high-profile Third World disasters captured the public imagination and fuelled a rapid expansion of the sector. However, this expansion also overlapped with the increasing commitment of a number of

agencies to long-term development, in particular the trio of Christian Aid, Oxfam, and War on Want. Taking up the cause of development motivated these organisations to engage in domestic campaigning and awareness-raising activities, which became more overtly political as the decade progressed. This chapter argues that, despite this increasing political focus, NGOs were consistently brought back to simplistic charitable relief as a result of the media, public opinion, and the decisions taken by the sector as a whole. The DEC played a crucial part in this, as it reinforced a popular depiction of its members as apolitical relief actors, while internally the nature and make-up of the Committee acted as a significant restraint on the sector's broader politicisation. This depoliticising role of the DEC is examined at length through three in-depth case studies of major emergencies in the period between 1968 and 1973; namely the Nigerian Civil War, the East Pakistan Crisis, and famine in Ethiopia and the Sahel.

These first two chapters present a bottom-up perspective of the growth of NGOs. Chapter three complements these with a top-down study of the relationship between the British state and the humanitarian sector during the same chronological period (1942-74). It is shown that the government attached relatively little importance to emergency relief until the 1960s, when public support for humanitarian aid grew quickly as a result of media coverage, decolonisation, and the public activities of NGOs. These same trends drove the rise of the humanitarian sector, and as the leading NGOs grew they also increased their legitimacy in the eyes of the state. A series of major disasters in Nigeria, East Pakistan and the Sahel in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to soaring official relief expenditure, while also bringing about closer partnership between the government and the DEC members. By 1973, the government accepted increased responsibilities for providing humanitarian aid, and initiated an overhaul of its relief machinery. This resulted in the creation of a specialist Disaster Unit within the Ministry of Overseas Development, to

spearhead a more comprehensive and effective humanitarian response. Crucially, the Disaster Unit also implemented closer integration with the NGO sector, using the DEC as the vehicle. The success of the DEC therefore contributed to the state forging a closer relationship with the NGO sector as a whole.

Chapter four examines the continuation and further development of these trends, in the decade following the creation of the Disaster Unit. This period witnessed a further politicisation of development NGOs, who articulated an increasingly distinct and radical advocacy agenda. This also corresponded with the emergence of a critique of humanitarian aid from within the development community. However, it is shown that the leading NGOs still continued to be drawn away from advocacy and back to more simplistic emergency assistance. NGOs extended their capacities for disaster relief, aided by advances in media technologies and increasing public support. Crucially, the British government also worked to co-opt the sector, using the Disaster Unit to build up a wider infrastructure for relief around the DEC. This effectively enmeshed the Committee members as instruments for the delivery of humanitarian aid within an integrative and technocratic disaster relief industry. The state also politically contained the sector through the interventions of the Charity Commissioners. The political activities of the DEC members were also undermined by the active interventions of the television broadcasters, who policed the boundaries of the sector and strongly resisted any attempts by the DEC to broaden out its mandate. While these powerful forces all worked to contain the sector, it is also argued that the leading NGOs themselves exacerbated these trends through their own deliberate decision-making. In an increasingly competitive humanitarian industry, aid agencies repeatedly returned to simplistic disaster fundraising as a way to maintain public support and drive institutional growth.

Chapter five sets out how all of these trends culminated in the humanitarian response to a severe famine in Ethiopia in 1984-85. Ethiopia has been widely depicted as an epochal event in the history of non-state humanitarianism. The massive public reaction to media images of African famine in late 1984 is often seen as giving rise to the contemporary professionalised aid industry. This chapter locates Ethiopia within a longer history of NGOs and emergency relief, arguing instead that the response to the famine, including the iconic Band Aid phenomenon, was as much a continuation of prior trends as it was a break. Furthermore, the simplistic apolitical humanitarianism promoted by Band Aid generated massive popular support, but it also worked to further undermine the politicising trends within the NGO sector. Band Aid therefore represented a step backwards for the development community. However, the DEC members once again exacerbated these issues through their deliberate decisions, as the sector became more and more dominated by inter-agency rivalries, material incentives, and competition for publicity.

By tracing the trajectory of humanitarian NGOs over this period, these chapters highlight and problematise a paradox that increasingly took root within the sector, between high-profile charitable relief and long-term development advocacy. A final concluding chapter summarises these findings, and what they demonstrate about the nature of non-state humanitarianism. This chapter also sets out how this history contributes to understanding changing patterns of activism, engagement and participation in contemporary Britain.

Chapter One

The Emergence of a Disaster Lobby, 1942-1963

In December 1963, the five largest humanitarian organisations in Britain came together to form the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). Comprised of the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and War on Want, the DEC was intended to provide a ‘co-ordinating machinery’ for how these NGOs responded to major disasters overseas.¹ Acting as an independent Standing Committee, the DEC met after large-scale emergencies to pool information and discuss planned responses. Crucially, the DEC could also initiate joint appeals to the public through television, for donations to support relief efforts. The formation of the Committee was presented by those involved as a pragmatic and rational step, to pool resources, share knowledge, and streamline the appeal-making process. The DEC continues to present itself in a similar fashion today.²

In practice the creation of the DEC was more complex and problematic, and reflected a number of longer-term trends and competing trajectories within the humanitarian sector. This chapter unpacks and explores these developments, setting out a longer history of British NGOs and disaster relief in the period between the Second World War, and the creation of the Committee in 1963. It is argued that the DEC represented the culmination of two decades of co-ordination between NGOs in providing apolitical emergency assistance, which the Committee consolidated and institutionalised. However, it did so at a time when this approach was beginning to be challenged by a more

¹ In January 1964 Lord Astor, Chairman of the Standing Conference of British Organisations for Aid to Refugees, referred to these organisations as ‘the big five which constituted the backbone of the refugee organisations and formed the nucleus of the Standing Conference’: TNA: Charity Commissioners papers: CHAR 11/193: ‘Note on meeting with Lord Astor on 29th January 1964’, 3 February 1964.

² For more on the contemporary DEC, see: <http://www.dec.org.uk/> [accessed 31 March 2014]. For a useful, if somewhat limited overview of the Committee, see: Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), pp.42-49.

expansive vision of international aid. Involvement in long-term development in the early 1960s influenced a number of principal NGOs to look beyond charitable relief, to also tackling the structural forces which created and perpetuated global hunger and poverty. The DEC therefore highlighted a nascent tension within the sector, between traditional humanitarian assistance and long-term development. It is therefore suggested that the Committee's creation should be interpreted more as a response to competition between aid agencies for resources and publicity, and the growing power of television to influence the public.

To articulate this argument, this chapter is structured into four distinct sections. Firstly, it is shown that the experience of the Second World War also brought about fundamental changes within the humanitarian sector. The linking together of the largest British relief bodies in 1942, largely at the behest of the British government, established a new precedent for planned, co-ordinated humanitarian responses. The War also enrolled aid agencies into a new era of expert-driven and professionalised relief, in which governments and intergovernmental agencies assumed responsibilities for the regulation of humanitarian aid. The 1940s also gave rise to a new generation of NGOs, which included the organisations that would become Christian Aid and Oxfam. While humanitarian NGOs differed slightly in their characteristics and approach, at this time they were all geared towards the provision of short-term emergency assistance, mainly to refugees displaced by conflict.

It is then shown how the sector continued to co-operate and develop after the move into peace-time. British NGOs gradually moved into new theatres of war and disaster both within and outside of Europe during the 1950s, often following a lead being set by governments and intergovernmental bodies. Making popular appeals for funding to support this work fuelled a period of sustained growth, as the public responded generously

to media reports of distant suffering. As aid agencies generated larger incomes, they also gradually professionalised their organisational structures and practices. By the late 1950s, a collective approach to organised, overtly apolitical emergency relief was well established within the NGO sector.

However, as the 1950s drew to a close this form of assistance began to be overshadowed by newer types of organisation. Major transnational humanitarian campaigns brought British NGOs closer together with other non-state actors, government, and intergovernmental bodies. In particular, the launch of the UN World Refugee Year in 1959, closely followed by the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign in 1960, spurred the growth of NGOs while also enrolling them into a new era of international development spearheaded by the UN. The third section examines this crucial period, and how it acted as a catalyst for a number of principal aid agencies to shift their focus from immediate charitable relief to long-term development. In taking up the cause of international development, these NGOs also tentatively began to enter the political arena. Having traditionally only ameliorated the visible effects of global poverty, development agencies now explored ways to address its more complex root causes.

While this suggested a substantial change in direction for the NGO sector, it did not spell the end of aid agencies responding to overseas disasters. Indeed, the formation of the DEC indicates how this branch of their work continued to grow in the early 1960s. The fourth section addresses this further expansion of the disaster relief business in the early 1960s, leading up to the formation of the DEC in late 1963. Involvement in World Refugee Year and the Freedom from Hunger Campaign brought the leading NGOs together, but it also accentuated competition between them for income and publicity. The early 1960s therefore witnessed a new era of more intensive and professionalised humanitarian fundraising. In this context, high-profile disasters consistently brought

NGOs back to short-term crisis management, as public donations for relief work fuelled rapid institutional growth. The rise of television as a medium reinforced this trend, enabling new levels of fundraising while exacerbating rivalry within the sector. It was in this context that the DEC was created, as a means to dampen competition and harness the new power of television to influence the public.

The form of inter-agency co-ordination implemented by the DEC reflected a longer lineage of depoliticised relief established during the 1940s. It also appeared out of step with the broader direction of a number of aid agencies towards long-term development in the global South. The DEC paved the way for a rapid expansion of the British humanitarian industry, and many of the themes discussed throughout this thesis (in particular the problematisation of the relationship between NGOs, disasters and the media) can be detected and unpicked very early on in the history of the modern humanitarian sector. The DEC also reinforced a growing contradiction within British humanitarianism, between short-term relief and new forms of political action on the causes of global underdevelopment and suffering.

The Second World War

The Second World War has been widely understood as a period of fundamental change in international humanitarianism. Michael Barnett argues that the conflict inaugurated a new age of ‘neo-humanitarianism’, characterised by Cold War, nationalism, development and sovereignty. For Barnett, this age is demarcated from the prior phase of imperial humanitarianism, characterised by colonialism, commerce, and the ‘civilising mission’.³ This shift is commonly attributed to governments assuming responsibility for regulating

³ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

humanitarian aid, as part of a broader drive towards increased state planning in the post-war order. Enthusiasm for intervention motivated Washington and London to begin post-conflict planning as early as 1941, with relief work acquiring a distinct urgency.⁴ This was in contrast to humanitarian efforts in Europe during the First World War, which were generally implemented by individual voluntary organisations with the assistance of local institutions. While this relief work received a certain degree of financial support from governments, it was largely unorganised and suffered from a lack of effective international co-ordination.⁵

In Britain, state intervention also prompted a new level of co-ordination within the NGO sector. This began in mid-1942, as officials from the Ministry of Economic Warfare sought to mesh the leading, internationally-affiliated voluntary agencies with their own plans for post-war relief. This led to the Council of Voluntary Societies for the Relief of Suffering and for Aiding Social Recovery being established in June 1942, later renamed the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA). COBSRA was a consultative committee designed to facilitate closer co-ordination between aid agencies and the state, and a total of 40 British humanitarian organisations joined the Committee. 11 of these eventually despatched their own teams of relief workers to continental Europe, and collectively these bodies were the principal organisations in the humanitarian sector at this time (table 1.1).⁶ An official from the Ministry of Food was appointed Chairman (Sir William Goode), reflecting a degree of governmental control over the Council.⁷

⁴ Jessica Reinisch, 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA', *Past & Present*, supplement 6 (2011, pp.258-289), p.261; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

⁵ Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43:3 (2008, pp.421-435), p.422.

⁶ Mary Kinnear, *Woman of the World: Mary McGeachy and International Cooperation* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), pp.111-112; Steinert, 'British Humanitarian Assistance', pp.423-425.

⁷ SCFA: Box A1214: 'The 192nd Meeting of The Council', 21 January 1943: Report of post-war committee (C.2803.).

The British Red Cross Society and Order of St John of Jerusalem	The Friends Relief Service
The Friends Ambulance Unit	The Young Women's Christian Association
The Save the Children Fund	The Salvation Army
The Catholic Committee for Relief Abroad	The Jewish Committee for Relief Abroad
The International Voluntary Service for Peace	The Boy Scouts Association
The Guide International Service	

Table 1.1: Operational members of COBSRA.⁸

Following formation, the Council was informed that all 'all immediate relief work would be administered by the Army... there would be no possibility of civilian relief work being done within the near future'.⁹ Furthermore, all large appeals to the public were to be banned, on the grounds that such appeals could provide information to belligerent nations. The Council members accepted government oversight and agreed to undertake no overseas relief work without official permission¹⁰, with the Army to act as 'final authority' in the pre-armistice period.¹¹ COBSRA subsequently established a panel of experts to survey overseas relief requirements and make recommendations to the War Office. This working party was comprised of an even mix of government officials and senior staff from the COBSRA agencies, and served to join up the voluntary societies and

⁸ Steinert, 'British Humanitarian Assistance', pp.423-424.

⁹ SCFA: Box A1214: Save the Children Fund, 'The 192nd Meeting of The Council', 21 January 1943: Report of post-war committee (C.2803.).

¹⁰ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, 'The 65th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 6 January 1943: Post-war committee (E.924.).

¹¹ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, 'The 66th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 3 February 1943: Abyssinia (E.932.).

relevant government departments.¹² This involvement in COBSRA set a new precedent for co-ordination between the NGOs involved. Indeed, this period witnessed a transformation of voluntary action within the humanitarian sector, as working under government and military authority encouraged a degree of professionalisation, while also drawing aid agencies into an emerging, more intricate system of humanitarian governance.

COBSRA's close links with government also ensured its members would receive a prominent role in working alongside the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the international relief agency mandated to coordinate aid efforts in liberated Europe. Established in 1943, the UNRRA was to have overall control of relief in liberated countries after the military administrations were withdrawn, and the government communicated to COBSRA that 'British organisations... represented on the Council would have the best claim to official approval'.¹³ For its part, COBSRA emphasised its recognition of 'the necessity of unified operational control' for relief, and throughout 1944 agencies such as Save the Children began deploying teams into the field to work under UNRRA control.¹⁴ The relationship between UNRRA and national NGOs was not without tension, as aid agencies expressed concerns that they would be 'absorbed in the UNRRA machine'.¹⁵ COBSRA members were also anxious to enter the field and became frustrated by the long delays in moving aid workers from the UNRRA training camps in the Middle East to the liberated countries.¹⁶ These tensions largely subsided after

¹² SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, 'The 70th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 10 June 1943: Post-war committee (E.999.).

¹³ SCFA: Box A1214: Save the Children Fund, 'The 194th Meeting of the Council', 15 July 1943: Report of post-war committee (C.2840.).

¹⁴ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, 'The 82nd Meeting of the Executive Committee', 8 June 1944: Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (E.1214.).

¹⁵ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, 'The 87th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 14 December 1944: Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation (E.1326.).

¹⁶ SCFA: Box A1214: Save the Children Fund, 'The 201st Meeting of the Council', 19 April 1945: Foreign Relief and Rehabilitation (C.2956.).

April 1945, and UNRRA increasingly enlisted the co-operation of voluntary bodies, with Save the Children one of those content to confine its work to UNRRA commissioned areas.¹⁷

Gerard Daniel Cohen has argued that the scale and character of the UNRRA operation constituted a new phase in humanitarian action. Subordination to UNRRA authority deterred voluntary agencies from favouring a particular national or religious group, encouraging an 'increased secularisation of relief work'.¹⁸ While UNRRA itself was short-lived, falling victim to Cold War concerns in 1947, the organisation's approach to humanitarianism strongly influenced the emergence of NGOs. UNRRA emphasised the importance of planning and professional expertise, and the organisation's field workers tended to be staunch internationalists dedicated to modern welfare techniques.¹⁹ Voluntary organisations worked closely with UNRRA, emulating their methods and taking up a more professionalised approach to relief work. The UNRRA therefore arguably signalled 'the end of the charitable phase of modern humanitarianism'.²⁰ In the process, NGOs were also incorporated into a nascent international aid regime. The COBSRA members were willing partners in this new era of technocratic, depoliticised relief, and worked prominently alongside the UNRRA throughout its existence.

The organisations that would become Oxfam and Christian Aid were also founded during this period, in response to the conflict. Oxfam began life as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, as part of a larger national Famine Relief Committee created in 1942, which lobbied the British government to provide famine relief to Nazi-occupied Greece.

¹⁷ SCFA: Box A1214: Save the Children Fund, 'The 202nd Meeting of the Council', 19 July 1945: Mrs. Woodruff's Report on Italy (C.2973.).

¹⁸ Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.59-61.

¹⁹ Andrew Harder, 'The Politics of Impartiality: The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in the Soviet Union, 1946-7', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47:2 (2012, pp.347-369), p.362.

²⁰ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, p.59.

The Oxford Committee was one of many local bodies which sprung up as part of this network, being founded in October 1942 by a group of Quaker-inspired individuals. Early activities of the Oxford Committee focused upon what Maggie Black terms ‘modest lobbying’ of the government to provide assistance to Greece, which achieved little tangible results. The Committee was galvanised in 1943 by the membership of Cecil Jackson-Cole, a local philanthropist who pioneered a business-like approach to fundraising. It was at Jackson-Cole's initiative that the Committee formally registered as a charity in 1943, and began making repeated appeals for funds to the public. The Oxford Committee proved to be one of the most successful local Famine Committees, raising £12,700 in its first campaign.²¹

From the outset the Oxford Committee was influenced by a Quaker internationalist tradition, which emphasised principles of humanitarian neutrality and impartial aid.²² It was not a member of COBSRA, which reflected its small, amateur, non-operational status. Indeed, there was a clear contrast between COBSRA agencies and the national Famine Relief network. COBSRA deferred to official authority and refused to pressurise policymakers over aid to Greece, simply stating that ‘the question of sending food had to be considered by the Allied Governments’. Save the Children justified its decision not to ‘agitate politically’ on the grounds that ‘the present position in regard to relief was different from that when the Fund came into being, which was after the cessation of hostilities’.²³ COBSRA similarly declined to participate in left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz's ‘Save Europe Now’ campaign, launched in 1945 to pressurise the British

²¹ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992), pp.13-16.

²² Black, *A Cause For our Times*, pp.1-2; For more on Quaker internationalism, see: Jenny Carson, ‘The Quaker Internationalist Tradition in Displaced Persons Camps, 1945-48’, in Peter Gatrell and Nick Baron (eds.), *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 67-86).

²³ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 67th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 10 March 1943: Children in Occupied Europe (E.946.).

government into addressing the refugee crisis in Germany.²⁴ Instead, the COSBRA members deemed the campaign to be too ‘political’.²⁵ However, in practice the Oxford Committee also shared characteristics with the COBSRA approach, as it moved away from lobbying to focus more on fundraising for emergency aid. This funding was channelled through the Friends Relief Service (FRS), the official relief arm of the British Quakers and an operational member of COBSRA. The FRS provided a machinery for deploying Quaker aid and relief workers into the field to work alongside the UNRRA and other voluntary organisations.²⁶ The approach of the Oxford Committee was affirmed by its continued operation after the national Famine Relief Committee had wound itself down in 1945, enlarging its charitable objectives to the ‘relief of suffering in consequence of the war’.²⁷

Christian Aid was also formed in response to war, beginning life as Christian Reconstruction in Europe (CRE) in 1944, a department of the British Council of Churches (BCC).²⁸ From the outset, CRE worked under the direction of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, an international inter-church organisation founded in 1948 which arose out of the ecumenical movement. Christian Reconstruction in Europe defined its objective as ‘the provision of help to European Churches and Christian institutions which have suffered through the war’. For CRE, relief work was deeply connected with

²⁴ For more on the ‘Save Europe Now’ campaign, see: Matthew Frank, ‘The New Morality - Victor Gollancz, “Save Europe Now” and the German Refugee Crisis, 1945–46’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 17:2 (2006, pp.230-256).

²⁵ SCFA: Box A419: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 96th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 11 October 1945: “Save Europe’s Children” Meeting (E.1483.).

²⁶ Carson, ‘The Quaker Internationalist Tradition’, p.71.

²⁷ Black, *A Cause For our Times*, p.2.

²⁸ The British Council of Churches was an ecumenical organisation which included most of the major non-Roman Catholic churches in Britain. Today it is known as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. For more, see: Colin Davey, *The Story of the BCC* (London: BCC, 1990).

ecumenical mission.²⁹ Working through the WCC also established a pattern for humanitarian assistance which has largely persisted within the organisation ever since. Like Oxfam, CRE lacked the size, prestige or resources to participate directly in COBSRA. CRE instead functioned by making appeals to the British Churches, and channelling the funds these raised into the WCC's European relief programme. However, the organisation also pursued a similar apolitical, emergency-oriented approach. Working through the World Council of Churches also served to associate the organisation with the UNRRA relief efforts. Despite its orientation towards aiding Church institutions, the WCC recognised the authority of the UNRRA, stating in 1944 that 'it will be impossible to carry on any reconstruction work in the needy countries without the consent of the responsible authorities'.³⁰ What this all pointed to was the dominance of a particular approach to humanitarianism within the emerging modern NGO sector, geared towards war and the provision of apolitical relief. Emphasising planned co-ordination and logistical efficiency, this approach endured after the post-war relief efforts in Europe had peaked, and the NGO sector stood ready to co-ordinate again in times of emergency.

The Globalisation of Relief

1948 marked a watershed in post-war relief, as Europe's recovery moved from emergency aid to reconstruction. The winding down of the UNRRA after 1947 led to relief being brought firmly under American control, and the subsequent launch of the Marshall Plan

²⁹ Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service Archive, SOAS Library, London (hereafter ICAA): Box ICA1, file ICA/02/01/02: William Patton, 'Letter to the Rev. A.C. Craig', 26 March 1943; ICAA: Box ICA1, file ICA/01/02: Committee for Christian Reconstruction in Europe, 'Draft Constitution', 1944.

³⁰ ICAA: Box ICA1, file ICA/02/01/03: World Council of Churches, 'Third Memorandum on The Reconstruction of Christian Institutions in Europe', February 1944.

financed governments to rebuild infrastructure and industry across the continent.³¹ The move into peacetime also effected the NGO sector. Although relief needs in Europe persisted well into the 1950s, especially in relation to displaced persons in Germany and across the continent, aid agencies began seeking to expand further into the global South. As established bodies and the leaders in their field, this transition came naturally to the British Red Cross and Save the Children, who remained committed to a form of emergency humanitarianism coloured by wartime. Indeed, Save the Children came to be shaped by a military ethos in the early post-war period, extensively recruiting former military and colonial personnel and consolidating itself as part of the establishment. This included securing the Queen as the organisation's patron in 1952.³²

Many of the British bodies which had sprung up during the war elected to wind themselves down (including COBSRA in 1950), although both the Oxford Committee and Christian Reconstruction in Europe elected to continue as permanent relief agencies. In 1949 Oxfam further altered its charitable objectives to 'the relief of suffering arising as a result of wars or of other causes in any part of the world'. The organisation also initiated a process of internal professionalisation under the dynamic leadership of Leslie Kirkley, an iconic figure in the organisation's history.³³ In the same year, CRE was restructured into a more permanent arm of the British Council of Churches, changing its name to the Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service Department (ICARS).

ICARS was deliberately modelled after the Reconstruction and Inter-Church Aid Department of the World Council of Churches, which had itself been created as 'a body

³¹ Harder, 'The Politics of Impartiality', p.365.

³² Matthew Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Paternalism and Colonialism', *The Journal of Modern History* (forthcoming, 2015).

³³ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.32-33, quote at p.37; Ben Whitaker, *A Bridge of People: A Personal View of Oxfam's First Forty Years* (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp.18-20.

which in an emergency could organise relief for areas outside Europe'.³⁴ ICARS publicity described the new agency as 'a permanent factor in the life and work of the British Churches', and throughout the 1950s it functioned primarily as a national fundraising agency for a broader WCC programme of international emergency aid.³⁵ In 1952 Inter-Church Aid appointed Janet Lacey as Director, a position she would hold until 1968. Lacey became one of the central figures in the organisation's history, overseeing a period of growth and consolidation. Lacey was also intimately connected to the World Council of Churches, working in administrative roles for the inter-church aid division, and leading a number of fact-finding missions. Under Lacey, ICARS closely followed WCC orthodoxy.³⁶

What united all of these organisations in the 1950s was an emphasis on emergency relief, especially working with refugees. As organisations they had collectively been shaped by responding to conflict, and considered the application of emergency humanitarianism outside of Europe to be a natural progression. SCF openly defined itself as a 'war charity' in 1951, stating that 'many of the Fund's present activities were connected with the difficulties of war'.³⁷ Indeed, the War had provided such a strong impetus for humanitarian action that aid agencies initially found it challenging to sustain their momentum. In this regard the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 provided an important stimulant, as NGOs gravitated towards a new theatre of conflict under the banner of the UN.

³⁴ ICAA: Box ICA1, file ICA/02/01/07: 'Fourteenth Meeting of the British Council of Churches: Report of the Executive Committee', March 1949.

³⁵ ICAA: Box ICA6, file ICA/04/01: Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service Department, *Making Christian Fellowship Real: A New Chapter in Corporate Christian Action* (London: ICARS, 1950), pp.6-7.

³⁶ Janet Lacey, *Christian Aid* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1961); Janet Lacey, *A Cup of Water: The Story of Christian Aid* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970); Michael Taylor, *Not Angels but Agencies: The Ecumenical Response to Poverty - A Primer* (London: SCM Press, 1995).

³⁷ SCFA: Box A420: Save the Children Fund, 'The 138th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 22 May 1951: War Charities Act, 1940 (E.2381.).

Despite a conviction among humanitarian agencies to operate in Korea, it was not until early 1953 that charitable organisations were permitted by the UN to undertake relief work, under the umbrella of the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency (UNKRA). Korea proved to be a crucial intervention for the NGO sector. Church agencies were significantly involved in the region, with ICARS channelling significant funds to Korea Church World Service, the instrument of the Korean National Council for all relief operations.³⁸ Between 1954 and 1956, Oxfam made more financial grants for Korea than any other nation.³⁹ Save the Children was especially eager to work in Korea and managed to get a team into the field in 1952, bypassing the British state and obtaining permission through the Australian SCF branch.⁴⁰ The precedent for co-ordination on emergency relief established during the Second World War was clearly evident in Korea, with SCF officials observing a ‘very happy spirit of co-operation between all the relief organisations’, with ‘much room for expansion’.⁴¹

Save the Children channelled substantial resources to the region from 1953 onwards. In late 1954 the SCF council commented that ‘of all the fields in which the Fund was working, Korea was the most rewarding... the Founder's dream of relief work in the Far East had now been realised’.⁴² SCF designated Korea as a central theatre of operations, and worked heavily to publicise their own involvement. In 1954 the Fund commented that ‘everything possible would have to be done to get publicity... the plight of the Koreans did not appear sensational enough’.⁴³ The Fund subsequently emphasised

³⁸ ICAA: Box ICA5, ICA/03/13: Janet Lacey, ‘The Involvement of Inter-Church Aid in Lands Outside Europe’, unknown date.

³⁹ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.47-49.

⁴⁰ Save the Children Fund, *Thirty-Third Annual Report, 1951-52* (London: SCF, 1952), p.2.

⁴¹ SCFA: Box A420: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 160th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 21 September 1954: Apologies for absence (E.2734.).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ SCFA: Box A1214: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 236th Meeting of the Council’, 21 January 1954: Korea (C.3698.).

to its workers in Korea the ‘necessity of employing a professional photographer’, as it was ‘essential when trying to raise funds to have a steady flow of information backed with good photographs’.⁴⁴

This led to dramatic images of the suffering of Korean children being utilised prominently in SCF fundraising and publicity material for a number of years. For SCF, the purpose of this ‘propaganda’ was ‘to stimulate the flow of contributions to the relief work’.⁴⁵ A 1958 leaflet (image 1.1) typified this approach, centred on an image of four malnourished Korean children under the headline ‘Korean Plight Shames Humanity’:



Image 1.1: Save the Children Fund, ‘Korean Plight Shames Humanity’, May 1958.⁴⁶

Save the Children had a long history of utilising such marketing techniques. Graphic child-centric publicity had a populist appeal, and was effective in generating donations

⁴⁴ SCFA: Box A420: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 155th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 16 February 1954: Korea (E.2657.).

⁴⁵ Save the Children Fund, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report, 1953-54* (London: SCF, 1954), p.9.

⁴⁶ SCFA: Box A1218: ‘Korean Plight Shames Humanity’ (Monthly News Sheet of the SCF National Penny-a-Week Appeal, No. 104), May 1958.

from the general public. Indeed, the agency had effectively invented the genre of modern emergency fundraising in the 1920s.⁴⁷ Such images also fitted into a longer lineage of child-centric charitable appeals dating back to missionaries and philanthropists in the colonial period.⁴⁸ Images like these also restricted SCF to a narrow, apolitical mission of child relief, by calling on donors to sympathise with an archetypal child rather than a larger community or nation as a whole.⁴⁹ Such was SCF's persistence in using Korean children in its appeals that the Bishop of Korea personally requested that the Fund discontinue the practice in 1958. The SCF Council were largely dismissive of the Bishop's request, observing that 'there was no question that these pictures brought in the most money'. The Council therefore decided that 'the Fund's press appeals should not be altered... the present method should be continued until the Fund's workers advised it to stop'.⁵⁰

SCF's attitude towards Korean imagery pointed to a conception of disaster that had developed in conflict situations, and was geared towards short-term crisis management rather than long-term development. Images of vulnerable children reinforced this emergency humanitarianism, while also generating public donations which translated into institutional growth. SCF's insistence that such images 'brought in the most money' typified the sector in the 1950s, as NGOs developed and grew using dramatic visuals of

⁴⁷ Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film'.

⁴⁸ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.130; Marianne Gullestad, *Picturing Pity: Pitfalls and Pleasures in Cross-cultural Communication - Image and Word in a North Cameroon Mission* (NY: Berghahn, 2007), p.25; Kate Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood', *Antipode*, 40:4 (2008, pp.632-657).

⁴⁹ Ellen Boucher, 'Cultivating Internationalism: Save the Children Fund, Public Opinion and the meaning of Child Relief, 1919-1924', in Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (eds.), *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars* (London: IHR, 2012, pp.169-188), p.187; Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!'" Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 86:231 (February 2013, pp.116-137).

⁵⁰ SCFA: Box A1215: Save the Children Fund, 'The 252nd Meeting of The Council', 10 July 1958 (C.4144); SCFA: Box A421: Save the Children Fund, 'The 190th Meeting of the Executive Committee', 17 June 1958: Foreign Relief (E.3361.).

disasters and displacement to mobilise public support. Ben Whitaker charts Oxfam's growth in the 1950s through the increasing amounts raised by the organisation's BBC *Week's Good Cause* radio appeals, beginning with £9,700 in 1950, rising dramatically to £31,000 in 1956, and reaching £46,700 by 1958.⁵¹ Post-Korea, the large and high-profile refugee displacement which followed the failed Hungarian uprising of 1956 provided a further stimulus for non-governmental action. Media coverage of the Hungarian crisis raised awareness of the role NGOs could play in responding to humanitarian emergencies, as aid agencies worked closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in channelling assistance to Hungarian refugees.⁵² Save the Children experienced a 29 percent increase in income in 1957 due to its Hungarian appeal. Contributions to ICARS trebled between 1956 and 1957, its staff observing that 'the consequent plight of 180,000 refugees captured the sympathy of a public which at that moment in history needed an outlet for emotion and compassion'.⁵³ Indeed, a public appeal by the Lord Mayor of London alone raised more than £2.5 million for the refugees.⁵⁴

The Hungarian crisis also encouraged ICARS to direct more of their publicity towards the general public, rather than solely targeting their religious constituency. This resulted in the first ever Christian Aid Week in May 1957, a carefully designed publicity initiative to maximise exposure of the organisation to the national public, and leverage this into funding and support. The name 'Christian Aid' was selected on the basis that the term 'Inter-Church Aid' suggested 'a more or less private mutual aid society operating between churches'. Instead, it was hoped that Christian Aid was a phrase which would,

⁵¹ Whitaker, *A Bridge of People*, p.20.

⁵² Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-63* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.51-52; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.111-113.

⁵³ CAA: Box CA/I/14, file CA/I/14/1: British Council of Churches, 'Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service', 1958.

⁵⁴ Linda Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger: The Past, Present, and Future of Sanctuary* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), p.127.

through repetition, achieve ‘the status, sympathy and currency of Save the Children or Red Cross’.⁵⁵ It was this public relations logic, coupled with the success of Christian Aid Week as an annual event, that contributed to ICARS permanently changing its name to Christian Aid in 1964.

As the 1950s drew to a close, a collective approach to organised, overtly apolitical emergency relief was well embedded within the NGO sector. One notable exception to the rule was War on Want, which was founded in the early 1950s as an overtly political advocacy body connected to the political Left. War on Want grew out of the Association for World Peace (AWP), created in 1950 by left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz in support of overseas development. The AWP in turn created a committee to investigate world poverty, chaired by Labour MP and future Prime Minister Harold Wilson. The committee subsequently published a report entitled *War on Want - A Plan for World Development*, which advocated intensive global development as a means to contain communism and prevent further world wars. The report sold 20,000 copies, giving rise to War on Want as a genuine grassroots movement.⁵⁶ War on Want's official biographers depict this genesis as a ‘synthesis of the campaigns against war and colonialism and a growing recognition of the need for a new post-colonial campaign against world hunger and poverty in the age of the atom bomb’.⁵⁷ However, War on Want proved unable to maintain its initial momentum, and a lack of resources and the death of key figures resulted in a loss of direction. Throughout most of the 1950s War on Want existed only as an informal committee with a meagre income, functioning as little more than a ‘talking

⁵⁵ CAA: Box CA/I/2, file CA/I/2/2: Maurice Rickards, ‘Projected National Appeal’, 7 September 1956.

⁵⁶ Mark Luetchford and Peter Burns, *Waging the War on Want: 50 Years of Campaigning against World Poverty* (London: War on Want, 2003), pp.12-20.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

shop'.⁵⁸ It was only when Frank Harcourt-Munning (a Christian socialist of private means) took over as administrator and, from 1958 onwards, began investing significant amounts of his own resources that War on Want emerged as a mainline NGO. This development was reflected in the organisation finally being registered as a charity in 1959.⁵⁹

This revival also led to War on Want developing a capacity for emergency relief in line with the rest of the sector, although it always retained a connection to its radical advocacy origins. War on Want's support for Algerian refugees affected by the war of independence with France played a significant role in the organisation's reversal of fortunes, and the agency produced a range of provocative publicity documenting the plight of Algerian refugee children.⁶⁰ Reflecting established methods of co-ordinating on emergencies, War on Want formed the British Committee for Algerian Refugees alongside Christian Aid and Oxfam, to lobby for the inclusion of Algerian refugees in the UN World Refugee Year initiative of 1959. This Committee utilised a robust media strategy to draw attention to Algerian refugees, which included attempts to have articles and appeals covered in the national press, and lobbying for a broadcast appeal on the BBC.⁶¹

⁵⁸ War on Want had an income of 'no more than £75' in 1955. see: Frank Harcourt-Munning, *The Lonely Maverick* (London: Harcourt-Munning, 1985), p.97.

⁵⁹ Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, pp.28-33.

⁶⁰ See, for instance: CAA: Box CA/A/1, file CA/A/1/4: War on Want, *Yas Mina* (London: War on Want, 1959).

⁶¹ CAA: Box CA/A/1, file CA/A/1/4: 'Report from the Working Party of the British Committee for Algerian Refugees', November 1959.

National co-ordination and the rise of Development

While the 1950s was marked by a common emphasis on emergency relief in conflict or post-conflict situations, this approach to humanitarian action began to be overshadowed by newer types of organisation as the decade came to a close. The key catalyst for this was the involvement of NGOs in initiatives launched by the UN, which facilitated closer co-ordination between intergovernmental bodies, donor states and aid agencies. This also worked to tie NGOs into a new era of international development about to be launched, as indicated by the UN designating the 1960s as a ‘Development Decade’.⁶² Taking up the cause of development inspired a shift within the sector, as a number of prominent NGOs gradually recast themselves as ‘development agencies’, promoting expert-led solutions to the root causes of poverty across the developing world. This in turn encouraged new forms of co-operation and activity which were very different in character to the established practices of apolitical emergency relief.

The concept of overseas development was not alien to NGOs. The imperial missionary societies that preceded modern aid agencies had provided education, health and social services to rural populations in Africa and Asia as early as the eighteenth century. Harald Fischer-Tiné documents how the Salvation Army worked on reducing poverty in colonial India by establishing educational and medical institutions.⁶³ Such activities also helped to create important grassroots institutions for modern NGOs to work through in the post-imperial period. In a similar vein, Save the Children undertook work

⁶² For more on the first UN Development Decade, see: Richard Jolly, *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp.85-110; Richard Jolly, ‘Underestimated Influence: UN Contributions to Development Ideas, Leadership, Influence, and Impact’, in Bruce Currie-Alder *et al.* (eds.), *International Development: Ideas, Experience, and Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp.881-898).

⁶³ Harald Fischer-Tiné, ‘Global Civil Society and the Forces of Empire: The Salvation Army, British Imperialism, and the “Prehistory” of NGOs (ca. 1880–1920)’, in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (eds.), *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.29-67).

in Africa in the 1930s that not only aimed to alleviate immediate hunger, but to also address broader welfare needs through constructing and running schools in rural villages.⁶⁴

Involvement in the UNRRA aid programme in 1940s Europe also encouraged humanitarian NGOs to twin emergency assistance with ‘rehabilitation’ programmes. Rehabilitation was a loose term which was adapted to different contexts, but in practice involved going beyond meeting the basic material needs of displaced persons to also providing a comprehensive welfare package.⁶⁵ Aid agencies were heavily involved in the provision of these services, coming into contact with professional American welfare methods in the process, and they continued to undertake rehabilitation projects outside of Europe in the 1950s as a supplement to relief. For instance, Christian Aid channelled significant funding to a Mau Mau rehabilitation programme in Kenya in the mid-1950s, which was ran by the Christian Council of Kenya. The rehabilitation element included visitations to detainee camps, children's homes, women's work and social work in the villages, blended with more traditional emergency assistance.⁶⁶

These initiatives indicated a growing interest by humanitarian organisations in providing additional welfare services that went beyond immediate relief. However, they were also all self-contained and small in scale, with no apparent connection to broader processes of national or international development. Rehabilitation was on the periphery of NGO assistance, which was dominated by the immediate demands of emergency relief. The notable exception to this in Britain was War on Want, which was an advocate for international development from its creation. However, War on Want struggled to put these

⁶⁴ Hilton, ‘Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film’.

⁶⁵ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, pp.65-66.

⁶⁶ ICAA: Box ICA5, file ICA/03/13: Janet Lacey, ‘The Involvement of Inter-Church Aid in Lands Outside Europe’, December 1959; CAA: Box CA/A/2, file CA/A/2/5: Janet Lacey, ‘Christian Council of Kenya and Inter-Church Aid’, September 1960.

ideas into practice in the 1950s, and when it channelled money to overseas development projects it had to rely on local groups and institutions already in place. It therefore ended up supporting the same types of limited welfare activity as other secular and faith-based organisations.⁶⁷

The international development agenda was instead being led at this time by Western governments and intergovernmental organisations. Britain and France had begun implementing development projects in their colonial territories during the 1920s, as an increasing awareness of colonial poverty and underdevelopment prompted interventions to finance infrastructure and welfare services. In Britain, the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1929 and 1940 raised the importance of economic development, while tying it more closely to official colonial policy.⁶⁸ However, the modern era of international development is generally acknowledged as beginning with US President Harry Truman's inauguration address of January 1949. Against the backdrop of an emerging global Cold War, Truman committed the US to a 'bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas'.⁶⁹

As Gilbert Rist argues, Truman's use of the term 'underdeveloped' offered a new worldview of North-South relations, replacing the traditional colonial worldview with a 'developed/underdeveloped dichotomy' more in keeping with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ongoing globalisation of the world system of states.⁷⁰ Truman's

⁶⁷ Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, p.31.

⁶⁸ Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007). See also: Charlotte Lydia Riley, 'Monstrous predatory vampires and beneficent fairy-godmothers: British post-war colonial development in Africa' (PhD thesis: University College London, 2013).

⁶⁹ Harry S. Truman, 'Inaugural Address', 20 January 1949. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13282> [accessed 31 March 2014].

⁷⁰ Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (3rd ed.: London: Zed, 2008), p.73.

speech also consolidated an emphasis on economic growth as the key development doctrine of the period. It was widely assumed that rapid state-led economic growth and modernisation, facilitated by the transfer of Western capital and technology, would quickly propel developing countries towards becoming industrialised nation states. Development was also closely linked to security objectives in the aid programmes of the US and many Western nations, as a means to prevent the spread of communism.⁷¹

Following Truman's declaration, the UN created the institutions to oversee and implement development policy, and other industrialised nations followed the American lead in setting up their own foreign aid programmes.⁷² The crucial stimulus for NGOs beginning to work more closely with the UN and become partners in this new era of development came in 1959, with the launch of the UN World Refugee Year (WRY). WRY was an ambitious attempt by UN agencies, governments and non-state actors to increase public awareness of enduring refugee situations around the world. WRY was supported in Britain by a number of NGOs, including Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children and War on Want. The WRY National Committee was a prestigious body, with the Queen as its Patron. Many NGOs hoped their involvement in World Refugee Year would grant them exposure and prestige; Oxfam Director Leslie Kirkley was head of WRY public relations and publicity, and he viewed the initiative as an opportunity to elevate Oxfam on the national stage.⁷³ Christian Aid head Janet Lacey also obtained an important position, as vice-chair of the British WRY Executive Committee.⁷⁴ World Refugee Year was officially launched in June 1959, and its blend of innovative

⁷¹ Erik Thorbecke, 'The evolution of the development doctrine and the role of foreign aid, 1950-2000', in Finn Tarp (ed.), *Foreign Aid and Development: Lessons Learnt and Directions for the Future* (London: Routledge, 2000, pp.12-35), pp.14-17.

⁷² Carol Lancaster, *Foreign Aid: Diplomacy, Development, Domestic Politics* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2007), pp.28-32.

⁷³ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.59.

⁷⁴ Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.91.

campaigning, organisation and theatricality proved to be highly effective in raising funds, financing an enhanced role for NGOs. Of the aid agencies involved, Christian Aid was the most successful, playing a prominent role and raising over £1,250,000. Oxfam also raised a substantial sum of £755,900.⁷⁵

Peter Gatrell has depicted World Refugee Year as ‘a turning point in the “life” of many NGOs’.⁷⁶ The initiative brought a new level of international attention to humanitarian issues, especially those concerning refugees outside of Europe. In the process, WRY created new opportunities for NGOs to participate in an international campaign conducted under the aegis of the UN. World Refugee Year also helped to internationalise the humanitarian NGO sector, as national aid agencies from almost 100 countries participated and collaborated in carrying out the campaign.⁷⁷ Kevin O’Sullivan argues that WRY therefore helped reinforce an ‘international language of humanitarianism taking shape alongside the realm of inter-state relations’.⁷⁸

In Britain, the success of World Refugee Year enabled participating organisations - especially Christian Aid and Oxfam - to acquire exposure and legitimacy in the national arena. WRY also forced a pooling of resources between agencies, and a closer coming together of senior figures within the NGO community.⁷⁹ In the process, WRY reshaped the sector by elevating Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want into leading agencies, on a par with the British Red Cross and Save the Children. Crucially, WRY also acted as a powerful stimulus to national co-operation for these NGOs, in tandem with governmental and intergovernmental bodies. The conclusion of WRY in 1960 therefore marked the

⁷⁵ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.61.

⁷⁶ Gatrell, *Free World?*, p.203.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁷⁸ Kevin O’Sullivan, ‘A “global nervous system”: The rise and rise of European humanitarian NGOs, 1945-1985’, in Marc Frey *et al.* (eds.), *International Organizations and Development, 1945-1990* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, forthcoming).

⁷⁹ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.91.

emergence of a new phase in humanitarian action, as NGOs were beginning to be integrated more closely into the international aid system.

These trends were accelerated and extended by the launch of the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC) in 1960, organised and overseen by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The FFHC was heavily influenced by World Refugee Year, and adopted many characteristics of its approach. The FFHC also intended to go further than WRY's focus upon the provision of immediate relief to refugees. Instead, the FAO envisioned the FFHC as a global education and information campaign, to promote long-term agricultural development in the global South. A key driving force behind the FFHC was FAO Director-General Binay Sen, who was committed to addressing world hunger and had pushed (unsuccessfully) for a more integrated global food bank throughout the 1950s.⁸⁰ The launch of the FFHC also pointed to a growing international awareness of the problems of malnutrition and underdevelopment in the newly decolonising states, and the disparity between this and agricultural surpluses in the West.⁸¹ The FAO enlisted a variety of partners for its mission, in particular other UN agencies, national governments, and NGOs. The latter were seen as playing a vital part in stimulating and co-ordinating FAO efforts, and NGOs quickly became supportive of the FFHC's aims.⁸²

In Britain, the response to the FFHC was one of great enthusiasm. The government set up and financed a National Freedom from Hunger Committee to run the domestic

⁸⁰ D. John Shaw, *World Food Security: A History since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.77-84.

⁸¹ Ruth Jachertz and Alexander Nützenadel, 'Coping with hunger? Visions of a global food system, 1930–1960', *Journal of Global History*, 6:1 (March 2011, pp.99-119), p.113; Anna Bocking-Welch, 'Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960–70', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.879-896).

⁸² Amy L. S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organisation, and World Health Organisation Changed the World, 1945-65* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), pp.106-121.

campaign, which brought together more than 30 organisations in early 1961. As with WRY, the National FFHC Committee was a prestigious body, which included the heads of all three political parties, church leaders, and the Duke of Edinburgh as patron. By the time the Campaign was officially launched in Britain in June 1962, there were 63 NGOs associated with the FFHC Committee. The success of the FFHC affirmed a rural development focus, stressing the importance of national planning and international co-ordination through the UN, and led to a greater realisation of global hunger. In 1961 the UN General Assembly designated the 1960s to be a ‘Development Decade’ - the era of development had truly arrived.⁸³

The effect of the FFHC on NGOs was substantial. Globally, a shift in focus from refugee concerns to the theory and practice of development could be seen as taking place during the 1960s. The FAO commented in 1968 that the campaign had ‘influenced the policy of non-governmental organisations towards development problems’, and helped to ‘turn their attention from emergency and relief action and a charitable approach towards economic development priorities’.⁸⁴ Shifting NGOs away from a ‘charitable approach’ also implied a further professionalisation of non-state actors, and their closer integration into the UN system. The international action spearheaded by WRY and the FFHC increased the profile of international aid and development issues in global forums, and helped shape the emergence of a ‘global humanitarian culture’.⁸⁵ In Britain, the FFHC influenced the philosophy and approach of Oxfam and other NGOs towards longer-term development objectives. Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want gradually recast themselves as ‘development agencies’, placing new emphasis on development programming and campaigning over traditional emergency assistance. Oxfam in particular

⁸³ Staples, *The Birth of Development*, pp.114-115; Jolly, ‘Underestimated Influence’.

⁸⁴ Council of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), ‘Future operation of the Freedom-from-Hunger Campaign – Note by the Director General’, 2 August 1968.

⁸⁵ O’Sullivan, ‘A “global nervous system”’.

used the FFHC as a springboard to become a practitioner of development aid, and became the main vehicle of the campaign during its key period in the 1960s, where according to Oxfam's official biographer a 'new crusade on behalf of the poor overseas took root in British hearts and minds'.⁸⁶

The FFHC also consolidated the move towards closer national co-operation between NGOs begun by World Refugee Year, and altered the sector by motivating these actors to co-ordinate on long-term development. Becoming development agencies also implied a new level of political engagement by NGOs, as attempting to tackle the root causes of poverty (rather than simply ameliorating its effects) drew aid agencies into the politics of overseas development. Entering into the development field stimulated debates over an apparent need to raise public awareness of global hunger and poverty within Britain, and whose responsibility this was. The UK Freedom from Hunger Committee accordingly positioned itself as a co-ordinating body for what would later be termed 'development education', co-ordinating the various different initiatives of its member NGOs to inform the public about long-term development.⁸⁷ This appeared to represent a dramatic shift in direction for the sector, compared to traditional notions of short-term relief. Indeed, this fast pace of change was most clearly evident in the attitude of Save the Children, which (while publicly supporting the FFHC) was deeply reluctant to expand its work from emergency relief into long-term development. The Fund struggled to formulate projects to its liking, and yet was also aware that if such projects were not funded then

⁸⁶ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.70; Gatrell, *Free World?*, p.234.

⁸⁷ Donald Geoffrey Harrison, 'Oxfam and the rise of development education in England from 1959 to 1979' (PhD thesis: University of London, 2008), p.94.

‘much valuable support might be lost to other organisations’.⁸⁸ When the initial phase of the FFHC came to an end in 1964, the SCF, unlike other NGOs, was against its renewal.⁸⁹

The Disaster Business

The Freedom from Hunger Campaign was instrumental in stimulating voluntary organisations to re-orientate themselves towards development. It also set in motion a gradual move of the sector into the political arena, which would become more apparent later in the decade. The early 1960s has thus often been presented by commentators as marking a dramatic shift in humanitarian action, away from emergency aid to the politics of long-term development.⁹⁰ However, this linear narrative is too simplistic. The early 1960s also witnessed a parallel expansion of the sector's involvement in the field of disaster relief, as reflected in the creation of the DEC in late 1963. Indeed, the creation of the DEC highlighted an emerging tension within the sector. Despite taking up the cause of international development, high-profile emergencies consistently brought NGOs back to relief, and provided a means for rapid growth through intensive fundraising campaigns. The spread of television ownership was a crucial factor in this regard, enabling new levels of fundraising while also intensifying competition within the sector.

In bringing the leading NGOs closer together on the national stage, World Refugee Year and the Freedom From Hunger Campaign also accentuated competition between them, especially in the field of publicity. Christian Aid experienced a record level of press

⁸⁸ SCFA: Box A422: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 227th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 18 September 1962: Freedom from Hunger (E.3980.).

⁸⁹ SCFA: Box A421: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 264th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 14 December 1964: Freedom from Hunger Campaign (E.3776.).

⁹⁰ See, for instance: Clare Saunders, ‘British Humanitarian, Aid and Development NGOs, 1949-Present’, in Nick Crowson *et al.* (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society in Politics Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.38-58), p.43.

attention in 1960, in both religious and national newspapers, which was directly attributed to ‘the wide public interest which has developed in World Refugee Year’. The WRY National Committee similarly stated that it had generated ‘vastly increased publicity for the constituent agencies’.⁹¹ A number of aid agencies began scaling up their advertising budgets in the 1960s, and the decade saw many more appeals for funds in the aid field than in previous years. Oxfam, buoyed by its association with WRY and under the ambitious leadership of Leslie Kirkley, adopted a more professionalised and well-resourced PR strategy, aiming to become the largest aid and development organisation in the country. Oxfam continued Cecil Jackson-Cole's practice of applying business methods to charitable action, pioneering innovative fundraising schemes and more sophisticated marketing techniques. Indeed, it was during the 1960s that NGOs from a diverse range of sectors came to view the use of such publicity tactics as a ‘necessary tool of the modern charity and campaigning organization’⁹². Oxfam accordingly increased its up-front investment in publicity, which became dominated by powerful and hard-hitting images of starving children.⁹³

This publicity strategy was evident in Oxfam's response to famine in the Republic of Congo in late 1960, which marked a key moment in the organisation's history. The Congo had slid into crisis almost immediately after independence from Belgium in June 1960, and by the end of the year a UN emergency food programme was being directed to 300,000 refugees displaced by tribal conflict in the south of the country.⁹⁴ The launch of a UN Congo Famine Relief Fund also alerted British newspapers to the crisis, and vivid famine stories began appearing in the press soon after (the *Daily Mail* referred to ‘the

⁹¹ CAA: Box CA2/I/44, file CA2/I/44/2: Hugh Samson, ‘Public Relations Report for May 1959-May 1960’, June 1960.

⁹² Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.92.

⁹³ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.79-80.

⁹⁴ TNA: Foreign Office Papers: FO 371/155086: UN, ‘United Nations Civilian Operations in the Congo - Progress Report No.7’, 5 January 1961, p.7.

Belsen of the Congo'⁹⁵). This press coverage culminated in a 'shock issue' of the *Daily Mirror* in January 1961, which included many graphic images of African famine (image 1.2). Crucially, the *Mirror* also urged its readers to donate to one or more of Oxfam, War on Want and the British Red Cross.⁹⁶



Image 1.2: *Daily Mirror* 'shock issue' on the Congo, January 1961.⁹⁷

Oxfam seized upon the press coverage, ordering 50,000 prints of the *Daily Mirror* news spread and mailing them to all its supporter groups and donors, calling for further funds for famine relief. Oxfam's strategy was highly effective, generating an instant response from the British public. The Oxfam office was inundated with donations, and further press

⁹⁵ Arthur Cook, 'The Belsen of the Congo', *The Daily Mail*, 28 December 1960.

⁹⁶ 'The heartbreak of the Congo', *The Daily Mirror*, 6 January 1961, p.1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

coverage followed.⁹⁸ The organisation's strategy was so effective that ITV news independently encouraged viewers to donate to Oxfam, which technically constituted a breach of broadcast regulations.⁹⁹ War on Want and Save the Children also benefitted (to a lesser extent) from being associated in the media coverage with Congo relief.

By February 1961 Oxfam's Congo appeal had raised £100,000 for famine relief, to be channelled through the UN. Maggie Black has argued that this outpouring of public generosity was 'something completely new', and 'burnt the image of the starving African child onto the collective British conscience'.¹⁰⁰ In practice the image of the starving child had a much longer history, and was already well established as a standard trope of the humanitarian narrative. The real impact of the press coverage was in raising the profile of Oxfam. Despite internally beginning to shift towards a developmental outlook, the organisation became more concretely associated with apolitical humanitarian relief in the eyes of the general public. Such was the success of this publicity tactic that by 1964, press reports of neglected British children could refer to them as looking 'just like an advert for Oxfam relief'.¹⁰¹

Christian Aid had also been involved in the Congo, raising almost £40,000 to be channelled through the World Council of Churches.¹⁰² The organisation (then still known as the Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service) however went unmentioned in the media, its staff commenting with some resentment that 'considerable limelight has been turned on Oxfam, War on Want and the Red Cross'.¹⁰³ Hugh Samson, the agency's head of communications, concluded that in the Congo 'Inter-Church action did not appear to be

⁹⁸ 'Cash roles in for Congo', *The Daily Mirror*, 10 January 1961, p.5.

⁹⁹ ITA/IBAA: Box 3996264, file 5002/5, vol. 1: Geoffrey Cox (Editor, ITN), 'Letter to Noel Stevenson', 17 January 1961.

¹⁰⁰ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.63-67.

¹⁰¹ 'Girl, 3, "like Oxfam advert"', *The Daily Mirror*, 13 March 1964, p.4.

¹⁰² CAA: Box CA/A/2, file CA/A/2/1: 'Aid from the churches for the Congo', 1960.

¹⁰³ CAA: Box CA/A/2, file CA/A/2/1: Mr Sexton, 'Memorandum to Janet Lacey', 11 January 1961.

relevant'.¹⁰⁴ The reluctance of the press to mention Inter-Church Aid contributed to the organisation changing its name to the more memorable Christian Aid in early 1964. The bitter reaction to Oxfam's monopolisation of press coverage also reflected an ongoing rivalry between the two agencies in the 1960s over publicity. In particular, Christian Aid took exception to Oxfam appealing directly to the Churches, which broke a prior agreement between the organisations. This 'shameless' tactic was itself attributed to the impact of War on Want's 'doubtful' publicity - referring to the organisation's tendency for marketing shock tactics post-Algeria.¹⁰⁵ These disputes all pointed to how the growth of NGOs had created a more congested and competitive humanitarian environment by the early 1960s.

This competition was intensified by the emergence of television as a popular medium. Television ownership expanded rapidly after the Queen's coronation in 1953, especially after the introduction of commercial television in 1955 and an expansion of reception to cover the entire country at the end of the decade. By 1960 over 70 percent of the population had access to both BBC and ITV, as television became the main lens through which the British public viewed and understood the wider world.¹⁰⁶ Publicity-oriented NGOs naturally gravitated towards television from the late 1950s onwards, convinced (like many of their contemporaries) that the medium had an unrivalled power to create and shape public opinion. The introduction of commercial television reinforced this conception, as observers looked on in awe at the perceived persuasive powers of television to subconsciously manipulate the public to purchase consumer products.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ CAA: Box CA/A/2, file CA/A/2/1: Hugh Samson, 'Congo', 7 February 1961.

¹⁰⁵ CAA: Box CA/I/14, file CA/I/14/3: 'Memorandum on Christian Aid Week and the BBC', May 1962.

¹⁰⁶ Dominic Sandbrook, *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Abacus, 2006), pp.383-408; see also: Jack Williams, *Entertaining the Nation: A Social History of British Television* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2004), p.14; Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), p.77.

¹⁰⁷ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: Press, broadcasting and the internet in Britain* (7th Edition: Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.167.

However, opportunities for NGOs to make direct appeals to the public on television were initially very limited, as they were not permitted to purchase advertising time on ITV (a restriction which remained in place until 1989). The BBC had introduced charitable appeals to television in 1956 on a quarterly basis, and from 1959 these were extended to every month. These were the television equivalent of the BBC's long-running *Week's Good Cause* radio programme, which had provided airtime for pre-approved charitable organisations to make philanthropic appeals to the public since 1927.¹⁰⁸ Access to these television appeals was regulated by the Central Appeals Advisory Committee (CAAC), an independent body also set up in 1927, and mandated to advise the BBC on appeals policy and procedures. To be eligible, organisations had to satisfy a variety of criteria, and were restricted to an interval of two years between appeals.¹⁰⁹ In late 1962 ITV also began broadcasting such appeals, using the same machinery as the BBC. Notably, despite rivalries between the broadcasters, the commercial television authorities accepted the oversight of the CAAC and looked to it for guidance.¹¹⁰

However, given the regulation of the CAAC, and the lengthy application and production processes involved, this machinery was unsuitable for sudden and dramatic disaster appeals. BBC policy was initially to only grant emergency appeals when the appeal was being made for a national fund, such as the Lord Mayor's Fund, which effectively excluded voluntary organisations.¹¹¹ This attitude began to change in the early 1960s. An emergency appeal for victims of an earthquake in Northern Iran in September 1962 raised over £400,000 for the British Red Cross to spend on emergency relief - a huge sum which overtly demonstrated the power of television to reach mass audiences. The

¹⁰⁸ Eve Colpus, 'The *Week's Good Cause*: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-War BBC', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:3 (2011, pp.305-329).

¹⁰⁹ BBC WAC: file R7/283/1: 'Appeals Policy and Practice', January 1961.

¹¹⁰ BBC WAC: file T16/9/4: 'Central Appeals Advisory Committee', 3 October 1962.

¹¹¹ BBC WAC: file B420-004-001: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of a meeting', 1 November 1965.

Iran appeal was also internally problematic. BBC staff criticised the ‘confusion and inefficiency’ of the British Red Cross in producing the appeal and handling the donations, as the huge funds overwhelmed the organisation administratively and led to the appeal being over-subscribed, as not all the money could be spent in the disaster area. This raised troubling questions over the status of these funds in charity law.¹¹²

Anxieties over inter-agency competition, and the new levels of fundraising made possible by television, prompted the Standing Conference of British Organisations for Aid to Refugees (which included all the main relief NGOs) to form a ‘Sub-Committee on Emergencies’ in early 1963. The sub-committee was a precursor to the DEC, and was presented as a pragmatic attempt to rationalise and co-ordinate emergency relief. It was also intended to dampen competition, and within the sub-committee the idea of making joint appeals for disasters (and sharing the donations raised equally) began to gain currency among Oxfam and other agencies.¹¹³

Calls for closer co-ordination and joint appeals were reinforced in July 1963, after War on Want was granted an emergency appeal on BBC television to raise funds for disaster relief in Skopje, Macedonia (struck by a powerful earthquake). The response to the appeal was huge, surpassing £250,000 within a week. By October 1963 the total had risen to over £380,000, well above the original target of £100,000. The level of donations overwhelmed War on Want administratively, to the point that the BBC became critical of their ‘elusive and unhelpful’ stance.¹¹⁴ It also provoked jealousy and criticism among other NGOs on the sub-committee. Christian Aid Director Janet Lacey expressed concerns over ‘how the special appeals for emergencies are carried out... I would hate us to get a

¹¹² BBC WAC: file T16/9/4: Joanna Spicer, ‘Television Appeals: Central Appeals Advisory Committee’, 2 November 1965.

¹¹³ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, File CA2/F/1/9: Standing Conference of British Organisations for Aid to Refugees - Sub-Committee on Emergencies, ‘Revised minutes of the first meeting of the Sub-Committee on Emergencies’, 25 April 1963.

¹¹⁴ BBC WAC: file R7/118/1: R.D. Pendlebury, ‘Letter to Richard Dimpleby’, 23 September 1963.

sum of that size for one project'. Lacey went on to call for 'a fund for immediate emergencies so that no special BBC appeal is made on behalf of any one organisation and also there would always be some funds in hand to send immediate help'.¹¹⁵

The other agencies were thinking along similar lines, and in December 1963 the sub-committee was officially reconstituted as the Disasters Emergency Committee. The DEC was comprised of the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Save the Children, and War on Want - the five leading NGOs which had come to form the nucleus of the sector. The DEC was designed to function as a 'co-ordinating machinery', acting as an independent Standing Committee which met after major disasters to pool information, discuss planned responses, and initiate joint action when deemed appropriate. All five members had equal authority, with decisions taken by majority vote. The British Red Cross provided the necessary administrative staff and machinery, and the DEC stressed a need for close co-operation with government departments (primarily the Foreign Office, which was responsible for disaster relief).¹¹⁶ Committee meetings tended to be relatively exclusive affairs, attended by the DEC secretariat and the Chief Executives of the individual member agencies, although representatives from the Foreign Office, UN agencies, foreign embassies, and the broadcasting authorities were also invited to observe and contribute.

The DEC shared a similar organisational ethos to COSBRA, in its emphasis on logistical co-ordination, deference to authority and depoliticised emergency relief. The DEC also institutionalised this approach to humanitarianism just as three of its members (Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want) were beginning to look beyond it, to a more expansive vision of the politics of overseas aid. This suited the staunchly apolitical British

¹¹⁵ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/1: Janet Lacey, 'Letter to Viscount Astor', 11 October 1963.

¹¹⁶ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of first meeting', 18 December 1963.

Red Cross and Save the Children, who did not share their enthusiasm for development. Indeed, Save the Children had deliberately pushed for the Red Cross to spearhead the DEC and delimit the Committee's activities strictly to relief for this very reason.¹¹⁷ With the DEC poised to make regular, joint disaster appeals to the public on television in the years to come, a foundation was in place for further dramatic growth of the British disaster relief lobby. However, this trajectory was clearly unaligned with the broader direction of many principal agencies towards long-term development. The gap between the two was apparent in War on Want's suggestion that the DEC could provide a separate, insulated revenue stream for emergencies, which would also work to free up agency funding for development programmes.¹¹⁸ While this was a rational viewpoint, it also raised the counter-possibility that continuous, high-profile disaster appeals would instead reinforce public support for relief at the expense of development as a whole.

Conclusions

The two decades between the Second World War and the creation of the Disasters Emergency Committee in 1963 marked an important period in the history of British humanitarianism. The modern NGO sector materialised and took shape, triggered by the devastation of total war, and growing rapidly on the basis of successive emergencies in the emerging Third World. Co-ordination between aid agencies during the war (as implemented by COBSRA) provided the model for responding to these disasters, based

¹¹⁷ SCFA: Box A72: Patrick Renison, 'Preliminary notes for a meeting of the Disasters Emergency Committee on Special Appeals', 7 July 1965; SCFA: Box A72: W.N. Hibbert, 'Memorandum: Disasters Emergency Committee', 12 July 1965.

¹¹⁸ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Standing Conference of British Organisations for Aid to Refugees - Sub-Committee on Emergencies, 'Minutes of a meeting', 23 July 1963.

upon short-term apolitical relief funded by simplistic, emotive appeals to the British public for funding.

By the early 1960s, the continued growth of NGOs, a professionalisation of their publicity strategies, and the rapid spread of television ownership all contributed to the sector becoming a much more competitive environment. This was reinforced by intergovernmental fundraising initiatives such as World Refugee Year and the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, which brought the principal NGOs closer together and enrolled them into a new era of more intensive, media-driven fundraising. Competition between humanitarian organisations for resources is often depicted as a major contemporary challenge currently facing the sector. However, it is apparent that as early as the 1960s the NGO sector was acting in a more business-like fashion, as budgets were scaled up and public support for international aid grew. This directly contributed to the creation of the DEC in 1963. Despite being presented as a pragmatic coming together of like-minded actors, in practice the Committee owed more to a longer history of emergency relief, anxieties about competition between insecure NGOs, and the new power of television to evoke an emotional response from mass audiences. The creation of the DEC institutionalised the relationship between NGO expansion and media coverage of disasters, paving the way for a continuous growth of the British humanitarian industry over the following decades.

The overlapping of these trends with the start of a shift into the development field also indicated how the sector was beginning to effectively pursue two competing trajectories simultaneously. In the early 1960s, NGO involvement in the politics of development was still very tentative, and aid agencies were reluctant to fully enter the political arena. Instead, development NGOs concentrated on less controversial educational initiatives. But the contrast between the depoliticised relief co-ordination embodied by the

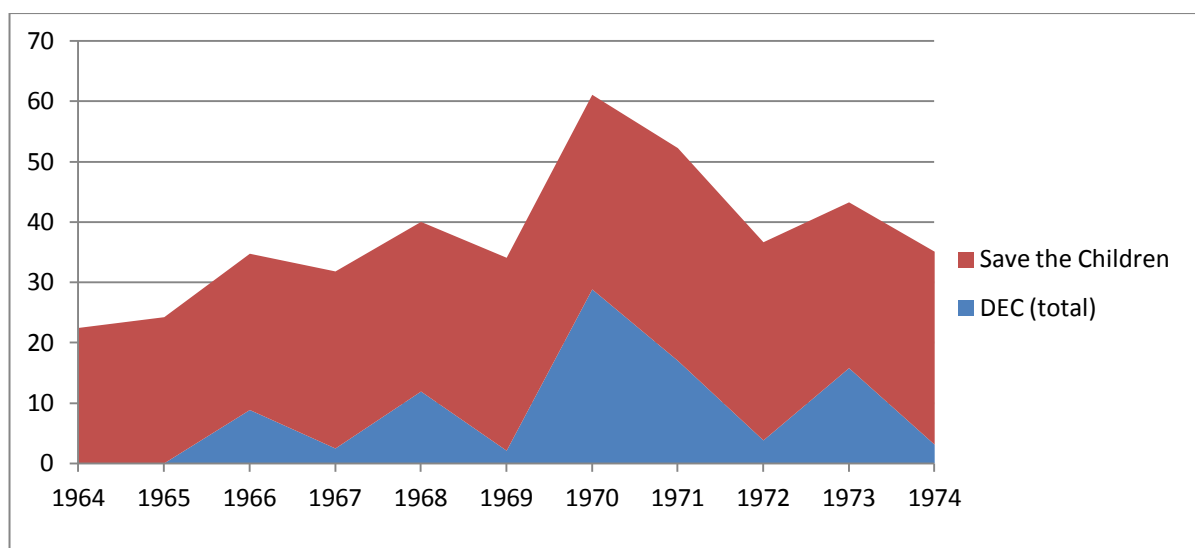
DEC, and the new possibilities of development co-operation envisioned by the FFHC, implied an emerging paradox in how the sector functioned. The provision of short-term charitable relief, financed by the populist appeal of exploitative images of starving children, appeared to contradict new objectives to educate the public about the root causes of distant suffering. The tension between these two trajectories would become more evident towards the end of the 1960s, yet it was clearly already present at the point of the DEC's creation in 1963.

Chapter Two

Charity or Advocacy?

The First Decade of the Disasters Emergency Committee, 1964-74

The creation of the DEC in late 1963 represented a deliberate attempt by the leading humanitarian organisations to harness the power of television, and increase their fundraising potential through broadcast joint emergency appeals. The five DEC agencies were therefore well positioned for the events of the following decade, as a series of major disasters in the Third World attracted the media spotlight and resulted in massive public responses. In particular, a succession of high-profile crises in Nigeria, East Pakistan and Ethiopia in the late 1960s and early 1970s fuelled an intensive growth in the scale and prominence of NGOs. The DEC fundraising mechanism made a direct contribution to this growth, as illustrated by a comparison of DEC and Save the Children income during this period (graph 2.1). Institutional expansion made it possible for humanitarian NGOs to broaden out their operations, and play a more prominent role in responding to overseas emergencies. In the process, the DEC mechanism enabled its members to construct what amounted to a humanitarian oligarchy in Britain, as exclusive access to television ensured a steady stream of publicity and revenue, while raising their legitimacy in the eyes of the state.



Graph 2.1: Cumulated income (£m) of the Disasters Emergency Committee and the Save the Children Fund, 1964-74 (adjusted for inflation, 2012).¹

This building up of the sector's capacity for disaster relief also ran parallel to the increasing engagement of a number of leading organisations in international development, which opened up new arenas for NGO action. Aid agencies recognised the need for educational campaigns, to raise the British public's awareness of the complex issues connected to global poverty and underdevelopment. As the 1960s progressed these activities gradually became more overtly political, as NGOs twinned development education with direct lobbying of government to commit more to overseas development. A more pronounced advocacy role also implied a shift in focus away from emergency relief, as NGOs looked beyond short-term crisis management towards facilitating long-term change. The sector thus became increasingly Janus-faced over the course of this period, in that it looked towards two contrasting directions (relief and development) simultaneously.

¹ Income data for Save the Children sourced from SCF annual reports. DEC fundraising data sourced from <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals/appeals-archive> [accessed 31 March 2014]. Adjusted for inflation using Bank of England Inflation Calculator, 2012 rate: <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/inflation/calculator/flash/default.aspx> [accessed 31 March 2014].

This apparent tension between charitable relief and political advocacy is integral to unpicking non-governmental humanitarianism. In this context, the fundraising appeals and publicity produced by aid agencies have attracted significant attention, as it through such forms of representation that NGOs have constructed a relationship with the public and shaped popular understandings of the wider world. It is widely acknowledged that humanitarian organisations have a long history of representing the global South in a particular way. This publicity style is based upon hard-hitting visual images of individual suffering, predominantly vulnerable children or women (or indeed, women with children). Such images have been consistently effective at capturing the attention of the viewer, and provoking an emotional response which translates into donations. These images are usually accompanied by a caption or narrative, which reinforces the effect by describing in vivid terms the suffering captured in the image. Commonly, NGO appeals and publicity also offer the viewer an immediate form of action to help alleviate the hardship on display, by donating directly to the organisation concerned.² A typical example of this style of charitable fundraising from the period in question is shown below (image 2.1).

² Seymour H. Fine, 'The Starving Baby Appeal', in Seymour H. Fine (ed.), *Marketing the Public Sector: Promoting the Causes of Public and Nonprofit Agencies* (Brunswick: New Jersey, 1992, pp.154-159); Henrietta Josephine Lidchi, "'All in the choosing eye": Charity, Representation and the Developing World' (Unpublished PhD thesis: Open University, 1993).



Image 2.1: Oxfam, Christmas press appeal, December 1970.³

The processes by which audiences receive and respond to such media messages are complex, and debates continue over the extent to which audiences have agency to interpret and shape messages or ‘codes’.⁴ While the nature of audience reception for charitable advertising is also contested⁵, there is a general consensus among commentators

³ Oxfam, ‘The ghost of Christmas present appeal’, *The Times*, 9 December 1970, p.7.

⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse’, *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Occasional Paper* (Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973); Ronald Lembo and Kenneth H. Tucker, ‘Culture, television, and opposition: Rethinking cultural studies’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 7:2 (1990, pp.97-116); Lawrence Black, ‘Whose finger on the button? British television and the politics of cultural control’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 25:4 (October 2005, pp.547-575); David E. Morrison, ‘Cultural and Moral Authority: The Presumption of Television’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 625:1 (September 2009, pp.116-127).

⁵ Magdalini Tsoutsoumpi, ‘Audience Reception of Charity Advertising: Making Sense, Interpreting and Decoding Advertisements That Focus on Human Suffering’ (MSc thesis: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012).

that this form of humanitarian advertising negatively impacts upon public perceptions of the developing world. It is argued that these appeals reproduce colonial ideas and stereotypes, by presenting the global South as helpless, passive, and dependent upon the civilised North for assistance and guidance.⁶ The ubiquitous imagery of starving children has come in for especially strong criticism, for infantilising the developing world by attributing to it an ignorant and child-like state.⁷ Such images also fit into a longer lineage of child-centric charitable appeals dating back to missionaries and philanthropists in the colonial period, who used suffering children as symbolic objects of ‘innate pathos universally worthy of humanitarian concern’.⁸ These images have therefore been implicated in obscuring the more complex structural causes of inequality and suffering in the global South, and the interconnections between First World affluence and Third World poverty.

As will be shown in this chapter, the growth of the humanitarian sector over the 1960s and early 1970s can be heavily attributed to the populist appeal of this form of representation. The emergency appeals produced by the DEC were typical of this genre of humanitarian fundraising, and the individual Committee members also promoted this view of the Third World in their own publicity. Indeed, Stanley Cohen argues that it was during this period that the stereotypical image of the starving African child became a ‘universal

⁶ Kate Manzo, ‘An extension of colonialism? Development education, images and the media’, *The Development Education Journal*, 12:2 (2006, pp.9-12); Kate Manzo, ‘Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood’, *Antipode*, 40:4 (2008, pp.632-657); Lisa Rideout, ‘Representations of the “Third World” in NGO advertising: practicalities, colonial discourse and western understandings of development’, *Journal of African Media Studies*, 3:1 (March 2011, pp.25-41).

⁷ Nandita Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp.33-45.

⁸ Emily Baughan, “‘Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!’ Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain’, *Historical Research*, 86:231 (February 2013, pp.116-137), quote at p.124. See also: Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.130; Marianne Gullestad, *Picturing Pity: Pitfalls and Pleasures in Cross-cultural Communication - Image and Word in a North Cameroon Mission* (NY: Berghahn, 2007), p.25; Manzo, ‘Imaging Humanitarianism’.

icon of human suffering'.⁹ This was the result of a widespread dissemination of such images on television in relation to major emergencies (such as the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s), as well as their repeated usage in NGO advertisements and fundraising material. However, the perpetuation of such images by aid agencies over this period was also fundamentally problematic. Presenting the developing world as ignorant and passive may have maximised fundraising income, but it was counter-productive to the new objectives of development NGOs to raise public awareness and understanding of the structural causes of global poverty.

This tension within development agencies, often depicted as a clash between fundraising and education, has been well documented.¹⁰ It also points to more deep-rooted issues concerning the extent to which NGO practices (and, therefore, NGOs themselves) are political. The simplistic images and narratives of NGO emergency appeals often suggest an abstraction from politics, with the starving child used to represent an abstract universal humanity, removed from any national or political context. This practice has a long history in non-governmental humanitarianism, dating back to the fundraising success of Save the Children in the early 1920s.¹¹ Arguably, portraying emergencies and crises in this fashion also works to depoliticise global poverty and suffering, through their presentation as naturally occurring, apolitical conditions outside of human agency. This style of representation therefore appears incompatible with political

⁹ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p.178.

¹⁰ Jørgen Lissner, 'Merchants of Misery', *New Internationalist*, 100 (June 1981); Cohen, *States of Denial*, pp.178-195.

¹¹ Ellen Boucher, 'Cultivating Internationalism: Save the Children Fund, Public Opinion and the meaning of Child Relief, 1919-1924', in Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (eds.), *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars* (London: IHR, 2012, pp.169-188); Baughan, 'Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain'.

campaigning on the causes of underdevelopment, which aims to convey a sense of injustice and interconnectedness.¹²

This chapter explores how this tension between disasters and development played out between 1964 and 1974 - the first ten years of the DEC. It is shown how, despite an increasing political focus on the causes of global underdevelopment, in practice the humanitarian sector was consistently brought back to apolitical relief. A key instrument in this was the rise of television, which publicised and brought a new immediacy to distant suffering, thereby stimulating public demands for humanitarian aid. By contrast, public support for the less dramatic processes of long-term development was not as forthcoming. While these factors worked to politically contain the sector, humanitarian NGOs also exacerbated this process through their own decision-making. Divides within the sector and widely shared anxieties over the consequences of becoming overtly political all drove aid agencies back to a familiar and less controversial position of short-term charity. NGOs also undermined their own advocacy ambitions through a reliance on patronising images of starving children, which generated funding while also depoliticising global poverty and suffering. The DEC mechanism was crucial to all of this, as it promoted simplistic narratives of disaster on television and consolidated a public depiction of its members as apolitical relief actors. The discrete and moderate nature of the Committee itself also worked to reinforce a depoliticised humanitarianism within the sector, as it provided a means for conservative elements to restrain more radical voices.

To set out this argument, this chapter is structured into five distinct analytical sections. Firstly, the move towards a political advocacy role by the majority of the sector is charted. Following on from the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign, aid agencies continued to co-ordinate on development activity in the 1960s, gradually becoming more

¹² Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism'; Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty*.

political as the decade progressed. NGOs realised that their own efforts were miniscule when compared to official actors, which in turn fostered a more committed lobbying agenda, despite the oversights of charity law. Development NGOs were also influenced by the broader societal climate of unrest which characterised the late 1960s, as they recruited younger activists who impatiently pushed for more radical change. This new focus upon advocacy was reflected in such initiatives as the formation of the World Development Movement in 1970, which aimed to rally grassroots support for pro-development policy change.

However, in practice the effectiveness of these activities was always limited by a lack of widespread popular interest in development issues, especially in relation to emergency relief. High-profile disasters consistently brought the focus of NGOs back to traditional charity, while reinforcing a popular conception of aid agencies as relief actors acting outside of politics. As a mechanism for making emergency appeals to the public through television, the DEC was a key agent in this process. The second section therefore undertakes a brief overview of the DEC mechanism, clarifying how it functioned in practice, its relationship with the television broadcasters, and the discourses of humanitarianism it promoted in its early appeals. It is shown that from the outset the DEC deliberately simplified disasters and disaster relief in its publicity, depicting a generic state of emergency and relying on negative images and narratives of suffering to raise funding. The DEC was therefore fundamentally apolitical in character, despite the advocacy ambitions of the sector. The fundraising success of the DEC also reflected broader trends, such as the rapid development of television, and the ongoing professionalisation of NGO advertising practices.

The importance of the DEC in shaping the direction of the sector is then set out through case studies of three major emergencies in the period between 1968 and 1973.

The first of these examines the humanitarian response to the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s. The Nigerian Civil War has been well documented by scholars, who widely present it as a critical moment in the history of modern humanitarianism and NGOs. This case study builds on the existing literature, by documenting the contribution of the DEC. While at first the Committee members responded to the conflict discretely and carefully, television images of starvation in the secessionist state of Biafra in June 1968 transformed the crisis into a major political issue. The combination of a sudden surge of popular support for Biafra, and an increasingly radical climate within the NGO sector, led to Oxfam breaking with the DEC and launching a major publicity campaign. This unilateral action enabled the agency to monopolise public donations for Biafra (fuelling their own expansion), but it also resulted in Oxfam becoming publicly associated with an explicitly political, pro-Biafran position on the conflict itself. This overt political involvement created serious problems for the organisation, including sharp criticisms from the other DEC members within the Committee. In this context the DEC acted as a restraining influence and depoliticising force, as the other agencies pressurised Oxfam to disassociate itself from the pro-Biafra lobby and re-emphasise its apolitical humanitarian credentials. In the process, Oxfam's experience also pointed to the broader problems NGOs faced in becoming more political.

A second case study looks at the involvement of the DEC agencies in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the early 1970s. A fatal cyclone in late 1970 brought international NGOs to the region at a time of political volatility between Pakistan's West and East wings. The DEC's television appeal for the cyclone raised a record sum, which highlighted how effective the fundraising mechanism could be. However, while funding was extracted from the public on the basis of simplistic disaster publicity, the growing ideological focus on development within the sector impacted upon how these donations

were actually spent. The trio of Christian Aid, Oxfam, and War on Want formed a Consortium to discretely spend their DEC income on agricultural development programmes in the cyclone region, effectively blurring the populist appeal of emergency relief with rural development. This blurring represented a tacit acknowledgement by the agencies that development had failed to mobilise the public, and they instead utilised the spectacle of disaster for their own purposes. This tension between relief and development was further exacerbated by the political involvement of the Consortium's aid workers, as well as War on Want more generally, after the outbreak of civil war between East and West Pakistan in 1971. Many of these individuals became staunchly pro-Bangladesh, and (as with Oxfam and Biafra) the other DEC members deliberately intervened to restrain radical voices and re-assert an apolitical stance.

A third and final case study examines the exposure of a severe famine in Ethiopia in late 1973 by British television. Having previously attracted minimal media attention, a single ITV documentary (*The Unknown Famine*) elevated Ethiopia into a major international crisis. Shortly afterwards, a wide array of donor governments, intergovernmental agencies and international NGOs were mobilised to implement a major aid programme across the entire Sahel region of Africa. *The Unknown Famine* also deliberately simplified the famine by presenting it as a sudden natural disaster without human agency, obscuring the political failings of the Ethiopian government. This decision was taken deliberately by the film crew (including presenter Jonathan Dimbleby) to maximise the response of the public to the film. The DEC members were well aware of this, and yet they were also complicit in this simplification by endorsing the film, and using its footage in their own broadcast appeal. The record fundraising total generated by this appeal further highlighted how effective this form of representation was. The public reaction to the ITV film also reinforced how ineffective the sector's educational and

advocacy work had been in generating mass support, in relation to disasters featured on television. It is ultimately concluded that these case studies, and the decade as a whole, raise challenging questions about the nature of overseas development, the relationship between NGOs and the public, and the linkages between the humanitarian sector and government.

NGOs and the Politics of Development

As chapter one discussed, the early 1960s marked the beginning of a shift within the NGO sector. A number of leading organisations invested in campaigns to tackle the root causes of global hunger and poverty, rather than solely ameliorating its visible effects. This shift in approach also necessitated new forms of voluntary action, as these newly-christened development agencies explored ways to build up public awareness of the complex issues and politics linked to global development.

These trends continued to gather pace after 1963, as the British state also moved more concretely into the development field. The election of Harold Wilson's Labour government in 1964 led to the creation of the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM), charged with executing all aspects of development policy. The ODM was formed amid great optimism; the first three Ministers of Overseas Development were Cabinet members, and the new Ministry commanded substantial resources.¹³ As part of its remit to administer all aspects of the British overseas aid programme, the ODM also sought to draw upon the growing expertise of development NGOs, and supported increased co-

¹³ Owen Barder, 'Reforming Development Assistance: Lessons from the UK Experience', *Center for Global Development - Working Paper Number 70* (October 2005), p.6, available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=984062> [accessed 31 March 2014]; Barrie Ireton, *Britain's International Development Policies: A History of DFID and Overseas Aid* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.31-32; see also: TNA: Overseas Development Papers: OD 15/15: Ministry of Overseas Development, 'Aid Policy', 16 November 1964.

ordination within the sector. Indeed, the ODM went as far as to help aid agencies set up their own lobby in 1965, as the Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development (VCOAD). VCOAD grew out of the FFHC and was intended to provide a joint platform for development programming and public awareness raising initiatives. The Committee had an initial membership of the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), Christian Aid, the FFHC, Oxfam, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Save the Children, the United Nations Association, and War on Want. The British FFHC committee wound down shortly after, with VCOAD taking on all of its functions. In particular, co-ordination of NGO public education and awareness raising activities became a key VCOAD function, picking up where the FFHC had left off.¹⁴

In practice, the effectiveness of such activities was limited from the outset by a lack of clarity over what was permissible under charity law. Throughout this period the sector was aware that its public awareness campaigns could be classified as overly political. Development NGOs therefore risked censure from the Charity Commissioners, the non-ministerial body responsible for monitoring and regulating the voluntary sector. During the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Oxfam and other agencies had regularly made public statements that called upon policymakers to do more to address world poverty.¹⁵ By contrast, as early as 1962 the Commissioners had stated that ‘propaganda and advocacy for legislation’ was ‘political, and not charitable’. This foreshadowed an official examination of the work of Oxfam and other development NGOs in 1963. Initially, the Commissioners argued that development aid as a whole was political, and not suited to the work of charitable organisations. While the Commissioners later softened their stance, largely on the grounds that the government had itself encouraged NGOs to

¹⁴ Donald Geoffrey Harrison, ‘Oxfam and the rise of development education in England from 1959 to 1979’ (PhD thesis: University of London, 2008), pp.93-95.

¹⁵ See, for instance: ‘Oxfam’s call to government: More aid for hungry’, *The Guardian*, 4 August 1962, p.10.

take up a developmental role, they also requested that Oxfam make it clearer to the public how they spent their donations. In 1965 the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief accordingly changed its name to Oxfam, although in practice it had been widely known as this for some time.¹⁶ While this particular clash with the institutions of the state was resolved amicably, it also demonstrated how the Charity Commissioners could intervene at any moment to investigate a particular organisation or sector.

Nonetheless, development NGOs slowly became more political in their stance on development aid as the 1960s progressed, demonstrating more will to exert pressure on policymakers. A key stimulus for this was a downgrading in the importance of overseas aid by the government. While the ODM had been launched amidst genuine enthusiasm, economic difficulties led to the aid budget being abruptly cut by £20 million in 1966. Oxfam activists observed that this was a larger sum than their organisation had ever spent in their twenty year history. The Minister for Overseas Development was also removed from the Cabinet, as optimism for development gave way to a reducing official commitment.¹⁷ The size of the aid budget cuts also confirmed a perception within the NGO sector that only donor governments and multilateral institutions possessed the necessary resources and scale to address the huge issue of global poverty. An influential report by a senior Oxfam official in 1967 stated that:

‘Relief and development of peoples in all parts of the world cannot be accomplished by voluntary agencies alone. Massive effort by governments is essential, and to encourage such effort, Oxfam must sometimes play the role of Socrates and be a gadfly to sting the State to action’.¹⁸

¹⁶ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992), pp.85-91.

¹⁷ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.155; Peter J. Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p.35.

¹⁸ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.155.

Such thinking reinforced an ongoing trend for NGOs to become more political, even if this risked further confrontation with the Charity Commissioners. Oxfam was not the only organisation traversing this path. War on Want also became more geared to political lobbying over the course of the 1960s, and its radical origins enabled it to do so with less internal disquiet than other agencies. However, the organisation's overall effectiveness was restricted by financial difficulties throughout the 1960s.¹⁹ Christian Aid's take up of advocacy was facilitated by the British Council of Churches adopting a resolution in 1966 that 'the more equitable distribution of the world's growing wealth is a primary demand of justice'. The same document also stated that such action 'must be undertaken through governmental action, for voluntary aid cannot of itself establish economic justice'.²⁰ In this regard Christian Aid was also following broader shifts taking place in the World Council of Churches. In 1968 the British Council issued a further 'Policy Statement on Christian Aid and World Development', which specifically called upon Christian Aid to promote the cause of 'economic justice'. This was to be advanced by lobbying 'all political parties' to commit to making one percent of GNP available for overseas aid, to restructure the terms of trade to provide 'freer access for developing nations to the markets of the world', and urging the ODM to extend family planning and population control measures.²¹

This general momentum towards more overt political activism in turn encouraged greater co-ordination between NGOs within VCOAD (with the notable exception of the more conservative Save the Children). The membership of the development-oriented organisations also began to swell with younger student radicals, who impatiently pushed

¹⁹ Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.71-72.

²⁰ CAA: Box CA/J/1: British Council of Churches, *World Poverty and British Responsibility* (London: SCM Press, 1966), p.5.

²¹ CAA: Box CA/J/5: British Council of Churches, 'A Policy Statement on Christian Aid and World Development', October 1968.

for a faster pace of politicisation, reflecting a broader confrontational climate of the late 1960s. VCOAD's General Secretary remarked privately that 'militants in all the members of VCOAD' were 'upsetting their elders and pushing them all the time for a more positive stance on the part of the voluntary societies in favour of more government aid'.²² Within Oxfam, these flames were stoked further by the appointment of Rev. Nicolas Stacey as Deputy Director in early 1968. An outspoken and controversial figure with a flair for publicity, Maggie Black describes Stacey as 'the new look for the 1960s generation... a young people's leader for the aid lobby'.²³ Stacey identified with the radical elements within the organisation, and pushed for Oxfam to assume a more muscular campaigning agenda.²⁴

These militant voices came together to form the Haslemere Group in 1968, a non-charitable body that was technically outside of the formal charity network. In practice, Haslemere was heavily comprised of young activists connected to Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want. The group published the *Haslemere Declaration* in March 1968, an overtly political manifesto on the causes of global poverty and underdevelopment. The Declaration stated that the developed world was directly responsible for the condition of the developing nations, through exploitation, trade imbalances, and the inequality of the international monetary system. Influenced by critiques of Western-led development emanating from the global South, Haslemere called for a revolution in world politics to create parity between nations, an overtly radical position that was in stark contrast to traditional humanitarian assistance. Indeed, Haslemere advanced a critique of the entire practice of emergency relief, equating it with 'tossing sixpence in a beggar's cap: money given by those who have no intention of changing the system that produces beggars, and

²² TNA: OD 15/72: R. Miles, 'Haslemere Declaration', 5 June 1968.

²³ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.156-157.

no understanding that they are part of it'. Haslemere's authors intended for the Declaration to be a call to arms, a focal point around which a mass movement could crystallise in support of development, to exert pressure upon the state.²⁵ The ODM interpreted it as 'another manifestation of student power which is impatient for the right outlets for their energies... their militancy is as strong in Christian Aid as in Oxfam'.²⁶

Adopting this more overt advocacy role was not an organic process for NGOs, and it gave rise to heated debate and divisions within the sector. Save the Children was especially alarmed at what it perceived as a reckless entry into the political arena by its fellow VCOAD members, and deliberately worked to slow down or halt this momentum when possible. Indeed, SCF expressed little enthusiasm for long-term development and had internally opposed the creation of VCOAD in 1965, although it felt obliged to join due to concerns that it would appear publicly out of step with the other agencies.²⁷ Hence, when in late 1968 Christian Aid produced a paper which it hoped to publish jointly through VCOAD, calling for political pressure on government to increase aid levels, SCF staff expressed their 'dismay and concern'. Save the Children Director Colin Thornley argued that it would be a 'grave error' for the organisation to be 'in any way associated' with political protest, as it risked 'causing disillusionment amongst many of its supporters, to the serious detriment of their fund-raising'. SCF threatened to withdraw from VCOAD if the publication went ahead, which led to Christian Aid abandoning the idea altogether.²⁸

The following year, the more radical agencies within VCOAD tabled a proposal to publish a document entitled *A Manifesto on Aid and Development* through the Committee,

²⁵ The Haslemere Group, *The Haslemere Declaration* (London: Haslemere, 1968).

²⁶ TNA: OD 15/72: R. Miles, 'Haslemere Declaration', 5 June 1968.

²⁷ SCFA: Box A422: Save the Children Fund, 'The 251st Meeting of the Executive Committee', 15 June 1965: Freedom from Hunger Campaign (E.3869.).

²⁸ SCFA: Box A421: Save the Children Fund, 'The 271st Meeting of the Executive Committee', 19 November 1968: Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development (E.4248).

which called for increased official aid, and more intensive political advocacy work in support of this objective. Much of the Manifesto was synthesised from papers originally prepared by Oxfam, which Nicolas Stacey had played a role in drafting.²⁹ Save the Children strongly opposed the proposal, as they had done a year earlier with Christian Aid's paper. The Manifesto also attracted the scrutiny of the Charity Commissioners, who interpreted it as an illegal use of charitable funds for political activity. To circumvent these obstacles, the trio of Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want created the World Development Movement (WDM) in 1970 as a separate, non-charitable body distinct from VCOAD, to which all political activity could be hived off. This also left VCOAD as concerned solely with co-ordinating educational and informational activities.³⁰ As a non-charitable organisation, WDM was free to pursue advocacy work outside the constraints of charity law, while retaining an association and connection with the leading development agencies.

A similar rationale led to the creation of the pro-development magazine *New Internationalist* in 1973 by Christian Aid and Oxfam, which despite being funded by the two agencies maintained a position of editorial independence.³¹ However, despite these legal innovations, the launch of WDM was largely an anti-climax. *A Manifesto on Aid and Development* failed to capture public attention on the scale envisioned by the NGOs, in stark contrast to a series of high-profile disasters in Africa and Asia which occurred over the same period. Maggie Black attributes this failure to the sheer complexity of the issues connected to global poverty and underdevelopment, which were inevitably less geared to dramatic representation than emotive images of suffering disaster victims. WDM's growth

²⁹ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp.155-158.

³⁰ SCFA: Box A424: Colin Thornley, 'Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development and Action for World Development', 11 November 1970.

³¹ CAA: Box CA2/D/9, file CA2/D/9/13: Development Press Ltd., 'Note of a meeting', 31 August 1972.

was slow, and failed to significantly engage young activists, who instead tended to mobilise around such issues as the anti-Vietnam War movement.³²

Development NGOs thus found themselves in a difficult position by the early 1970s. They had come to recognise and articulate the need for a more overt advocacy role, to mobilise the public and exert political pressure upon government. Taking up this role also implied a shift in focus away from emergency relief concerns, as made explicit in the *Haslemere Declaration*. However, the sector was also divided over what constituted an acceptable limit to their own radicalisation. This was partially due to the constraints of charity law, as enforced by the conservative-minded Charity Commissioners. It also reflected a deep-rooted anxiety that the general public was not motivated by international development, as demonstrated by the lukewarm response to Haslemere and WDM's Manifesto. Many agency staff worried that to be publicly associated with politics risked losing the trust of their established supporters. Save the Children in particular felt that political protest could negatively impact upon their fundraising ability. This also proved to be a formidable barrier for the more advocacy-oriented agencies as well. Calls by Nicolas Stacey in 1970 for Oxfam to reduce its overseas aid commitments and invest more in domestic campaigning were resisted by the organisation's Council of Management. Instead, the Council publicly reaffirmed that Oxfam's primary purpose was to raise money to finance overseas aid projects. Despite being considered by many as a future leadership candidate, Stacey's position became untenable, and he resigned later that year.³³ Upon his exit, Stacey commented in the *Times* on the complex dilemmas being raised by the sector's politicisation:

‘...I accept that the whole tradition of charities in Britain makes it extraordinarily difficult to combine fund raising on a large scale with education, propaganda and political pressure... The sincere and well-meaning but elderly and cautious people with a high

³² Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p.159-162.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp.159-161.

threshold of boredom who dominate the web of committees that control most charities shrink from the cut and thrust of the political arena. While the typical donor, thought to be elderly, female and middle class, probably considers politics dirty, pressure groups irrelevant and controversy ungentlemanly.³⁴

The reaffirmation of the primacy of Oxfam's aid programme by the organisation's Council also indicated how the sector's involvement in overseas disaster relief operations had been expanding, fuelled by growing public support for NGO emergency interventions. As much as this period represented an advancement of the sector's commitment to developmental advocacy, in practice high-profile disasters also redirected the focus of NGOs back to traditional, apolitical assistance. In the process, a popular conception of aid agencies as charitable relief actors was also reinforced, restricting public awareness of long-term development. As a recently-founded mechanism for making emergency appeals to the public via television, the DEC clearly played a crucial role in this process.

The DEC and Emergency Humanitarianism

Once the DEC had been established in late 1963, the Committee's initial years were largely spent working out the technicalities for launching joint emergency appeals on television. The DEC agencies had taken care to cultivate close links between themselves and the BBC, which was highly supportive of the new 'co-ordinating machinery' for disasters. However, the making of joint broadcast appeals was complicated by the lack of any specific BBC emergency appeals policy.³⁵ After protracted discussion the BBC Appeals Secretary eventually confirmed in September 1965 that he would consider 'all

³⁴ cited in Ben Whitaker, *A Bridge of People: A Personal View of Oxfam's First Forty Years* (London: Heinemann, 1983), p.26.

³⁵ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: British Red Cross Society, 'Memorandum from Sir Patrick Renison', 5 July 1965.

appeals sponsored by the DEC'. Under the new arrangements, the DEC members could collectively request a broadcast appeal for any disaster they considered to be of sufficient magnitude. If the broadcasters agreed, a primetime appeal would be granted to the Committee for transmission on BBC television and radio, presented by a prominent BBC personality. This reflected a longer lineage of the BBC using celebrities and public figures in charitable appeals, as a way to establish a personal connection between the viewer and a specific cause. This also built on an older tradition of voluntary organisations using a 'figurehead' to frame their activities and fundraising.³⁶

The appeals themselves were produced by in-house BBC specialists, working from original scripts and material provided by the Committee.³⁷ The DEC was also provided with facilities for processing and disbursing the public donations they could expect their appeals to generate. The DEC was intended to function primarily as a fundraising mechanism, and was only responsible for allocating the funds among its members; the individual agencies maintained responsibility for how they spent their shares. In practice these tended to be allocated equally, subject to the extent of each individual NGO's involvement in affected regions.³⁸ It was also agreed that emergency appeals would be broadcast simultaneously on commercial television, as ITV used the same appeals machinery as the BBC.³⁹ The emergency appeals process was eventually formalised in an aide-memoire in March 1971, the product of discussions between senior British Red Cross and BBC staff. The aide-memoire included an acknowledgement by the BBC that the DEC members were 'the leading British charities concerned with the provision of aid and

³⁶ Eve Colpus, 'The Week's Good Cause: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-War BBC', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:3 (2011, pp.305-329), pp.322-323.

³⁷ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of a meeting', 1 November 1965.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 8th meeting', 23 August 1966.

relief overseas'. The document also recognised the exceptional status of the DEC mechanism, stating that emergency appeals were 'unique in the sense that for them alone... the BBC was prepared to break its normal schedules to appeal to the giving public'. It was also agreed at this time that 'to preserve the credibility of emergency appeals', requests for broadcasts would be 'confined to major disasters'. The broadcasters also made clear that they had to be in unanimous agreement before any appeal would be granted.⁴⁰

These arrangements granted the DEC agencies an unprecedented level of access to national television for British charitable organisations. Indeed, while the DEC worked to dampen competition between its members for emergency fundraising, it also prevented external organisations from challenging their exclusive status. The DEC agencies were aware of this, and actively excluded other NGOs from sharing in the privileges of the Committee. For instance, an application from Help the Aged to join the DEC in 1968 was rejected on the basis that 'the Committee would no longer serve the purpose it was set up for if its membership was expanded'.⁴¹ This rejection was agreed by all of the DEC agencies, despite Oxfam's acknowledgement that Help the Aged had become 'a considerable force to be reckoned with', whose expenditure on press advertising was 'second only to our own'.⁴² The DEC fundraising mechanism thus also worked to consolidate the de facto oligarchy of its members within the humanitarian sector.

The DEC's first joint appeal was aired in August 1966, for people affected by a earthquake in Eastern Turkey. The appeal was fronted by BBC presenter Cliff

⁴⁰ BBC WAC: file 420-4-1: 'Emergency Appeals: Aide-Memoire of BBC/DEC Conversation', 9 March 1971.

⁴¹ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: B.J. Dudbridge, 'Letter to Janet Lacey', 13 February 1968; CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 31st meeting', 20 February 1968.

⁴² CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Philip Jackson, 'Letter to A.B. Hodgson', 23 January 1968.

Michelmore (who had long-standing links with Christian Aid⁴³), and established a particular publicity style and fundraising model which the DEC would consistently adhere to in the following years. The appeal emphasised the extensive human suffering caused by the disaster, and was framed as a moral imploration to the audience, stating that ‘we need your help and we need it urgently’.⁴⁴ However, little information of substance was provided to the public concerning the actual delivery of aid, or the disaster's broader political context. The appeal raised a record sum of over £550,000 for emergency relief, the majority of which was channelled into a War on Want housing project.⁴⁵ Internally, the DEC Chairman viewed the appeal's success as a validation of ‘the decision of the five member Charities to combine their resources in such emergencies’.⁴⁶ The critical role of television in sparking this response was not lost on the individual agencies. Oxfam, which was undertaking a development programme in India throughout this period (becoming operational in the field for the first time⁴⁷), observed that although the public had donated a record amount for Turkey, they had been ‘stolidly unmoved and apparently unconvinced by the Indian famine’. This contrast was attributed directly to a ‘brilliant Cliff Michelmore T.V. Appeal’.⁴⁸

Buoyed by the success of the Turkey appeal, the DEC launched further appeals in 1967 and 1968 in response to wars in the Middle East and Vietnam, which raised £164,000 and £350,600 respectively. The appeals were framed in a similar manner to the Turkey earthquake, despite both being for conflicts with complex man-made causes.

⁴³ Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-63* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.173.

⁴⁴ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the 8th meeting’, 23 August 1966.

⁴⁵ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Turkish Earthquake Appeal, Interim Account - 31st December, 1966’, 23 January 1967.

⁴⁶ TNA: FO 371/185854: A.B. Hodgson, ‘Letter to The Rt. Hon. G.A. Brown, M.P.’, 28 September 1966.

⁴⁷ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.112.

⁴⁸ Oxfam, *The Sibford Papers: Discussion Week for Young People* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1966), p.48.

Indeed, the DEC deliberately championed itself as a non-political actor in its publicity for such emergencies. The 1967 Middle East appeal urged the viewer to ‘forget politics’, and instead ‘help the tired, hungry, homeless, torn victims of the six-day war’.⁴⁹ The 1968 appeal for Vietnam similarly characterised the DEC approach as ‘No politics. No boundaries. Send us money now. We’ll rush your aid to the people of Vietnam’.⁵⁰ This deliberately apolitical presentation of the DEC was reinforced by the Vietnam appeal being made for both sides of the conflict, which required contributions to be made to organisations working in North Vietnam.⁵¹ The generous public responses to these early appeals demonstrated the effectiveness of this form of representation at generating donations without controversy.

The DEC mechanism worked smoothly in these initial years, and the Committee enjoyed a relaxed relationship with the broadcasting authorities. In depicting a simplified state of generic ‘emergency’, these appeals also worked to foster a paternalistic and one-sided relationship between the DEC members and the public, grounded in passive philanthropy rather than political engagement. As has been demonstrated, this was increasingly in contradiction with the development education programmes being pursued by many of the same organisations. Indeed, the manner in which the DEC operated was reminiscent of the emergency humanitarianism which characterised the sector in the 1940s and 1950s. As a form of co-ordination, the DEC ultimately had more in common with COBSRA in the 1940s, then it did with the new types of organisation emerging within the sector such as the Freedom from Hunger Campaign or VCOAD.

The fundraising success of early DEC appeals also indicated the growing power of television footage to influence the public. Television ownership rose throughout the

⁴⁹ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Middle East appeal’, *The Guardian*, 27 June 1967, p.14.

⁵⁰ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Vietnam appeal’, *The Guardian*, 12 February 1968, p.16.

⁵¹ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the 30th meeting’, 13 February 1968.

1960s, consolidating the medium as the lens through which the British public viewed and understood the wider world. Mark Donnelly describes this trend as ‘the most important cultural transformation of the sixties’.⁵² The spread of television, and concurrent advances in communications technology, brought a new immediacy and emotional impact to images of distant suffering. News reports of overseas disasters helped stimulate humanitarian empathy among the viewing public, evoking an impulse to act immediately to address emergencies in the newly post-colonial states.⁵³ This humanitarian imperative to ‘save’ shared many characteristics with older colonial discourses of Western benevolence and paternalism, and captured how notions of imperial philanthropy continued to endure in post-imperial humanitarian aid.⁵⁴ Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann notably refers to a ‘politically double-edged form of empathy’ emerging during this period, which ‘bore similarities to the imperial humanitarianism of the early nineteenth century’.⁵⁵

The sophisticated procedures and technical processes involved in producing, broadcasting, and collecting the proceeds from DEC appeals also reflected an ongoing professionalisation of NGO advertising taking place throughout the 1960s. Within the humanitarian sector Oxfam led the way, extensively commercialising its operations and applying sophisticated corporate techniques to fundraising and public relations. A report in the *Guardian* in 1964 referred to Oxfam as ‘our most businesslike charity... girding the

⁵² Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005), p.77.

⁵³ Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist: Relief Work in Famine and War* (London: Earthscan, 2001), p.15; Michael Cotey Morgan, ‘The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights’, in Niall Ferguson *et al.* (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010, pp.237-50); Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp.133-134.

⁵⁴ Helen Gilbert and Chris Tiffin (eds.), *Burden or Benefit?: Imperial Benevolence and Its Legacies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008); Anna Bocking-Welch, ‘Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960–70’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.879-896), p.884.

⁵⁵ Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ‘Introduction: Genealogies of Human Rights’, in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (ed.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.1-26), p.20.

country with gift shops as determinedly as any trading street company'.⁵⁶ Other NGOs followed suit, marking a broader shift to professional advertising within the voluntary sector as a whole. Professionalised fundraising spurred the expansion of NGOs, but it also worked to contain the more radical voices within the sector by encouraging simplification and homogenisation, drawing organisations to the centre ground ideologically.⁵⁷

This was especially apparent for humanitarian agencies, who repeatedly returned to the stereotypical image of the starving child due to its emotional impact. A British advertising consultant memorably commented in 1969 that the most effective charitable fundraising method was to 'show babies, all the time show babies and more babies'.⁵⁸ This professionalising process was so pervasive that by 1970, the *Times* commented that disaster relief had 'undergone a complete metamorphosis in the past decade'. This was attributed to the evolution of amateur groups into 'professional organisations fired by the entrepreneurial spirit'. The same article acknowledged that while this had potentially 'robbed "charity" of much of its charm', disaster relief had become 'big business' and professional business methods were therefore now required, not only to raise money but to also account for how it was spent.⁵⁹

These trends all significantly accelerated in the period between 1968 and 1973, which witnessed a quick succession of major, internationalised emergencies in Nigeria, East Pakistan, and the Sahel belt of Africa. Widely covered in the Western media, these disasters captured the attention of the public and stimulated a further expansion of international aid agencies. Indeed, the late 1960s is often presented as the beginning of a

⁵⁶ Fiona MacCarthy, 'Fund against famine', *The Guardian*, 2 September 1964, p.6.

⁵⁷ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.99.

⁵⁸ Edgar Hereward Phillips, *Fund-raising Techniques and Case Histories* (London: Business Books, 1969), quoted in Jørgen Lissner, *The Politics of Altruism: A Study of the Political Behaviour of Voluntary Development Agencies* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1977), p.131.

⁵⁹ Guy Hawtin, 'Aid is big business now', *The Times*, 9 June 1971, p.21.

new phase in humanitarian action, as NGOs and emergency aid were rapidly globalised.⁶⁰ In Britain, the DEC was prominently involved in the humanitarian response to all three of these disasters, most overtly in raising public donations through televised appeals, but also as a forum for NGO collaboration and discussion. In the process, the DEC also worked to actively reinforce a depoliticised humanitarianism within the NGO sector as a whole. The contribution and role of the DEC in these emergencies is examined below in three detailed case studies, beginning with the Nigerian Civil War in 1968.

Biafra, 1968

In 1968, humanitarian NGOs from across the Western world launched a major relief operation in response to the Nigerian Civil War, being fought between the Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG) and the Secessionist state of Biafra in the East. The Biafran crisis has been widely presented as a critical moment in the history of modern humanitarianism and NGOs. Michael Barnett describes the civil war as opening a ‘new chapter in humanitarian action... while the suffering was hardly unprecedented, the international response was’.⁶¹ Television images of Biafran starvation gave rise to huge public demands for intervention all over the world (Tony Vaux refers to the ‘first humanitarian disaster to be seen by millions of people’⁶²), propelling NGOs to a new level of prominence. Biafra also gave rise to important new agencies such as Concern and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). NGOs were able to step into the ‘humanitarian vacuum’ created by an absence of donor governments and UN agencies, taking on a leading role

⁶⁰ Kevin O’Sullivan, ‘A “global nervous system”: The rise and rise of European humanitarian NGOs, 1945-1985’, in Marc Frey *et al.* (eds.), *International Organizations and Development, 1945-1990* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, forthcoming).

⁶¹ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.133.

⁶² Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist*, p.15.

and further fuelling their own expansion. Biafra is also infamous as the moment when NGOs lost their ‘innocence’, as the Biafran leadership exploited their humanitarian efforts to sustain themselves and prolong the conflict. Alex de Waal thus depicts Biafra as both a ‘totem and taboo’ for NGOs; it drove their emergence and professionalisation, yet did so while also exposing naive agencies to the harmful, unintended consequences that can arise from providing relief in times of conflict.⁶³ Rony Brauman, former president of MSF, states that ‘the Biafran War of 1967-70 was the founding event of the modern humanitarian aid movement’.⁶⁴

The humanitarian response to the Biafran crisis has thus been well documented in existing scholarship. The following case study adds to this literature, by examining the role played by the DEC. The Committee members initially responded to the war in a similar manner to previous appeals, by making a deliberate effort to appear apolitical and neutral and providing aid to both sides with discretion. To work in Biafra where the need was greater, NGOs could channel funds through the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was tasked with leading the humanitarian response in the absence of official intervention. Alternatively, they could work through established religious structures in the region, such as the Irish Holy Ghost Fathers. The latter group was itself a problematic body to direct aid through, as many missionaries in the field identified with the Biafran cause and actively blurred humanitarian aid with political action. This extended to

⁶³ Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp.133-147; Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.117-131; Ian Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar: Altruism under fire - non-profit organizations and international development* (Ottawa: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995), pp.102-106; Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London: Villiers, 1997), pp.72-79; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, ‘Humanitarian Aid and the Biafra War: Lessons not Learned’, *Africa Development*, 34:1 (2009, pp.69-82).

⁶⁴ Rony Brauman, *Dangerous Liaisons: Bearing Witness and Political Propaganda. Biafra and Cambodia – The Founding Myths of Médecins Sans Frontières* (Paris: MSF CRASH, 2006), p.3.

accusations that individual missionaries were engaged in arms trafficking for the Biafran military.⁶⁵

Catholic missionaries would later begin their own airlift into Biafra in 1968, in conjunction with Caritas and other European Church agencies, which became known as the Joint Church Aid (JCA) airlift. JCA was less concerned with neutrality, and permitted their assistance to be carried on flights also transporting arms and ammunition for the Biafran military.⁶⁶ The DEC agencies provided grants and funding to both the ICRC and Irish missionaries, while also taking care to provide aid in Federal territory, using the Committee as an arena to exchange dialogue and pool knowledge. The DEC members however declined to launch a televised joint appeal following a meeting in May 1968, due to the logistical and political challenges of getting aid into Biafra. Instead the agencies agreed to hold off all publicity until the ICRC channel was fully secured, at which point all funds raised could be channelled directly into the expanding ICRC aid programme.⁶⁷

At this point, the civil war had largely failed to capture media or public interest in the West, despite the efforts of the Biafran leadership and individual aid workers or journalists. This situation was dramatically altered in June 1968, as a sudden upsurge of media images of starvation and suffering transformed Biafra into a major international news story. In Britain, ITV aired a lengthy news report from the Biafran refugee camps on 12 June, narrated by broadcaster Alan Hart. Hart's report featured powerful footage of starving Biafran children being attended to by white aid workers, and explicitly called for relief to be made available (image 2.2). Television reports were further reinforced by features and photographic spreads of starving Biafran children in several national

⁶⁵ Kevin O'Sullivan, *Ireland, Africa and the End of Empire: Small State Identity in the Cold War, 1955-75* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp.89-93.

⁶⁶ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.120.

⁶⁷ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 35th meeting', 20 June 1968.

newspapers, such as the *Sun* and the *Sunday Times*, which called on the international community to act. The effect of this media coverage was instant, mobilising public compassion in support of humanitarian relief efforts in Biafran territory. Biafran propaganda (which had been struggling in vain to internationalise the war) quickly seized upon these new developments, disseminating a mass of sensational imagery and exaggerated claims about the death rate and Federal atrocities in Biafra.⁶⁸



Image 2.2: Images from ITN news report on Biafra, 12 June 1968.⁶⁹

The sudden transformation of Biafran suffering into a major domestic issue dovetailed with the broader social climate of protest and tumult which characterised the late 1960s. As a staunch supporter of the Nigerian Federal Government (which included supplying arms), the British Labour government came under immense pressure for its pro-Nigeria policy. Harold Wilson acknowledged to his cabinet in late 1968 that the war had ‘aroused profound feeling in the country... it could give rise to a political and Parliamentary crisis of the utmost gravity’.⁷⁰ Evocative television images of emaciated African children created public demands for action, which in turn placed pressure on aid agencies to visibly

⁶⁸ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.121.

⁶⁹ ITN, ‘Biafra Famine’ news report, *ITV Late Evening News*, originally broadcast 12 June 1968 (Television).

⁷⁰ TNA: Cabinet Paper CC(68) (CAB/128/43): ‘Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday 10th December 1968’, 11 December 1968.

intervene. Within the NGO sector, these demands were further exacerbated by broader calls for more overt political action on Third World suffering. In this heated environment, Oxfam broke with the previous DEC agreement to avoid publicity, and took unilateral action. The organisation deployed its professionalised publicity machinery in support of Biafran relief, launching a major fundraising campaign within days of the ITV news reports. The campaign utilised the now ubiquitous images of starving Biafran children to capture the attention of the viewing public, and drive fundraising (image 2.3). Indeed, Oxfam's rapid response enabled the organisation to quickly generate substantial public donations at the expense of other aid agencies. Oxfam's income soared over the course of 1968, fuelling further organisational expansion.⁷¹



Image 2.3: Oxfam, Biafra press appeals, June/July 1968.⁷²

⁷¹ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.122.

⁷² Oxfam, 'Biafra emergency appeal', *The Guardian*, 19 June 1968, p.9; Oxfam, 'Biafra emergency appeal', *The Guardian*, 29 July 1968, p.20.

The deliberate use of the trope of the starving African child reflected its effectiveness in Oxfam's fundraising since the Congo crisis. Furthermore, despite claims that Oxfam was 'not concerned with the rights and wrongs of this conflict', these appeals associated the organisation with the Biafran cause, effectively adopting a political stance on the war. The very naming of Oxfam's 'Biafran emergency appeal' drew criticism from the Nigerian High Commissioner in London, who complained that the advertisement would 'add credence to the fiction that a State of "Biafra" exists'.⁷³ In practice many Oxfam staff had already adopted a pro-Biafran position. This included senior executives such as Nicolas Stacey, who made regular appearances on television which cast Oxfam as Biafra's saviour. Leslie Kirkley himself flew to Biafra in a blaze of publicity to negotiate directly with the Biafran leadership on the relief issue.⁷⁴ The radical climate within Oxfam, and the sector as a whole, motivated the agency towards taking a more overtly political stance which went well beyond the apparently neutral humanitarianism of the DEC.

While Oxfam's publicity blitz thrust the organisation into the limelight, the consequences of their pro-Biafran campaigning also demonstrated the problems that could arise from becoming more political. The agency was repeatedly and publicly attacked by the Nigerian Federal Government for becoming 'politically involved' in the conflict. At a meeting between the Nigerian leadership and NGO representatives in July, all aid agencies were warned that 'political interference would not be tolerated from any relief organisation'.⁷⁵ Within the British government there was a consensus that Oxfam had become too partisan, and the organisation was excluded from an official mission to Nigeria in July 1968 led by future DEC Chairman Lord Hunt. Instead, the mission included representatives from the more moderate British Red Cross and Save the

⁷³ Lasse Heerten, 'The Biafran War in Britain: An Odd Alliance of late 1960s Humanitarian Activists', *Journal of the Oxford University History Society*, 8 (2009), p.8.

⁷⁴ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.122-123.

⁷⁵ TNA: FCO 38/301: 'International Relief Agencies meet General Gowon', 20 July 1968.

Children.⁷⁶ Indeed, SCF's response to the conflict was in stark contrast to Oxfam. The Fund was very careful to avoid antagonising the Nigerian state, and eventually withdrew its aid workers from Biafra altogether in October 1968. Instead SCF operated solely in Federal territory, where it received significant financial assistance from the British government.⁷⁷

Crucially, Oxfam also came under heavy criticism within the privacy of the DEC, for taking unilateral action and breaking the prior agreement to hold off publicity. The British Red Cross stated that Oxfam had undermined its partners by jeopardising the possibility of future DEC broadcast appeals for Nigeria. Oxfam replied that they had tried to 'pave the way for the DEC by stirring up public opinion', and had 'no intention of prejudicing a DEC television appeal'. Oxfam also agreed that they would place their own publicity on hold if a DEC appeal was launched.⁷⁸ Rebuked by its fellow agencies, and facing sharp official criticism, Oxfam began to rein in its more radical elements. The agency dialled back on its controversial statements, and moved to publicly disassociate itself from the emerging Biafra lobby in Britain. This included sending a representative to a July rally in London to announce that Oxfam was a 'completely non-political body'.⁷⁹ The organisation's representative in Lagos also formally apologised to the Nigerian government, assuring that Oxfam would 'henceforth avoid doing anything that might cause suspicion of the humanitarian motives of his organisation'.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.123.

⁷⁷ SCFA: Box A650: Save the Children Fund, 'The 222nd Meeting of The Overseas Relief and Welfare Committee', 11 July 1968: Nigeria (ORW.4003.); TNA: Cabinet Paper C(69)160 (CAB/129/146): 'Nigeria: Relief' (Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), 26 November 1969.

⁷⁸ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 35th meeting', 20 June 1968.

⁷⁹ Heerten, 'The Biafran War in Britain', pp.8-9.

⁸⁰ TNA: FCO 38/301: 'International Relief Agencies meet General Gowon', 20 July 1968.

Oxfam's response to Biafra highlighted many of the tensions and contradictions within the sector. The promotion of simplistic, negative images of starving Biafran children generated significant financial benefits, while also further reinforcing problematic stereotypes of African suffering and helplessness. Simultaneously, the organisation also attempted to move beyond charitable relief and become more politically involved in the conflict, which exposed the divides within the sector concerning the acceptable limits of political engagement. In this context, the DEC functioned as an instrument for moderation, providing a forum for its other members to restrain Oxfam and push the organisation back to a less controversial stance of charitable relief.

Within the broader international humanitarian community, Oxfam's experience was not unique. The same pressures that had influenced the agency to break ranks with the DEC could be detected all across Europe. Attending a meeting between the ICRC and European NGO representatives in August 1968, Lord Hunt observed the 'tremendous pressures of public opinion for quick decisions and action on relief operations... independent initiatives will prove irresistible unless [the ICRC] can move fast'. He added that there was a clear 'Biafran bias' evident among the assembled NGOs.⁸¹ British Red Cross Director A.B. Hodgson, also attending, observed the 'extreme frustration and sense of concern of all the 20/30 nations represented at the apparent inability of the ICRC to organise relief'. Hodgson added that the British public appeared comparatively 'balanced and objective' about Nigeria compared to France and the Scandinavian nations, where 'the Biafran problem is all that concerns their public'.⁸² In France, dissatisfaction with the ICRC famously led to the founding of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in 1971, which

⁸¹ TNA: FCO 38/302: 'Report on the Mission by Lord Hunt and Mr. Hodgson to Geneva', 14 August 1968.

⁸² TNA: FCO 38/302: A.B. Hodgson, 'Note on visit to Geneva with Lord Hunt', 15 August 1968.

took up a more aggressive media role. The experience of Biafra remains an important ‘founding myth’ for MSF.⁸³

The DEC eventually agreed to launch a joint broadcast appeal in November 1968, in response to an ICRC appeal for resources. By this point the initial wave of intense media coverage and public pressure over the Biafran issue had waned. Consequently, the appeal itself was a relatively low-key affair, which the agencies all wished to conclude quickly without interrupting their Christmas fundraising plans. The appeal for ‘Nigerian War Victims’ was cast in the established DEC mould, made for both sides of the conflict and avoiding any direct reference to ‘Biafra’. The appeal provided little concrete information on the complex politics of relief at play in the region, instead focusing on the abstract icon of the starving African child.⁸⁴ Behind the scenes, the appeal was more problematic. The broadcast was presented on the BBC by Nicolas Stacey, an Oxfam representative who had become publicly associated with the Biafran cause. This decision, taken at the last-minute by the British Red Cross when the BBC declined to provide its own staff, provoked genuine anger within the Committee. Christian Aid commented that it was ‘very unfortunate indeed for DEC inner relationships’.⁸⁵ Save the Children objected ‘in the strongest terms to the selection of a representative of one of the member organisations’.⁸⁶ Tellingly, when the appeal was broadcast on ITV it was presented by newsreader Andrew Gardner instead. The DEC would later make a thinly veiled criticism of Stacey that ‘the appeal did not really get under way until after the ITV broadcast... the

⁸³ Brauman, *Dangerous Liaisons*; Rony Brauman and Joelle Tanguy, ‘The MSF Experience’ (MSF, 1998), available at: <http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/work/field/msfexperience.cfm> [accessed 31 March 2014]; see also: Fabrice Weissman, ‘Silence Heals...from the Cold War to the War on Terror, MSF Speaks Out: a Brief History’, in Claire Magone *et al.* (eds.), *Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011, pp.177-198); Eleanor Davey, ‘From *tiers-mondisme* to *sans-frontiérisme*: Revolutionary Idealism in France from the Algerian War to Ethiopian Famine’ (PhD thesis: Queen Mary, University of London, 2011), pp.33-39.

⁸⁴ TNA: FCO 64/392: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘An appeal for Nigeria War Victims by the Rev. Nicolas Stacey’, November 1968.

⁸⁵ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/2: Alan Brash, ‘DEC Public Appeal’, 22 November 1968.

⁸⁶ SCFA: Box A092: Colin Thornley, ‘Letter to F.M.D. Pritchard’, 22 November 1968.

appeal on ITV had the greater impact'.⁸⁷ These internal debates further highlighted the competitive rivalries between NGOs, as well as demonstrating how the DEC was acting as a handbrake on the sector's own politicisation.

The DEC raised a total of £242,000 for Nigeria, falling short of a number of previous appeals. Save the Children had anticipated this 'limited response', which was attributed to a lack of follow-up advertising and the appeal cut-off date coming earlier than usual, to minimise interference with Christmas fundraising.⁸⁸ The poor response to the appeal also reflected how the DEC mechanism had been sidelined by Oxfam's unilateral action, which prevented the Committee from being able to position itself as a leading channel for donations when public compassion was at its peak. Instead, in relation to Biafra the DEC's significance was more that it provided a means for the other agencies in the sector (particularly the conservative British Red Cross and Save the Children) to restrain overtly political activity. In the process, a simplistic humanitarianism embedded in the origins of the Committee was re-asserted. The deliberate cutting-short of the eventual DEC Nigeria appeal also revealed the limits to which the Committee could dampen competition within the sector. As important as Nigerian relief was, the DEC members still prioritised their own Christmas fundraising programmes, which were a vital source of income and publicity.

By this point the war was entering into its final phases. The accidental shooting down of an ICRC aircraft by Federal forces in June 1969 effectively ended the ICRC airlift into Biafra, and after this date the only method of getting aid supplies into the region was via the expanding Joint Church Aid airlift, which most NGOs transferred their support to. Notably, in a reflection of Oxfam's earlier predicaments, they did so without

⁸⁷ ITA/IBAA: Box 3996264, file 5002/6: George Pole, 'Letter to D. Edwards', 24 February 1969.

⁸⁸ SCFA: Box A422: Save the Children Fund, 'The 271st Meeting of The Executive Committee', 19 November 1968: Recent Overseas Relief and Welfare Activities - Nigeria/Biafra (E.4247.).

publicity or fanfare.⁸⁹ By this point Biafra's defeat was inevitable, and a final Nigerian offensive in late 1969 forced the surrender of the Biafran military in January 1970. Following Biafra, the DEC made a number of appeals in rapid succession in late 1969 and early 1970, for floods in Algeria, an earthquake in Yugoslavia, an earthquake in Turkey, and floods in Romania. While none of these disasters were on a scale approaching Nigeria, they all raised respectable sums for the Committee without controversy.

This flux of appeals indicated how integral disaster fundraising was to the sector, despite these coinciding with the launch of the World Development Movement. Indeed, the Committee members pressed ahead with these joint television appeals despite an awareness that the regular appearance of the DEC on television would discourage the BBC from covering the wider work of the individual agencies. Christian Aid's head of communications observed that 'within the BBC the attitude towards these big five charities individually is hardening, but the attitude towards them collectively as represented by the DEC has softened to the point where they don't really like to say no when approached for a joint appeal'.⁹⁰ What this suggests is the DEC agencies actively consolidated a public conception of themselves as concerned with humanitarian relief, rather than political justice. Christian Aid notably attributed the glut of appeals to the British Red Cross, which needed funds after having 'emptied its coffers into Nigeria'.⁹¹

⁸⁹ CAA: Box CA/A/6, file CA/A/6/5: Stanley Mitton, 'The Nigerian/Biafran Situation', 1969.

⁹⁰ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/7: Hugh Samson, 'Letter to Bryan J. Dudbridge', 15 June 1970.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Bangladesh, 1970-72

While the Biafran crisis highlighted the problematic relationship between NGOs and politics, it did not slow down the increasing advocacy ambitions of the sector. Indeed, Biafra arguably encouraged the sector to engage more systematically with development theory and programming, as a means to try and avoid the problems of relief encountered during the conflict. The Biafran episode also reinforced how effective provocative images of disaster and human suffering were at galvanising the public, especially when compared to the lukewarm reaction to the launch of the World Development Movement in the same period. As Maggie Black observes, for ‘all the achievements of the emerging development lobby, no-one could pretend that “1 per cent of GNP” and “fair trade” evoked in the public mind the passionate concern that a Biafran child could conjure’.⁹² Within a year of the war in Nigeria concluding, the NGO relief network was once again mobilised to respond to a major disaster, this time in the Indian subcontinent.

In late 1970, a destructive cyclone struck the coastal regions of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), causing huge damage and an estimated 500,000 fatalities. Media coverage of the devastation quickly galvanised a large international relief effort. This also brought British NGOs to the region at a time of intense political conflict between Pakistan's East and West wings. This erupted into an all-out civil war in 1971, which also gave rise to a massive refugee displacement from East Pakistan to India. The sheer magnitude of refugees crossing the border transformed the conflict into an international humanitarian crisis, with repercussions felt across the globe. The crisis eventually culminated in a brief war between Pakistan and India, and the independence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh. The scale and complexity of the emergency also contributed to a reconfiguration of international humanitarian action over the course of the 1970s (as discussed further in

⁹² Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p.159.

chapters three and four). Against this volatile political backdrop, humanitarian NGOs struggled to implement aid programmes in both the cyclone affected region and the refugee camps without becoming entangled in the chaotic politics of relief.

Despite the importance of this emergency in humanitarian history, there has been substantially less published on the Bangladesh crisis than other major international disasters, such as Biafra. This reflects a broader lack of historical literature on the creation of Bangladesh in general. Srinath Raghavan attributes this to the professional tendencies of South Asian history, in particular a bias towards cultural and social history, and a reluctance to examine the period beyond 1947.⁹³ Excellent historical scholarship is now emerging. Antara Datta uses the 1971 refugee crisis to explore how attitudes to refugees and borders shifted during the period, and how this relates more broadly to the history of citizenship and participation in South Asia. Datta's work includes a thorough account of how the UN assumed authority for co-ordinating the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in 1971. This paved the way for increased involvement of the UN system in the provision of emergency aid.⁹⁴ Srinath Raghavan's global history of the creation of Bangladesh locates the events of 1971 in the context of broader international processes. This includes humanitarian responses in the West, such as NGO fundraising and George Harrison's famous Concert for Bangladesh.⁹⁵ There is still a pressing need, however, for a more systematic investigation of the contribution of NGOs to how the Bangladesh crisis unfolded.

The devastation caused by the 1970 cyclone was widely covered in the international media, provoking a huge public response across the world. British government officials observed that 'sudden human tragedy on such a scale has rarely

⁹³ Raghavan, *1971*, pp.4-5.

⁹⁴ Antara Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

⁹⁵ Raghavan, *1971*.

occurred since the advent of mass media... this calamity touched off a response of exceptional sympathy and generosity in many parts of the world'.⁹⁶ The DEC launched a broadcast appeal almost immediately, presented by the famous actor Richard Attenborough, which called for immediate aid for 'one of the worst catastrophes the world has ever known' (image 2.4).⁹⁷ The appeal resonated with the British public, who donated a record sum of £1.49 million to be divided up equally among the five member agencies.⁹⁸ The record amount demonstrated how effective the DEC could be as a fundraising mechanism, as exclusive access to television enabled the Committee to position itself as a channel for the public compassion fostered by emotive news footage. The DEC's deliberately simplistic approach to publicity also coloured its fundraising with a broad populist appeal.

⁹⁶ TNA: FCO 37/721: Frank Sargeant, 'Natural disaster in East Pakistan: The 1970 Cyclone and its Consequences', 15 December 1970.

⁹⁷ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 63rd meeting', 16 November 1970.

⁹⁸ War on Want Archive, SOAS Library, London (hereafter WOWA): Box 125: War on Want, 'East Pakistan cyclone Relief Fund: Receipts and Payments Account', 13 December 1972.



Image 2.4: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘East Pakistan Floods’ press appeal, November 1970.⁹⁹

Reflecting the problems encountered in Biafra, the DEC members made a conscious effort to present themselves as apolitical in their work in the cyclone region. From the outset, it was agreed that ‘none of the members should proceed with projects without the full agreement of the Pakistan Government’.¹⁰⁰ As in Nigeria, aid agencies also assumed a more prominent role due to the lack of an official presence. The British government had deployed an effective and large-scale relief effort spearheaded by the Royal Navy in the immediate post-cyclone period. However, this was quickly withdrawn only weeks later due to the political difficulties created by stationing British soldiers on Pakistan soil. From

⁹⁹ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘East Pakistan Floods Appeal’, *The Guardian*, 18 November 1970, p.20.

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FCO 37/721: ‘East Pakistan Disaster Relief’, 21 December 1970.

this point on the DEC agencies assumed responsibility for all British relief and rehabilitation efforts, with tacit governmental support.¹⁰¹

The response of the NGOs to the cyclone appeared publicly to be no different than previous emergency operations. In practice, the manner in which the DEC members spent their funding was problematic, and indicated a growing and contradictory tension between short-term relief and long-term development. Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want all agreed to spend the majority of their shares from the DEC appeal on rural development programmes. This led to the formation of a DEC sub-committee, to jointly implement such projects in the cyclone region. This sub-committee was legally constituted as the 'Consortium of British Charities' in April 1971. The Consortium was mandated to promote agricultural development through land cultivation, community development, and mechanisation programmes.¹⁰² The consortium was structured so that Christian Aid would handle publicity, Oxfam would handle supplies, and War on Want would handle accounting. Iain Macdonald, War on Want's International Director, was appointed to the post of co-ordinator. Macdonald oversaw a team of aid workers carrying out the Consortium's work in East Pakistan, but answerable to the agency executives back in Britain.¹⁰³

The Consortium was characterised by a staunchly pro-development outlook, captured in such statements as 'the post cyclone situation might create a climate favourable to the acceptance of basic agricultural development'.¹⁰⁴ However, the public had donated on the basis of a simplistic DEC emergency appeal, which had implied all contributions would be put towards immediate relief. Instead, the Consortium agencies

¹⁰¹ TNA: FCO 37/720: 'Annex: The Political and Economic Repercussions of the Disaster', December 1970.

¹⁰² CAA: Box CA2/C/4, file CA2/C/4/14: 'Notes for Christian Aid's Report to the BCC', 27 April 1971.

¹⁰³ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/4: 'History of the Consortium of British Charities: Christian Aid, Oxfam, War on Want', 27 September 1972.

¹⁰⁴ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: 'Meeting Record - DEC Sub-Committee East Pakistan', 1 January 1971.

deliberately blurred the appeal of this form of humanitarianism with their own commitment to long-term development. This reality was never communicated to the public, especially not through the DEC, which promoted and endorsed a narrative of charitable altruism.

This tension was complicated by the gradual involvement of Consortium aid workers in the politics of the region. The outbreak of civil war in March 1971 was accompanied by a violent crackdown on Bengali separatists by the West Pakistan Army, which resulted in the widespread killing of unarmed civilians. These events also placed the Consortium plans on hold, as the Pakistan government no longer permitted foreigners to enter East Pakistan. In this volatile context, the Consortium team became increasingly pro-Bangladesh. Co-ordinator Iain Macdonald prepared a report which accused the British government of conspiring to aid West Pakistan. The same report urged the Consortium agencies to take action to prevent ‘the continuation throughout next winter of appalling misery among the people of all parts of East Pakistan’.¹⁰⁵ Extracts from Macdonald's report later appeared in the *Times*, which risked attracting the censure of the West Pakistan military. Christian Aid and Oxfam subsequently discussed removing Macdonald from his position, on the grounds that he could no longer be trusted to ‘conduct the delicate negotiations which were required if the Consortium was to obtain permission to start up its programmes in East Pakistan’.¹⁰⁶

However, Macdonald's views were not out of place within War on Want, which was beginning to accelerate the pace of its own radicalisation. Council members referred to a ‘genocide’ taking place in East Pakistan, and in June 1971 Chairman Donald Chesworth visited the region. Observers commented that Chesworth became ‘totally

¹⁰⁵ CAA: Box CA2/C/4, file CA2/C/4/14: Iain Macdonald, ‘Brief Assessment of the present situation in East Pakistan in relation to Future Relief and Rehabilitation Work’, 7 April 1971.

¹⁰⁶ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: ‘Minutes of Meeting of the Consortium of British Charities’, 14 June 1971.

committed towards Bangladesh... He can envisage no other future for East Pakistan than the emergence of an independent government of Bangladesh'. Chesworth also described the West Pakistan military as 'savage and senseless'.¹⁰⁷ Following Chesworth's visit, War on Want began making significant finance available for the 'Bangladesh Voluntary Service Corps', an overtly political pro-Bangladesh organisation composed of young male refugees, the board of which included a War on Want Field Director. These developments provoked deep concern among the other DEC agencies, who feared public association with War on Want could result in their expulsion by the West Pakistan government. As had happened with Oxfam and Biafra, the other Consortium agencies used the DEC forum to restrain War on Want's overtly political activities. This included refusing to go along with War on Want plans to make public statements on the causes of the suffering in East Pakistan. Christian Aid Director Alan Booth commented at this time that NGOs should 'not attempt to use the power of money to give the appearance of political interference in the Third World... I felt this rather strongly in the case of Nigeria and Biafra'.¹⁰⁸

The Consortium was finally able to resume its aid programme in July 1971, by coming under the umbrella of the UN. Christian Aid and Oxfam pressurised Macdonald's staff to remain separate from 'the general situation in East Pakistan... the Consortium should restrict its terms of reference to post-cyclone rehabilitation programmes'.¹⁰⁹ By this point the Pakistan Army was treating the Consortium aid workers with growing hostility, who acknowledged they were 'increasingly unwelcome to military authorities'.¹¹⁰ In practice Macdonald continued to agitate, criticising the Pakistan government and issuing predictions that a severe famine would soon develop in the

¹⁰⁷ TNA: Dominions Office Papers: DO 133/220: W.K. Slatcher, 'East Pakistan Refugees', 4 June 1971.

¹⁰⁸ CAA: Box CA2/C/4, file CA2/C/4/13: Alan R. Booth, 'Bengal', 20 April 1971.

¹⁰⁹ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: 'Minutes of Meeting of the Consortium of British Charities', 4 August 1971.

¹¹⁰ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/4: 'History of the Consortium of British Charities'.

cyclone region. Oxfam commented privately that Macdonald worked more for War on Want than for the Consortium, and pressed for his removal.¹¹¹

The violence in East Pakistan also sparked a mass displacement of refugees into the Eastern provinces of India, and by May an estimated 30,000 refugees were crossing the border every day due to Pakistan hostility.¹¹² In the same month the Pakistan government, faced with a humanitarian crisis that was spiralling out of control, officially requested that the UN assume overall command of co-ordinating relief. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was subsequently designated as a 'focal point', administering assistance to refugees and co-ordinating the myriad of UN agencies and NGOs also involved.¹¹³ This marked a new phase of UN engagement in emergency relief, as discussed further in chapter three.¹¹⁴

Despite the unfolding refugee crisis, the DEC agencies initially worried that 'by being involved with the refugee problem they may be prevented from carrying out the rehabilitation programme'.¹¹⁵ However, with public interest in the refugees growing, the DEC launched a new 'India/Pakistan Relief Fund' appeal in June 1971. This had no links with the previous cyclone appeal, and was deliberately constructed to make no reference to the political chaos unfolding in the region - instead stressing that it was 'people as human beings with which the charities are concerned'.¹¹⁶ The DEC deliberately focused on the suffering of individual bodies, using the abstract image of the suffering child as a way to raise money and prevent political discussion. A DEC press advertisement from

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² TNA: Prime Minister's Office Papers: PREM 15/568: Ian McCleary, 'East Pakistan', 13 May 1971.

¹¹³ TNA: PREM 15/569: 'Secretary of State's interview on Panorama on 7 June', June 1971.

¹¹⁴ Peter MacAlister-Smith, *International Humanitarian Assistance: Disaster Relief Actions in International Law and Organization* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), p.146.

¹¹⁵ WOVA: Box 222: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of Directors (Council)', 17 May 1971.

¹¹⁶ Disasters Emergency Committee, 'India/Pakistan Relief Fund', *The Times*, 28 June 1971, p.5.

July 1971 was explicitly framed in this fashion, focusing on the death of a young Bengali boy (image 2.5).

He died because the cost of living was too high.

Like thousands of other Pakistani refugees, this 10-years old boy made his way to India, only to find death. His father had to bury him in the mud because there was no wood for cremation.

You doubtless saw this harrowing sight on ITN: Every day whole families are dying. The problems of disease, hunger and homelessness intensify daily as refugees continue to pour in. Now the monsoon brings the threat of floods, famine and further disease.

The Disasters Emergency Committee* at once organised supplies of cholera vaccine, rehydration fluid, syringes, multivitamins, baby food, milk powder, tents and ambulances. These supplies have already saved hundreds of lives. But we need to spend money faster than it is coming in.

We must have *more money - NOW!*
Your donation may actually *save a life.*

Please send cash, post free, to:
India/Pakistan Relief Fund, P.O. Box 999,
Freepost, London WC2R 0SD or hand
it in to your local bank or pay
into Giro Account 600-7007
at any Post Office.

**DISASTERS
EMERGENCY
COMMITTEE**

*The Disasters Emergency Committee comprises: The British Red Cross Society, Christian Aid, Oxfam, the Save the Children Fund, and War on Want.

Image 2.5: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'India/Pakistan relief' press appeal, June 1971.¹¹⁷

The powerful image of a deceased child in the appeal was intended to immediately capture the attention of the reader, and provoke an emotional response. The narrative that accompanies the photograph makes clear that 'like thousands of other Pakistani refugees,

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

this 10-years old boy made his way to India, only to find death. His father had to bury him in the mud because there was no wood for cremation'. The appeal then goes on to offer the reader the opportunity to alleviate such suffering, by stating that 'we must have *more* money - NOW! Your donation may actually *save* a life'. The appeal was very successful, raising over £1.4 million to be distributed among the DEC members.¹¹⁸ It also deliberately depoliticised the complexities of the civil war and refugee displacement, allowing the DEC agencies to raise funds for a politically volatile emergency in a relatively neutral way. Save the Children privately acknowledged how the refugee displacement had been distorted, stating that 'in view of the Fund's policy of treading a delicate political tightrope... it was felt necessary to restrict the outflow of information to the news media'.¹¹⁹ The injection of new funds enabled the DEC members to undertake relief and rehabilitation programmes in the refugee camps on the Indian border. However, in August the Indian government expelled all foreign NGOs, due to a view that the Indian state was better equipped to run the camps.¹²⁰ The DEC agencies had no choice but to comply, although their exodus was largely downplayed to the British public which had just donated to them so generously.

As 1971 drew to a close, the difficulties of operating in the region prompted the Consortium NGOs to consider abandoning the cyclone aid programme altogether.¹²¹ Political events overtook the agencies, as war erupted between India and Pakistan in December. India's rapid victory after only 13 days of fighting forced West Pakistan troops out of East Pakistan, which gained its independence as Bangladesh. Britain and the international community officially recognised the new state in the early months of

¹¹⁸ CAA, Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 73rd meeting of the Disasters Emergency Committee', 7 September 1971.

¹¹⁹ SCFA: Box A040: Fran Willison, 'Review of the Public Relations Programme for 1971', 3 January 1972.

¹²⁰ Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia*, p.35.

¹²¹ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: 'Minutes of Meeting of the Consortium of British Charities', 12 November 1971.

1972.¹²² The cessation of hostilities defused some of the political volatility surrounding the Consortium, which resumed its development work in 1972. Indeed, the Consortium team stated that the widespread destruction and chaos that had unfolded in the region also offered ‘an opportunity for imaginative basic integrated development’.¹²³

The Consortium team was subsequently brought under the supervision of the Bangladesh authorities, to contribute to mechanisation and agricultural development programmes.¹²⁴ Despite the grand visions of the team, in practice the Consortium quickly fizzled out, hindered by a lack of communication with the UK and increasingly subsumed by the developmental agencies of the Bangladesh state. Macdonald resigned in May 1972, commenting that the Consortium staff had become an ‘embarrassment’, and had even been declared ‘persona non grata’ in certain areas.¹²⁵ Macdonald also referred to a ‘lack of funds’ for the programme, as the cessation of hostilities also signified the end of large-scale emergency fundraising. The Consortium team lingered on inside Bangladesh to little impact, to the extent that by the end of the decade the entire project was viewed within War on Want as ‘ossified’, and an example of ineffective engagement with development theory.¹²⁶

The fizzling out of the Consortium project after 1971 also indicated the importance of disaster to fuelling the work of NGOs in the Third World. Indeed, as Bangladesh declared its independence the DEC was already looking to its next emergency, intervening in Nicaragua in late 1972 in response to a destructive earthquake. A remarkably similar approach to East Pakistan was adopted, as a Consortium of agencies led by Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want was set up to implement long-term development programmes in

¹²² TNA: FCO 37/1046: House of Commons, ‘Bangladesh’, 4 February 1972.

¹²³ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: ‘Organisation of the Consortium’, 5 January 1972.

¹²⁴ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/3: ‘Minutes of the Meeting of the Consortium’, 27 January 1972.

¹²⁵ CAA: Box CA2/C/16, file CA2/C/16/4: ‘History of the Consortium of British Charities’.

¹²⁶ WOVA: Box 122: Mark Luetchford, ‘Interview with Andy Rutherford’, 12 January 2001.

the earthquake region. The deliberate attempt to blur relief and development in these disaster zones, with little tangible results, prompted significant internal debate within the sector. A post-mortem report of the Nicaragua Consortium suggested that aid agencies lacked a 'clearly defined understanding of what either "relief" or "development" should be taken to mean'. The same report advised that the realisation of tangible development results would therefore require 'a much more vigorous campaign of socio-political-economic education among those power groups in the more developed world which control the means of production'.¹²⁷

What this suggests is that complex and problematic relief operations, as encountered in Nigeria and East Pakistan, also reinforced the trajectory of development NGOs towards more radical domestic campaigning. Paradoxically, these same disasters also raised the capacity of NGOs for emergency relief, and consolidated a public conception of them as apolitical humanitarians. The prevalence of simplified disaster imagery compounded this, by depoliticising global poverty and perpetuating problematic stereotypes. Indeed, agricultural development in contexts such as Bangladesh had arguably only been made possible by the declaration of an emergency, which provided fundraising income, domestic support, media coverage, and an infrastructure to work through.

Ethiopia and the Sahel, 1973-74

In the humanitarian responses to Biafra and Bangladesh, television obviously played an integral role. Dramatic images of human suffering acted as a lightning rod for popular

¹²⁷ CAA: Box CA3/LA/C100: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 'A Summary Report on the experiences of the CIIR Projects Education and Evaluation Team in Nicaragua, December 1972-May 1974, with recommendations for action', 15 May 1974.

compassion, which in turn led to increasing donations to aid agencies. These huge public responses also further associated the NGOs involved with short-term relief, rather than long-term development. These trends culminated in October 1973, when a single ITV documentary about a famine in Ethiopia sparked a massive public outcry. The documentary helped galvanise an international aid effort across the entire Sahel belt of Africa, comprised of donor governments, intergovernmental agencies, and NGOs.

The famine itself was primarily the result of drought and harvest decline, compounded by the inaction of Emperor Haile Selassie's imperial government.¹²⁸ Indeed, the Sahelian region as a whole had been experiencing an intense drought since the late 1960s, resulting in desertification and crop failure. Livestock was decimated, and millions were exposed to hunger, thirst, and disease.¹²⁹ The countries mainly affected were Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), all in North West Africa. Ethiopia was also affected, especially in its Northern provinces.¹³⁰ Historical scholarship on the international community's response to the crisis has tended to focus upon the role played by UN agencies. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) both took a leading role in co-ordinating the international response to the Sahel crisis after 1972. This also marked these organisations becoming further engaged in the provision of emergency relief, having traditionally been development-oriented.¹³¹ As with Bangladesh, less attention has been paid to the role played by NGOs.

¹²⁸ CAA: Box CA2/A/4: Oxfam Information Office, 'The Famine in Ethiopia: General Description', February 1974; Peter Woodward, *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), pp.174-176.

¹²⁹ Nicole Mölders, *Land-Use and Land-Cover Changes: Impact on Climate and Air Quality* (New York: Springer, 2012), p.86.

¹³⁰ TNA: OD 30/449: 'Paper on drought relief - Sahelian zone and Ethiopia', 21 December 1973.

¹³¹ D. John Shaw, *World Food Security: A History since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); D. John Shaw, *The World's Largest Humanitarian Agency: The Transformation of the UN World Food Programme and Food Aid* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

The DEC agencies had been aware of worsening conditions in the Sahel region of Africa throughout 1973. However, at a meeting in July, the DEC members had agreed not to launch a joint broadcast appeal, due to divisions within the Committee over what kinds of activity should be funded. Christian Aid and War on Want both pushed for an appeal to be explicitly made for long-term development projects in the Sahel, a position opposed by the British Red Cross and Save the Children on the basis that the situation ‘demanded long-term attention by international agencies and governments rather than DEC member charities’. Oxfam supported development in principle, but argued that in this particular case short-term relief was preferable.¹³² This dispute also captured deeper divides within the sector as a whole, as the Red Cross and SCF bitterly opposed any attempt to move the DEC away from its original mandate for emergency relief. By contrast, War on Want’s ongoing radicalisation was pushing the organisation further away from traditional charity. Indeed, at the very same DEC meeting, the agencies also discussed a War on Want proposal for the DEC to undertake a ‘long-term once for all solution to the world drought problem’, which was dismissed as unrealistic.¹³³ Christian Aid and Oxfam blurred these two positions together; committed to long-term development, but unwilling to give up responsibilities for disaster relief, and the benefits that emergency appeals provided.

At this point in time, NGOs had limited knowledge of Ethiopia, where they had little presence or contacts. Oxfam was one notable exception, having learnt of famine conditions in May 1973 through Father Kevin Doheny. Doheny was a prominent Holy Ghost Father and veteran missionary, who had played a significant role in Biafra in 1968. Doheny had established the Christian Relief Association in May 1973, later the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA), as an umbrella body for Ethiopian

¹³² CAA: Box CA2/D/11, file CA2/D/11/6: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the 82nd meeting’, 10 July 1973.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Churches and missionary bodies. CRDA was designed to share knowledge of the famine and appeal for funds from European Churches. CRDA was also heavily influenced by the Joint Church Aid initiative in Nigeria; Doheny later referred to it as ‘an outgrowth of the Biafran war... I would not have got the idea were it not for Biafra’.¹³⁴ Oxfam was one of the first Western agencies to support CRDA, and began making small grants after May 1973. However, there was still little awareness of the true extent of the famine within the country. It was only after a UNICEF survey in August 1973 that a true picture emerged, and Oxfam despatched their Communications Officer Tony Hall to the famine zones to provide advice from the field. Hall would later say of this period that ‘the people I talked to hadn't spoken to a reporter... Officials and missionaries were steering by the seat of their pants through raging human calamity, with no past experience to guide them, under government suppression’. Hall added that with ‘with no outside help to call on many were near breakdown themselves’.¹³⁵ Hall repeatedly sent articles and photographs to the British press, attempting to generate coverage of Ethiopia, with little success. Hall later commented on the difficulties he experienced with the media:

‘We rushed our material back to UK and waited in a feverish mood for the shocked reaction, convinced that this was quite shattering international news. But the news gatekeepers on this occasion could not give the prominence or make enough room for our coverage to do it justice. The only appropriate place that week was already taken by a calamity in the Far East. The crisis quota had been filed. The material was rushed over to another national weekly, where much of it was published as the lead item on page two. There were no big follow-ups, no signs of urgency in morning news conferences. We had failed to catch the wave’.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Kevin Doheny, *No Hands But Yours: Memoirs of a Missionary* (Dublin: Veritas, 1997), p.100.

¹³⁵ Tony Hall, ‘Do we see famine as it is? An eyewitness in northeast Ethiopia 1973/4’, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Conference presentation (Addis Ababa, 1994), available at: <http://xuitlacoche.blogspot.co.uk/2010/03/famine-in-ethiopia-1973-to-1974.html> [accessed 31 March 2014].

¹³⁶ Tony Hall, ‘Africa Emergency Report’, October 1985, quoted in Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986), pp.48-49.

Hall's depiction of an apathetic media correlates with the findings of scholars who have examined how the news constructs overseas disasters.¹³⁷ Despite Hall's failure to 'catch the wave' however, a brief publication of his in the *Sunday Times* was read by Jonathan Dimbleby, presenter of ITV's current affairs programme *This Week*. Dimbleby set out to Ethiopia with a film crew to document the famine, working closely with Tony Hall and Kevin Doheny. The footage they took was subsequently edited and broadcast on ITV as *The Unknown Famine* on 18 October 1973. A half-hour primetime documentary, *The Unknown Famine* consisted entirely of graphic footage of famine victims in the relief camps in Northern Ethiopia. The film documented huge numbers of peasants gathered in the camps, visibly afflicted by starvation and disease. Appearing throughout the film were powerful scenes of young children either dying or already dead (image 2.6). Dimbleby's commentary through the film was sparse and emotive, emphasising the need for immediate assistance. Towards the end of the film, a pile of young dead bodies is shown, as Dimbleby's narrative makes clear that they all died the previous night from starvation.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, 'The Structure of Foreign News', *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:1 (1965, pp.64-91); Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*; Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Greg Philo, 'From Buerk to Band Aid: the Media and the 1984 Ethiopian Famine', in John Eldridge (ed.), *Getting the Message: News, Truth and Power* (London: Routledge, 1993, pp.104-125); Larry Minear *et al.*, *The News Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (eds.), *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London: Zed, 1999); Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999); CARMA International, *The CARMA Report on Western Media Coverage of Humanitarian Disasters* (Washington, DC: CARMA, 2006); Simon Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2009); Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013).

¹³⁸ ITA/IBAA: *This Week* scripts collection: 'The Unknown Famine (original script)', October 1973.



Image 2.6: Images from *The Unknown Famine*, October 1973.¹³⁹

Dimbleby's film was also a crass simplification, in that it provided no explanation or context for the famine beyond a vague reference to drought. Instead the famine was presented as a sudden, natural disaster beyond human agency, rather than as a political failure of the Ethiopian government. Dimbleby later acknowledged that he had deliberately distorted the famine to maximise the film's effect on the public. Dimbleby justified this on the basis that to ascribe blame would have resulted in 'the impact of the horror [being] diminished', as the public would be less inclined to support relief efforts. For Dimbleby, this was linked with a lack of public understanding of Third World issues, stating that 'the degree of ignorance that one was having to confront in one's audience meant that we soft-pedalled that enormously'.¹⁴⁰

Dimbleby's tactic was effective. *The Unknown Famine* was viewed by an estimated twelve million people, and the ITV switchboards were jammed as soon as the

¹³⁹ ITV/Thames Television, *This Week: The Unknown Famine*, first broadcast on ITV, 18 October 1973 (Television).

¹⁴⁰ quoted in Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, pp.55-56.

programme ended with callers wishing to help.¹⁴¹ Both the BBC and the press picked up the Ethiopia story, providing it with endorsement and further momentum. The film was shown at the House of Commons, which the Shadow Minister for Overseas Development (Judith Hart) used to call for greater official aid. Dimbleby observed that ‘the result of the film has been a speeding up of creaky machinery between London and Addis Ababa’.¹⁴² The film was circulated across Europe and the Commonwealth, mobilising a multitude of NGOs in the process. Oxfam commented that the film aroused public concern ‘first in Britain, and later in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark and Italy’.¹⁴³ Quebec donated \$1 million within a month, prompting the Assistant Director of Oxfam-Quebec to state that ‘after two and a half years of our efforts to publicise the causes of underdevelopment, 15 minutes of publicising the effects through the film seemed to do it’.¹⁴⁴

The massive international reaction appeared to justify Dimbleby's depiction of famine. It also reaffirmed the power of television images of starving children to provoke a reaction from the audience. This reality was not lost on the British NGO sector, and within days the DEC had agreed, produced and aired a national appeal for ‘victims of the droughts in Ethiopia and the countries in the Sahelian zone’. The appeal was presented by Jonathan Dimbleby, and based around recycled clips from *The Unknown Famine*. The speed with which the previous DEC decision to not appeal for the Sahel was reversed highlighted how quickly the sector could be brought back to simplistic disaster relief by

¹⁴¹ ITA/IBAA: *This Week* scripts collection: *The Unknown Famine: A Report on Famine in Ethiopia* (London: Thames Television, 1974); ITA/IBAA: Box 3996264, file 5002/5 vol. 1: K.W. Blyth, ‘Special Disaster Appeal Procedures: Memorandum by the IBA Appeals Secretary’, 1 April 1974.

¹⁴² ITA/IBAA: *This Week* scripts collection: Jonathan Dimbleby, ‘*This Week - The Unknown Famine*’, 23 October 1973.

¹⁴³ CAA: CA2/A/4: Oxfam Information Office, ‘The Famine in Ethiopia: General Description’, February 1974.

¹⁴⁴ ITA/IBAA: *This Week* scripts collection: *The Unknown Famine: A Report on Famine in Ethiopia* (London: Thames Television, 1974).

television images. Indeed, DEC press advertising overtly encouraged philanthropy rather than political engagement from the public, stating ‘this is what you can do to help: Give money. That's the quickest, kindest way you can help over 2 million people in Ethiopia and the Sahel now on the verge of starvation’.¹⁴⁵ *The Unknown Famine* established a deliberately depoliticised humanitarian narrative which both the NGO sector, and Dimpleby himself, knew was limited and misleading. Yet, the DEC also chose to endorse and reinforce this narrative through its own publicity. That the appeal raised a new record sum of £1.54 million demonstrated how effective this approach could be for the sector's own expansion.

The DEC also underwent a membership change at this point, as the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD) was permitted to join, although not in time to be featured in the Ethiopia appeal publicity. The official Catholic aid agency for England and Wales, CAFOD had been founded in 1962, growing steadily over the following years. As a member of Caritas (the Catholic equivalent of the World Council of Churches), it had provided support for the Joint Church Aid airlift in Biafra. CAFOD had also been agitating for entry to the DEC for a number of years, without success. For CAFOD, membership promised legitimacy as well as funding. In 1970, the organisation had been excluded from an NGO meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss relief efforts in Nigeria, on the grounds that only the ‘big five’ DEC agencies were invited.¹⁴⁶ CAFOD's eventual entry in 1973 was facilitated by Christian Aid, who agreed that the Roman Catholic Church should be represented, and proposed that CAFOD be allowed in and share their appeals allocation. The other agencies felt obliged to accept, and the

¹⁴⁵ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Ethiopian and African Drought Appeal’, *The Guardian*, 31 October 1973, p.9.

¹⁴⁶ TNA: FCO 65/794: Cabinet Office, ‘Note of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street’, 13 January 1970.

broadcasters approved CAFOD's entry as a joint member with Christian Aid.¹⁴⁷ Subsequent DEC publications referred to 'Christian Aid with the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development' as a single member, and a single chair was allocated to the pairing at DEC meetings.¹⁴⁸

Buoyed by a record appeal, the DEC agencies mobilised to undertake relief and development work not only within Ethiopia, but also across the entire Sahelian belt of Africa. Here they formed one small part of a much larger international aid programme made up of donor governments, intergovernmental agencies, and non-state actors. While these international aid efforts aimed to address the widespread food crisis affecting the region, in practice their effectiveness was restricted by a number of major obstacles. The logistical challenges of co-ordinating aid across such a vast geographical area were huge. Transportation of aid, equipment and supplies proved to be a substantial bottleneck, with airlift and airdrop operations necessary for remote areas. Ports were largely unequipped to handle the large volumes of aid required.¹⁴⁹ Such were the ongoing difficulties that by early 1974, Oxfam voiced concerns within the DEC that both state and non-state agencies were 'open to severe criticism in respect of the Sahel... the international media and general public are not going to be impressed by the apparent lack of concrete action to relieve effectively the drought situation'.¹⁵⁰ In the same month, War on Want acknowledged that it was having serious difficulties in spending its DEC income responsibly in the Sahel.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ BBC WAC, file B420-4-1: D.B. Mann, 'Disasters Emergency Committee', 27 November 1973.

¹⁴⁸ CAA: Box CA2/D/11, file CA2/D/11/6: Alan Booth, 'Letter to DEC Secretary', 4 January 1973.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw, *The World's Largest Humanitarian Agency*, pp.54-56.

¹⁵⁰ CAA: Box CA2/D/20, file CA2/D/20/2: Philip Jackson, 'Letter to DEC Agencies', 22 March 1974; CAA: CA2/D/20/2: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 89th Meeting', 30 March 1974.

¹⁵¹ WOWA: Box 223, file 02041: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Management', 4 March 1974.

Oxfam's fear that the public would be alienated by the lack of concrete progress in the field highlighted the gap between the simplistic images and narratives put forward on television, and the political complexities of the aid work being undertaken in the field. *The Unknown Famine* and its accompanying DEC appeal both depicted a one-dimensional view of famine, and the apparent ease with which NGOs could solve it if supported financially. This discourse was in stark contrast to the more sophisticated and overt political campaigning being undertaken elsewhere in the sector, such as through the World Development Movement. Indeed, the massive public response to *The Unknown Famine* also highlighted how relatively ineffective the sector's development education and advocacy activities had been in building up mass support for long-term development.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown how, despite an increasing commitment to political advocacy on the causes of global underdevelopment, the leading humanitarian NGOs were consistently brought back to emergency relief over the course of the DEC's first decade. The growth of the sector over this period was largely the result of responding to major, high-profile Third World emergencies, such as those in Biafra, Bangladesh, and the Sahel. The DEC fundraising mechanism made a crucial contribution to this, as access to television raised the public profiles of its members. This in turn provided a supply of public support and donations for NGO relief work. In the process, the DEC also helped consolidate the dominance of its members within the sector, who increasingly came to resemble a humanitarian cartel.

NGO emergency appeals such as those made by the DEC promoted a simplistic, depoliticised form of humanitarianism, by focusing upon the suffering of individual

bodies while providing little concrete information about the structural forces which created and perpetuated it. The widespread dissemination of such images in the mass media during this period, in particular stereotypical images of starving children in Africa, helped consolidate an enduring image and particular understanding of the Third World. Central to this was a repackaging of traditionally imperial ideas of benevolent Westerners intervening to save helpless colonial subjects. Furthermore, this paternalistic view of the world was paradoxically being reinforced at the very same time that the principal development NGOs were attempting to undo it through their public education programmes.

Many individuals within the development community were aware of this contradiction, and often expressed frustration at the media's tendency to only pay attention to Africa and the developing world when dramatic scenes of crisis and human suffering were unfolding. During the Biafran War, Christian Aid staff commented that it was 'the Congo story all over again... these tragedies should not be used simply as a stimulant for emergency action'. Instead, they called for media coverage to also 'give point to the undramatic and un-newsworthy development projects of education, nation-building, youth leadership, and community welfare'.¹⁵² The acknowledgement that development projects were undramatic and un-newsworthy was itself an implicit admission of a lack of public engagement in international aid outside of immediate relief. However, while NGOs were apt to bemoan the practices of the media, they were also directly implicated in promoting this view of the Third World themselves, through their emergency appeals and publicity. Revealingly, when Oxfam set up its own Education Unit in the 1960s to promote development education work, its staff saw themselves as working to undo problematic

¹⁵² Christian Aid, 'Publicity and Public Relations Report for July and August 1968', August 1968.

stereotypes of the Third World not only perpetuated by the mass media, but also by their own organisation.¹⁵³

This tension between apolitical relief, and an emerging advocacy agenda suggests that linear historical narratives of NGOs progressing from being charities to advocacy bodies are overly simplistic.¹⁵⁴ For instance, Clare Saunders argues that from the mid-1960s British humanitarian organisations were politicised, as part of a ‘widespread political awakening’ of society as a whole during the decade.¹⁵⁵ Florency Passy similarly draws a clear divide between traditional charitable humanitarianism, and the rise of a contemporary political ‘solidarity movement’ which emerged out of the new social movements which arose in the 1960s.¹⁵⁶ Approaching the humanitarian sector from this social movement perspective is limiting, as it fails to capture the competing trajectories and processes at play with the sector. This chapter suggests that it may be more appropriate to characterise the 1960s as a period of professionalisation for humanitarian NGOs, rather than politicisation. Aid agencies experienced substantial financial growth and became more effective fundraisers, while also broadening out their involvement in operations on the ground for both emergency relief and grassroots development work.

The Janus-faced nature of the sector, in pursuing both depoliticised relief and developmental advocacy simultaneously, was inherently problematic. Perpetual emergency operations led to proportionately less resources being available for tackling the causes of poverty, which encouraged a critique of the practice of disaster relief to

¹⁵³ Harrison, ‘Oxfam and the rise of development education in England’, p.125.

¹⁵⁴ See, for instance: Barbara Rugendyke and Cathryn Ollif, ‘Charity to advocacy: Changing agendas of Australian NGOs’, in Barbara Rugendyke (ed.), *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp.17-43), p.21.

¹⁵⁵ Clare Saunders, ‘British Humanitarian, Aid and Development NGOs, 1949-Present’, in Nick Crowson *et al.* (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-state Actors in Society and Politics Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp.38-58), pp.43-44.

¹⁵⁶ Florence Passy, ‘Political Altruism and the Solidarity Movement: An Introduction’, in Marco Giugni and Florence Passy (eds.), *Political Altruism? Solidarity Movements in International Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, pp.3-25).

crystallise within the more radical corners of the sector. Haslemere's equation of traditional charity with 'tossing sixpence in a beggar's cap' was an early example of this emerging viewpoint. By the early 1970s, War on Want in particular was losing patience with the continued demands of relief work. In reference to the crisis in the Sahel, in 1974 War on Want called for a way to ensure that the DEC would 'consider the long-term needs', and 'not react solely on the basis of... Dimpleby's emotive programmes that tell only a fraction of the truth'.¹⁵⁷ While laudable, this critique failed to recognise how disasters were the fuel driving all of the sector's expansion and work. This was particularly evident in contexts such as Bangladesh and the Sahel, where a number of DEC agencies used income extracted from the public for relief to finance development projects. While it may not have been their intention, this contradiction arguably amounted to a deception of the public. Indeed, the history of the DEC during this period arguably suggests that the project of overseas development, as pursued by NGOs, was only made possible by a continuous cycle of major emergencies.

Finally, the presence of the British state looms large over this period. The government played an important role in the sector's move into long-term development, by encouraging co-ordination through the FFHC and VCOAD. It also did so indirectly, by stimulating political action through cuts to the official aid budget. The state then policed the boundaries of this political activity through the interventions of the Charity Commissioners. The state also shaped the sector in the field of humanitarian aid. The government worked closely with the DEC agencies in responding to major emergencies such as those in Biafra, Bangladesh and the Sahel, often channelling bilateral aid through them. In the process, the DEC mechanism also had the effect of raising the legitimacy of its members in their relations with the state. Accounts of contemporary humanitarianism

¹⁵⁷ WOWA: Box 222, file 02039: Peter Burns, 'Address to 1974 Annual General Meeting', 19 October 1974.

often draw attention to the close bonds that have developed between state and non-state actors. However, in practice there is a much longer lineage of interactions between the two, to the extent that historical emergence of NGOs cannot be fully understood without a corresponding appreciation of the role played by government. The following chapter explores this relationship at length.

Chapter Three

Humanitarian Governance: NGOs, Disasters, and the State, 1942-74

In June 1974, the British Government established the Disaster Unit, a specialised body within the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM). The Disaster Unit was tasked with leading all aspects of emergency relief policy, including monitoring potential disasters, mobilising supplies, and liaising with other governmental departments. Crucially, the Unit also emphasised closer co-ordination with the humanitarian NGOs represented on the Disasters Emergency Committee. The creation of the Unit as a ‘focal point’ for humanitarian aid represented a departure for official relief policy. Over the course of the previous decade, media coverage of overseas disasters, along with the operations and publicity of NGOs, had gradually forced a shift in the attitude of government. Whereas the state had traditionally downplayed the political and geopolitical importance of emergency relief, it was now compelled by public pressure to accept increased responsibilities for humanitarian response. To do so, the ODM naturally looked towards closer co-ordination with the leading NGOs, whose own expansion and professionalisation over the previous years had raised their legitimacy and profiles in the eyes of the state. The overhaul of British relief policy represented by the Disaster Unit therefore also formalised the close relationship that had developed between the NGO sector and the state in the governance of overseas emergencies.

Chapters one and two of this investigation set out how the British humanitarian sector professionalised and expanded in the years between the Second World War and the early 1970s, largely on the basis of high-profile disasters in the Third World. This chapter examines the same chronological period and events, but does so through a ‘top-down’ perspective of how the emergence of NGOs was also shaped by their interactions with

government. To date, there has been no systematic historical overview of official British relief policy. While the emergency aid efforts in 1940s Europe have attracted significant attention (in which the British government played a major role, alongside the US and the newly founded United Nations), little attention has been paid to the trajectory of official relief policy in the following years.¹ Barrie Ireton's recent history of British development policy does briefly touch upon disaster relief, although its focus is largely on the post-Cold War era.² This represents a significant gap. Non-governmental organisations have always been influenced and shaped by official authority, and a historical account of British humanitarianism is incomplete without an appreciation of the crucial role played by the state.

In Britain, there is a long history of interaction between NGOs and government.³ Geoffrey Finlayson popularised the notion of a 'moving frontier' between voluntary organisations and the government, shifting back and forth at different historical junctures.⁴ As the modern interventionist state developed, it often relied on voluntary associations to provide services, and accordingly made provisions for the funding of certain charitable organisations or sectors. The two World Wars further fuelled such collaboration, encouraging the professionalisation of the voluntary sector while bringing about increased

¹ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp.107-131; Gerard Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.59-61; Jessica Reinisch, 'Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA', *Past & Present*, supplement 6 (2011, pp.258-289); Johannes-Dieter Steinert, 'British Humanitarian Assistance: Wartime Planning and Postwar Realities', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43:3 (2008, pp.421-435).

² Barrie Ireton, *Britain's International Development Policies: A History of DFID and Overseas Aid* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.99-116.

³ Nicholas Deakin, 'The perils of partnership: The voluntary sector and the state, 1945–1992', in Justin Davis Smith *et al.* (eds.), *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector* (London: Routledge, 1995, pp.39-63); Jane Lewis, 'Reviewing the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state in Britain in the 1990s', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-Profit Organizations*, 10:3 (1999, pp.255-270); Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.188-217.

⁴ Geoffrey Finlayson, 'A moving frontier: voluntarism and the state in British social welfare', *Twentieth-Century British History*, 1:2 (1990, pp.183–206).

interdependence with the state.⁵ While the creation of the welfare state in the 1940s fostered concerns that voluntary action would consequently decline, in practice it also provided a myriad of new opportunities.⁶ In recent decades, successive governments have sought to forge a more formalised relationship with voluntarism, providing financial incentives for NGOs to provide welfare services once administered by the state. This has been particularly evident since the 1980s, as the state has moved towards a more ‘contractual relationship’ through rationalising funding arrangements and increasing the levels of official financial support.⁷ These developments have also raised concerns about the independence of the voluntary sector, and whether modern NGOs have effectively been co-opted into becoming ‘cheap providers of services’ by a neoliberal state.⁸

These issues are particularly contentious for international aid agencies, who have been the recipients of substantial amounts of official funding in recent decades. This surge in official support is generally depicted as beginning in the 1980s, when aid donors supposedly turned to NGOs out of a belief that they were more efficient and effective implementers of grassroots development projects. The 1980s is thus often depicted as an ‘NGO decade’, as aid agencies were feted for their perceived comparative advantage, receiving increasing amounts of official aid and gaining increased opportunities for participation in governmental and intergovernmental forums.⁹ This reconfiguration of the

⁵ Justin Davis Smith, ‘The Voluntary Tradition: Philanthropy and Self-help in Britain 1500–1945’, in Justin Davis Smith *et al.* (eds.), *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector* (London: Routledge, 1995); Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁶ Matthew Hilton and James McKay, ‘The Ages of Voluntarism: an Introduction’, in Matthew Hilton and James McKay, *The Ages of Voluntarism: How we got to the Big Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.1-26).

⁷ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.194.

⁸ National Council of Voluntary Organisations, *Effectiveness and the Voluntary Sector* (London: NCVO, 1990); Rodney Hedley and Justin Davis Smith, *Volunteers and the Contract Culture: A Discussion of the Effects of Contracts on Volunteers with some Suggestions for Good Practice* (London: Volunteer Centre UK, 1994); Deakin, ‘The perils of partnership’; Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.33.

⁹ Doug Hellinger, ‘NGOs and the Large Aid Donors: Changing the Terms of Engagement’, *World Development*, 15, supplement (1987, pp.135-143); Mark Robinson, ‘An uncertain partnership: the Overseas

NGO/donor relationship foreshadowed dramatic increases in the amount of official aid being channelled through aid agencies in the post-Cold War period, for both emergency relief and development assistance.¹⁰ For instance, in 2013 Oxfam received 44 percent of its total income from ‘government and other public authorities’.¹¹ This phenomenal growth in official support has in turn given rise to anxieties that NGOs and donors may have become ‘too close for comfort’. For many commentators, official funding has stimulated the growth of NGOs, while also eroding their legitimacy and independence. It has been argued that high levels of official support renders aid agencies more accountable to donors than recipients, and more geared to the bureaucracy of ‘contract culture’ than political campaigning for global justice.¹²

Given these concerns, there is a clear need for more sustained historical analysis of the fluctuating relationship between humanitarian NGOs and the state. Such an analysis should shed further light on these issues than the largely ahistorical literature published to date, which tends to focus on single fixed points in time. Furthermore, the majority of this literature focuses on official funding for NGO development projects, and tends to take for granted that donors have a longer history of supporting non-governmental relief work.

Development Administration and the voluntary sector in the 1980s’, in Anuradha Bose and Peter Burnell (eds.), *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979: Between Idealism and Self-Interest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, pp.158-177); Catherine Agg, ‘Trends in Government Support for Non-Governmental Organizations: Is the “Golden Age” of the NGO Behind Us?’, *UNRISD Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 23* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2006); Kim D. Reimann, ‘A View from the Top: International Politics, Norms and the Worldwide Growth of NGOs’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 50 (2006, pp.45-67); David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp.38-40; Nicola Banks and David Hulme, ‘The role of NGOs and Civil Society in Development and Poverty Reduction’, *BWPI Working Paper 171* (Manchester: Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, June 2012).

¹⁰ Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp.117-135; Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Business* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

¹¹ Oxfam, *Annual Report & Accounts 2012/13* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2013), p.5.

¹² Michael Edwards and David Hulme, ‘Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on non-governmental organisations’, *World Development*, 24:6 (June 1996, pp.961-973); David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, pp.167-180; Agg, ‘Trends in Government Support for Non-Governmental Organizations’.

There is therefore much that we still do not know about how the contemporary humanitarian industry emerged historically in Britain, characterised by strong interconnections between the leading NGOs and government.

This chapter undertakes such an analysis, focusing upon the period between the Second World War and the creation of the Disaster Unit in 1974. It is argued that although the state often funded NGO relief efforts in the past, the British government attached little political significance to humanitarian aid until the 1960s. It was during this decade that public demand for emergency relief work grew, as media coverage of overseas disasters and the publicity tactics of NGOs generated a new awareness of distant suffering. As the leading aid agencies expanded and professionalised during this period, they also raised their legitimacy in relation to the state, which recognised the practical and political benefits of collaboration. This was especially evident after the creation of the DEC in 1963, which provided a rational channel between government and sector. Closer partnership with the state was further stimulated by the succession of major emergencies in Biafra, Bangladesh and the Sahel in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These crises led to soaring official expenditure on relief, large amounts of which were channelled through the DEC. By the end of 1973, public criticism of the government's response to these emergencies resulted in a radical overhaul of official relief policy, culminating in the Disaster Unit. The success of the DEC thus contributed to the state forging a closer relationship with the sector, as the Disaster Unit targeted closer integration with the Committee. It is therefore suggested that the 1970s was the crucial decade when donors turned to NGOs, rather than the 1980s as generally assumed.

To articulate this argument, this chapter is structured into three distinct analytical sections. As these cover the same chronological period as chapters one and two, many of the same events and emergencies are revisited (in particular the humanitarian crises in

Biafra, Bangladesh, and the Sahel). They are however approached from a different, top-down perspective which focuses upon the role of the state, and its interactions with the NGO sector. Firstly, the British government's approach to disaster relief is examined, from its origins in the colonial period, to the mid-1960s. It is shown that for most of this history the state attached little political significance to humanitarian aid, with the exception of the relief efforts undertaken in Europe during the 1940s. This approach began to be destabilised in the 1960s, as public awareness of overseas disasters and distant suffering grew as a result of decolonisation, media coverage of emergencies, and the publicity of humanitarian NGOs. As public demand for a more effective humanitarian response grew, the concurrent expansion of aid agencies also encouraged a closer coming together between the government and the NGO sector, especially after the creation of the DEC in 1963. While emergency relief was still regarded as less important than international development by government at this time, there were clear indications that humanitarian aid was taking on increasing political significance.

The second section explores how the massive public responses to the Biafran crisis in 1968, and the East Pakistan crisis of 1970-71, marked a watershed for British official relief policy. Media images of suffering and starvation created a demand for relief well beyond the existing policy framework, and funds were diverted from the development aid budget as a result. The leading NGOs helped to foster this popular pressure through their appeals and publicity. Aid agencies also benefitted from increased official expenditure, as in practice large amounts were channelled through the DEC. This further consolidated the links between the Committee members and government, boosting their legitimacy. The perceived failure of the ICRC in Biafra also prompted calls for a new international machinery for disaster relief, setting in motion a broader global momentum towards increasing co-ordination which also impacted upon NGOs.

Thirdly, the British government's response to the food crisis in Ethiopia and the Sahel in 1973-74 is explored. It is argued that the Sahel marked a culmination of all of these trends. Television images of famine in Ethiopia in late 1973 triggered a massive relief effort, and prompted stinging public criticism of the state's perceived inability to effectively respond to overseas emergencies. By contrast, the leading NGOs were widely depicted as being more efficient and effective than the official bureaucracy. This criticism sparked a re-examination of British relief policy, which was extended into a radical overhaul upon the election of the Labour government in early 1974. It was in this context that the ODM created the Disaster Unit as a new focal point, which placed heavy emphasis on integrating more thoroughly with the DEC. The fundraising success of the DEC therefore contributed to a reconfiguration of the relationship between the state and humanitarian NGOs, which was placed on a more formal and rationalised footing. This also reflected broader societal trends of the early 1970s, as a range of governmental departments attached new importance to working with the voluntary sector. It is ultimately suggested that this shifting nature of official relief policy, and the relationship between NGOs and states, raises challenging implications about the divides between governmental and non-governmental, and the impact of official support on the broader political agendas of development NGOs.

Official Disaster Relief

The origins of the British state's involvement in emergency relief are rooted in colonial history. Providing limited financial aid after natural disasters in the colonial territories (such as hurricanes in the West Indies) could deflect criticism and reaffirm imperial legitimacy. However, such amounts were limited and voted by Parliament on an ad hoc

basis - there was no coherent relief policy, or broader sense of obligation to humanitarian principles at this time.¹³ Prior to the twentieth century, international humanitarianism was instead advanced mainly by non-state actors, and the humanitarian imperative to provide emergency relief was institutionalised in the decades after the creation of the ICRC in 1863.

In the early twentieth century, the magnitude of the First World War influenced the deployment of a multitude of voluntary organisations to meet the huge relief needs of refugees and civilian populations. While the British government provided some degree of financial support for these efforts in Europe after 1918, it was not until the Second World War that the state accepted responsibility for official regulation of humanitarian aid.¹⁴ Allied planners agreed that the post-1918 relief efforts had been slow, insufficient, wasteful and poorly organised, reflecting a broader enthusiasm for the virtues of state planning which characterised the period. In this context, a particular significance and urgency was attached to addressing the major humanitarian crisis set to unfold after the Axis defeat, as relief would have to address this crisis before the new post-war era could be inaugurated.¹⁵ Mark Mazower adds that the US viewed relief as a mechanism to bring as much ‘international machinery’ into operation as possible, to shore up the support of the American public for continuing post-war international co-operation.¹⁶

The 1940s relief efforts have been widely depicted as a fundamental transformation in humanitarian action, as Western governments and intergovernmental organisations assumed authority for co-ordinating relief.¹⁷ As chapter one discussed, in

¹³ Matthew Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p.173; Barder, ‘Reforming Development Assistance: Lessons from the UK Experience’, p.3; Ireton, *Britain's International Development Policies*.

¹⁴ Steinert, ‘British Humanitarian Assistance’.

¹⁵ Reinisch, ‘Introduction: Relief in the Aftermath of War’, pp.373-376.

¹⁶ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), p.200.

¹⁷ See, for instance: Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp.107-131.

Britain state intervention led to the creation of the Council of British Societies for Relief Abroad (COBSRA) in 1942. Set up by the Ministry of Economic Warfare in 1942, COBSRA was intended to mesh the leading humanitarian agencies with the state. The Council accepted the authority of both the Allied governments and militaries, extended in 1943 to the newly formed the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). COBSRA set a new precedent for co-ordination between British NGOs, which foreshadowed the creation of the DEC in the early 1960s. Working under governmental and military authority also motivated the leading agencies to further professionalise and raise their overall effectiveness in the field. The 1940s relief efforts have therefore been seen as ‘the end of the charitable phase of modern humanitarianism’, as aid became more planning-minded and expert-driven, giving rise to a new type of humanitarian regime.¹⁸

In the new post-war international environment that followed, Britain did experience a brief spurt of humanitarian generosity in the early 1950s. In 1953 alone, the British government provided substantial aid in response to natural disasters in the Netherlands, Greece, Italy and Turkey, in addition to aid for relief in the colonies.¹⁹ This increase was attributed to ‘a greater international-mindedness’, as well as a sense of obligation after Britain had itself benefitted from the Marshall Plan largesse in 1947. However, this new approach to relief did not last. By 1955, senior officials within both the Foreign Office and the Treasury were critiquing emergency aid as an unnecessary expenditure which generated few political benefits. Instead they advocated a return to pre-war levels of emergency relief, which treated government assistance for disasters abroad as ‘the exception rather than the rule’.²⁰

¹⁸ Cohen, *In War's Wake*, pp.59-61; see also: Reinisch, ‘Introduction: Relief in the Aftermath of War’.

¹⁹ TNA: DO 35/9162: ‘HMG action after natural disasters abroad’, 12 July 1955.

²⁰ TNA: DO 35/9162: ‘H.M. Government assistance after natural disasters abroad’, 18 July 1955.

A new relief policy was subsequently set out, which restricted humanitarian aid unless there was ‘positive political advantage’ to be gained from its provision. Man-made disasters (which included famines and civil wars) were also excluded, on the grounds that they were ‘predictable’, not ‘sudden and catastrophic’, and therefore did not merit a response on either political or humanitarian grounds.²¹ A limit of £10,000 expenditure for any one disaster was put in place, with overall decision-making authority assigned to the Foreign Office.²² These policy guidelines indicated a lack of political significance being attached to emergency assistance. This policy remained the norm throughout the remainder of the 1950s, with emergency aid only provided in exceptional circumstances such as the failed 1956 Hungarian revolution.²³ Indeed, many officials shared a view at this time that British sympathy for disasters overseas was more appropriately expressed in public donations to the British Red Cross or similar agencies.²⁴

The international relief efforts connected to the Second World War did not therefore bring about a lasting change in the relationship between the state and the humanitarian NGO sector, despite the closer co-ordination brought about by COBSRA. This was because, fundamentally, official attitudes within Whitehall towards humanitarian aid as a whole did not change outside of wartime. It was not until the 1960s that this conception of humanitarian aid began to be destabilised, as public awareness of overseas disasters and distant suffering began to grow. As chapter two explored, public support for disaster relief increased over the course of the 1960s, facilitated by decolonisation, media coverage of disasters, and the provocative publicity produced by leading humanitarian NGOs. These trends also drove the institutional expansion and increasing visibility of aid

²¹ TNA: OD 69/6: ‘Disaster Relief: Note of preliminary Treasury views on ODM letter of 7 June 1974’, 11 July 1974.

²² TNA: DO 35/9162: ‘Natural Disasters’, 1955.

²³ TNA: FO 371/122391: ‘Humanitarian Aid to Hungary’, 12 November 1956.

²⁴ TNA: DO 35/9162: ‘Aid by the United Kingdom Government to other Commonwealth countries suffering from sudden natural disasters’, 1955.

agencies, which worked to bring them closer to the organs of the state. A key stimulus for this was the UN World Refugee Year initiative (WRY) in 1959. The Foreign Office supported the aims of WRY, but received little financial support from the Treasury. Instead, officials looked to support initiatives undertaken by voluntary organisations, who had ‘already shown their mettle in the campaign for Hungarian refugee relief in 1956 and 1957’.²⁵ This style of co-ordination was built upon and further extended by the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC). The British FFHC national committee was largely financed by the state, with NGOs expected to carry out the campaign's core activities.²⁶

As discussed in chapter one, WRY reshaped the sector and set in a motion a period of sustained NGO growth, as the leading agencies began scaling up their publicity budgets and making many more appeals to the public. As humanitarian NGOs raised larger amounts from the public for specific emergencies, they also raised their own legitimacy and profiles in relation to the state. For instance, Oxfam's aggressive fundraising drive for the Congo crisis in 1961 not only resulted in greater public recognition. The large sums raised also impressed government officials, and the Foreign Office developed closer links with senior Oxfam staff as a result.²⁷ In 1963, War on Want's fundraising success for the Skopje earthquake enabled the organisation to play a major role in the field, and the state made £60,000 of long-term aid available for transporting the organisation's reconstruction materials. When a former War on Want engineer voiced criticisms of the agency's ‘amateur and unprofessional approach’ in Skopje to the Charity Commissioners, official support also extended to political protection. The Foreign Office intervened to request that

²⁵ quoted in Peter Gatrell, *Free World? The Campaign to Save the World's Refugees, 1956-63* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.81.

²⁶ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992), pp.71-72.

²⁷ TNA: FO 371/155088: Foreign Office, ‘Telegram no. 1666 to Leopoldville’, 22 June 1961.

the individual concerned keep such criticism ‘within the counsels of the Charity Commission’. The Foreign Office added that ‘the overall effect of War on Want has been good... we do not therefore feel that British-Yugoslav relations would be served by a public post-mortem into the spending of War on Want money in Skopje’.²⁸

This official support for NGO relief efforts picked up further after the creation of the Disasters Emergency Committee in 1963. The DEC was welcomed by Foreign Office staff, who viewed the Committee as a positive step to minimise inter-agency competition and provide a rational channel of communication between themselves and the sector.²⁹ For their part, the DEC members had courted closer relations with the state, and Foreign Office officials were invited to attend and observe Committee meetings. In practice, official collaboration with the DEC tended to take the form of financial and political support for specific relief operations. For instance, when the DEC made its first joint appeal in August 1966 for an earthquake in Turkey, Foreign Secretary George Brown waived the costs of shipping supplies for the agencies to the disaster zone.³⁰ Similarly, the Foreign Office encouraged the Committee to launch an appeal for the Middle East in June 1967, and collaborated with the DEC to implement an emergency aid programme in South Vietnam following the Tet offensive in January 1968.³¹ This form of official co-ordination, with its emphasis on logistical management and operational effectiveness, was similar in character to the work of COBSRA in the 1940s. It was also similarly military-driven and depoliticised, and worked to reinforce the DEC's apolitical humanitarianism.

The emergence of NGOs as partners was formally acknowledged in relief policy at this time, revised in 1964 to state that ‘the voluntary societies in the UK will wish to offer

²⁸ TNA: FO 536/121: J.D. Campbell, ‘Letter to C.A. Thompson’, 18 December 1964.

²⁹ TNA: DO 170/16: T.J. Lennard, ‘Letter to Brigadier T.W. Boyce’, 6 August 1963.

³⁰ TNA: FO 371/185854: A.E. Davidson, ‘Letter to J.E. Lucas’, 9 September 1966.

³¹ CAA: Box CA2/F/1, file CA2/F/1/9: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the twenty-second meeting’, 15 June 1967; TNA: FCO 65/794: Denis Greenhill, ‘Letter to Sir Hugh Ellis-Rees’, 10 February 1970.

aid, and it is the intention of the Foreign Office to co-operate with the societies as far as possible'. Policy was also updated to introduce a distinction between 'immediate first aid' and 'longer-term aid' in disaster response. While the ceiling for immediate aid remained fixed at £10,000, additional funds could be provided for long-term aid if required from the overseas aid budget, administered by the newly established ODM. It was assumed that this long-term aid would be used mainly to pay for the transportation of NGO equipment and supplies for reconstruction.³² The new distinction of 'longer-term aid' reflected the emergence of a coherent development aid policy in the early 1960s, marked by the creation of the ODM in 1964.³³ The ODM also embodied a developmental bias within government, and the new department had no mandate to provide disaster relief. A fundamental distinction was made at this time between disaster relief and development aid; the former was seen as a short-term measure, the cost of which could largely be borne by the affected nation, in contrast with the latter, which was capital-intensive and of crucial geopolitical significance.

There were, however, signs of relief taking on increasing political significance as the 1960s progressed. NGOs again played an important role in this, as large popular responses to disasters, expressed as donations to aid agencies, could also highlight a relative lack of action by the state. For instance, press coverage of famine conditions in the Congo in early 1961 (which Oxfam exploited so successfully) aroused considerable public attention, and opposition MPs used the popular outcry to call for increased aid and pressurise the government. The Foreign Office acknowledged its vulnerability to

³² TNA: DO 170/80: 'Draft amendment to order book chapter xii: 14: Relief Measures after Natural Disasters Abroad' (XC 17/1), 1964.

³³ Barber, 'Reforming Development Assistance: Lessons from the UK Experience', p.7; see also: TNA: OD 15/15: Ministry of Overseas Development, 'Aid Policy', 16 November 1964.

‘criticism of the comparatively small scale of our contribution’, which quickly came to be depicted in certain sections of the press as government indifference to human suffering.³⁴

The People published such a piece under the headline ‘Starving children scandal’, commenting that ‘welfare organisations were shocked last night by the disclosure of red-tape bungling which is keeping huge consignments of food dumped on a British airfield... while Congolese children for whom the food is destined are dying of starvation’.³⁵ In a similar vein, the substantial public funds raised by War on Want for the Skopje earthquake led to criticism of the official response within Parliament, as opposition MPs called for the government to match the £0.5 million raised by the agency.³⁶ While these instances of public pressure were short-lived and minor in their political effects, they hinted at an inherent weakness in official relief policy. When television images of distant suffering resonated with the public, NGOs could generate funding for relief on a scale which outweighed the state's contribution. As a result, the state was vulnerable to being depicted as indifferent to human suffering and incapable of responding effectively.

Indeed, food shortages in India in 1966 directly challenged some of the assumptions underlying the government's attitude to disaster relief. Fears of a possible famine led to calls from within the ODM to make funding available for emergency food aid, outside of the development aid programme.³⁷ The ODM had committed significant development aid to India in this period, as part of a wider British policy geared towards maintaining India's stability and Cold War allegiance.³⁸ The US had similar objectives in the region at this time, exporting substantial amounts of its agricultural surpluses to India

³⁴ TNA: FO 371/155084: Foreign Office, ‘Telegram no.88 to Rome’, 12 January 1961.

³⁵ ‘Starving children scandal’, *The People*, 29 January 1961.

³⁶ Hansard: House of Commons, 29 July 1963, volume 682, columns 35-38: ‘Earthquake, Skopje (United Kingdom Aid)’.

³⁷ TNA: DO 189/468: ‘Record of meeting held in the Commonwealth Relations Office’, 6 January 1966.

³⁸ TNA: DO 189/467: ‘Meeting held in the Commonwealth Relations Office’, 20 December 1965.

during the 1960s.³⁹ The Foreign Office acknowledged that the £10,000 immediate aid limit would therefore appear ‘derisory in relation to the size and nature of the problem and to our special relationship with India’.⁴⁰ Instead, a £19 million interest-free loan was offered, as an advance instalment of development aid, to cover ‘special needs arising from the shortage of food and water’.⁴¹ The Foreign Office also covered the cost of shipping dried milk donated by the DEC agencies.⁴² This usage of development aid for emergency relief suggested a greater complexity to disasters than commonly assumed, and foreshadowed debates which would arise more forcefully in the following years.

‘The Need for New Machinery’: Biafra and Bangladesh, 1968-72

If the limitations of British relief policy had been briefly highlighted by the food shortages in India, then these limitations were emphatically exposed by the Nigerian Civil War in the late 1960s. Nigeria was a watershed in British relief policy, as the established approach was dramatically destabilised by the question of channelling relief to secessionist Biafra. In the process, a momentum towards significant changes in the formulation and implementation of official relief policy was also initiated, culminating in the creation of the Disaster Unit in 1974.

After the outbreak of civil war, the British position (as the former colonial power) was one of staunch support for the Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG), due mainly to anxieties over the principle of tribal secession in Africa. Britain also had significant oil interests in Nigeria and acted as a major supplier of arms to the FMG,

³⁹ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ TNA: DO 189/473: ‘Indian Food Situation’, November 1966.

⁴¹ TNA: FCO 11/24: ‘Food scarcity situation in India’, 28 April 1967.

⁴² TNA: FCO 11/24: J.P. Waterfield, ‘Letter to A.A. Duff’, 3 February 1967.

which was seen as essential to maintaining influence in the region.⁴³ Consequently, the upsurge of media images of Biafran starvation in the summer of 1968 (and the popular compassion these elicited) exerted immense political pressure on the Labour government for its pro-Nigeria policy. A statement from Howard Wilson to his cabinet in December 1968 underlined how seriously his administration had been shaken by the Biafran controversy:

‘The Nigerian question had aroused profound feeling in the country, in Parliament, and indeed in the Cabinet itself. It could give rise to a political and Parliamentary crisis of the utmost gravity. The Government might be defeated in the House, largely by the votes of its own supporters and perhaps even on a vote of confidence, with incalculable repercussions on sterling, on our whole economic situation, and on the future of the Government itself...’⁴⁴

As chapter two explored, NGOs played an important role in fermenting public opinion. Oxfam in particular launched an intensive publicity campaign which capitalised on and extended the public outcry. In the process the organisation brought further pressure to bear upon policymakers, exacerbated by radical voices such as Nicolas Stacey who openly criticised the government for a perceived lack of action.⁴⁵ The magnitude of the crisis, and the strength of popular support for intervention in Biafra, created a huge demand for official relief well beyond the limits of the existing policy framework. Instead, the Minister of Overseas Development (Reginald Prentice) announced that £1 million would

⁴³ TNA: Cabinet Paper C(68)126: ‘Nigeria: Why we support the Federal Government’ (Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), 9 December 1968.

⁴⁴ TNA: Cabinet Paper CC(68) (CAB/128/43): ‘Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Tuesday 10th December 1968’, 11 December 1968.

⁴⁵ P.J. Yanch, ‘Catholic Humanitarian Aid and the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War’, in Chima J. Korieh and G. Ugo Nwokeji (eds.), *Religion, History, and Politics in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Ogbu U. Kalu* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005, pp.156-172), p.164.

be diverted from the development aid budget for emergency relief, in each of the years 1969-70 and 1970-71.⁴⁶

In practice these funds were to be spent entirely in Nigeria, channelled either through the ICRC or British NGOs.⁴⁷ Aid agencies assumed a new level of prominence during the Nigerian emergency, stepping into the vacuum created by a lack of official intervention. Indeed, the crisis demonstrated to government officials the benefits of working through non-state actors, as NGOs provided a means to circumvent the refusal of the Biafran leadership to accept British bilateral aid.⁴⁸ Working with the DEC members also provided a means for the British government to restrain Oxfam's political involvement. It did so by excluding the organisation from official missions to the region on the grounds that it had become too 'partisan'. The state also limited its financial support to more moderate, apolitical agencies such as the British Red Cross and Save the Children. SCF in particular received generous funding from the aid programme, to support its Nigerian socio-medical teams at a cost of approximately £500,000.⁴⁹

Overall, the prominent role played by the DEC members in Biafra worked to further boost the official legitimacy of the Committee. This was illustrated in January 1970 when, following the Biafran surrender, a meeting was arranged between the Prime Minister and the voluntary organisations to discuss relief needs in the former secessionist territory. Despite vocal protestations from organisations such as CAFOD and Help the Aged for inclusion (which included speaking out in the press⁵⁰), only the 'big five' DEC

⁴⁶ TNA: OD 20/500: Overseas Development Administration, 'Emergency Relief and the Aid Programme', 14 December 1970.

⁴⁷ TNA: FCO 59/1237: 'British Disaster Relief Policy: Annex 2: Relief Aid to Nigeria during and following the 'Biafran' War 1968-70', February 1974.

⁴⁸ TNA: Cabinet Paper C(69)160 (CAB/129/146): 'Nigeria: Relief' (Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs), 26 November 1969.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ A.J. Travers, 'British aid agencies to carry on', *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 January 1970, p.7.

organisations were invited.⁵¹ Such cases of overt co-ordination with the sector also reflected a growing desire to draw upon the perceived capabilities and expertise of the voluntary sector within Whitehall. In 1970, Edward Heath's Conservative government entered office aiming to work more closely with the voluntary sector, and a number of governmental departments began exploring ways to draw upon the capacities of NGOs.⁵²

In the aftermath of the Biafran war, the perceived failure of the ICRC to effectively co-ordinate relief also prompted calls for a new international machinery to be set up for major disasters within Whitehall. These calls were echoed more broadly at the intergovernmental level. Papers prepared in 1970 by the renamed Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) argued that the ICRC had 'lacked the physical, human and political resources to cope adequately with the pressures facing them'. It was suggested that the ICRC was unsuited to conflicts such as Nigeria, where one of the combatants was not a government and hence had no commitment to the Geneva Conventions. FCO officials widely agreed that Biafra demonstrated 'the need for new machinery'. They envisioned an international organisation which could take responsibility for administering relief, provide a channel of communication between donors and affected governments, and co-ordinate the necessary agreements to distribute assistance where it was needed.⁵³

There was less consensus, however, on which organisation could take on such a role. The British press even presented the DEC as a potential model for an effective supranational relief body to emulate.⁵⁴ The realistic option was the creation of a specialised UN relief agency, which could mobilise the UN's resources and expertise. However, to do so would also require sharp demarcation from the UN's political organs.

⁵¹ TNA: FCO 65/794: Cabinet Office, 'Note of a Meeting held at 10 Downing Street', 13 January 1970

⁵² Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, pp.192-193.

⁵³ TNA: FCO 59/617: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 'International Relief operations', September 1970.

⁵⁴ Campbell Page, 'Wanted - instant aid for disaster zones', *The Guardian*, 4 September 1968, p.6.

In Nigeria, the Federal Government had resisted all UN involvement, for fear that even limited intervention would grant the Biafran leadership a de facto international presence.⁵⁵ These FCO policy discussions mirrored debates taking place elsewhere at the international level, within both donor governments and the UN itself. The UN Secretariat discussed taking on a larger relief role throughout 1970, and in July 1970 both Britain and the US supported a UNHCR resolution to appoint a relief co-ordinator. It was envisioned that this co-ordinator could draw on UN resources, to deal with major man-made and natural disasters as and when they occurred.⁵⁶

Similar debates were also taking place among NGOs, and in Britain the DEC agencies were invited to contribute to these Foreign Office proposals as they were drafted. The DEC members also called for a ‘a greater measure of co-ordination in emergency situations’, reflecting a broader momentum towards planning in humanitarian action as a whole. Save the Children commented internally that ‘co-ordination of relief activities at all levels was now very much the thing... we ought not to oppose it even though its value to SCF might be limited’.⁵⁷ Much like the FCO, the DEC also lacked a clear vision of how this could be effectively implemented. An Oxfam proposal to create a DEC Disasters Operation Officer post, to co-ordinate the activities of all the agencies in the field, was rejected by the other members as ‘too far reaching and... curtailing unacceptably the freedom of action of individual agencies’.⁵⁸ Instead the DEC opted to appoint a Liaison Officer, who could work in an advisory role to help enhance agency co-operation and

⁵⁵ TNA: FCO 59/617: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, ‘International Relief operations’, September 1970.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ SCFA: Box A423: Save the Children Fund, ‘The 286th Meeting of the Executive Committee’, 17 June 1971: Disasters Emergency Committee appeal for India (E.4499.).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

mitigate competition for publicity. In practice the Liaison Officer was given minimal authority and influence, achieving few tangible results before being let go in 1973.⁵⁹

These trends were reinforced and given fresh impetus by the East Pakistan cyclone in late 1970, and subsequent outbreak of civil war and mass refugee displacement in the Indian subcontinent in 1971. The cyclone came shortly after the election of Edward Heath's Conservative government in October 1970, which rebranded the ODM as the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and incorporated it into the Foreign Office. In practice the ODA still remained relatively self-contained, with its own minister, policies, procedures and staff.⁶⁰ Television news reports of the suffering caused by the cyclone generated substantial public concern. British officials observed that 'sudden human tragedy on such a scale has rarely occurred since the advent of mass media, and this calamity touched off a response of exceptional sympathy and generosity in many parts of the world'.⁶¹ As chapter two explored, this public outcry also translated into a record fundraising sum for the DEC's cyclone appeal. Indeed, FCO officials commented that 'the response of the British public and voluntary bodies has been recognised in East Pakistan as outstanding'.⁶²

In response to this public commotion, the new Minister for Overseas Development (Richard Wood) immediately committed £1 million for emergency relief, to once again be drawn from the development budget.⁶³ This financed a large-scale relief operation spearheaded by the Royal Navy (Operation Burlap), which involved diverting ships to the Bay of Bengal. These ships carried tons of food, clothing and supplies, as well as

⁵⁹ CAA: box CA2/D/11, file CA2/D/11/6: Noel Charles, 'Disasters Emergency Committee', 23 May 1973; CAA: box CA2/D/11, file CA2/D/11/6: A.B. Hodgson, 'Letter to Major A.J.M. Watt', 1 October 1973.

⁶⁰ Barder, 'Reforming Development Assistance', p.7.

⁶¹ TNA: FCO 37/721: Frank Sargeant, 'Natural disaster in East Pakistan: The 1970 Cyclone and its Consequences', 15 December 1970.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ TNA: OD 20/500: Overseas Development Administration, 'Emergency Relief and the Aid Programme', 14 December 1970.

helicopters, boats and personnel to move materials to the disaster area.⁶⁴ Privately the relief effort was viewed as a logistical success. However, political unrest within Pakistan over ‘the landing of foreign troops in... the name of relief’ led to a Ministerial decision to conclude Operation Burlap and withdraw all military elements from the region by mid-December.⁶⁵ In their absence, the FCO instead turned to the DEC agencies, commenting that ‘charitable organisations, under the direction of the Pakistan authorities, will remain primarily responsible for the continuing British effort in the rehabilitation period’.⁶⁶

From this point on the British government utilised the DEC agencies as key instruments in their Pakistan relief plans. Following the outbreak of civil war in East Pakistan and the start of mass refugee movements into India, the Foreign Secretary (Sir Alec Douglas-Home) determined that ‘the main [relief] effort should be made, and seen to be made, by private charities but... the Government should give whatever discreet help is possible’.⁶⁷ As in Nigeria, working through NGOs was politically advantageous for the British government, permitting aid to be discretely channelled while minimising the risk of destabilising relations with either Pakistan or India. FCO officials stressed that British assistance in West Bengal ‘must be presented as a venture by private charities... we wish to avoid publicity about [the government’s] involvement’. For the FCO, camouflaging their involvement through aid agencies would ensure ‘a good reception by the Pakistan Government for any major relief effort we might later wish to make in East Pakistan’.⁶⁸ The DEC mechanism contributed to this closer coming together of the state and NGOs, as it provided its members with the necessary resources and visibility to take on a more expansive role.

⁶⁴ TNA: FCO 37/720: ‘East Pakistan Cyclone Disaster’, 30 November 1970.

⁶⁵ TNA: FCO 37/720: Sir Charles Elworthy (Chief of the Defence Staff), ‘Operation Burlap’, December 1970.

⁶⁶ TNA: FCO 37/720: ‘Situation Report on the East Pakistan Cyclone Disaster’, 3 December 1970.

⁶⁷ TNA: PREM 15/568: Nicholas Barrington, ‘Letter to K.R. May’, 29 April 1971.

⁶⁸ TNA: PREM 15/568: Nicholas Barrington, ‘Letter to P.J.S. Moon’, 30 April 1971.

Bangladesh also gave fresh impetus to debates over the need for a new international machinery for disasters. Faced with a rapidly escalating refugee crisis, the Pakistan Government formally requested that the UN assume authority for co-ordinating relief in May 1971.⁶⁹ A substantial UN relief mechanism was quickly put in place, involving most of the specialised UN agencies. The UNHCR acted as a ‘focal point’ for all assistance, tasked with overall co-ordinating authority.⁷⁰ British expenditure on relief soared in this period as the government contributed over £16 million to UN appeals for aid for the Pakistan crisis. As in Nigeria, this funding was diverted from the official development programme (graph 3.1 and graph 3.2).⁷¹ The East Pakistan crisis demonstrated that Biafra was not a unique phenomenon, and to adequately respond to such major, internationalised emergencies would require a new level of co-ordinated response. The following year, the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) was created. The result of two years of protracted debate, UNDRO was weakened from the outset. Under-financed, isolated within the UN system, and with an intentionally vague mandate, UNDRO limped along with few tangible achievements over the following decade. However, what UNDRO did reflect was a new international will for enhanced co-ordination of major relief efforts - despite a lack of consensus over what such co-ordination meant in practice.⁷²

⁶⁹ TNA: DO 133/220: Anthony Kershaw, ‘Letter to Lord Hunt’, 25 May 1971.

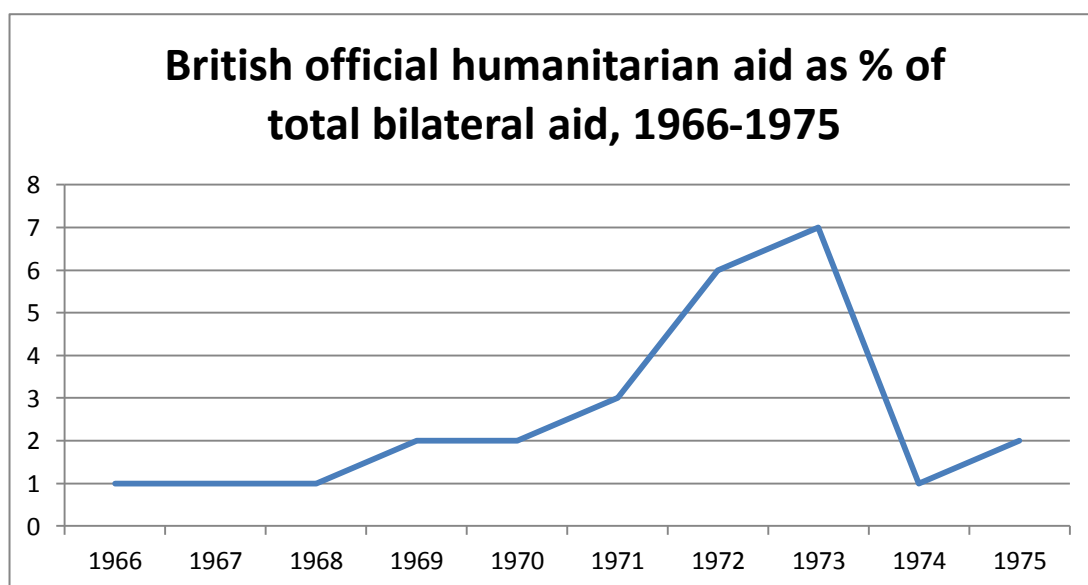
⁷⁰ Antara Datta, *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp.21-22.

⁷¹ TNA: FCO 59/1237: ‘British Disaster Relief Policy: Annex 1: British Relief Aid to Bangladesh 1971-73’, February 1974.

⁷² For more on UNDRO, see: John Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders: The International Politics of Natural Disasters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), pp.51-55.



Graph 3.1: Annual expenditure by British government on humanitarian aid, 1966-1975.⁷³



Graph 3.2: Annual expenditure by British government on humanitarian aid, as a percentage of total bilateral aid expenditure, 1966-1975.⁷⁴

Within the British government, the diversion of significant funding from development to emergency relief sparked heated debate concerning the future direction of the aid programme. Many officials within the ODA were against such practices on the grounds

⁷³ Ireton, *Britain's International Development Policies*, p.100.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.100.

that any expenditure on relief was a detriment to development, which should always be the department's primary purpose. This group included Minister for Overseas Development Richard Wood, who voiced concerns that relief was 'already becoming a significant part of the expenditure under a programme which is intended for development'. Wood added that 'parliamentary and public opinion will... look to us to do something additional rather than merely diverting what would otherwise have been spent on aid'.⁷⁵ However, a growing number of ODA officials argued that humanitarian aid should be incorporated into the aid programme permanently, which would also shift authority for relief from the Foreign Office to the ODA. While this shift would allow large sums to be released quicker for major emergencies such as Nigeria and Bangladesh, this was not the only rationale. It was also suggested that as the aid programme was 'associated in the public mind with disaster relief as much as with development aid', public support for development aid 'might be weakened if aid funds were not available for relief'.⁷⁶

This assumption that the public's support for overseas aid was motivated by humanitarian rather than developmental concerns was also a tacit acknowledgement of the impact of media images of disaster. Indeed, it is revealing that this soaring relief expenditure also overlapped with cuts to the overseas aid budget. Growing public responses to overseas emergencies placed increased pressure on the government to react more effectively to disasters (and to be *seen* to be reacting more effectively). For instance, in responding to an earthquake in Nicaragua in late 1972, FCO staff commented on how 'considerable emphasis has been placed by the Prime Minister's Office on the importance

⁷⁵ TNA: OD 20/500: Richard Wood, 'Letter to Anthony Barber', 15 June 1971.

⁷⁶ TNA: OD 20/500: Overseas Development Administration, 'Emergency Relief and the Aid Programme', 14 December 1970.

of good publicity in connection with our relief effort in Nicaragua... the interest aroused by the disaster is likely to lead to public interest in our assistance for reconstruction'.⁷⁷

In linking the need to satisfy popular demand for emergency relief with the development aid programme, British officials were also thinking along similar lines to the NGO sector. That is, despite a bias towards developmental objectives, it was recognised that apolitical media images of disaster were evoking the strongest response from the British public. While consensus on how to address these issues was not yet forthcoming, it was clear that the state was gradually moving towards accepting a more expansive and interventionist humanitarian aid policy. Similar trends were also affecting other donor governments, as well as UN agencies and NGOs, as the global spread of television and advances in communications technology brought a new immediacy to distant suffering, and stimulated international humanitarian empathy.⁷⁸

The Turn to Disaster: Ethiopia and the Sahel, 1973-74

These trends all culminated in the aftermath of a major international aid effort in the Sahel region of Africa, which peaked in 1973-74. Despite being in the grip of a severe drought since 1968, the international community was largely unresponsive to the growing problems in the Sahel until the end of 1972, when the FAO and World Food Programme (WFP) began publicising the crisis and calling for aid. By this point, five years of successive drought had led to huge relief requirements throughout the region. The FAO was appointed as the UN lead agency in co-ordinating relief for the Sahel, with the WFP

⁷⁷ TNA: OD 28/387: B.P. Austin, 'Nicaragua: assistance following the earthquake', 22 January 1973.

⁷⁸ Michael Cotey Morgan, 'The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights', in Niall Ferguson *et al.* (eds.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2010, pp.237-50); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, 'Introduction: Genealogies of Human Rights', in Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (ed.), *Human Rights in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.1-26), p.20.

also given a key role due to its expertise in distributing food aid.⁷⁹ UNDRO had little involvement in the Sahel operation, due to UN in-fighting and a lack of executive authority.⁸⁰ Appeals for aid were made by UN agencies and the Sahelian countries themselves throughout 1973; in May the FAO appealed to member states for £6 million worth of aid, as well as for aircraft to transport supplies from ports to the interior.⁸¹ Britain responded by making RAF aircraft available for transporting supplies, at a cost of approximately £2.5 million (paid for from the development aid budget).⁸²

These multilateral appeals also drew the attention of the world's press to the drought, and media coverage of the Sahel gradually increased throughout 1973, especially as conditions worsened after the failure of the 1973 rains. A *Guardian* report from Mali in September 1973 observed the 'sudden worldwide concern for the [Sahel] after years of indifference... Western nations are now practically competing with each other to show their humanitarian concern for the several million Africans threatened with famine...'.⁸³ This media scrutiny intensified after the ITV broadcast of Jonathan Dimbleby's documentary on famine in Ethiopia in October (*The Unknown Famine*), which transformed Ethiopia into a major international news story, as discussed in chapter two. British officials later acknowledged the documentary's direct impact, commenting that 'Jonathan Dimbleby's television report on Ethiopia stirred consciences in many countries and provoked an enormous response... it even galvanised government machines'.⁸⁴ The sudden exposure also raised major questions about how the famine had happened and the lack of an adequate international response, and relief efforts were quickly scaled up in

⁷⁹ D. John Shaw, *The World's Largest Humanitarian Agency: The Transformation of the UN World Food Programme and Food Aid* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.54.

⁸⁰ TNA: OD 15/119: 'Disaster Relief', February 1974.

⁸¹ 'African drought aid plea', *The Guardian*, 12 May 1973, p.1.

⁸² TNA: OD 30/450: Overseas Development Administration (Africa Division), 'Sahel - Famine relief and development', 5 September 1974.

⁸³ David Ottoway, 'Bitter taste of a grain of comfort', *The Guardian*, 17 September 1973, p.3.

⁸⁴ TNA: FCO 59/1237: D.M. Kerr, 'International Disaster Relief', 2 May 1974.

intensity. As Peter Woodward comments, after *The Unknown Famine* the ‘wheels of the relief juggernaut rolled a little faster’.⁸⁵

Subsequently, in November 1973 the FAO launched an appeal for 500,000 tonnes of food and \$30 million to fund emergency relief in the Sahel and Ethiopia. At the same time, Britain (along with other donors) agreed to participate in an international programme of long-term development assistance throughout the Sahel. Britain also rolled out a major rural development programme in Ethiopia after Dimpleby's film. In January 1974, the European Community announced that five per cent of the EEC's total budget for that year (amounting to approximately £110 million) would be earmarked for food aid, targeted primarily at the Sahel and Ethiopia.⁸⁶ Leading NGOs were also involved. In Britain, the DEC agencies participated in the expanding African aid programme, funded by a record DEC appeal based on footage from *The Unknown Famine*. As with previous operations, the ODA worked closely with the DEC, financing the transportation of equipment and supplies to the region for Committee members.⁸⁷

The public outcry generated by broadcast of *The Unknown Famine* also resulted in widespread public criticism of the British government for its slow response, which was depicted as bureaucratic failure and indifference to human suffering. The Deputy Director of Christian Aid openly criticised the government for delays in distributing aid to the Eastern Sahel nations, referring to ‘a lack of vigour, a lack of imagination, and a lack of ground representation that goes beyond red tape or bureaucracy’.⁸⁸ Richard Wood observed the ‘considerable concern in the House of Commons, reflecting the concern in

⁸⁵ Peter Woodward, *The Horn of Africa: Politics and International Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), pp.174-176; For more on the impact Dimpleby's film inside Ethiopia, see: Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (NY: Human Rights Watch, 1991), pp.157-158.

⁸⁶ ‘Europe's £110M for food aid’, *The Guardian*, 26 January 1974, p.2.

⁸⁷ TNA: OD 30/449: ‘Paper on drought relief - Sahelian zone and Ethiopia’, 21 December 1973.

⁸⁸ Peter Niesewand, ‘Britain plans food airlift to the Sahel’, *The Guardian*, 9 April 1974, p.2.

the country as a whole, that the British Government had repeatedly found itself reacting to crisis situations which might perhaps have been foreseen earlier'.⁸⁹

The ineffective response of the state was often publicly contrasted with leading NGOs, who were commonly depicted as efficient, apolitical, non-bureaucratic actors. The ODA identified a 'feeling in the press that the Government... was incapable of responding as quickly as voluntary societies to potential disaster situations'.⁹⁰ ODA staff also reached a conclusion that such relief work was 'more appropriate to the function of the voluntary agencies', and that that improving the official relief response would require closer co-ordination with the NGOs.⁹¹ In practice this was to be implemented through the DEC, which was now increasingly being promoted as 'an essential part of the coordinating machinery'.⁹² The increasing recognition of aid agencies at this time reflected their growth and high visibility in responding to emergencies such as Biafra and Bangladesh. It also mirrored ongoing shifts in development theory, as dissatisfaction with the state-led model fostered a view of NGOs as less bureaucratic and more effective at reaching grassroots communities than their official counterparts.⁹³

Media coverage of distant suffering played a crucial role in bringing about these changes. The ODA acknowledged that 'the quick access of news media to disasters and their presentation, especially by television, has created a Ministerial and public demand for a more immediate and fuller response'.⁹⁴ Richard Wood observed a 'change in public opinion over the last few years, with the result that British Governments were now

⁸⁹ TNA: OD 15/119: Overseas Development Administration, 'Note of a Meeting: Disaster Relief', 8 November 1973.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ TNA: OD 15/119: Willie Morris, 'Action in famine situations: early lessons from the Ethiopian experience', 12 December 1973.

⁹² TNA: OD 15/119: Richard Miles, 'Emergency Relief etc', 21 December 1973.

⁹³ David Hulme and Michael Edwards, 'NGOs, states and donors: an overview', in Hulme and Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors* (pp.3-22).

⁹⁴ TNA: FCO 59/1237: E.C. Burr, 'Disaster Relief', February 1974.

expected to do more in distant countries than they had been'.⁹⁵ This assumption within government that public opinion now expected a speedier and more effective humanitarian response indicated the extent to which humanitarian philanthropy had risen to prominence in the previous decade. As one ODA representative summarised, 'public and parliamentary opinion... will not permit [the government] to do nothing'.⁹⁶

Consequently, a re-examination of relief procedures and policy was initiated within the FCO and ODA. A policy paper in early 1974 opened with a revealing statement that 'the problem of disaster relief in developing countries is one of which governments are becoming increasingly aware'.⁹⁷ There were once again renewed calls for the ODA to assume authority for disaster relief, and finance it entirely from the development aid budget. The department had previously resisted this measure, on the grounds that it would be 'at the expense of development'. However, there were now sufficient precedents of using the aid programme to fund relief, and officials observed that 'the public generally hardly distinguish between relief and development, or relief and rehabilitation'. It was therefore recommended that 'disaster relief for developing countries will fall on the Aid programme'.⁹⁸

The election of Howard Wilson's minority Labour government in March 1974 sped up and extended these proposals further. The new administration altered the ODA to again become a separate Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM), and Judith Hart replaced Richard Wood as the Minister for Overseas Development. Judith Hart had briefly served as Minister in 1970, and had been Labour's Shadow Minister in the years since.

⁹⁵ TNA: OD 15/119: Overseas Development Administration, 'Note of a Meeting: Disaster Relief', 8 November 1973.

⁹⁶ TNA: OD 15/119: Willie Morris, 'Action in famine situations: early lessons from the Ethiopian experience', 12 December 1973.

⁹⁷ TNA: FCO 59/1237: Overseas Development Administration (Economic Planning Staff), 'British Disaster Relief Policy', 7 February 1974.

⁹⁸ TNA: OD 15/119: 'Disaster Relief', February 1974.

Hart was familiar with the cutting edge of development theory, and sympathised with a number of socialist critiques of orthodox state-led development gaining currency at this time.⁹⁹

Hart had also been a vocal supporter of improving international relief co-ordination through the UN¹⁰⁰, and understood the power of television to shape aid interventions. Following the broadcast of Dimbleby's film in October 1973, Hart arranged for it to be shown at the House of Commons, which she then used to call for increased official aid.¹⁰¹ Upon entering office in March 1974, Hart watched a private screening of Dimbleby's follow-up documentary, and invited him to attend private talks at the ODM.¹⁰² Hart designated relief policy as one of her key priorities upon entering office, especially in relation to man-made disasters. Hart privately saw herself as being 'in the firing-line' for disaster policy failures, and supported the idea that the ODM take over all relief responsibilities.¹⁰³ Hart also attacked the previous administration for treating relief in the Sahel as 'a vexatious affair which detracted from their proper task of promoting pure development'. ODM officials commented that 'the only people who have emerged with credit from these disasters are the media', referring specifically to ITV and Jonathan Dimbleby.¹⁰⁴

Hart and her department subsequently set about overhauling the governmental machinery for relief. Proposals were put forward for the creation of a specialist unit within the ODM, to deal exclusively with the emergency relief stage of disasters. In doing so,

⁹⁹ Judith Hart often courted controversy for her socialist views. In late 1971, Hart argued that the relationship between the First and Third Worlds could be improved if 'the rich countries themselves were to demand and achieve radical changes in the world of market economy and abandon their own neo-colonialism'; see: Judith Hart, 'We are unlikely to be moved', *The Guardian*, 30 December 1971, p.13.

¹⁰⁰ 'Sanctions demand against Pakistan', *The Guardian*, 15 May 1971, p.7.

¹⁰¹ ITA/IBAA: *This Week* scripts collection: Jonathan Dimbleby, 'This Week - The Unknown Famine', 23 October 1973.

¹⁰² Philip Jordan, 'Minister may offer aid to famine victims in Ethiopia', *The Guardian*, 14 March 1974, p.9.

¹⁰³ TNA: FCO 59/1237: R.E. Steddon, 'Letter to Mr Kerr', 15 March 1974.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: FCO 59/1237: D.M. Kerr, 'International Disaster Relief', 2 May 1974.

relief responsibilities for man-made disasters would also be formally removed from the FCO, and vested in the ODM as an integral aspect of overseas aid policy. Privately a senior ODM official commented that the new ideas were ‘unorthodox and uncomfortable. They are meant to be... the existing bureaucracies have failed disgracefully’. The same individual added that ‘developmentally minded officials will never quite measure up to this task... they will have to have their comfortable ways upset if this very real need is to be met, and if Parliament and the media are to be satisfied that we are capable of a human response’.¹⁰⁵

The result of these proposals was the creation of the Disaster Unit in June 1974. A specialist body within the ODM, the Disaster Unit was to be responsible for disaster planning, earmarking supplies, liaising with other government departments, monitoring reports on potential disasters, and leading the initial response to ‘man-made’ and ‘predictable’ disasters in developing countries (including famine, drought, war and civil disturbances).¹⁰⁶ The Unit was designed to be a new focal point for disasters, regarding emergency relief as a primary consideration, rather than a distraction from the pursuit of development. The Disaster Unit marked a new significance for disasters in Whitehall, as relief structures were to be expanded and capacity built up at. Other donor governments established similar bodies at this time, institutionalising the distribution of humanitarian assistance.¹⁰⁷

The Disaster Unit regarded the improvement of relief co-ordination as one of its primary objectives, and emphasised its intention to ally more closely with the NGO sector. ODM staff stressed a need to ‘make sure our efforts were integrated with [voluntary organisations]... we wish to plan and work in collaboration with these bodies at

¹⁰⁵ TNA: FCO 59/1237: D.M. Kerr, ‘International Disaster Relief’, 2 May 1974.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: FCO 59/1237: ‘Disaster Unit’, June 1974.

¹⁰⁷ Randolph C. Kent, ‘Reflecting upon a Decade of Disasters: The Evolving Response of the International Community’, *International Affairs*, 59:4 (Autumn 1983, pp.693-711), p.700.

all stages, since their role will continue to be an essential one'.¹⁰⁸ This prioritisation of NGOs reflected how aid agencies were now increasingly being feted by the state, for their perceived efficiency, expertise, lack of bureaucracy, and capacity to reach the poorest communities. The DEC played an integral role in facilitating this official recognition of NGOs, as it fuelled the growth of its members while providing a channel between themselves and government. The emphasis placed by the ODM on co-ordination also represented a broader increase of state support for the voluntary sector in the 1970s, as a number of governmental departments looked for ways to liaise with NGOs and draw upon their distinctive capacities and methods. Matthew Hilton *et al.* argue that the government also sought to shape the sector at this time, by bringing NGOs under increased official oversight.¹⁰⁹

The Disaster Unit accordingly designated the DEC as its preferred vehicle for co-ordination, and began to build up closer relations with the Committee. In June 1974 the DEC Chairman (Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh) confirmed an approach by the ODM, who expressed 'a strong desire to make closer contact with the voluntary agencies, and to develop much further joint relief enterprises'. The DEC members did not engage with this proposal uncritically. Alan Brash, Director of Christian Aid, commented that the Committee members were 'anxious about... the tendency of this Government to draw all available groups into its orbit of good will, and to expect a degree of common cooperation and common action which is probably beyond the real interests of the voluntary agencies'. He added that 'cooperation with the Government agencies may often be a good thing, but ought not at the same time to be uncritically expected as a general principle'.¹¹⁰ That the DEC members ultimately supported the Disaster Unit, despite their concerns of possible

¹⁰⁸ TNA: OD 15/119: 'Disaster Unit: material for press conference', June 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.193.

¹¹⁰ CAA: Box CA2/D/20, file CA2/D/20/2: Alan R. Brash, 'Memorandum to Vernon Littlewood', 13 June 1974.

co-option, demonstrated how years of close collaboration with the state had also tied the sector into a broader momentum towards integration that it was unable, or unwilling, to go against.

Conclusions

The closer coming together of the DEC members and government over this period reinforces how humanitarian NGOs and the state have a long history of interaction and collaboration. The British government drew upon the capacities and expertise of aid agencies to enhance their own capabilities. Working through NGOs also yielded political benefits in volatile contexts such as the Nigerian Civil War, or the East Pakistan crisis. In turn, NGOs also shaped official relief policy through their own expansion, interventions, and publicity, which helped increase popular support for humanitarian action. An official preference for working through the DEC also conferred legitimacy and prestige upon its members, consolidating the Committee's oligarchy within the humanitarian NGO sector. Collaborating with government to implement relief from the 1960s onwards also enrolled the DEC members into the broader momentum of the international aid system towards increased integration post-Biafra. What all this all ultimately suggests is that the history of the British humanitarian sector cannot be presented as separate or distinctive from the state. Rather, their complex interactions and interconnections dictate that they should be examined in tandem, and in practice the two have often been mutually co-constitutive. The question often asked today of whether NGOs and donors have become 'too close for comfort' is arguably misleading, as it implies there was a previous era when NGOs acted independently outside of government. In practice, the two have been intertwined for longer than generally assumed.

The overhaul of disaster relief enacted by the ODM in 1974 formed part of a broader shift in British overseas aid policy as a whole. Following the lead being set by the World Bank and other multilateral institutions, in 1974 Judith Hart implemented a re-orientation of official development aid towards a 'basic needs' approach, which emphasised poverty reduction through rural, small-scale, grassroots development.¹¹¹ This new approach was to the benefit of leading development NGOs (such as Christian Aid and Oxfam), who were now widely perceived as more effective at reaching such micro-environments than official bureaucracies. These organisations had collaborated with the ODA to implement development projects in Ethiopia in 1973, which raised the possibility of the state providing financial support for NGO development projects, to make 'better use of the special capacity of these agencies'.¹¹²

The ODM subsequently introduced its Joint Funding Scheme (JFS) in 1975, to make bilateral aid available for suitable NGO development programmes on a pound-for-pound basis. Despite modest beginnings, the JFS would eventually develop into an important source of funding for the leading development agencies.¹¹³ The 1980s has been widely depicted as the critical juncture when donors turned to aid agencies and the effects of official funding became visible. The evidence put forward in this chapter suggests that it was actually during the 1970s that this shift took place, facilitated by events in the 1960s. Furthermore, it is revealing that upon entering office, Hart's administration felt it necessary to address the issue of disaster relief first. Arguably, the ODM understood that, since the public supported emergency relief more than development aid, criticisms of the official humanitarian response had to be defused before a new development policy could

¹¹¹ TNA: OD 69/6: Ministry of Overseas Development, 'Draft White Paper - Outline', January 1975.

¹¹² TNA: OD 15/114: Overseas Development Administration (Information Department), 'ODA support for voluntary agency work overseas', 14 February 1974.

¹¹³ TNA: OD 68/43: Naomi Good, 'Joint Funding Scheme: First Year 1975/76', May 1976; see also: Robinson, 'An uncertain partnership'.

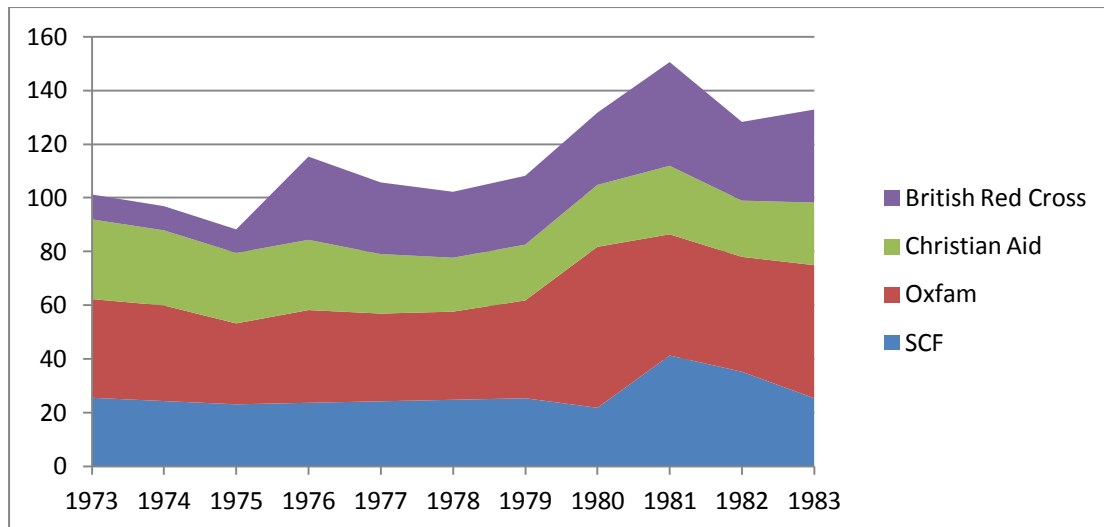
be implemented. Furthermore, it was collaboration between the state and NGOs in the provision of humanitarian aid which helped forge the connections and infrastructure that made official support for grassroots development possible.

The creation of the Disaster Unit in 1974 represents an important point in the history of British humanitarianism, as it formalised the relationship between the state and the NGO sector. Closer integration also further enrolled the leading aid agencies into an emerging international aid architecture. The increasing financial and logistical support for NGO relief work heralded by the Disaster Unit suggested a further growth in the influence and size of aid agencies. It also raised the possibility that a more instrumental approach could co-opt and contain the sector as a whole, by turning development NGOs into service providers for apolitical relief. The following chapter explores how these trends unfolded in the decade after the creation of the Disaster Unit.

Chapter Four

NGOs and the Technocratic Disaster Relief Industry, 1974-84

The creation of the Disaster Unit in 1974 formalised the relationship between the Disasters Emergency Committee and the state. Over the course of the following decade, the Unit frequently responded to overseas emergencies of varying magnitudes. In the process, the Unit regularly channelled financial and logistical support through the DEC agencies, utilising them as instruments for the delivery of official humanitarian aid. This trend became more pronounced in the early 1980s, as the new Conservative government downgraded the importance of development aid while simultaneously directing more funding through the voluntary sector. Closer collaboration with government, and increasing official financial support, further stimulated the expansion and professionalisation of the humanitarian sector. This expansion of NGOs was also driven by growing popular support for emergency relief operations, a continuation of long-running trends (graph 4.1). The British public responded generously to media reports of distant suffering, the impact of which was heightened by technological advances such as the spread of colour television. For instance, popular outcry at media images of Cambodian suffering in late 1979 led to huge public demands for relief, which Oxfam was leveraged to double its income in less than a year. All of these trends contributed towards the gradual development of an expansive and integrated disaster relief industry in Britain, in which the leading humanitarian NGOs were deeply embedded.



Graph 4.1: Cumulated income (£m) of the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund, 1973-83 (adjusted for inflation, 2009).¹

This building up of an infrastructure for humanitarian aid also overlapped with a more systematic engagement by agencies such as Christian Aid, Oxfam, and War on Want in the complexities and politics of international development. As the 1970s progressed, these development NGOs articulated a distinctive non-governmental methodology of aid, influenced by alternative theories of development emanating from the global South. This new approach emphasised sustainable grassroots programmes, working in partnership and solidarity with the global poor to help them liberate themselves from unjust economic and political conditions. This multifaceted and more radical approach also fostered a greater recognition of the need for development to be twinned with effective advocacy and education programmes. Development NGOs expanded their activities, taking up specific and overtly political Third World issues in national and transnational arenas. Crucially, more radical advocacy also stimulated a critique of humanitarian aid from within the NGO sector. For many within the development community, disaster relief increasingly

¹ Income data sourced from Matthew Hilton *et al.*, '7.3: Cumulated income of international aid and development NGOs, 1945-2009' (Adjusted for inflation, 2009), Non-Governmental Organisations 1945-97 project datasets: http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/appendix/figures/Chap_7/Figure%207.3.xlsx [accessed 31 March 2014].

came to be perceived as outdated and ineffective in the struggle for long-term structural change.

The NGO sector thus came to be characterised by a growing paradox over the course of this period. Despite the evolution of a sophisticated and overtly political advocacy agenda, which explicitly looked beyond short-term relief, the leading aid agencies continued to grow by responding to successive major emergencies. This chapter explores these contradictory trajectories, and sets out how despite an increasing political focus within the sector, a more integrated and depoliticised apparatus for humanitarian aid took shape. The principal British NGOs were enmeshed in this technocratic infrastructure, as service providers for the delivery of humanitarian aid channelled from the British government.

A number of commentators have depicted this instrumentalisation of NGOs as characteristic of the post-Cold War period. This is often attributed to dramatic increases in international expenditure on emergency relief since the 1990s, and the growing tendency of donors to channel this assistance through international NGOs. Mark Duffield argues that this has resulted in aid agencies being absorbed into a ‘mutual web of overlapping objectives’, which ties them to the policy objectives of donor governments, UN agencies, and Western militaries.² John Degenbol-Martinussen and Poul Engberg-Pedersen similarly point to a sophisticated ‘cross-cutting governance network’ of government agencies, inter-governmental organisations and international NGOs, which delivers humanitarian aid in a variety of contexts.³ For Duffield, the NGO movement is now no longer external to the state, but has instead reinvented itself as ‘intrinsic to its reconstruction and power

² Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.28.

³ John Degenbol-Martinussen and Poul Engberg-Pedersen, *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation* (London: Zed, 2003), pp.199-215.

projection'.⁴ A number of authors have portrayed NGOs as becoming 'governmentalised' in this way, spreading the language and techniques of governance (and global governance) to the micro-level.⁵

Profound increases in the amounts of official humanitarian aid being channelled through non-state actors has also raised concerns that this diverts NGOs away from long-term development and advocacy concerns. This represents an extension of long-standing debates over whether NGOs and donors have become 'too close for comfort'.⁶ It has been argued that instrumentalisation leads to aid agencies becoming preoccupied by bureaucratic donor demands for accountability, evaluation and results-based management.⁷ Katie Bristow states that these pressures have undermined the potential of NGOs to articulate alternative notions of development. Instead, they have moved towards the 'pro-market (neoliberal) and technology-orientated agenda' of donor states and

⁴ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*, p.29.

⁵ Ole Jacob Sending and Iver B. Neumann, 'Governance to Governmentality: Analyzing NGOs, States, and Power', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50 (2006, pp.651-672); Janice Gross Stein, 'Humanitarian Organisations: Accountable - Why, to Whom, for What, and How?' in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.124-142); Janice Gross Stein, 'Background knowledge in the foreground: conversations about competent practice in "sacred space"', in Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot (eds.), *International Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp.87-107), p.94; Patricia Noxolo, 'Freedom, Fear & NGOs: Balancing Discourses of Violence & Humanity in Securitising Times', in Mark Duffield and Vernon Hewitt (eds.), *Empire, Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013, pp.130-145).

⁶ Stephen Commins, 'NGOs: ladles in the global soup kitchen?', *Development in Practice*, 9:5 (1999, pp.619-622); Michael Edwards and David Hulme, 'Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on non-governmental organisations', *World Development*, 24:6 (June 1996, pp.961-973); David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

⁷ Thomas F. Carroll, *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development* (Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1992), p.18; Tina Wallace *et al.*, *Standardising Development: Influences on UK NGOs' Policies and Procedures* (Oxford: WorldView, 1997); Tina Wallace *et al.*, *The Aid Chain: Coercion and Commitment in Development NGOs* (Warwickshire: ITDG, 1999); Alexander Cooley and James Ron, 'The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action', *International Security*, 27:1 (Summer 2002, pp.5-39); David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

intergovernmental agencies.⁸ In short, the increasing bureaucracy and managerialism which accompanies closer integration with donors is also seen to have a depoliticising effect. Acting as service providers for emergency aid arguably contains NGOs within a broader system of humanitarian governance, which restricts their freedom to campaign against the structural causes of global poverty.⁹

What this literature does not make clear is how this humanitarian infrastructure developed historically, instead largely presenting it as a product of the 1990s. Furthermore, emphasis on a perceived process of governmentalisation can also imply that humanitarian NGOs have been passive receptors for the co-option of government, without agency themselves. This chapter demonstrates how in Britain this technocratic aid industry actually took shape in the 1970s, following the creation of the Disaster Unit. The Unit pursued a managerial approach to relief which emphasised logistical efficiency and technical expertise, drawing upon the capacities of the DEC members to augment its own response. In the process, integration between the Disaster Unit and the DEC consolidated a depoliticised form of humanitarianism which contradicted the political advocacy agenda also being articulated within the sector. This process was further reinforced by the actions of the television broadcasting authorities, who actively worked to restrain the political activity of the DEC members. However, it is also argued that NGOs themselves exacerbated these trends through their own deliberate decision-making, as they utilised the populist appeal of emergency appeals to fuel their own expansion.

⁸ Katie S. Bristow, 'Transforming or Conforming? NGOs Training Health Promoters and the Dominant Paradigm of the Development Industry', in Anthony J. Bebbington *et al.* (eds.), *Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives* (London: Zed, 2008, pp.240-260), p.240.

⁹ Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London: Villiers, 1997), pp.141-143; Anthony Bebbington, 'Donor-NGO relations and representations of livelihood in nongovernmental aid chains', *World Development*, 33:6 (June 2005, pp.937-950); Jude Howell, 'Post-9/11 Global Security Regime and Non-Governmental Public Action', in Jude Howell (ed.), *Global Matters for Non-Governmental Public Action* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp.41-65), p.64.

To articulate this argument, this chapter is structured into four distinct analytical sections. First, the history of NGO advocacy over the course of this period is set out, continuing on from earlier chapters. As development NGOs engaged more systematically with alternative theories of development during the 1970s, their philosophy and approach to aid evolved to emphasise increased solidarity with the global poor. This in turn fuelled a more radical and sophisticated advocacy agenda, which openly targeted the structural causes of Third World suffering. By the early 1980s, this advocacy was increasingly professionalised and expert-driven in character. Becoming more overtly political also stimulated a self-critique of emergency relief from within the sector, as NGOs looked to shift the focus of their work away from traditional philanthropy. Stereotypical media images of starving children, ubiquitous in NGO emergency appeals in the 1960s, began to be denounced for perpetuating unethical stereotypes of the developing world. Particular attention is paid here to War on Want, which as the most radical voice in the sector articulated a powerful critique of both disaster relief in general, and the DEC specifically. War on Want eventually exited the Committee altogether in 1979, ostensibly to focus solely on long-term development.

The second section explores how, despite this political trajectory, the sector was contained by the building up of a sophisticated infrastructure for humanitarian aid by the British government. Closer integration between the Disaster Unit and the DEC granted increased authority to the Committee at the official level, while also tying its members into a relief apparatus that was inherently technocratic and depoliticising. The channelling of official emergency relief through NGOs became more overt after 1979, as the new Conservative government downgraded the significance of development aid and raised the relative importance of humanitarian assistance. The state also restricted the political activities of the sector more directly, through the interventions and oversight of the

Charity Commissioners. Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want all attracted the scrutiny of the Commissioners in the late 1970s for their political activities, setting up a period of increased surveillance in the 1980s.

A third section explores how this process of containment was reinforced by the actions of the television broadcasting authorities. The BBC and the IBA also enacted closer co-ordination with the DEC during this period, which strengthened the authority of the Committee members within their sector. However, the broadcasters also strongly resisted attempts by the DEC to broaden out the types of emergencies and crises they could appeal for. This resulted in a series of bitter disputes between the broadcasters and the DEC in the early 1980s, as the Committee attempted to expand their mandate to cover more complex, overtly political man-made disasters in Africa and Latin America. In the process, the broadcasters imposed a conception of voluntary action upon the DEC which was fundamentally apolitical. This represented an effective policing of the NGO sector's political boundaries by the television authorities, and highlighted the broadcasters' important and active role in shaping the British humanitarian industry.

Finally, the extent to which NGOs were themselves implicated in these trends is examined. While the NGO sector was politically contained by more powerful forces, the agencies also exacerbated this further through their own deliberate decision-making. The DEC members regularly requested emergency appeals, and were complicit in depoliticising global poverty despite their own awareness of the problems in doing so. Ultimately, humanitarian NGOs understood that dramatic disaster appeals in the media were far more effective at generating public support than their broader long-term development work. This support in turn translated into increased donations, fuelling further institutional expansion. This was apparent in Oxfam's response to a major emergency in Cambodia in late 1979, as an intensive publicity campaign and a public

association with the relief efforts helped double the organisation's income in less than a year. The effectiveness of NGO political advocacy was also limited by divisions within the sector, which reflected the broader problems associated with charitable organisations entering the political arena. It is ultimately concluded that this period represents a critical period in the modern history of humanitarianism, which sheds light on broader issues such as the implication of aid agencies in governance, the relationship between the media and voluntary action, and the types of political participation fostered by NGOs.

NGOs and Advocacy

Chapters one and two outlined how, beginning in the early 1960s, a number of organisations within the humanitarian sector began publicising the root causes of global poverty and underdevelopment. In doing so, they intended to mobilise public support for international development. The stimulus for this new direction was the involvement of agencies such as Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want in initiatives linked to the First UN Development Decade. Of particular importance was the UN Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC), which helped raised awareness of the needs of post-colonial nations. NGO collaboration on development was extended over the course of the decade, aided by co-ordinating initiatives such as the Voluntary Committee for Overseas Development (VCOAD). VCOAD took over the FFHC's remit, and strove to integrate the development programmes and educational activities of its member agencies. As the 1960s progressed, NGO campaigns gradually became more political in character, based on a realisation that only governments and intergovernmental institutions could bring about lasting long-term change. More overt lobbying of policymakers risked confrontation with the Charity

Commissioners, as well as exacerbating divisions within the sector regarding the acceptable limits of political engagement.

The 1960s concluded with a widespread recognition that the Development Decade had largely failed to lift Third World populations out of extreme poverty.¹⁰ However, humanitarian NGOs still entered the political arena with hesitation, restricted by the constraints of charity law, and anxieties concerning how overt political engagement would be interpreted by the general public. It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that more radical campaigns emerged, although these were revealingly rarely undertaken by the leading agencies directly. Instead, this political activity was hived out to external, non-charitable bodies such as the Haslemere Group, the World Development Movement, and *New Internationalist* magazine. While these institutions were legally distinct from the mainline agencies, in practice organisations such as Christian Aid, Oxfam, and War on Want all financed and supported them either directly or indirectly.

As the 1970s progressed, education and advocacy programmes continued to evolve and take on more importance, driven by the emergence of a distinctive NGO approach to development. As the First UN Development Decade came to an end, orthodox state-led development models were increasingly criticised for failing to address extreme poverty and inequality in the developing nations.¹¹ Disillusionment with economic growth also fostered a greater understanding of the interconnectedness of rich and poor nations,

¹⁰ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992), pp.153-154; Richard Jolly, *UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), p.107.

¹¹ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp.177-180; Kate Bayliss, 'Privatization Theory and Practice: A Critical Analysis of Policy Evolution in the Development Context', in Jomo KS and Ben Fine (eds.), *The New Development Economics: After the Washington Consensus* (London: Zed, 2006, pp.144-161); Philip McMichael, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective* (5th ed.: Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012).

and the structural forces which worked against long-term change.¹² In this climate, development NGOs engaged more systematically with various alternative theories and frameworks of development emanating from the global South. This included ideas of appropriate technology, liberation theology, and support for Julius Nyerere's experiment with *ujamaa* in Tanzania.¹³ A particularly influential concept was the notion of 'conscientisation', or consciousness-raising, associated with Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire.¹⁴

What united all of these ideas was a focus on bottom-up community development, and NGOs gradually incorporated these theories into a new conception of overseas aid in the 1970s. Whereas NGOs had supported official development policy in the 1960s, they now promoted an alternative model which emphasised sustainable grassroots programmes, working in partnership with local communities.¹⁵ In the process, these organisations were adopting a more socialist ideology, viewing their development work as a means to empower the global poor to liberate themselves from unjust economic, political and social conditions.¹⁶ Organisations such as Oxfam undertook a major

¹² Barbara Rugendyke and Cathryn Ollif, 'Charity to advocacy: Changing agendas of Australian NGOs', in Barbara Rugendyke (ed.), *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007, pp.17-43), p.26.

¹³ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.180-183; Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2008).

¹⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1973); E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Blond & Briggs, 1973); Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.180-183; Jennings, *Surrogates of the State*.

¹⁵ Peter J. Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp.96-128; Lewis and Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development*, pp.91-93; Nicola Banks and David Hulme, 'The role of NGOs and Civil Society in Development and Poverty Reduction', *BWPI Working Paper 171* (Manchester: Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, June 2012); Michael Jennings, 'NGOs', in Nic Cheeseman *et al.* (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of African Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, pp.322-333); David Lewis, *Non-Governmental Organizations, Management and Development* (3rd ed.: Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp.91-93.

¹⁶ Jennings, *Surrogates of the State*, p.121.

evolution in their programming as a result, moving from traditional missionary projects to a ‘multifaceted development process based on educational enlightenment’.¹⁷

Becoming practitioners of alternative development also stimulated debates within NGOs, concerning their philosophy of aid as a whole. Aid agencies explored ways to link their project work with their wider roles, aiming to scale up their efforts into broader schemes of alternative development. This shift in focus fostered a greater recognition of the need to twin grassroots development with more substantial educational and advocacy initiatives. Christian Aid and Oxfam both invested more substantially in this aspect of their work during the 1970s as a result. For instance, in 1974 the Oxfam Council of Management began allocating five per cent of all un-earmarked income to public education. A year later, the organisation set out a new mission statement which incorporated various radical theories of alternative development (in particular conscientisation) into its institutional character. Maggie Black has depicted this new statement as a ‘turning-point’ in the history of Oxfam, as a sense of solidarity with the poor displaced ‘the old idea of beneficence towards them’.¹⁸

Like Christian Aid and Oxfam, War on Want also pursued a more radical path over the course of the 1970s. War on Want's origins as a political campaigning body had generally allowed the organisation to navigate this course less problematically than other agencies. However, War on Want's overall effectiveness had been hindered in the late 1960s by its financial dependency on Frank Harcourt-Munning. Harcourt-Munning had been central to the revival of War on Want as a mainline NGO at the end of the 1950s, as discussed in chapter one. His insistence that ‘not one penny would be deducted from gifts for overseas aid to meet the costs of administration’ also increasingly stifled the

¹⁷ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, pp.177-202, quote at p.197.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.197.

organisation as the 1960s progressed.¹⁹ This amateur ethic was in stark contrast to other NGOs (especially Oxfam), who were professionalising and spending more on marketing to fuel organisational growth. War on Want's finances became increasingly unstable, and Harcourt-Munning was forced out in 1969.²⁰ His exit unleashed a process of professionalisation, as well as a further shift to the political Left. War on Want developed an extensive ideological attachment to grassroots development as the 1970s progressed, which also involved committing to a more vigorous campaigning role in Britain.²¹

This new outlook could be seen in War on Want's connection to the famous baby milk campaign. The campaign originated in a 1973 *New Internationalist* article on health problems and deaths among infants in the Third World, caused by the aggressive marketing of infant formula by baby food companies.²² The following year, War on Want produced an investigative report (*The Baby Killer*) which documented the mis-selling and subsequent misuse of infant formula by transnational corporations such as Nestlé.²³ War on Want's report publicised the story, and received wide circulation in the British press. The report was also translated and disseminated internationally, giving rise to a transnational advocacy campaign on the link between baby milk and Third World malnutrition. The movement had an immediate and lasting impact, resulting in an organised, international consumer boycott of Nestlé products. The campaign also led to the implementation of international Codes of Conduct, and a closer coming together of

¹⁹ Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

²¹ Mark Luetchford and Peter Burns, *Waging the War on Want: 50 Years of Campaigning against World Poverty* (London: War on Want, 2003), pp.74-76.

²² 'Action now on baby foods', *New Internationalist*, 6 (August 1973), <http://newint.org/features/1973/08/01/baby-food-action-editorial/> [accessed 31 March 2014].

²³ Mike Muller, *The Baby Killer: A War on Want investigation into the promotion and sale of powdered baby milks in the Third World* (London: War on Want, 1974).

Northern and Southern NGOs in shared advocacy.²⁴ The importance of *The Baby Killer* in sparking this movement was a major advocacy success for War on Want, and the organisation continued to campaign on the baby milk issue into the 1980s and beyond.

The baby milk advocacy network also represented a prototype for a new form of global campaigning by NGOs. This advocacy was characterised by diverse coalitions of transnational actors coming together on specific international issues, operating outside of traditional diplomatic and political channels. For instance, Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want all participated to some extent in the global anti-apartheid movement of the late 1970s, as part of a much broader transnational advocacy network.²⁵ Christian Aid and War on Want also began to engage with transnational human rights campaigning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, much of which was spearheaded by human rights NGOs such as Amnesty International. This was partly influenced by their work in Latin America, which experienced a rising spiral of political violence largely initiated by authoritarian military regimes.²⁶ What these various initiatives all pointed to was an increasing momentum of development NGOs taking up specific and more overtly political Third World issues in national and transnational arenas. In 1980 the General Secretary of War on Want acknowledged the intention to ‘gradually push forward the frontiers of War on Want's charitable objectives’. This was to specifically include ‘human rights, some

²⁴ John Clark, *Democratizing Development: The Role of Voluntary Organizations* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1990), pp.134-136; Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity For All: Consumer Activism in an Era of Globalisation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press); Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, pp.76-77.

²⁵ For more on the transnational anti-apartheid movement, see: Håkan Thörn, *Anti-Apartheid and the Emergence of a Global Civil Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational Activists in Britain and the United States, c.1919-64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²⁶ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, p.240. On Latin America during this period, see: Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

political angles, international economic relations, race relations... [and] international politics.’²⁷

In the process, NGO advocacy became more professional. Maggie Black documents how Oxfam's Public Affairs Unit had evolved into an efficient and effective research body by the early 1980s. The Unit published well-researched and sophisticated reports on specific issues, such as the misuse of pesticides and medicines in the developing world by multinational corporations. This approach to advocacy was based upon the authority of technical expertise, and was specifically directed at powerful actors in governmental and professional spheres rather than the general public.²⁸ This diverse range of NGO activities all fed back into a trajectory towards more overt political engagement on the root causes of poverty. In 1983 Oxfam underwent an internal reorganisation, increasing its education and campaigning staff numbers, and updating its charitable objectives. The organisation added to its mandate an aim to ‘educate the public concerning the nature, causes, and effects of poverty, distress and suffering... to conduct and procure research concerning these and to publish or otherwise make the results thereof available to the public’.²⁹

Crucially, increasing emphasis on advocacy also implied a shift away from emergency relief concerns, which were equated by many within the sector as traditional philanthropy, outdated and ineffective in the struggle for long-term change. An early example of this self-critique was the *Haslemere Declaration* in 1968, which likened charitable relief to ‘tossing sixpence in a beggar's cap: money given by those who have no intention of changing the system that produces beggars, and no understanding that they

²⁷ WOVA: Box 223, file 02042: W.O.W. Campaigns Limited, ‘Minutes of the first meeting of the Council of Management’, 31 May 1980.

²⁸ Black, *A Cause for Our Times*, p.255.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.256.

are part of it'.³⁰ More generally, this attitude was also reflected in a critique of NGO emergency advertising, which emerged from within the development community in the 1970s. This critique denounced the perpetuation of simplistic images of starving children as unethical, exploitative, and misleading. For instance, in 1973 Oxfam publicly announced its intention to stop using such imagery altogether, and instead seek to 'educate rather than incite pity'. The agency went on to state that 'people have become blunted by disaster, so we now intend to concentrate on the constructive aspect of our work in advertisements and to rely on local groups to do the follow-up in fundraising'. War on Want added at the same time that 'the starving child has really been flogged to death, and we now make the assumption that the energy we used to give to advertising for funds must be spent on education of the public here'.³¹

These criticisms reflected how many individuals within the NGO sector were interpreting the short-term objectives of charitable fundraising as contradictory to the longer-term aims of advocacy and education work. Instead, a growing number of commentators implicated this style of representation in advancing an unethical and colonial depiction of the Third World, which did not fit with the new rhetoric of empowerment, participation, and solidarity with the global poor. In an influential article in *New Internationalist* in 1981, Jørgen Lissner referred to such images as being 'pornographic', in that they exhibited 'the human body and soul in all its nakedness, without any respect and piety for the person involved'.³² Initially quite radical, this critique permeated through the development community in the late 1970s and early 1980s.³³

³⁰ The Haslemere Group, *The Haslemere Declaration* (London: Haslemere, 1968).

³¹ Lindsay Mackie, 'Oxfam changing child plea image', *The Guardian*, 6 October 1973, p.4.

³² Jørgen Lissner, 'Merchants of Misery', *New Internationalist*, 100 (June 1981).

³³ Henrietta Josephine Lidchi, "'All in the choosing eye": Charity, Representation and the Developing World' (Unpublished PhD thesis: Open University, 1993); Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about*

As the DEC was a central instrument for disaster relief, it also was subjected to this critique, advanced primarily by War on Want. Indeed, War on Want's radical trajectory in the 1970s stimulated within the organisation a growing dissatisfaction with the entire practice of humanitarian aid. Agency staff commented in 1973 that they no longer wished to have an 'ambulance function', arguing that they were 'not a disaster organisation... every attempt the organisation had made to participate in a disaster situation had diverted its efforts to carry on the task it was created to do'.³⁴ War on Want subsequently pushed for the DEC to evolve beyond a simple relief fundraising mechanism, and work instead towards development and public campaigning. By 1974, the War on Want Council of Management was discussing leaving the Committee altogether, although it was instead agreed to remain with a long-term objective to 'replace the existing DEC with a consortium for development'.³⁵

War on Want was not alone in this dissatisfaction with the Committee's emphasis on short-term crisis. Oxfam proposed that the DEC be renamed the 'Disaster Appeals Committee', arguing that the alteration would 'remove the "emergency" connotation whilst retaining the disaster concept'. It was envisaged that this would 'facilitate the change of emphasis from immediate relief into short-term rehabilitation and hopefully longer-term development'. The proposal was given serious discussion by the DEC, to the point of being put forward to the BBC and IBA for their consideration.³⁶

War on Want further criticised the DEC for its unbalanced approach towards aid and publicity, and placing 'too much emphasis on short-term relief rather than long-term

Atrocities and Suffering (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), pp.178-195; Nandita Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

³⁴ WOWA: Box 222, file 02037: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of Directors (Council)', 15 January 1973.

³⁵ WOWA: Box 223, file 02041: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Management', 2 September 1974.

³⁶ CAA: Box CA2/D/20, file CA2/D/20/2: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of matters discussed at a meeting of Chief Executives', 22 July 1975.

rehabilitation'. Instead they proposed that the DEC should function as an 'information-gatherer', and have a Charter which would 'include donor education among its functions'.³⁷ By 1977, War on Want's discomfort hardened to the point of simply giving away their proceeds from a DEC appeal for a cyclone in India, to the Indian Red Cross and other relevant bodies (including Oxfam). The agency subsequently sent out a letter to supporters indicating that 'War on Want does not plan to support every disaster'.³⁸ For War on Want, the issue was fundamentally one of political engagement. In 1977, disputes within the Committee over a proposed appeal for Mozambique were reported in the British press, and War on Want took the opportunity to publicly state that 'relief agencies cannot pretend not to be political. All aid involves political choices'.³⁹

Tensions between War on Want and the DEC came to a head in early 1979. Referring to the Indian cyclone appeal, General Secretary Mary Dines commented in January on the need to 'start thinking seriously about whether we continue our membership of the DEC... we should reconsider our position during the year'.⁴⁰ A month later, War on Want terminated its membership of the Disasters Emergency Committee. Agency staff attributed the DEC exit to Mary Dines, and her ideological conviction that War on Want should be engaged solely in long-term development.⁴¹ Dines had been an outspoken activist for migrant and refugee rights in Britain prior to joining the organisation in 1976, and under her leadership she pushed for War on Want to take up a more radical approach to development. This included overtly political campaigning in Britain, such as highlighting 'the links between development aid and imperialism'.⁴²

³⁷ WOWA: Box 223, file 02041: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Management', 20 January 1975.

³⁸ WOWA: Box 223, file 02041: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Management', 14 January 1978.

³⁹ Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Disaster turns political', *The Guardian*, 16 April 1977, p.6.

⁴⁰ WOWA: Box 222, file 02039: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Annual General Meeting', 6 January 1979.

⁴¹ WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Ken Ritchie', 15 January 2001.

⁴² 'War on Want magazine', *The Catholic Herald*, 14 July 1978.

Subsequently, when the DEC launched an appeal for East Africa in 1980, War on Want publicly stated that ‘our limited resources can be better utilised in working with organised groups in developing countries in their efforts to ensure future development’. The same statement added that War on Want was ‘not a relief agency as such. It is a development agency’.⁴³

While War on Want represented the radical edge of the sector, its criticism of the DEC did reflect a more general desire within the development community to downgrade the importance of emergency relief, and place more emphasis on addressing the root causes of global poverty. However, despite this discernible will to explore different avenues for NGO action, in practice the sector continued to be drawn back to disaster relief, which was presented publicly as apolitical. This was particularly evident in the consistent fundraising success of NGO emergency appeals, such as those made by the DEC. This appears to represent a significant paradox in the history of humanitarian NGOs, which requires unpicking.

The State and Technocratic Relief

The crucial driver in NGOs extending their involvement in emergency relief, despite an increasing political focus, was the British government. Indeed, the role of the state is integral to the historical development of humanitarian NGOs during this period. As chapter three documented, the creation of the Disaster Unit within the Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) in 1974 reflected an acceptance by government of the need for a more effective relief machinery. This mirrored similar developments in other Western nations and intergovernmental forums, as reforms were initiated on a number of

⁴³ quoted in Luetchford and Burns, *Waging the War on Want*, p.102.

fronts with the aim of improving relief co-ordination and effectiveness. Donor governments and UN agencies set up dedicated emergency units, and UNDRO was empowered as a central focal point. NGOs entered into new networks and coalitions, and a swathe of disaster research groups were established. What Randolph Kent termed the ‘international disaster relief network’ thus began to take shape at this time.⁴⁴ A recent paper has depicted a transnational humanitarian ‘knowledge community’ as emerging during this period, as the objectives of a network of interconnected actors ‘began to coalesce into collective methods for improving humanitarian response’.⁴⁵

Within Britain, the Disaster Unit was intended to act as a focal point for emergency relief, mirroring similar institutions established in other donor governments.⁴⁶ Initially only responsible for ‘man-made’ and ‘predictable’ disasters, the Disaster Unit’s key functions included providing emergency aid, liaising with UN agencies, and liaising with British NGOs. The Unit was also responsible for monitoring potential disasters, and advising the ODM and FCO on disaster related issues such as planning, research and training. The Unit placed strong emphasis on logistical management, maintaining a fleet of vehicles which could be deployed to disaster zones at short notice. While the Unit’s executive responsibilities were all related to short-term immediate relief, it also advised the ODM and FCO on post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction needs.⁴⁷

From the outset, the Disaster Unit attached considerable importance to integrating its work closely with the leading humanitarian NGOs, using the DEC as a vehicle. This reflected the ODM’s aim to enhance its capabilities by drawing upon the existing capacity,

⁴⁴ Randolph C. Kent, *Anatomy of Disaster Relief: The International Network in Action* (London: Pinter, 1987), pp.68-69.

⁴⁵ Eleanor Davey *et al.*, ‘A history of the Humanitarian System: Western Origins and Foundations’, *ODI HPG Working Paper* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2013), pp.29-34, quote at p.29.

⁴⁶ Randolph C. Kent, ‘Reflecting upon a Decade of Disasters: The Evolving Response of the International Community’, *International Affairs*, 59:4 (Autumn 1983), pp.693-711), pp.698-699.

⁴⁷ TNA: OD 69/14: ‘The Disaster Unit’, 7 December 1976.

experience and expertise of the NGO sector. For instance, the Disaster Unit held equipment reserves at a British Red Cross warehouse, and when it needed to obtain further supplies it would use the Red Cross as a purchasing agent.⁴⁸ This emphasis on working with the DEC also reflected how the voluntary sector as a whole was being afforded a new level of official recognition in the 1970s. Successive governments sought a more formalised relationship with NGOs, in which the tangible benefits of collaboration were clearly identifiable and measurable.⁴⁹ More specifically, the use of the DEC as a co-ordinating mechanism also reflected how the Committee members had consolidated their position as leading players in the humanitarian sector. The Disaster Unit was represented at DEC meetings after 1974, often seeking the expert advice of its members, and in 1978 the ODM began funding the costs of the DEC secretariat.⁵⁰

Collaboration between the DEC and the state usually involved the Disaster Unit taking up a co-ordinating role, overseeing and directing NGO relief efforts, for which it provided financial and logistical support. For instance, in April 1975 the ODM made a grant of £250,000 to the DEC, to fund emergency relief measures in South Vietnam and Cambodia. The grant formed part of a larger £1 million aid package for ‘humanitarian needs in Vietnam and Cambodia’, as the Vietnam War drew to a conclusion. Minister for Overseas Development Judith Hart announced the grant in the House of Commons, stating that ‘the [NGOs] are already working out the logistics with help from my Disaster Unit’. The ODM grant for Indochina also set a new precedent, as the first time the DEC mechanism was used to finance relief efforts without making an appeal to, or raising any funds from, the British public.⁵¹ The Disaster Unit continued to work closely with the

⁴⁸ TNA: 69/18: J.R. Hards, ‘Letter to T. Takata’, 20 October 1980.

⁴⁹ Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise*, pp.192-194.

⁵⁰ TNA: 69/18: J.R. Hards, ‘Letter to T. Takata’, 20 October 1980.

⁵¹ CAA: Box CA4/C/27, file CA4/C/27/4: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Expenditure of H.M.G. Grant for Emergency Relief in Indochina, 1975’, 31 December 1976.

DEC throughout the 1970s, co-ordinating and making grants for NGO relief operations. In 1976 the state channelled funding through the Committee in response to an earthquake in Guatemala. This was undertaken despite the Guatemalan government turning down an offer of bilateral aid from the British government due to political differences over Belize.⁵² In the same year, the Disaster Unit also made funding and support available to the DEC for relief efforts in response to an earthquake in Turkey, and the ongoing Civil War in Lebanon. Neither of these operations involved a DEC broadcast appeal to the public.⁵³

Initiatives such as these provided an additional revenue stream for the DEC members, further building up their relief capacities. In the process, an infrastructure for humanitarian aid gradually took shape, in which NGOs had an integral role as instruments of official aid policy, delivering emergency relief in return for government grants. Crucially, this nascent relief industry was also technocratic in character. The Disaster Unit emphasised logistical efficiency and technical expertise, based around notions of metrics, planning, resources and strategy. ODM staff acknowledged the divergence between the Unit's conception of emergency assistance, and the approach traditionally followed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO):

‘The Unit concentrates on humanitarian aspects, applying accumulated knowledge, experience and expertise; the FCO sees disaster relief as mainly political in character although they too have experience of disaster responses. The Disaster Unit's horizons are wide in that all available related data is taken into account; the FCO concentrate their efforts on a dialogue with the Head of Mission, responding usually in relation to what they think they are best able to do - invariably cash, medical supplies, tents, blankets...’⁵⁴

⁵² CAA: Box CA3/LA/C77, file 01: War on Want, ‘Guatemala Earthquake Appeal: Income and Expenditure Account for the period from 9th February 1976 to 9th September 1976’, September 1976.

⁵³ TNA: OD 15/130: Ministry of Overseas Development, ‘Turkish Earthquake: Minister offers charter-plane facilities for British voluntary agencies’, 29 November 1976; TNA: OD 15/130: Ministry of Overseas Development, ‘£450,000 for relief work in Lebanon’, 14 December 1976.

⁵⁴ TNA: OD 69/12: E.T. Barnes, ‘Future of the Disaster Unit: Relationship with FCO Natural Disasters Desk’, 26 September 1975.

The ODM staff utilised this perception of technical expertise to justify the Disaster Unit also assuming authority for responding to natural disasters, taking over from the FCO in late 1976. From this point on, the Unit was elevated into the focal point in government for ‘all questions arising from disasters in developing countries’.⁵⁵ Indeed, ODM staff argued that comparing the FCO and the Disaster Unit was an ‘an almost amateur-professional comparison’.⁵⁶ The Disaster Unit's approach was also inherently depoliticising of humanitarian crises and distant suffering, approaching them as technical problems that could be solved by more effective logistics, management and distribution. The exclusive focus on the immediate relief stage of disasters also implied an institutionalisation of humanitarian emergencies, as long-term causes and effects went unaddressed.

The incorporation of the DEC agencies into this infrastructure influenced them to operate in a similar way, sharing in the same language of technocratic expertise and planning as the Disaster Unit. Indeed, the Unit's professionalism reflected a broader standardisation of humanitarian action ongoing throughout this period, and the DEC considered the Unit to be an effective and reliable partner. Standardisation also implied a homogenisation of NGOs, and a move to the centre-ground ideologically. Following the ODM's assumption of authority for natural disasters in 1976, the DEC revealingly commented that they were ‘very pleased to hear that the Disaster Unit has now been assigned to deal with immediate relief aid for natural disasters as well as man-made disasters... we would like to express our congratulations’.⁵⁷

This integrated approach to relief co-ordination was apparent in the British response to a cyclone in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, in November 1977. The cyclone killed approximately 10,000 people, as well as causing widespread damage to

⁵⁵ TNA: OD 69/14: ‘The Disaster Unit’, 7 December 1976.

⁵⁶ TNA: OD 69/12: E.T. Barnes, ‘Future of the Disaster Unit: Relationship with FCO Natural Disasters Desk’, 26 September 1975.

⁵⁷ TNA: OD 69/14: Paul A. Adams (DEC Secretary), ‘Letter to B.W. Sellwood’, 11 November 1976.

livestock, crops and housing.⁵⁸ The Disaster Unit immediately took up a co-ordinating role, directing the DEC agencies (who also launched a broadcast appeal), contributing £190,000 for the purchase and transportation of NGO relief supplies, and supplying vehicles for DEC usage.⁵⁹ The reliance of the Unit on NGOs was financially and materially beneficial for the DEC members. It also represented an instrumentalisation of the sector, and the Unit's emphasis on administration and co-ordination reinforced the apolitical humanitarianism promoted by the DEC. War on Want revealingly played no part in the cyclone relief efforts, stating outright that they 'would not... be making any claims on government funds'.⁶⁰

Once the initial relief needs had been met, the ODM then turned its attention to implementing rehabilitation and development projects in the cyclone region. As bilateral aid was unacceptable to the Indian government in this context, the ODM proposed to channel official aid through the DEC instead, 'for medium and long term rehabilitation projects'.⁶¹ The increasingly close relationship between the ODM and the DEC at this time reflected an extension of governance beyond the formal state apparatus, as NGOs gradually became governmentalised.

This building up of a wider relief infrastructure by the state became more pronounced in the 1980s, as Britain's overseas aid policy was dramatically altered after the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government in 1979. The new administration downgraded the importance of development assistance, with more weight attached to commercial, industrial and political objectives. ODM staff numbers were cut,

⁵⁸ Raghavulu Naidu, 'Disaster Mitigation Measures for Cyclone-Prone Areas of Andhra Pradesh', in Pardeep Sahni *et al.* (eds.), *Disaster Mitigation: Experiences and Reflections* (New Delhi: PHI Learning, 2001, pp.67-75), p.68.

⁵⁹ TNA: OD 27/370: P.J. Walsgrove, 'Letter to Mr Windsor', 10 January 1978; TNA: OD 15/130: Ministry of Overseas Development, 'Britain's help for Indian Cyclone victims', 25 November 1977.

⁶⁰ TNA: OD 27/370: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of an informal meeting', 16 December 1977.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

and the Ministry itself was incorporated into the FCO and once again renamed as the Overseas Development Administration (ODA). The official aid budget consequently fell from 0.52 percent of gross national product (GNP) in 1979, to 0.32 percent by 1988.⁶² While these cuts represented a step backwards for the progress of long-term development, they also raised the relative importance of official disaster relief. In 1980 approximately 2 percent of the ODA budget was spent on humanitarian aid, rising to 11 percent by 1987.⁶³

Significant amounts of this funding were channelled through the NGO sector by the Disaster Unit, which retained its prominent role and reputation for professionalism in the 1980s.⁶⁴ For instance, a record sum of £6.1 million raised by a DEC appeal for refugees in East Africa in 1980 was inflated by a contribution of £500,000 from the ODA.⁶⁵ This also established a trend of the government making direct financial contributions to DEC broadcast appeals, which continues today.⁶⁶ The 1980s therefore witnessed a significant increase in the provision of disaster relief from the state to aid agencies, foreshadowing the prominence of NGOs as the preferred channel for humanitarian aid from donor governments and UN agencies in the post-Cold War era.⁶⁷

⁶² John Mitchell, 'Public campaigning on overseas aid in the 1980s', in Anuradha Bose and Peter Burnell (eds.), *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979: Between Idealism and Self-Interest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, pp.146-157), p.147.

⁶³ Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013), p.60.

⁶⁴ TNA: OD 69/18: Overseas Development Administration Disaster Unit, 'Replies to Questionnaire', October 1980.

⁶⁵ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 1): Disasters Emergency Committee, 'East African Emergency Appeal: Income and expenditure account for the period 6 June 1980 to 23 June 1981', 25 August 1981.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, the decision by the Department for International Development (DFID) to contribute £5 million to a DEC appeal for the Philippines in November 2013: Department for International Development, 'Typhoon Haiyan: UK Government will match public donations', 12 November 2013, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/typhoon-haiyan-uk-government-will-match-public-donations> [accessed 31 March 2014].

⁶⁷ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*; James D Fearon, 'The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.49-72); Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp.117-135.

Furthermore, these increases in official funding were facilitated by the rationalising of arrangements between the DEC and the state in the 1970s.

This building up of what increasingly resembled a technocratic humanitarian aid industry had an unstated outcome of containing the sector's political activities. The channelling of increasing amounts of disaster relief through aid agencies meant that the DEC members were all increasing their capacities for relief, despite the intention of the development-oriented organisations to focus on other aspects of their work. Furthermore, increasing official support also imposed new demands upon the sector for accountability and evaluation. The state also worked to restrict the sector's political involvement more directly in this period, through the interventions of the Charity Commissioners.

The principal development NGOs had attracted the scrutiny of the Commissioners in the 1960s, and the taking up of more radical advocacy in the 1970s by Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want risked further clashes. By the end of the decade all three were facing official reprimands for their activities. Oxfam was cautioned for a *Young Oxfam* publication in 1978, which was found to be 'undoubtedly of a political nature and... beyond what was permissible for a charity'.⁶⁸ Christian Aid was flagged for supporting the Commission on Churches Participation in Development, an overtly political body within the World Council of Churches which engaged in 'financing political action and effecting changes in society'.⁶⁹ In both cases, Christian Aid and Oxfam accepted the Commissioners rulings and sought to downplay their own politicisation, presenting themselves as moderate bodies to avoid further sanctions. In this context, maintaining and extending a capacity for emergency relief also allowed development agencies to present themselves as apolitical when it was pragmatic to do so.

⁶⁸ TNA: CHAR 9/4: Charity Commission, 'Minutes of a Board Meeting: Board (78) Seventh Meeting', 27 June 1978: Oxfam - Political Activities (file 202918 A/2).

⁶⁹ Gareth Parry, 'Leading charities accused of venturing into politics', *The Guardian*, 20 June 1979, p.2.

In contrast, War on Want became embroiled in direct and open confrontation with the Charity Commissioners. The organisation's donation to strikers at the Grunwick Film Processing Laboratories in London in 1976 created an outcry in the right-wing press, triggering a period of intense scrutiny by the state.⁷⁰ A subsequent meeting between War on Want and the Commissioners in 1978 turned into an extended recital of the NGO's unacceptable political activities:

'In addition to the unacceptable nature of some of the Charity's publications, its activities on research, in promoting campaigns, and on certain aid projects had also been said at the meeting to be open to legitimate criticism. Research into international trade unionism and investigation of the activities of tobacco firms, multinational companies, and defence expenditure seemed remote from the Charity's object of conducting research into the causes and ways of relieving poverty. The War on Want campaigns based on its investigations into drug companies, the arms trade, the sale of powdered milk, multinational companies and tobacco companies all appeared to fall within the term "propaganda" ...'.⁷¹

War on Want stated in its defence that it wished to 'move away from the traditional forms of relief and to concentrate on overcoming the causes of poverty'. However, the Commissioners concluded that 'the political and propaganda nature' of many of its publications and activities were 'inappropriate to a charity', and 'right outside the legitimate scope of the charitable field'.⁷² War on Want's overt advocacy thus brought the organisation into direct conflict with the institutional structures of the state. The dispute resulted in War on Want being forced to sell off its print department, which produced material for a number of clients who were deemed to be radical and non-charitable.⁷³ The organisation also had to set up a separate company (WOW Campaigns Limited) as a non-

⁷⁰ WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Andy Chetley', 30 June 2000.

⁷¹ TNA: CHAR 9/4: Charity Commission, 'Minutes of a Board Meeting: Board (78) Twelfth Meeting', 19 October 1978: War on Want (file 208724 A/2 & 24/7/23).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Andy Chetley', 30 June 2000.

charitable entity, to continue its more controversial work. Indeed, WOW Campaigns defined its objective as to ‘support War on Want in all its activities and carry on efforts which were prohibited... by charity law’.⁷⁴

Increasingly overt political involvement by NGOs in the 1970s attracted the interest of the political Right. The late 1970s and 1980s witnessed a series of attempts by right-wing organisations and lobbies to ascribe illegitimacy to the campaigning and educational activities of development NGOs. For instance, the *Daily Telegraph* published a hostile piece in 1978 which attacked Christian Aid and Oxfam for their financial backing of *New Internationalist*, depicted as a ‘politically extremist’ Marxist-Leninist publication.⁷⁵ Thatcher's Conservative government also worked against NGO advocacy by removing official funding for development education activities, which Labour had provided increasing support for between 1975 and 1979. After 1979 this source of finance was cut off, reflecting the government's view that such initiatives were better conducted by voluntary organisations outside of the official sphere.⁷⁶

While the Conservative administration cut support for development education, it continued and extended the financial support for NGO development programmes introduced by Labour in 1975 (the Joint Funding Scheme, or JFS). Furthermore, it did so despite moving away from Labour's original rationale of directing aid to the poorest communities in the global South.⁷⁷ This extension of the JFS was largely a reflection of the government's commitment to addressing welfare issues with non-state solutions, and was consistent with the Conservatives' wider faith in privatisation. Indeed, Peter Burnell

⁷⁴ WOVA: Box 223, file 02042: W.O.W. Campaigns Limited, ‘Minutes of the first meeting of the Council of Management’, 31 May 1980.

⁷⁵ George Szamuely, ‘Political use of charity’, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1978.

⁷⁶ Donald Geoffrey Harrison, ‘Oxfam and the rise of development education in England from 1959 to 1979’ (PhD thesis: University of London, 2008), p.254.

⁷⁷ Peter Burnell, ‘Introduction to Britain’s overseas aid: between idealism and self-interest’, in Bose and Burnell, *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979* (pp.1-31), p.19.

argues that maintaining the JFS permitted the ODA to ‘retreat some way from a direct commitment’ to global poverty reduction, by privatising this responsibility out to the NGO sector.⁷⁸ Furthermore, financing NGO projects also allowed the government to present itself as supporting international development, despite making reductions to the official aid budget. The growth of official funding for NGOs in this period can be interpreted as an undermining of more radical campaigning and containing the sector within the agenda of government, as resources for advocacy were reduced by the pressures of meeting the demands of ‘contract culture’.⁷⁹

The development-oriented DEC members were certainly aware of this possibility. War on Want declined to apply for official support from the JFS in 1977, on the grounds that additional staff would be required to set up the machinery necessary to meet ODM procedures and evaluation requirements. By contrast, Christian Aid and Oxfam both re-assigned extra staff for this very purpose.⁸⁰ What this all points to is that a diverse range of state institutions were working to keep the sector focused upon apolitical disaster relief, and restraining the more radical advocacy increasingly being articulated within the development community.

The Power of Television

This process of political containment was also reinforced by the media, in particular the actions of the television broadcasting authorities. Closer integration between the DEC and

⁷⁸ Burnell, *Charity, Politics and the Third World*, p.215.

⁷⁹ Mark Robinson, ‘An uncertain partnership: the Overseas Development Administration and the voluntary sector in the 1980s’, in Bose and Burnell, *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979* (pp.158-177), p.176; Smillie, *The Alms Bazaar*, p.173; Janet G. Townsend *et al.*, ‘The Role of the Transnational Community of Development Non-governmental Organizations: Governance or Poverty Reduction?’, *Journal of International Development*, 14:6 (August 2002, pp.829-839).

⁸⁰ WOWA: Box 223, file 02041: ‘Co-funding between Government/EEC and agencies’, 9 February 1977.

the state also developed in parallel with increasing co-ordination between the Committee and the BBC and IBA, which reflected the crucial role of television in mobilising humanitarian responses. While the broadcasters had been content to approve successive DEC appeal requests during the 1960s without comment, the authorities gradually became more interventionist over the course of the 1970s. The initial catalyst for this was the massive public response to Jonathan Dimbleby's documentary on famine in Ethiopia (*The Unknown Famine*), aired by ITV in October 1973, as discussed in chapter two.

The popular outcry caused by *The Unknown Famine* prompted a closer examination of the entire broadcast emergency appeals mechanism. The IBA interpreted the film's impact as a new phenomenon in broadcasting, where a disaster 'fails to make the news headlines and instead hits the public through a single documentary'. The authority therefore argued that the broadcasters would benefit from being in 'a better position to respond' to such disasters in future. One proposed solution was in 'relaxing the controls' of emergency appeals, so that programmes such as *The Unknown Famine* could be explicitly linked with a DEC appeal at the time of broadcast. To do so required closer collaboration between the broadcasters and the DEC, and television production companies were subsequently required to consult with both bodies in advance if they were producing current affairs programmes or documentaries on Third World disasters.⁸¹ For instance, the IBA anticipated a public response to a 1974 documentary on floods in Bangladesh, and arranged for the eventual broadcast to be accompanied by a limited DEC advertising campaign. Furthermore, they did so despite a consensus among the DEC members that the situation inside Bangladesh did not merit a full national appeal.⁸²

⁸¹ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 1): K.W. Blyth, 'Special Disaster Appeal Procedures: Memorandum by the IBA Appeals Secretary', 1 April 1974.

⁸² TNA: OD 69/2: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of the 93rd meeting', 25 September 1974; CAA: Box CA3/A/PAC54, file 01: Elizabeth Stamp (Oxfam Information Office), 'Bangladesh Floods: Bulletin no.2', 13 August 1974.

While this closer coming together of the DEC and the broadcasters reinforced the Committee's status as a leading humanitarian instrument in Britain, it also concealed a divergence of views between the two regarding the DEC's importance. For its members, the Committee's significance was that it prevented inter-agency competition and provided a single channel between themselves and television. However, for the broadcasters, the DEC's utility was that it provided a convenient and efficient funnel for the public sympathy that was inevitably generated by television coverage of major disasters. The BBC Board of Governors stated that the DEC existed to 'respond to humanitarian feelings in a British public already alert to a disaster emergency'.⁸³

While this arrangement worked effectively for large-scale emergencies that suddenly captured the news headlines, it also reinforced a limited, apolitical conception of the NGO sector as emergency-oriented. As this chapter has documented, this image was increasingly in opposition to the growing political ambitions of the majority of the DEC members. Indeed, Oxfam's proposal in 1975 that the DEC be renamed the Disaster Appeals Committee to facilitate a 'change of emphasis from immediate relief into short-term rehabilitation and hopefully longer-term development' represented a deliberate attempt to broaden out this definition of the DEC's work. However, in practice both the BBC and the IBA quickly dismissed the idea, taking the position that the present name was 'the most appropriate and definitely the most effective'. Reflecting its deference to the broadcasting authorities, the DEC quietly dropped the idea.⁸⁴

Attempts by the DEC members to expand the Committee's mandate in the early 1980s, to make appeals for slow-onset and unpublicised man-made emergencies, resulted

⁸³ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: 'Extract from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors', 6 June 1980.

⁸⁴ CAA: Box CA2/D/20, file CA2/D/20/2: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Notes of matters discussed at a meeting of Chief Executives', 22 July 1975; CAA: Box CA2/D/20, file CA2/D/20/2: Kenneth Slack, 'Letter to Paul Adams', 1 September 1975.

in a series of bitter disputes between themselves and the broadcasters. These tensions began with a DEC request for an appeal in 1980 for ‘starving, drought stricken people in the Horn of Africa’. The appeal was in response to the huge refugee problems affecting the Horn region and was very ambitious in scope, covering Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya.⁸⁵ The appeal was also very different in character to previous DEC appeals. The BBC Appeals Secretary observed the ‘little recent coverage of these problems in the press’, which contradicted the perceived need for broadcast emergency appeals to be geared towards a ‘demonstrable outburst of public feeling’. The same official added that the BBC was not in favour of ‘trying to institute a third stage of appeals, for... annual appeals to provide aid to particular parts of the world’. It was argued that to do so could ‘destroy the DEC system which has worked well over the years’.⁸⁶

The perception that the DEC was trying to institute a new ‘stage of appeals’ indicated a hostile reaction to the Committee's request, which was seen as a departure from standard practice. Lewis Waddilove, Chairman of the Central Appeals Advisory Committee (CAAC), similarly interpreted the East Africa request as evidence of the DEC ‘virtually dictating the terms on which they shall make their appeals’. Waddilove stressed that the DEC did ‘not have some right to television time on the two channels to make appeals whenever they think some issue has arisen which justifies asking the public for support’.⁸⁷

While the appeal eventually went ahead in June 1980, raising a unexpected record sum of £6.1 million in the process, the request undermined the relationship between the DEC and the broadcasting authorities. These tensions were further exacerbated by a DEC

⁸⁵ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Aide Memoire on Refugees/Drought in Eastern Africa’, May 1980.

⁸⁶ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: D.B. Mann (BBC Appeals Secretary), ‘Horn of Africa Emergency Appeal’, 3 June 1980.

⁸⁷ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Lewis E. Waddilove, ‘Letter to D.B. Mann’, 17 June 1980.

request in 1982 for an appeal to aid ‘refugees and displaced persons in El Salvador and other Central American countries’. El Salvador had been in a state of civil war since 1980, and a violent climate of insurgency and state-sanctioned repression led to massive refugee displacements into neighbouring countries. The BBC was troubled by the request, as like East Africa there was no apparent ‘outburst of public feeling to which the broadcasting authorities were responding’.⁸⁸

In requesting these appeals, the DEC members were attempting to utilise the broadcast appeals mechanism to raise public awareness of complex, long-term, and politically volatile humanitarian crises which had gone largely unreported in the British media. The requests were partly a reflection of a changing global humanitarian environment, as a number of armed conflicts generated massive refugee displacements in the late 1970s.⁸⁹ It also reflected a changing humanitarian context in Britain, as institutional growth, professionalisation, and an increasing political focus all contributed to the principal NGOs expanding their ambitions to tackle more controversial issues.

Indeed, the BBC was especially troubled by the ‘possible political difficulties’ of airing an emergency appeal for Central America.⁹⁰ This referred to how the region had become a highly politicised geopolitical flash point in the early 1980s, as the US government designated El Salvador to be a key battleground in its renewed battle with Soviet communism. For the BBC, airing an emergency appeal was to risk also giving implicit political ‘endorsement of a particular relief programme’.⁹¹ This situation was

⁸⁸ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: D.B. Mann, ‘DEC Enquiry about Emergency Appeal for El Salvador’, 8 January 1982.

⁸⁹ Rony Brauman, ‘Refugee Camps, Population Transfers, and NGOs’, in Jonathan Moore (ed.), *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, pp.177-193), p.178.

⁹⁰ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: D.B. Mann, ‘DEC Enquiry about Emergency Appeal for El Salvador’, 8 January 1982.

⁹¹ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Denis Mann, ‘Note on a meeting between Lord Hunt of Tanworth, Chairman of the Disasters Emergency Committee, Colonel Terry Palmer, Chairman of the British Red Cross Society, and Mr. Lewis Waddilove, Chairman of the Central Appeals Advisory Committee’, 10 February 1982.

complicated by public allegations that humanitarian NGOs, including Oxfam, had channelled funding to ‘left-wing guerrillas’ fighting the El Salvadorian military regime.⁹² The BBC even sought guidance from staff in the Foreign Office, who advised that the government was ‘aware that the situation in El Salvador was highly politicised’. The Foreign Office added that the refugee displacements would most likely result in ‘a growth of anti-American feeling among people who thought also that the government should declare opposition to present American policies’.⁹³ The BBC's consultation with the FCO was later leaked to the press by an unnamed DEC member, further fuelling a hostile atmosphere.⁹⁴

The BBC's anxieties over being associated with a political stance on Central America reflected the Corporation's long-standing commitments to impartiality and political neutrality, bound up in its ethos of public service broadcasting.⁹⁵ Humanitarian NGOs had been restricted by this emphasis on neutrality before. Christian Aid had to make last-minute alterations to a BBC television appeal in 1968, as the Corporation objected to the statement ‘we are the ones who erect barriers against the exports of the poorer nations’ as being too political. Christian Aid's head of communications notably conceded that ‘in this instance one must buckle under, because the BBC give free TV time to charities on the understanding that they say nothing “political”’.⁹⁶ This also fitted into a

⁹² David Blundy, ‘Oxfam charged with ‘funding’ guerrilla Left’, *The Sunday Times*, 14 June 1981, p.8; Brian Walker, ‘Oxfam's relief funds reach those in need’, *The Sunday Times*, 21 June 1981, p.9.

⁹³ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: A.M.A. Palaus, ‘Appeal for Central America’, 18 February 1982; BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: ‘Record of telephone conversation with Mr. John Ure, Under-Secretary in charge of Central America Department of the Foreign Office’, 19 February 1982.

⁹⁴ ‘TV ban on aid appeal feared’, *The Observer*, 21 February 1982, p.11.

⁹⁵ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: Press, broadcasting and the internet in Britain* (7th ed: Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

⁹⁶ CAA: CA/I/14, file CA/I/14/4: Hugh Samson, ‘Christmas Day TV Appeal’, 18 December 1968.

longer lineage of the BBC regulating and restricting the political content of charitable appeals in the broadcast media.⁹⁷

The BBC was particularly sensitive to not appearing political in the 1980s, as both the Conservative Party and Conservative government initiated a series of attacks upon the Corporation for its alleged left-wing bias. This also led to the BBC Board of Governors gradually becoming stacked with Conservative appointments over the course of the decade.⁹⁸ Indeed, in this hostile political atmosphere both the BBC and development NGOs were under similar scrutiny from the political Right. BBC staff notably acknowledged that the El Salvador dispute had been compounded by the ‘overt political involvement of some of those who worked for charities’.⁹⁹ The BBC Board of Governors eventually allowed the Central America appeal to go ahead, on the grounds that to reject it would also be interpreted as a ‘political gesture’. There was therefore ‘less danger’ to the Corporation to agree to the broadcast.¹⁰⁰ Notably, both the BBC and the IBA refused to provide any of their own staff to present the appeal, which led to the unique situation of DEC Chairman Lord Hunt presenting his own organisation's appeal.¹⁰¹ In a reflection of the heated debates that had taken place, the appeal's script emphasised at the outset that it was ‘not concerned with politics’.¹⁰²

The BBC's admission that the El Salvador issue had been complicated by the ‘overt political involvement’ of certain NGOs was revealing. It suggested that increased awareness of the advocacy work of development NGOs had also impacted upon these

⁹⁷ Eve Colpus, ‘The Week's Good Cause: Mass Culture and Cultures of Philanthropy at the Inter-War BBC’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22:3 (2011, pp.305-329), pp.313-315.

⁹⁸ Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, pp.205-209.

⁹⁹ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: ‘Extract from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Radio Weekly Programme Review Board’, 23 June 1982.

¹⁰⁰ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: ‘Extract from the Minutes of a Board of Governors' Meeting: 77 - Central America: Application for Emergency Appeal’, 25 February 1982.

¹⁰¹ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: ‘Extract from the Minutes of a Board of Management Meeting: 278 - Central America: Application for Emergency Appeal [257]’, 8 March 1982.

¹⁰² BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: ‘Central America Disaster Appeal’, 8 March 1982.

agencies' collective room to manoeuvre. Now, established institutions such as the BBC and IBA were less prepared to tolerate what they regarded as inappropriate political engagement by charitable organisations. Furthermore, the heavy reliance of the DEC upon the broadcasters for continued access to television meant that in practice, the NGOs were compelled to defer to their authority and accept their decisions. This was despite the voicing of harsh critiques of the broadcasters within the privacy of Committee meetings, such as an internal DEC report which referred to the BBC's 'petty bureaucratic wrangling'.¹⁰³

DEC Chairman Lord Hunt was a key moderating influence in this regard, persuading the member agencies that they could 'not just assume the co-operation of the broadcasting authorities... these facilities were a privilege rather than a right'.¹⁰⁴ Following the El Salvador appeal, the DEC made a deliberate effort to restore its relations with the broadcasters. The DEC Handbook (which laid out the Committee's policies and procedures) was gradually revised over the course of 1982 and 1983, with the broadcasters closely involved throughout. The new Handbook, finalised in January 1984, laid down stricter guidelines for when the DEC could request an appeal, stipulating three criteria that all had to be met:

'(i) that an emergency has arisen; (ii) that the DEC charities are committed to an immediate and effective response; and (iii) that there is a sufficient degree of public awareness of an emergency to make probable a substantial response'.¹⁰⁵

The new Handbook also wrote into DEC policy that the Broadcasters would have ultimate authority over all appeals, in consultation with the CAAC. The broadcasters thus

¹⁰³ CAA: Box CA4/G/4, file CA4/G/4/1: Christian Aid, 'Report on Appeal for Central American Refugees of Disasters Emergency Committee', 20 April 1982.

¹⁰⁴ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 2): Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Minutes of Chief Executives meeting', 7 June 1982.

¹⁰⁵ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Disasters Emergency Committee Handbook', January 1984.

effectively ensured that ‘creeping’ disasters such as those in East Africa and El Salvador would no longer automatically qualify for broadcast appeals. Furthermore, the requirement for a ‘sufficient degree of public awareness’ upheld the broadcaster's limited conception of the Committee as a mechanism to provide ‘a single focus for public giving, and a single body to oversee the distribution’.¹⁰⁶ What the Central America dispute demonstrated therefore was an overt policing of the political boundaries of the humanitarian sector by the television broadcasters, especially the BBC. This also reinforced the significant gap between the simplistic, apolitical emergency fundraising of the DEC, and the broader developmental campaigning being carried out by certain elements within the sector. Indeed, the actions of the broadcasters arguably undermined this advocacy work altogether, in that it ensured that one of the most high-profile means of communication between the sector and the public would continue to be concerned solely with depoliticised images and narratives of human suffering.

The deliberate confining of the DEC's mandate to publicised major disasters was also an acknowledgement of the power of television images of human suffering to evoke a popular response. Indeed, by the late 1970s an assumption that television coverage was essential to effective humanitarian response had become embedded within the NGO sector. An initial reduced public response to the 1977 DEC Indian cyclone appeal was attributed directly to a ‘lack of TV, radio and press coverage’.¹⁰⁷ It took the return of representatives from the disaster area (who were then interviewed on television), and the screening of another Jonathan Dibleby documentary, to reinvigorate the appeal and capture the attention of the public. This reliance on the mass media was not lost on the aid agencies. The Director of Christian Aid asked publicly in the *Times* ‘have our minds been

¹⁰⁶ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Lewis E. Waddilove, ‘Notes on the Handbook of the Disasters Emergency Committee’, 1982.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: OD 27/370: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Notes of the 108th meeting’, 9 December 1977.

so satiated with images that our imaginations remain unkindled without that visual reporting?’¹⁰⁸ The record public response to a DEC appeal for East Africa in 1980 of £6.1 million appeared to provide an answer. The DEC Secretary summarised the fundraising total as ‘a magnificent result... a demonstration of the powerful effect that television can have in engendering public support’.¹⁰⁹

The consistent impact of provocative images of disaster also served to highlight the lack of television attention to more complex development issues, or indeed to broader events in the developing world as a whole. A substantial body of literature has documented how Western media reporting of the developing world, especially television, tends to be heavily biased towards dramatic emergencies or crises. By contrast, it is argued that the mass media provides little reporting of substance on routine economic or politic events in the global South, especially in Africa. This is generally attributed to the news values and judgements institutionalised within the mass media, which attach less importance to events the farther they occur away from home.¹¹⁰

The history of British television during this period suggests that this depiction is accurate. Influential journalists such as Jonathan Dimbleby have stated how they felt obliged to downplay their pro-development opinions in their programmes during this

¹⁰⁸ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Indian Cyclone appeal’, *The Guardian*, 13 January 1978, p.1; Kenneth Slack, ‘Why India's “low-profile” disaster failed to move the world’, *The Times*, 14 January 1978, p.14.

¹⁰⁹ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 1): Colonel J T Palmer, ‘Letter to M Gillies’, 29 October 1981.

¹¹⁰ Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2:1 (1965, pp.64-91); Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986); Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Greg Philo, ‘From Buerk to Band Aid: the Media and the 1984 Ethiopian Famine’, in John Eldridge (ed.), *Getting the Message: News, Truth and Power* (London: Routledge, 1993, pp.104-125); Larry Minear *et al.*, *The News Media, Civil War and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996); Tim Allen and Jean Seaton (eds.), *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London: Zed, 1999); Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999); CARMA International, *The CARMA Report on Western Media Coverage of Humanitarian Disasters* (Washington, DC: CARMA, 2006); Simon Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2009); Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: C.Hurst & Co., 2013).

period, as ‘development was then a minority interest’.¹¹¹ There were some successes in raising the profile of international development on television in the early 1980s, in particular the organised lobbying of newly-founded Channel 4 to commit to development education in 1982. This resulted in the creation of the International Broadcasting Trust, which brought together a Consortium of NGOs to produce Third World programmes.¹¹² However, on the whole, television coverage of aid and development issues was deeply biased towards simplistic accounts of disasters and human suffering during this period.

This lack of media interest in Third World events was exacerbated by the rapid institutional and technological changes that were taking place within the global media industry. Television news was revolutionised during the 1970s by the parallel developments of communications satellites and electronic news-gathering processes. As television news departments moved from using traditional film to portable video cameras and satellite linked delivery systems, the time delay between capturing and broadcasting footage was dramatically reduced.¹¹³ However, in becoming more immediate, the quality of reporting on foreign events was also downgraded. The ‘relentless search for instant news’ led to a shortening of deadlines and added pressures on news editors, increasing tendencies toward simplification.¹¹⁴ The high costs of maintaining television crews overseas, in comparison to the costs of accessing satellite material, resulted in the BBC and ITV significantly reducing their number of specialist foreign correspondents by the early 1980s. Instead, the broadcasters relied on international news agencies, and non-

¹¹¹ Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, p.44.

¹¹² Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, pp.63-65; Peter Catterall (ed.), *The Making of Channel 4* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999); ‘A Trust in Television’, *New Internationalist*, 119 (January 1983).

¹¹³ Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, pp.68-78; Edward Bliss, *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp.444-445; Edward S. Herman and Robert McChesney, ‘The Rise of the Global Media’, in Lisa Parks and Shanti Kumar (eds.), *Planet TV: A Global Television Reader* (NY: New York University Press, 2003, pp.21-39); Jonathan Higgins, *Satellite Newsgathering* (2nd ed.: Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2007), pp.13-20.

¹¹⁴ Harrison and Palmer, *News out of Africa*, p.72.

specialist reporters who were quickly flown in and out to cover major stories. The British press experienced a similar trajectory during this period, as the number of specialist correspondents in Africa dwindled to almost zero.

This decline in specialist knowledge of the developing world, especially Africa, further skewed reporting of the region towards ‘the spectacular, the bizarre or the truly horrific’.¹¹⁵ Consequently, negative popular conceptions and stereotypes of Africa and the Third World were reinforced, further undermining the effectiveness of NGO advocacy campaigns while increasing support for humanitarian philanthropy. Indeed, the impact of visual images of distant suffering upon the popular imagination was also strengthened by technological developments which improved picture quality, such as the spread of colour television in the mid-1970s.¹¹⁶

The Agency of NGOs

This chapter has shown how the power and influence of the state politically contained the humanitarian NGO sector, by building up an infrastructure for emergency relief around the DEC. The television broadcasters also actively reinforced this trend. However, focusing solely on this process of instrumentalisation can also imply that the DEC members were passively incorporated into an emerging aid architecture, without any agency themselves. In practice, the principal NGOs actively contributed towards building up a depoliticised disaster industry, as a result of their own deliberate and short-termist decision making. Despite expressing discomfort with the characteristics of emergency relief, the DEC agencies recognised that dramatic disaster appeals in the media were

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.76-82.

¹¹⁶ Arthur Marwick, ‘Social Trends, Structures, Values and Behaviour’, in Jonathan Hollowell (ed.), *Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp.241-259), p.254; Mark Clapson, *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.385.

unmatched in their effectiveness at capturing popular attention. Provocative images of suffering children therefore remained the most efficient method of driving fundraising and organisational growth within a crowded humanitarian marketplace. Furthermore, NGOs also struggled with the deeper-rooted dilemmas raised by becoming more political, which fostered divides within the sector and subtly encouraged aid agencies back towards familiar, apolitical charitable relief.

The most obvious demonstration of this agency of NGOs was the frequent DEC requests for broadcast emergency appeals. While the DEC was often obliged to make sudden appeals when disasters suddenly broke into the news cycle, the Committee also met regularly to discuss operations and pool information. The DEC also monitored for disasters which were considered serious enough to warrant an appeal, and the agencies often put forward requests to the broadcasters. When granted, these broadcast appeals all conformed to a typical model for emergency fundraising which was by now deeply embedded in the sector. As in the 1960s, these DEC appeals were designed to elicit an emotional response from the viewer, through an emphasis on provocative images of human suffering and simplistic accounts of humanitarian altruism. Furthermore, the Committee did so despite the emerging critique of this form of representation being articulated from within the sector. For instance, both Christian Aid and CAFOD expressed concerns within the DEC regarding a planned appeal for refugees in Indochina in 1979, stressing ‘the danger of misleading the public into thinking of this as a problem which can be met adequately by extra funds’.¹¹⁷ However, despite this unease, the final production was a crude and simplistic overture to the viewer to ‘do something special for the children’.¹¹⁸ In a similar vein, the DEC appeal for East Africa in 1980 raised a record

¹¹⁷ CAA: Box CA3/A/PAC80: Carlisle Patterson, ‘Memo to Michael Hawkes’, 14 August 1979.

¹¹⁸ BBC WAC: file B420-4-3: BBC, ‘Disasters Emergency Committee Appeal for Indo-China Refugees by Julian Pettifer (HHA 230J889)’, 12 September 1979.

amount on the basis of exploitative images of starving African children which were being denounced as ‘pornographic’ by a growing number of critics (image 4.1).

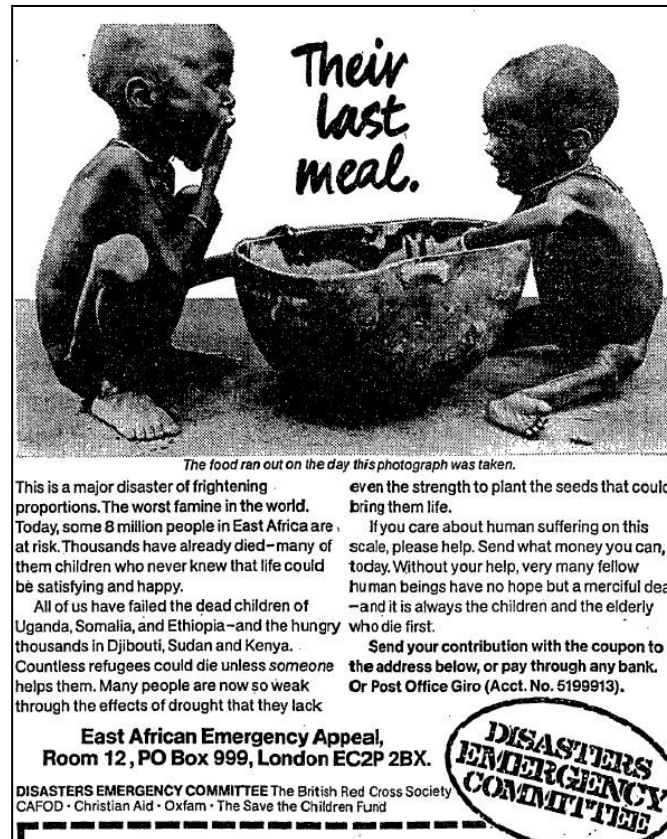


Image 4.1: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘East African Emergency’ press appeal, June 1980.¹¹⁹

The perpetuation of this publicity style indicates how the growth of NGOs during this period was ultimately a process being driven by emergencies. Despite Oxfam's statement in 1973 that people had become ‘blunted by disaster’, public support for emergency relief increased, spurred by continued advances in communications and media technologies. The potential of media-driven humanitarianism to fuel the rise of aid agencies was emphatically demonstrated by the crisis in Cambodia in late 1979. Cambodia suffered greatly under the genocidal rule of the Khmer Rouge in the latter half of the 1970s, and

¹¹⁹ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘East African Emergency Appeal’, *The Guardian*, 14 June 1980, p.17.

the sudden removal of Pol Pot from power in early 1979 left the country in ruins. Media exposure of the widespread suffering of the Cambodian population in Autumn of that year thrust the region into the international limelight, paving the way for a massive aid intervention.¹²⁰

For the British humanitarian sector, the entry of Oxfam into Phnom Penh in August 1979 before any other major international NGO allowed the organisation to monopolise publicity for Cambodian relief. This was aided by the coinciding of Oxfam's mission to Phnom Penh with a visit by outspoken journalist John Pilger and his team to the region, to film a documentary for ITV. Pilger's account of the suffering inside Cambodia, first published in a 'shock issue' of the *Daily Mirror* in September, depicted Oxfam as the only aid organisation making a positive contribution. In contrast, Pilger savagely criticised the ICRC and the UN, and the international community in general, for alleged inaction and indifference in failing to address the crisis. Pilger's reports triggered a massive reaction and demands for relief from the public, which also ensured a huge cash response for Oxfam.¹²¹ Further impetus was provided by the eventual airing of Pilger's Cambodia documentary on ITV in October (*Year Zero*), which was framed in a similar manner to his *Daily Mirror* reports.¹²² Brian Walker, Oxfam's Director during this period, later wrote that the 'massive external media coverage triggered by Pilger's "Killing Fields" article... alerted European and North American populations to the disaster and its

¹²⁰ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.214-235; see also: William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust and Modern Conscience* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1984); Babu M. Rahman, 'Constructing Humanitarianism: An investigation into Oxfam's changing humanitarian culture, 1942-1994' (PhD thesis: University of Wales, 1998), pp.91-98; Brian Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia', in Larry Minear and Hazel Smith (eds.), *Humanitarian Diplomacy: Practitioners and their Craft* (NY: United Nations University Press, 2007), pp.133-152; Larry Clinton Thompson, *Refugee Workers in the Indochina Exodus, 1975-82* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010).

¹²¹ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.203-205; John Pilger, 'Death of a Nation', *The Daily Mirror*, 12 September 1979, p.1, pp.3-17.

¹²² ATV, *Year Zero: The Silent Death of Cambodia*, first broadcast ITV, 30 October 1979, 9pm (Television).

scale, stimulating an enormous public response'.¹²³ As with Biafra a decade earlier, Oxfam's monopolisation of publicity also resulted in the DEC mechanism being sidelined, as the majority of the public preferred to donate to Oxfam directly.¹²⁴ The DEC was also impeded in this regard by the membership of the British Red Cross. The ICRC was presented in a very negative light in Pilger's media reports, and many of those who donated to Oxfam stipulated that none of their contribution should go through any Red Cross bodies.¹²⁵

Galvanised by the huge popular response, Oxfam launched an intense publicity drive, based on simplistic discourses of suffering children and Christmas generosity (image 4.2). Oxfam featured prominently throughout press and television coverage of the crisis, becoming strongly associated with Cambodian relief in the popular imagination. The BBC Children's television programme *Blue Peter* launched an appeal for Cambodia which was explicitly undertaken in support of Oxfam, and linked to the organisation's fundraising apparatus. The *Blue Peter* appeal was a great success, raising over £3 million for Oxfam by the time it closed in December.¹²⁶ The huge funds being tapped fuelled an intensive and remarkable period of expansion. Oxfam's income rose from £9.64 million in April 1979 to £18.76 million in April 1980, a 94 per cent rise in the space of just twelve months.¹²⁷ This in turn enabled the organisation to plan and execute a comprehensive aid mission that dwarfed any previous non-governmental undertaking. Oxfam led an NGO consortium of 31 voluntary organisations to implement an aid programme inside Cambodia, which involved bringing in regular barges loaded with relief supplies,

¹²³ Walker, 'NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia', p.143.

¹²⁴ CAA: Box CA3/A/PAC80: Jenny Borden, 'DEC Meeting 3rd October', 3 October 1979.

¹²⁵ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00440, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 2): Brian Walker, 'Letter to Charles Denton (Controller of Programmes, ATV)', 14 January 1980.

¹²⁶ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p.229.

¹²⁷ Oxfam, *Accounts for the financial year May 1979-April 1980* (Oxford: Oxfam, 25 June 1980).

including food aid and vehicles.¹²⁸ The programme ran at a cost of £2million per month, and Oxfam UK's leadership was reflected by it contributing half of all funding.¹²⁹

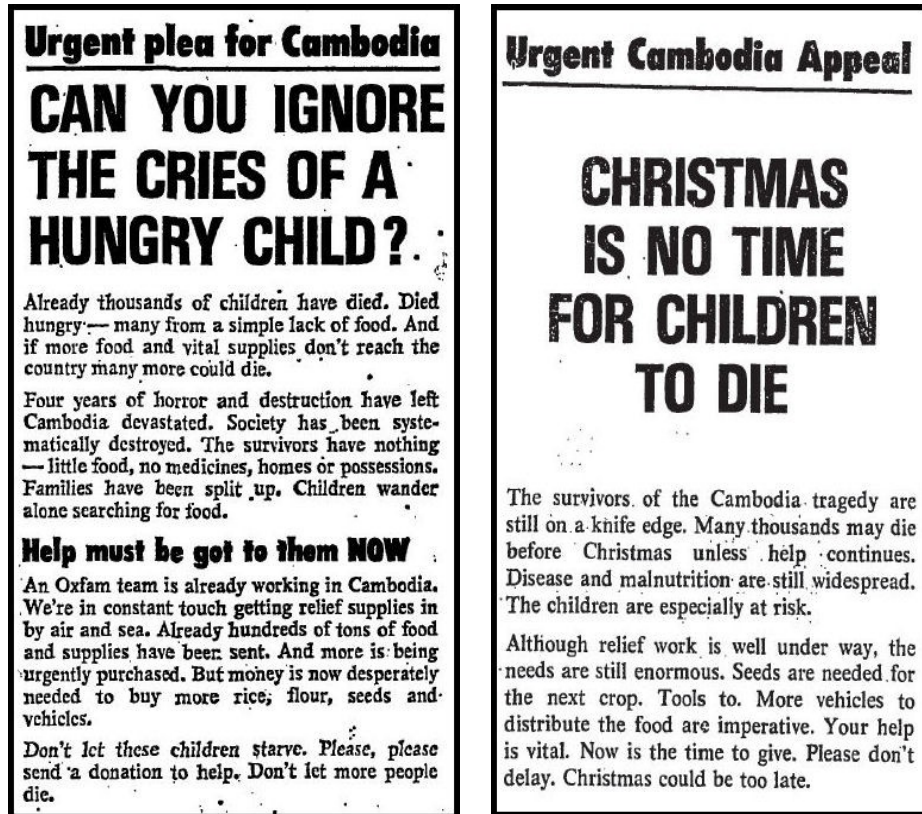


Image 4.2: Oxfam press appeals for Cambodia, October 1979.¹³⁰

The scale of Oxfam's response to Cambodia attested to how aid agencies could capture the imagination of the public with simplistic, emotional representations of disaster relief. Oxfam and its NGO partners also benefitted from a depiction of themselves in the media as bold, non-bureaucratic actors who had 'broken through the political barriers' to get aid to those who most needed it. This was often contrasted to the indifference of donor governments and intergovernmental bodies, a narrative which it was in the institutional

¹²⁸ Oxfam, *A Review of the Year 1979-80* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1980), p.6; Marcus Busch, *Angkar L: A short history of LWF Cambodia, 1979 to 2007* (Phnom Penh: Lay Leanghak/LWF Cambodia, 2008), p.8.

¹²⁹ Oxfam, *A Review of the Year 1979-80*, p.8.

¹³⁰ Oxfam, 'Urgent plea for Cambodia', *The Guardian*, 19 October 1979, p.14; Oxfam, 'Urgent Cambodia Appeal', *The Guardian*, 31 October 1979, p.6.

interest of the NGOs to maintain.¹³¹ The moral question of ‘can you ignore the cries of a hungry child?’ created an effective international appeal that disassociated the Oxfam Consortium from the political complexities and diplomatic wrangling that had ensnared the intergovernmental aid agencies. This approach deeply resonated with the general public, and popular compassion rallied behind Oxfam. According to one survey, over 80 percent of the British population supported Oxfam's work in Cambodia.¹³² The unprecedented scope of the NGO Consortium aid programme also indicated how the continued growth and professionalisation of aid agencies had created new opportunities for prominence within the emerging disaster relief system.

The substantial donations that high-profile disaster relief operations generated also sharpened competition within the humanitarian sector. Competitive pressures and tensions worked to undermine shared advocacy goals, as NGOs instead became preoccupied by short-term institutional growth. While the DEC had been designed as a means to dampen this competition, rivalries could quickly erupt between its members if the Committee was sidelined, as was the case with Cambodia in 1979. Indeed, Oxfam's monopolisation of publicity for Cambodian relief resulted in heated confrontation within the privacy of the DEC, especially after the broadcasting of John Pilger's documentary *Year Zero*. The production company responsible for *Year Zero* (ATV) had anticipated a strong public response to the footage, and included within the programme details of a Cambodia Fund for viewers to donate to. Within three days the fund had reached £250,000, eventually rising to over £1 million. However, the Cambodia Fund also bypassed the established procedures for broadcast emergency appeals, which stipulated that the DEC was the only recognised channel for public contributions. Despite this policy, ATV and Pilger resisted

¹³¹ For instance, see: Nick Davies, ‘Oxfam to send aid to Cambodia’, *The Guardian*, 12 September 1979, p.8.

¹³² cited in Walker, ‘NGOs break the Cold War impasse in Cambodia’, pp.147-148.

handing over the funds to the DEC, stating that it would be ‘embarrassing’ for the British Red Cross to receive any proceeds given the sharp criticisms made of the ICRC in Pilger's film. Instead, the filmmakers preferred to channel the donations directly to Oxfam, handing over the first £250,000 to the Oxfam NGO Consortium.¹³³

This decision provoked outrage from the other four DEC agencies. The Director of Christian Aid wrote to the IBA on their behalf, stating that ATV's actions were a ‘departure from all earlier practices’, and that the Cambodia Fund had no genuine legal standing. For the agencies, the incident was a deliberate undermining of the established system, which risked a ‘diminution of confidence’ in the broadcasters in future.¹³⁴ The British Red Cross was also incensed by Pilger's public ‘denigration’ of the ICRC, and attempted to gain assurances from the IBA that the film would not be distributed internationally (without success).¹³⁵ Within the DEC, conflict flared up between Oxfam and its Committee partners. At a meeting between the DEC, the IBA and ATV in early 1980, Oxfam Director Brian Walker openly stated that his organisation:

‘...does not recognise the right of the DEC to dictate how funds are spent or through which channels, once the closing date of a DEC appeal has passed... ATV, in Oxfam's view, were entitled to decide to whom, and through which channels their donations should be spent... Oxfam recognises that the DEC would have been a sensible reference point from which ATV could seek guidance as to how they might distribute their funds - but not as a DEC right. The power of decision can and must lie with ATV/IBA’.¹³⁶

The dispute was eventually settled by the intervention of the Central Appeals Advisory Committee, which made a pragmatic decision to allocate the remaining funds equally

¹³³ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00439, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 1): ‘Pilger: Cambodia’, 31 October 1979; ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00439, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 1): ‘Memo to David Glencross’, 2 November 1979.

¹³⁴ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00439, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 1): Kenneth Slack, ‘Letter to Sir Brian Young’, 2 November 1979.

¹³⁵ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00439, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 1): Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, ‘Letter to the Lady Plowden’, 6 November 1979.

¹³⁶ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00440, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 2): Brian Walker, ‘Aide-Memoire to Members of ATV/IBA and DEC attending the meeting on 26 February 1980’, 20 February 1980.

among the DEC members. The DEC accepted the solution and drew a line under the issue, stating that in future they hoped to ‘avoid a repetition of the slightly embarrassing situation which arose out of the very effective Pilger film’.¹³⁷ While it was resolved amicably, the *Year Zero* dispute highlighted how quickly competitive pressures could emerge within the increasingly congested humanitarian sector. This competition also drew the leading development NGOs back to charitable relief, despite calls for a shift in focus towards more overtly political advocacy on the structural causes of poverty. Indeed, these competitive tendencies indicated how professionalised NGOs were prone to act according to their own institutional self-interest, using their association with high-profile emergencies to extract funding from the public and drive spurts of rapid expansion.

These massive popular responses to images of disaster also highlighted a relative failure of aid agencies to achieve tangible results in their development education and advocacy work. Opinion polls of the British public taken between 1969 and 1981 concluded that popular support for overseas aid had actually diminished. While ODA officials acknowledged in 1981 that this reflected a period of national economic difficulties, they also interpreted the data as evidence that ‘the majority of the UK public is ignorant of aid and development issues’.¹³⁸ The downgrading of the importance of development aid by the Conservative government, and corresponding cuts to the official aid budget, also reduced the motivation for government officials to reverse this trend. Furthermore, NGO emergency appeals contributed to this public ignorance, as they put across a simplistic, apolitical depiction of disasters and the Third World which the agencies themselves knew was misleading. In the process, development NGOs

¹³⁷ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00440, file 5081/2/62/3 (vol. 2): Leslie Kirkley, ‘Letter to David Glencross’, 2 March 1980.

¹³⁸ TNA: OD 15/137: Peter Broderick, ‘Public Opinion - Aid’, 6 May 1981.

paradoxically helped to create a persistent problem of public engagement which undermined their own advocacy.

This lack of public enthusiasm for long-term development was illustrated by the trajectory of War on Want after exiting the DEC in 1979. Deprived of the proceeds from joint emergency appeals, the organisation quickly descended into financial crisis. Throughout the 1970s it had relied on DEC funding, and by 1982 the organisation was forced to initiate redundancies and aggressive cost-cutting measures.¹³⁹ Mary Dines's successor argued that War on Want should have never allowed itself to withdraw from the DEC, as it had relied so heavily on its income.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, the lack of support War on Want received from the other Committee members in its calls to modify the DEC and replace it with a 'consortium for development' suggested that a pragmatic decision had been taken on the part of the other agencies to retain a capacity for relief.

The lack of support from within the sector for War on Want also pointed to a more complex set of issues confronting NGOs, regarding the acceptable limits of overt political engagement. War on Want's clashes with the Charity Commissioners brought the entire sector under increased scrutiny, and the organisation's staff have since suggested that other agencies exerted pressure upon them to stop 'rocking the boat'.¹⁴¹ War on Want's exit from the DEC has been commonly attributed to a desire within the organisation to focus solely on long-term development. However, Mary Dines notably later suggested that the exit was also deliberately engineered by Oxfam, due to her organisation's controversial political activities and relatively small size in comparison with the other DEC members.¹⁴² What this suggests is that organisations such as Christian Aid and

¹³⁹ WOWA: Box 222, file 02039: War on Want, 'Minutes of the Annual General Meeting', 24 October 1982.

¹⁴⁰ WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Ken Ritchie', 15 January 2001.

¹⁴¹ WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Andy Chetley', 30 June 2000.

¹⁴² WOWA: Box 122: 'Interview with Mary Dines', 3 August 2000..

Oxfam found it useful to present themselves as moderate and less political in comparison to War on Want, and disaster relief provided a method to do so. In doing so, they were effectively taking a pragmatic decision to avoid official sanctions and maintain the support of the public.

Conclusions

The emergence of a relief infrastructure in the late 1970s and early 1980s represented a new phase in British humanitarianism. The relationship between the NGO sector and the state was placed on a more formal footing, enrolling aid agencies into a broader project of humanitarian governance while also bringing about containment and co-option. This shift can be interpreted as an example of Foucauldian governmentality, as the increased role for the DEC agencies to carry out humanitarian aid was not in itself a transfer of power from state to non-state, but more a changing rationality of government which extended forms of governance beyond the formal state apparatus.¹⁴³ While a number of scholars have depicted humanitarian NGOs as becoming ‘governmentalised’ in this way in the post-Cold War era, these trends can be detected in Britain as early as the 1970s. Furthermore, it is also evident that NGOs were not passive bystanders to these trends, but were rather active agents in building up a more sophisticated infrastructure for disaster relief, despite an increasing political focus on the root causes of global underdevelopment.

In responding to overseas emergencies during this period, humanitarian NGOs continued to recycle simplistic and depoliticised images of starving children and human

¹⁴³ For more on governmentality, see: Michel Foucault, ‘Governmentality’, in Graham Burchell *et al.* (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991, pp.87-104); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (2nd ed.: London: SAGE, 2010); Ulrich Bröckling *et al.* (eds.), *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

suffering in their publicity. Crucially, they did so despite the emerging critique of this form of representation from within the NGO community. Such images further consolidated a public association of aid agencies with apolitical relief, while also reinforcing problematic stereotypes of the developing world. The perpetuation of this form of representation demonstrates how emergency fundraising continued to be attractive to NGOs as means to generate public donations and support in a competitive marketplace. Indeed, this period would appear to lend credence to Kate Manzo's suggestion that images of suffering children are crucial to the construction of a 'humanitarian identity' by publicity-oriented NGOs.¹⁴⁴

The mass media was an integral actor in shaping an emergency relief infrastructure in Britain, especially television. News footage of Third World disasters and suffering regularly sparked powerful responses from the viewing public. The remarkable spurt of financial growth experienced by Oxfam in the year between 1979 and 1980 can be directly attributed to the organisation's high visibility in the media in relation to Cambodia. By contrast, the relative lack of attention given to more complex development issues on television also contributed to a lack of popular support for development advocacy. Furthermore, the television broadcasting authorities (the BBC and the IBA) were also implicated in building up a disaster relief industry more directly. The broadcasters implemented closer collaboration with the DEC during this period, confirming the Committee's exclusive status in their charitable appeals mechanisms. This reinforced the legitimacy of the DEC, and strengthened the oligarchy of its members within the humanitarian sector. However, the broadcasters also strongly resisted any attempts by the Committee to broaden out its mandate and the types of emergencies it could appeal for. In the process, the broadcasters (in particular the BBC) effectively

¹⁴⁴ Kate Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood', *Antipode*, 40:4 (2008, pp.632-657).

policed the boundaries of the humanitarian sector, imposing their interpretation of what was politically acceptable or not for British charities.

Public opinion was a crucial factor in all of these trends, acting as a consistent and powerful constraint on the political ambitions of NGOs throughout the period. While statistics on public opinion and overseas aid in this period are limited, and we should be wary of treating public opinion as a monolithic entity, opinion polls did indicate a general lack of understanding of, or support for, international development issues during this period. By contrast, popular support for disaster relief operations increased, as evident in the increasing sums generated by NGO emergency appeals in the late 1970s and early 1980s. What this all suggests is that the simplistic images and narratives of emergency relief put forward by aid agencies helped construct a problematic relationship between the humanitarian NGO sector and the general public. This relationship was ultimately passive and one-sided, characterised by a reliance on moral rhetoric and individual philanthropy, rather than concrete information and political engagement. By contrast, the more complex and radical public engagement called for in the advocacy campaigns of Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want was ultimately only ever the activism of a minority.

As the early 1980s progressed, the humanitarian sector was thus characterised by a growing paradox in how it operated and presented itself. An increasingly sophisticated and political advocacy agenda was twinned with growing prominence within a technocratic, professionalised and overtly apolitical disaster relief system. This system was given added impetus by growing public support for emergency assistance, reflected in massive public responses to specific disasters, such as Cambodia in 1979, or East Africa in 1980. Growing popular demand for humanitarian aid was also connected to institutional and technological changes in the mass media. The ODM was funnelling increasing amounts of official aid through the DEC members, further fuelling the growth of NGOs

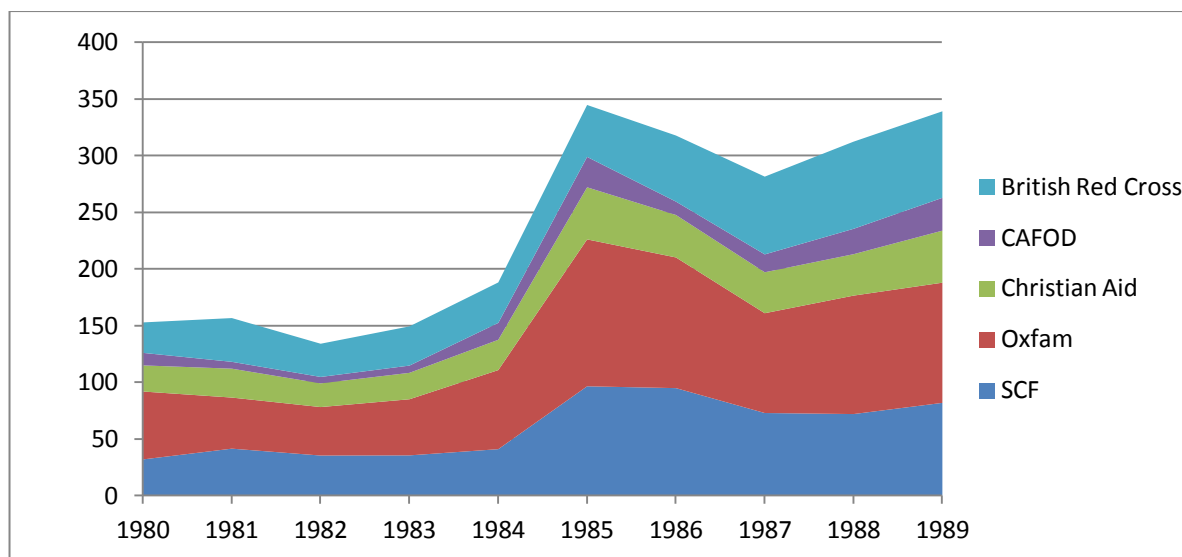
while raising challenging questions about how this support impacted upon the sector's legitimacy and independence. These trends all culminated in a massive humanitarian response to famine in Ethiopia in late 1984, which has been widely depicted as a seminal moment in the history of humanitarianism. The following chapter explores this intervention at length.

Chapter Five

Band Aid Humanitarianism: NGOs and Famine in Ethiopia, 1984-85

In October 1984, a single BBC news item galvanised an international aid effort unprecedented in its size and intensity. This now iconic report captured harrowing scenes of human suffering at a relief camp in northern Ethiopia, afflicted by a severe famine. The disaster was memorably described by reporter Michael Buerk as ‘biblical’, a powerful use of religious imagery which presented the famine as originating outside of historical forces and human agency. In reality, it was also the result of a series of brutal civil wars being waged by the authoritarian Ethiopian government. Television images of starving Ethiopian children gripped the conscience of the British public, instantly elevating the famine from an invisible disaster into a major domestic issue. The BBC footage quickly spread globally, transforming Ethiopia into an overnight *cause célèbre*. The media frenzy that followed triggered a huge fundraising boost for aid agencies, as public donations flooded into the humanitarian sector.

As the largest and most recognised aid agencies, the five DEC members captured the majority of this income in Britain, fuelling a period of sustained growth (graph 5.1). The popular response to Ethiopia was also extended and given added momentum by the Band Aid phenomenon, a fundraising initiative famously spearheaded by musician turned celebrity humanitarian Bob Geldof. Band Aid raised millions of pounds for famine relief through its innovative fundraising methods, in particular the iconic Live Aid concerts of July 1985. Watched by a global audience of almost two billion, Live Aid raised a remarkable \$150 million for aid projects in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.



Graph 5.1: Cumulated income (£m) of the British Red Cross, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam and the Save the Children Fund, 1980-89 (adjusted for inflation, 2009).¹

The Ethiopian famine has been widely presented as a major epochal event in the history of humanitarian action. The central role of television coverage in driving huge public donations to NGOs has been depicted as a turning point in charitable fundraising, resulting in the rise of a professionalised competitive aid industry.² The emergence of Band Aid has often been seen as sparking a new era of celebrity humanitarianism, in which high-profile stars have increasingly engaged publicly with both humanitarian and international development issues.³ Tanja Müller refers to the famine in Ethiopia as marking a watershed in relation to ‘the combined forces of media representation, celebrity humanitarian engagement and... the subsequent meteoric rise of global NGOs based on

¹ Income data sourced from Matthew Hilton *et al.*, ‘7.3: Cumulated income of international aid and development NGOs, 1945-2009’ (Adjusted for inflation, 2009), Non-Governmental Organisations 1945-97 project datasets: http://www.ngo.bham.ac.uk/appendix/figures/Chap_7/Figure%207.3.xlsx [accessed 31 March 2014].

² Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993); Henrietta Lidchi, ‘Finding the Right Image: British development NGOs and the regulation of imagery’, in Tracey Skelton and Tim Allen (eds.), *Culture and Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1999, pp.87-101), p.90; Jenny Edkins, *Whose Hunger? Concepts of Famine, Practices of Aid* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2000); Suzanne Franks, *Reporting Disasters: Famine, Aid, Politics and the Media* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2013).

³ Lisa Ann Richey and Stefano Ponte, *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 2011); Tanja R. Müller, ‘“The Ethiopian famine” revisited: Band Aid and the antipolitics of celebrity humanitarian action’, *Disasters*, 37:1 (January 2013, pp.61-79); Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

compassion'.⁴ The problematic issues which encountered the relief operations inside Ethiopia, in particular control and manipulation by the Ethiopian government, have also been seen as a crucial signpost in raising awareness of the political complexities of distributing aid during complex emergencies.⁵

This chapter examines the impact of the Ethiopian famine and Band Aid upon the British humanitarian sector, locating the period within the longer history of NGOs and emergency relief set out in previous chapters. The majority of scholarship on the famine shares an assumption that Ethiopia was a watershed in the history of humanitarianism and the rise of NGOs. By contrast, this chapter argues that while Ethiopia did accelerate the growth of a professionalised aid industry, this was actually a continuation and extension of prior trends. The public response to television images of famine in late 1984 was indeed substantial. It was also the culmination of a longer trajectory of increasing popular support for NGO disaster relief efforts over the previous years and decades. The particular representation of the famine promoted by both the media and Band Aid, which emphasised simplistic apolitical explanations and images of starving children, followed a formula for charitable fundraising embedded within the sector by years of NGO emergency appeals.

Band Aid had a substantial impact upon the leading aid agencies, as it reinforced a message of depoliticised humanitarianism and undermined the efforts of development NGOs to harness popular support for famine relief into advocacy campaigns. While Band Aid therefore represented a step backwards for the sector (and arguably humanitarianism in general), it is also shown that the leading NGOs exacerbated these problems through

⁴ Tanja R. Müller, 'The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: revisiting the dynamics between famine and celebrity', *Third World Quarterly*, 34:3 (2013, pp.470-484), p.472.

⁵ Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa* (London: Villiers, 1997), pp.112-132; Laurence Binet, 'Famine and Forced Relocations in Ethiopia, 1984–1986' (Paris: MSF, 2005), available at: http://speakingout.msf.org/sites/default/files/ETHIOPIE_VA.pdf [accessed 31 March 2014].

their own decision-making. Competitive pressures within the sector pushed NGOs to become overly occupied by fundraising, institutional expansion, and inter-agency rivalries. These long-running trends all helped consolidate the rise of a technocratic disaster relief industry.

This chapter draws on a blend of NGO, media and governmental sources to articulate this argument, and is structured into three distinct sections. First, the impact of Ethiopia upon the financial and institutional growth of NGOs is examined. While the sector as a whole received a massive influx of donations, the majority of this income was directed either to the five DEC members, or to Band Aid. This income was also supplemented by the channelling of official relief aid through the DEC. This revenue fuelled a period of intensive institutional expansion, as NGOs increased their staffing levels and project commitments, and further professionalised. This growth was clearly driven by the popular appeal of simplistic, apolitical accounts of famine, as reflected in the BBC Buerk report. The response to Ethiopia therefore fitted into a longer lineage of successful NGO emergency fundraising campaigns.

Secondly, it is shown that the development-oriented NGOs were uncomfortable with the link between their own growth and reductionist images of disaster, which they attempted to resolve through initiatives aimed at grassroots political mobilisation. However, the emergence of Band Aid negatively impacted upon the effectiveness of this advocacy work. Band Aid promoted a depoliticised conception of humanitarianism which delinked the effects of famine from its broader economic, political and social causes. Band Aid therefore represented a significant step backwards for the sector, giving rise to an increasingly sharp critique of the initiative from within the development community.

Thirdly, the contribution of NGOs to this process is examined. It is argued that the leading aid agencies were also guilty of the same criticisms that they directed at Band Aid.

The DEC was complicit in systematically distorting the famine and its causes as early as 1983, establishing a narrative for the media and Band Aid to later reproduce. Indeed, Band Aid's fundraising methods shared a number of characteristics with the DEC, as both prioritised income maximisation and simplification over public education and complexity. Furthermore, the leading NGOs exacerbated these trends further through their collective focus on organisational growth and competing with one another for resources. These competitive pressures manifested in a 1985 dispute between the DEC and a group of non-member agencies over the Committee's perceived oligarchy within the sector. It is ultimately suggested that this period reflects not only a culmination of long-running trends, but also reveals how the very legitimacy of voluntary action was being altered in a new era of neoliberal politics.

The Aid Industry Expands

The BBC decision to air footage of famine in Ethiopia as a leading news story in October 1984 had immediate and dramatic consequences. Viewers flooded the BBC with calls and enquiries, and the report was quickly carried by 425 of the world's broadcasting stations, reaching a potential audience of 470 million people.⁶ Western journalists deluged Addis Ababa as media coverage of Ethiopia soared exponentially, and donor governments came under intensive pressure to respond. Within the British government, this pressure resulted in a Ministerial decision to deploy two RAF Hercules aircraft to airlift supplies within the region, as well as making relief funds available for NGOs.⁷ Official international aid to Ethiopia soared from \$417 million in 1984 to \$784 million in 1985. The majority of this

⁶ 'A focus on famine', *The Times*, 13 March 1985, p.17.

⁷ Mark Robinson, 'An uncertain partnership: the Overseas Development Administration and the voluntary sector in the 1980s', in Anuradha Bose and Peter Burnell (eds.), *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979: Between Idealism and Self-Interest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, pp.158-177), p.171.

increase could be attributed to the US, which committed over \$500 million for humanitarian aid between 1984 and 1986.⁸

For British NGOs, the transformation of Ethiopia into a major issue resulted in an immediate surge of public donations. The DEC had previously made a joint appeal for 'Famine in Africa' in July that year, which raised a record sum of £9 million and indirectly led to the BBC despatching reporter Michael Buerk to Ethiopia. However, the appeal largely failed to generate any sustained media or public interest in the famine.⁹ The DEC quickly re-opened this appeal in October, and further donations flooded in. Furthermore, the large public profiles of the DEC members ensured that they were well positioned to feature prominently in press coverage and capture the majority of public donations to individual agencies. This was especially true for Oxfam and Save the Children, who benefitted from having operational relief workers in the field to provide interviews and quotes to Western journalists.

Statistics compiled by the DEC revealed that just under £100 million was donated by the public to humanitarian NGOs for Ethiopian relief in the period between April 1984 and September 1985. This figure included £34 million given directly to Band Aid (chart 5.1). Outside of Band Aid, the five DEC members collectively dominated with a cumulated total of £56.2 million, both through the DEC mechanism and as donations to individual agencies. While non-DEC agencies also experienced impressive financial

⁸ Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: 30 Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (NY: Human Rights Watch, 1991), p.178; Alexander Poster, 'The Gentle War: Famine Relief, Politics, and Privatization in Ethiopia, 1983–1986', *Diplomatic History*, 36:2 (April 2012), pp.399-425.

⁹ Mary Kay Magistad, 'The Ethiopian Bandwagon: The relationship between news media coverage and British foreign policy toward the 1984-85 Ethiopian famine' (Unpublished MA thesis: University of Sussex, 1985), pp.81-82.

growth (War on Want's annual income grew by 540 percent between 1984 and 1985¹⁰), their total takings were largely dwarfed by the DEC members.¹¹

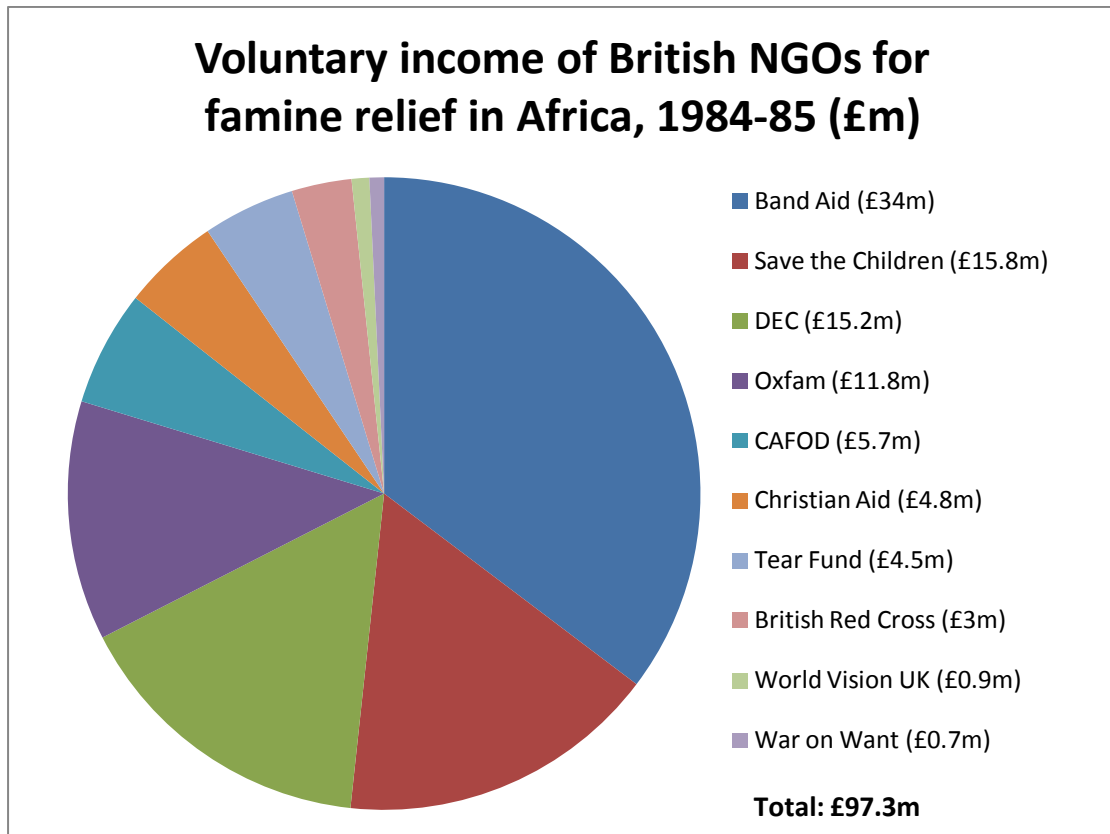


Chart 5.1: Voluntary donations from the British public to humanitarian NGOs, specifically for famine relief in Africa, from 1 April 1984 to 30 September 1985.¹²

This income boost was supplemented by the channelling of official relief aid from the British government through the DEC agencies, reflecting an increasing provision of humanitarian aid by the state to aid agencies that had begun in the mid-1970s. The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) relied on British NGOs to distribute the majority of bilateral food aid allocated to Ethiopia between 1984 and 1986, which Christian Aid acknowledged as ‘breaking new ground... UK bilateral food aid has not

¹⁰ War on Want, *Annual Report 1984-1985* (London: War on Want, 1985), p.16.

¹¹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/6: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Fundraising for Famine in Africa by British public channelled through voluntary relief and development agencies’, December 1985.

¹² *Ibid.*

gone through NGOs before'.¹³ Substantial cash grants were also given directly to NGOs from the state, channelled through the DEC by the Disaster Unit.¹⁴ Indeed, prior to October 1984, the ODA had already donated £1 million to the DEC's July 'Famine in Africa' appeal, in addition to a number of smaller financial grants to individual member agencies.¹⁵ This official emphasis on working through the DEC stemmed partly from a recognition of NGOs as flexible, efficient actors equipped to deliver aid in remote regions. It also reflected a deliberate policy of avoiding giving aid directly to the Ethiopian government, a Cold War rival suspected of corruption and diversion of relief.

This preference for using NGOs was also shared by other donor governments. The US channelled over 95 percent of its official relief aid to Ethiopia through bodies such as the ICRC and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).¹⁶ Mark Duffield has presented the heavy reliance of Western governments on NGOs in Ethiopia as a critical moment when NGOs began to be absorbed into a 'thickening web of overlapping aims and mutual interests connecting donor states, recipient governments, UN agencies, and militaries', which would become more overt after the conclusion of the Cold War.¹⁷ As chapter four of this investigation argued, in practice the British government had been forging a more integrated and instrumentalised relationship with the DEC members since the 1970s, and Ethiopia marked a further step in consolidating this shift.

The sudden influx of income into the NGO sector fuelled a period of rapid and sustained institutional growth, accelerating the emergence of a professionalised aid industry. Oxfam increased its staff substantially, from 480 employees in 1983 to 726 in

¹³ Robinson, 'An uncertain partnership', p.171; CAA: Box CA4/A/32, file CA4/A/32/1: Clive Robinson, 'ODA Food Aid for Ethiopia', 30 July 1984.

¹⁴ CAA: Box CA4/A/32, file CA4/A/32/3: Pam Pouncey, 'Ethiopia', 31 October 1984.

¹⁵ TNA: OD 53/5: Timothy Raison, 'Letter to Geoff Lawler', 3 October 1984.

¹⁶ Poster, 'The Gentle War', p.415.

¹⁷ Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp.222-223.

1986, reaching 1153 by 1990.¹⁸ CAFOD and Christian Aid both roughly doubled their budgets and staff levels in the late 1980s.¹⁹ Save the Children's institutional expansion was particularly impressive, fuelled by a massive jump in income from £16.5 million to £42.5 million between 1984 and 1985. SCF subsequently underwent an internal reorganisation, dramatically increasing its number of overseas staff, with an emphasis on recruiting paid professionals rather than amateur volunteers. The Fund also opened up a spate of new local branches and branch shops across Britain, and committed substantial resources to sustaining its new scale and profile. Expenditure by SCF on administration accordingly increased from £455,00 in 1983 to £767,000 in 1986, hitting £1.26 million by 1989.

While this financial and institutional expansion opened up new opportunities for NGOs to increase their project commitments and influence, it also posed new challenges. To sustain this new level of operation required more intensive marketing, fostering competition within the sector. Save the Children adapted to this new environment by significantly scaling up its expenditure on fundraising, from £1.65 million in 1983 to £3.2 million in 1986, reaching £5.1 million by the end of the decade. SCF also diversified its sources of revenue, in particular by forging closer links with the corporate sector.²⁰ This increased intensity of fundraising further shaped the humanitarian sector into a more professionalised, competitive, and business-like environment.

It was self-evident that this spurt of NGO growth had been driven by the strength of the public's response to decontextualised television images and narratives of African famine. The iconic BBC report of October 1984 memorably referred to the famine as

¹⁸ Maggie Black, *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press/Oxfam, 1992), p.300.

¹⁹ Ian Linden, 'Social Justice in Historical Perspective', in Michael P. Hornsby-Smith (ed.), *Catholics in England 1950-2000: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (London: Cassell, 1999, pp.139-160), p.148.

²⁰ Save the Children Fund statistics are all sourced from SCF Annual Reports for the years 1983-1989.

'biblical... the closest thing to Hell on Earth'. This description coded the famine as a sudden, apocalyptic event existing outside of history or human agency. The report featured lengthy and graphic images of the suffering of starving children (image 5.1). It also made no reference to the direct link between this suffering and a series of brutal civil wars being waged in the Northern provinces by the authoritarian Ethiopian government.²¹



Image 5.1: Image from BBC News report on Ethiopia, 23 October 1984.²²

Reporter Michael Buerk later conceded that a deliberate act of self-censorship had taken place during the report's production, stemming from a concern that communicating these political realities also risked 'inhibiting people from coughing up their money'.²³ Jonathan Dimpleby notably made similar claims for his ITV documentary on famine in Ethiopia which aired over a decade earlier.²⁴ The Buerk report unleashed a torrent of media texts related to Ethiopia, as public opinion shifted firmly in favour of humanitarian relief

²¹ Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, pp.20-26.

²² *BBC News*, BBC1, 23 October 1984 (Television).

²³ quoted in Daniel Wolf, 'What happened to the f***ing money', *The Spectator*, 23 October 2004, p.14.

²⁴ Paul Harrison and Robin Palmer, *News out of Africa: Biafra to Band Aid* (London: Hilary Shipman, 1986), pp.55-56.

efforts. The majority of this publicity was characterised by simplistic narratives of drought and relief, and the perpetual recycling of provocative images of starving Ethiopian children. Indeed, the image of the Ethiopian child became ubiquitous in the media during this period, reflecting its power to solicit an emotional response from the public (image 5.2).

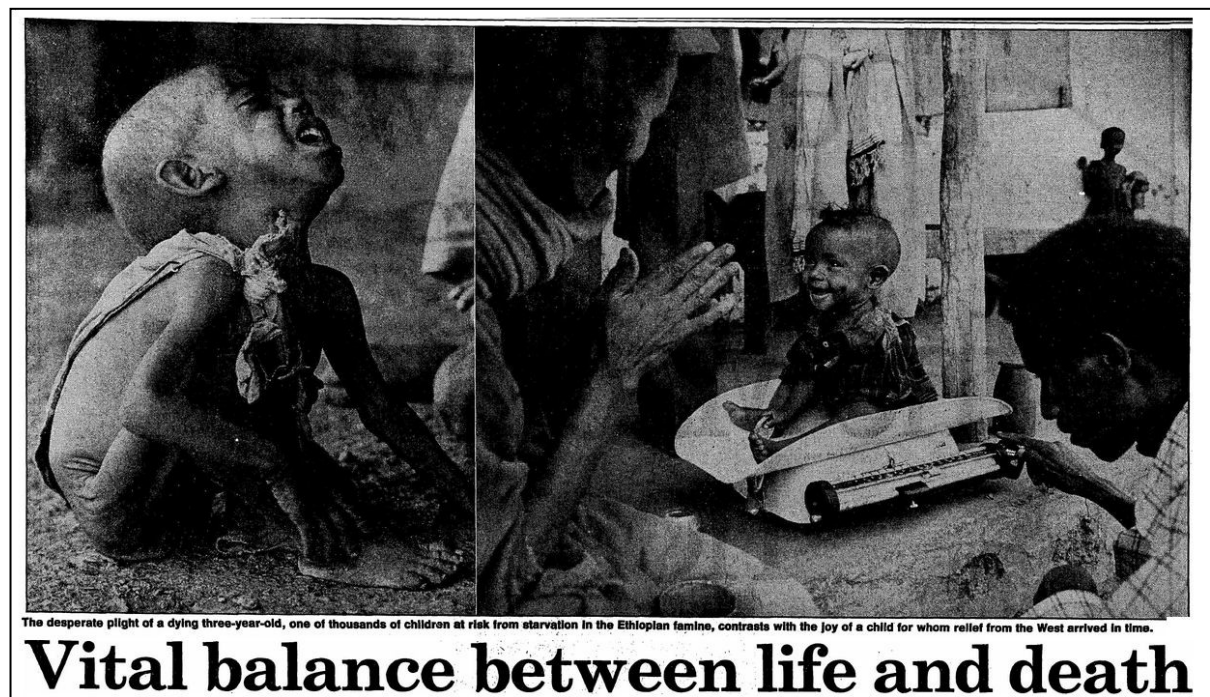


Image 5.2: Article in the *Observer* on famine in Ethiopia, November 1984.²⁵

While the intensive public reaction to these images and subsequent rapid growth of NGOs has been widely depicted as a watershed moment in humanitarian action, there was much that was familiar about this period. There were many similarities between Ethiopia and previous televised major disasters, such as Biafra in 1968, the Sahel in 1973, or Cambodia in 1979. In all of these cases, television images of human suffering provoked the sympathy of the public, which translated into substantial donations for aid agencies (especially the DEC). These public responses accelerated the growth of the sector, while

²⁵ Richard Hall, 'Vital balance between life and death', *The Observer*, 4 November 1984, p.7.

also further associating NGOs with disaster relief in the public imagination. Indeed, previous chapters of this investigation have shown how public donations for humanitarian aid had been steadily rising since the Second World War. This trend accelerated during the 1960s and 1970s as television coverage of disasters improved, and NGOs professionalised their marketing practices. Ethiopia consolidated this trajectory, underlined by a jump for international aid as a proportion of all voluntary income in Britain, from 11 percent in 1984 to 22 percent in 1985.²⁶ This also resulted in leading domestic organisations such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and Barnardo's reporting significant shortfalls in their 1984 income projections.²⁷

Band Aid Humanitarianism

As with previous major emergencies, the principal development NGOs were uncomfortable with the public's response to simplistic images of suffering children, and the implications of this for their wider advocacy roles. As chapter four discussed, NGO involvement in political advocacy and public campaigning had continued to evolve and professionalise in the early 1980s. Once vague and untargeted, this advocacy was now characterised by a focus on more specific Third World issues, and lobbying aimed at specific actors and structures.²⁸ NGOs such as Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want gradually pushed forward the frontiers of their activities, seeking to campaign more openly on the political dimensions of global poverty and injustice. In this context, the massive public mobilisation for famine relief in Ethiopia was inherently problematic. For

²⁶ Lidchi, 'Finding the Right Image', p.101.

²⁷ Sarah Boseley, 'Famine response hits charities', *The Guardian*, 28 December 1984, p.22.

²⁸ Robinson, 'An uncertain partnership', p.174.

those within the sector, it was based on a simplistic representation of famine which aroused popular compassion, but made no contribution to public awareness of the structural issues connected to global underdevelopment.

This problem was understood by the development agencies from quite early on. During the discussions for the DEC 'Famine in Africa' appeal in July 1984, Oxfam called for the content of the appeal to clarify that it was 'not only for the immediate emergency needs', but also for 'future work which would be carried out'. Oxfam's concern was that it planned to launch 'a campaign for Food and Hunger' later in the year, and was 'worried about the effect of the DEC appeal... they would be debating the needs for food not only for today but for the future'. The DEC Chairman agreed on the need to stress to the BBC appeal production team that development aid was also required, stating that 'there were many factors which had precipitated the situation and it should not be over-simplified'.²⁹ In practice the final produced appeal was indeed a crass over-simplification, and after October 1984 the leading development NGOs looked for ways to channel public compassion into grassroots activism and political action.

Oxfam's popular campaign (alluded to in the July DEC discussions) was launched in October as 'Hungry for Change'. The initiative aimed to build up public support for structural change in a global system that produced food surpluses in Europe, but malnutrition in Africa. The broadcast of the Buerk report in the same month gave the campaign an added poignancy, and it generated significant support, aided by a blitz of Oxfam publicity. One of the major political objectives of the campaign was to exert pressure on the government to increase official aid to Ethiopia, and reverse a planned six percent cut to the overseas aid budget.³⁰ The World Development Movement (WDM) also

²⁹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/6: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Minutes of the meeting of operational and PR staff members', 5 July 1984.

³⁰ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, pp.261-262.

orchestrated a nationwide campaign in November 1984 in opposition to these cuts. Already under pressure from the public to visibly do more in Ethiopia, this opposition resulted in a Conservative backbench revolt, and the proposed aid budget reduction was scrapped.³¹ In late 1984 the WDM also launched a ‘Famine in Africa’ petition, in conjunction with six development NGOs (CAFOD, Christian Aid, Euro-Action Accord, Oxfam, Save the Children and War on Want). This petition called on the British government to not only provide emergency assistance to Ethiopia for the foreseeable future, but to also ‘increase the quantity and quality of long term development aid to avert future famines in Ethiopia and elsewhere’.³² The petition attracted approximately 750,000 signatures, indicating a significant swelling of public support for aid agencies.³³

It was evident that the leading development NGOs were trying to channel public interest in famine relief into support for their politicised advocacy work. Indeed, just three weeks after the Michael Buerk footage was broadcast, the *Times* reported that a number of Oxfam directors were ‘tired of spending a third of Oxfam's budget on famine relief, year after year, while the causes of famine remain relatively unexamined and untouched’. The same piece revealingly added how it was ‘surprising’ that ‘such a venerable charity should have felt it necessary to enter an arena that is broadly speaking “political”’.³⁴

The major advocacy success during this period came in October 1985, a year on from the Buerk report and only three months after Live Aid. The WDM co-ordinated a mass lobby of parliament, supported by the leading NGOs and Churches, calling for increased official aid. 20,000 people descended on the House of Commons, and 15,000 of these gained entry to personally lobby their MPs. The event attracted significant media

³¹ John Mitchell, ‘Public campaigning on overseas aid in the 1980s’, in Bose and Burnell, *Britain's Overseas Aid since 1979* (pp.146-157), pp.62-63.

³² ‘Africa Famine Petition’, *The Guardian*, 16 November 1984, p.12.

³³ Mitchell, ‘Public campaigning on overseas aid in the 1980s’, p.152.

³⁴ Tony Samstag, ‘Ethiopia, an isle in a sea of starvation’, *The Times*, 14 November 1984, p.14.

interest, and featured the leaders of the three opposition parties all pledging their support for increases to the aid budget. In the weeks after the event, the government announced a boost of £47 million for the aid programme, despite a request by the Treasury for further cuts.³⁵ The announced increase was interpreted as a major success for the development lobby. The WDM stated that ‘the Government is finally beginning to catch up with the people of Britain’.³⁶ Maggie Black argued that the reaction to Ethiopia ‘ushered in a mood of concern about world hunger in Britain not seen for 20 years... the long years of agency-promoted development education in the classroom and the cultivation of interest in the media seemed at last to be paying dividends’.³⁷

It was in this context that the Band Aid phenomenon emerged and took shape. The story of Band Aid's rise has been well documented, as popular musicians Bob Geldof and Midge Ure captured the imagination of the public and raised millions for famine relief in late 1984 with the release of a star-studded charity record (*Do They Know It's Christmas?*). Geldof overcame a series of bureaucratic barriers to produce the record and bring it to market, often through sheer force of will, and the public responded generously. Geldof subsequently established the Band Aid Trust as a registered charity in January 1985 to administer these funds, and began planning further fundraising ventures. These plans culminated in Live Aid in July 1985, an extravagant multi-venue concert held simultaneously in London and Philadelphia to raise funds for famine relief. Live Aid surpassed all expectations, watched by a global audience of 1.9 billion people and raising a staggering £150 million worldwide, cementing itself in the popular imagination as an iconic moment of the 1980s.³⁸

³⁵ Mitchell, ‘Public campaigning on overseas aid in the 1980s’, p.153; Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p. 265.

³⁶ John Hooper, ‘Campaigners claim mass lobby forced ministers to rethink foreign package’, *The Guardian*, 13 November 1985, p.7.

³⁷ Black, *A Cause for our Times*, p. 265.

³⁸ Bob Geldof, *Is That It?* (London: Penguin, 1986); Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, pp.72-77.

Less attention has been paid to the complex relationship between Band Aid and the established NGOs, which was characterised by both co-operation and competition. Upon setting up the Band Aid Trust in early 1985, Geldof and his staff met regularly with the leading agencies to discuss how they could use their funds effectively in Ethiopia, without duplicating the work of other organisations. Oxfam distilled their experience in planning and executing relief operations into a series of short papers for Band Aid's usage.³⁹ However, Geldof also expressed his distaste for 'the rivalry-ridden world of the agencies', and declined to allocate any funds raised by the Band Aid single to other NGOs on the basis that his organisation could 'do their own shopping and get relief items free or at cut-prices because of Band Aid publicity'.⁴⁰

Within the DEC, there was also a perception that the Committee was 'not well looked upon by Band Aid', with suspicions that Geldof himself was 'anti-DEC'.⁴¹ The DEC members also had little involvement in the Live Aid concerts. Christian Aid staff observed they were all 'the targets of Band Aid's policy of seeking free access for its aid programme and of bypassing traditional channels of aid'. This restricted them to doing little more than offering staff 'just back from Ethiopia' for media interviews.⁴²

Despite this will to 'bypass' the established aid organisations, Band Aid's massive fundraising success impacted heavily upon the sector. Band Aid's populist appeal had allowed it to reach constituencies with which the established agencies traditionally had little success, in particular young people and non-professionals. Despite its reliance upon simplistic images of famine and relief, many established aid agencies interpreted Band

³⁹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Tony Vaux, 'Meeting with Bob Geldof, Peter Coleridge and Tony Vaux, at his home on 24 January 1985', 26 January 1985.

⁴⁰ Geldof, *Is That It?*, p.309; CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Mary Galvin, 'Band Aid', 22 February 1985.

⁴¹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Disasters Emergency Committee, 'Minutes of the meeting of Chief Executives, Operational and Appeals Staff', 24 July 1985.

⁴² CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: John Montagu, 'Band Aid concert appeal', 5 July 1985.

Aid's tapping of these new donor groups as a potential vehicle to harness unprecedented levels of public support for aid and development issues. Indeed, a number of political commentators and observers initially observed Band Aid in these terms. Stuart Hall memorably spoke in 1986 of a 'famine movement' having crystallised, in opposition to Thatcherite hegemony.⁴³ The *Daily Star* described Live Aid as evidence that 'pop stars and the people could achieve what politicians had been powerless to do - raise millions for the starving around the world'.⁴⁴ Aware of its widespread appeal, established aid workers discretely lobbied throughout 1985 for Band Aid to assume a more professionalised developmental approach which incorporated donor education into its activities.

This pressure contributed to the Band Aid Trust committing half of its proceeds from Live Aid into development programmes, which in practice involved established organisations submitting project proposals for Live Aid funding. Many leading international NGOs received significant proceeds from Band Aid for such projects, including Christian Aid, CARE, Caritas, CAFOD, Concern, MSF, Oxfam, Save the Children, and World Vision.⁴⁵ However, in a move reminiscent of the DEC in the 1970s, Band Aid's use of donations for long-term development projects was never fully communicated to the general public.

Despite securing a commitment to rural development, the established agencies were unable to persuade Band Aid to adopt a more overt educational role on the political dimensions of hunger and suffering in the Global South. Such concerns were particularly prevalent within the sector post-Live Aid, which was perceived as having captured the global conscience with simplistic messages of disaster and philanthropy. Christian Aid

⁴³ Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, 'People Aid: A new politics sweeps the land', *Marxism Today* (July 1986, pp.10-14).

⁴⁴ Rick Sky, 'Forty million notes!', *The Daily Star*, 15 July 1985, p.2-3

⁴⁵ Band Aid Trust, 'With Love from Band Aid' (1991), available at: <http://www.live8live.com/docs/bat-withlovefrombandaid%20.pdf> [accessed 31 March 2014].

noted the need for discussion within the sector regarding the ‘long-term future of this type of fundraising’, particularly in regards to how to ‘improve development education and political aspects in any future event’.⁴⁶ Oxfam similarly commented after Live Aid that ‘there is a very real potential for [Band Aid] to be making public statements which challenge some of the myths and stereotypes of famine in Africa’.⁴⁷ Optimism for doing so quickly gave way to frustration and criticism of Band Aid, which had largely dismissed these calls and instead focused on developing further fundraising initiatives cast in the Live Aid mould.

This was demonstrated by the announcement of a Band Aid ‘Schools for Africa’ campaign in August 1985, which did much to dampen any optimism within the sector that the public support for Live Aid could be harnessed into overt political action. The ‘Schools for Africa’ campaign involved appealing to British school children for donations of food, on the basis that ‘one more cheap item added onto the shopping list of every family could save thousands of starving people’.⁴⁸ Oxfam immediately circulated a document among other development agencies, criticising the new venture as having ‘the potential to set back development education considerably’. This was because it was seen as promoting a ‘negative and racist image of Africa’ as dependent on the generosity of white Westerners. It was also attacked as doing nothing to ‘raise questions about the causes of famine or challenge widely held misconceptions’. This was followed by a more general critique of Band Aid as a whole, for reinforcing ‘negative and racist stereotypes of Africa and black people generally... fundamental questions about why this crisis in

⁴⁶ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Martin Bax, ‘Post Live Aid’, 17 July 1985.

⁴⁷ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: A. Pennington, ‘Letter to all members of the Joint Agency Group’, 1 August 1985.

⁴⁸ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Band Aid, ‘Schools for Africa press release’, July 1985.

Africa is being allowed to happen are being raised... Band Aid/Live Aid are not coming up with the answers'.⁴⁹

Other agencies were thinking along similar lines. Christian Aid circulated a document to its staff and volunteers in September 1985, which outlined an increasingly stinging critique of Band Aid. Christian Aid criticised the 'Schools for Africa' initiative as 'a very expensive way to feed the hungry', which offered an 'over-simplified solution to Africa's problems', in that all that was needed was more food. More generally, the entire Band Aid project was also attacked for relying on the 'starving baby image'. For Christian Aid, this image promoted 'an oversimplified understanding' of relief and development as something 'rich, educated whites' do for 'poor, ignorant blacks'. Christian Aid accused Band Aid of promoting a 'racist view of the world', which was reinforced by all the artists involved in the British Live Aid concert being white. Finally, Band Aid was attacked for having 'no educational element', no attempt to 'look at the causes of the situation', and for putting forward a 'paternalistic view of development' through its commitment to twinning and sponsorship.⁵⁰

An article also appeared in the education supplement of the *Times* at this time, published under the name of the National Association for Development Education Centres (NADEC), but in practice authored by individuals connected to the leading development agencies. This piece observed that 'development education experts are uneasy about the way schools are being used in the Band Aid project to aid Ethiopia'. Once again, the use of images of starving children attracted significant criticism, the article stating that 'the worry to main-line aid agencies is that the images reinforces the stereotypes that began in the Biafran War: Africans leave babies to starve, are unable to run their own affairs, and

⁴⁹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: A. Pennington, 'Letter to all members of the Joint Agency Group', 1 August 1985.

⁵⁰ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Jean Harrison, 'Band Aid's "Schools for Africa" Project', 3 September 1985.

only Europeans can help'.⁵¹ These debates continued within the sector throughout the remainder of 1985. In September the Band Aid Trust published a new statement of general policy, which spoke of the need to 'draw public attention to the complex causes of famine and underdevelopment'.⁵² However, other NGOs found that requests for clarification from the Band Aid Trust on what this actually involved in practice led only to its staff 'talking rather vaguely about general publicity and its importance... [Band Aid] would not be more specific despite being pressed for more details'.⁵³

Band Aid went on to plan and execute further fundraising initiatives, such as Sport Aid in 1986, which raised approximately £30 million for famine relief through sponsored runs around the world. Such events followed a similar fundraising model to Live Aid, in that they were geared towards the creation of media-friendly spectacles and celebrity endorsement. Their perpetuation also reflected how the established NGOs had been unable to force Band Aid to take up a more overt educational or political position. Suzanne Franks has depicted Band Aid as having 'missed the chance' to harness its efforts for long-term change and consciousness-raising.⁵⁴ It is more accurate to state that Band Aid was simply never interested in this form of engagement. The Band Aid Trust defined itself explicitly as a 'non-political organisation', and it was designed from the outset to be geared towards short-term crisis management. The records and internal discussions of the Band Aid Trust in this period reveal little consideration was given to educational or advocacy programmes, instead focusing upon administration, logistics, and publicity.⁵⁵ To draw on David Korten's typology, Band Aid resembled a 'first generation' NGO, designed

⁵¹ Llyn Richards, 'Africa needs more than food, says experts', *The Times Education Supplement*, 4 October 1985, p.9.

⁵² CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Band Aid Trust, 'A Statement of General Policy', 18 September 1985.

⁵³ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: 'Band Aid Meeting: 23.9.85', 24 September 1985.

⁵⁴ Franks, *Reporting Disasters*, p.86.

⁵⁵ See, for instance: BBC WAC: file T41/482/1: Band Aid Trust, 'Minutes of Meeting of Band Aid Trustees', 21 January 1985.

to address the temporary alleviation of the symptoms of poverty, rather than the root causes.⁵⁶

Band Aid therefore represented a step backwards for the NGO sector, and arguably humanitarian action in general. It promoted a populist, non-political form of emergency humanitarianism which was extraordinarily effective in gaining public support and raising funds, but was largely incompatible with the forms of political engagement called for by the established aid agencies. Geldof's public statements throughout this period repeatedly presented Band Aid in morally unambiguous terms, displacing the complexities of politics with rhetorical appeals to morality. Indeed, Geldof stated explicitly that 'Band Aid was a moral issue: whether you were of the right or left was irrelevant'.⁵⁷ Band Aid therefore worked to depoliticise African hunger and poverty, by presenting these as moral issues which required an individual moral response, expressed in the act of donating money. The obtaining of a moral authority for these non-political answers also implied that the form of humanitarianism promoted by Band Aid had no need to justify itself. This deliberate positioning of Band Aid as a movement existing outside of established politics and formal bureaucracies clearly played a crucial role in its appeal. It also diverted attention away from the broader economic, political and social factors which created and perpetuated this suffering, by focusing upon individual obligation instead of collective solidarity. The massive popular support for this form of engagement therefore also represented a further undermining of development advocacy.

⁵⁶ David Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1990); John Degenbol-Martinussen and Poul Engberg-Perdersen, *Aid: Understanding International Development Cooperation* (London: Zed, 2003), pp.144-147.

⁵⁷ Geldof, *Is That it?*, p.286.

NGOs and Emergency

The failure of Band Aid to engage politically fostered legitimate criticism within the aid and development community. However, the principal humanitarian NGOs also exacerbated this depoliticising process, through their own poor decision-making. The leading NGOs were therefore culpable of many of the criticisms they had levelled at Geldof and the Band Aid project. For instance, the accusation that Band Aid was presenting an ‘over-simplified solution to Africa's problems’ could also be applied to the DEC from the very outset of the Ethiopian crisis. The Committee had made a joint broadcast appeal for Ethiopia as early as 1983. However, concerns that to publicise Ethiopia's ‘political situation’ (a veiled reference to the civil wars being waged by the Ethiopian government) would place the organisations and their partners at risk led to the appeal being deliberately restrictive in the information it communicated.⁵⁸ Instead, the appeal highlighted the humanitarian imperative to save lives, represented by images of vulnerable Ethiopian women and children. The DEC also provided no explanation for the famine beyond vague allusions to drought (image 5.3). As previous chapters have argued, this style of representation had been a consistent characteristic of the DEC since its inception. In the process, the DEC also established a narrative framework for Ethiopian famine reporting that the media would later take up more forcefully.

⁵⁸ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 2): Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Minutes of the Chief Executives meeting’, 25 March 1983.

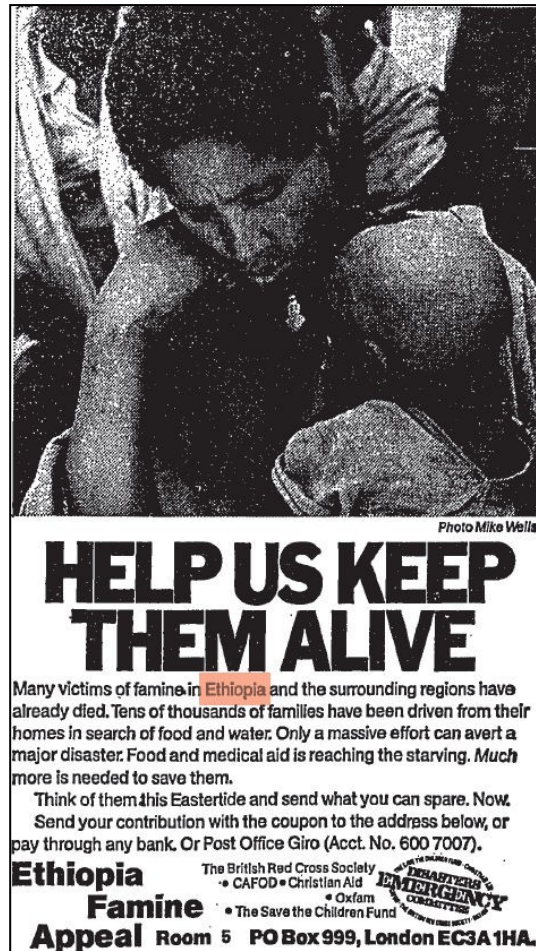


Image 5.3: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Ethiopia Famine’ press appeal, April 1983.⁵⁹

Similar discussions shaped a further DEC appeal for Ethiopia in July 1984, which was designed to accompany an ITV documentary on the famine entitled *Seeds of Despair*.⁶⁰ As with the 1983 appeal, DEC publicity emphasised the widespread suffering throughout the region (referring to ‘the greatest famine in living memory’), and the urgent need for donations for ‘humanity’s sake’. No information was communicated on the causes of famine, or the complex political conflicts affecting the distribution of aid in the region. Instead the appeal focused upon emotive images of starving Ethiopian children, taken directly from the *Seeds of Despair* film (image 5.4). Acknowledging the criticism such

⁵⁹ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Ethiopia Famine Appeal’, *The Guardian*, 2 April 1983, p.3.

⁶⁰ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/6: Christian Aid, ‘Aid Programmes in East Africa and the Sahel (funding January-June 1984, future trends)’, 11 July 1984.

images were now generating within the sector, an internal Christian Aid memo to staff commented that the appeal ‘shows the face of a starving child from the Ethiopia film... you have been warned!’⁶¹ The appeal produced a steady flow of public donations, aided by the BBC despatching reporter Michael Buerk to film a news piece on the famine to accompany the appeal. In a visit hastily arranged by Oxfam, Buerk visited a small agency operation in the South of the country. There, he was able to capture scenes of food shortages and malnutrition despite being far removed from the famine epicentre in the North. Reflecting Oxfam's influence, Buerk's July report provided a neatly simplified judgement of the causes of famine, stating that ‘the simple truth is that the rains have failed. The complicated truth is that the land can no longer support the number of people on it’.⁶²



Image 5.4: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Famine in Africa’ press appeal, July 1984.⁶³

⁶¹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/6: Kate Philipps, ‘Disasters Emergency Committee Africa Appeal’, 13 July 1984.

⁶² quoted in Brian Phelan, ‘Dying for News’, *The Listener*, 2898 (27 February 1985, p.28).

⁶³ Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Famine in Africa Appeal’, *The Guardian*, 20 July 1984, p.12.

With the sudden upsurge of media reporting on Ethiopia that followed the October BBC news report (which was actually a follow-up piece by Michael Buerk), the leading NGOs continued to promote simplistic discourses of famine. This included providing quotes from aid workers, making emergency appeals, and playing up to ethnocentric press reporting which contrasted the heroic benevolence of Western donor publics with the tragic plight of famine-afflicted Ethiopians. An overt example of this was Oxfam and Save the Children's participation in a media stunt arranged by the *Daily Mirror*. Shortly after Ethiopia became a major news story, the *Mirror* despatched its publisher Robert Maxwell in a blaze of publicity on a 'Mirror mercy flight' to the famine zone, loaded with food aid and relief supplies. The *Mirror's* comment that 'the response of the British people to the Ethiopian crisis is as magnificent as the plight of the Ethiopian people is desperate' was typical of how the tabloid press responded to Ethiopia at this time.⁶⁴ This dominant media narrative contributed to a broader popular perception of the famine as a sudden natural disaster which was now being ameliorated by aid agencies, backed by the financial and moral support of the public.

NGOs engaged in this deliberate simplification of the famine for both pragmatic and institutional reasons. There was a genuine anxiety that to draw public attention to the role of the Ethiopian government in creating famine, and manipulating relief for its own purposes, would lead to expulsion from Ethiopia. This in turn would not only mean an end to NGO relief projects in the region, but also place the local partners many agencies worked through at risk of reprisal. A number of NGOs were also involved in a cross-border operation to channel relief aid from Sudan to the relief wings of liberation movements in the Northern provinces of Eritrea and Tigray. This operation could only

⁶⁴ Alistair Campbell, 'ETHIOPIAN FAMINE: Mirror to the rescue', *The Daily Mirror*, 27 October 1984, pp.1-2; 'Out of despair, a harvest of HOPE', *The Daily Mirror*, 29 October 1984, pp.16-17.

function effectively if it remained clandestine.⁶⁵ These were rational reasons to restrict the flow of the information in Britain about the famine. However, this simplification also reflected an approach to representing emergency relief well rehearsed within the sector, particularly within the DEC. This publicity style aimed to maximise fundraising through the use of decontextualised images of suffering and apolitical moral appeals. It also simplified the relationship of the NGOs with the British public, as massive donations exerted pressure upon these organisations to maintain a public appearance of effectively using the money to alleviate suffering. To speak out on the causes of famine, and communicate the complex and harsh realities of delivering aid inside Ethiopia, risked losing the trust and financial support of the general public.

Within the British NGO sector, one notable exception to this was War on Want, which led two separate non-governmental Consortia to channel funds to Eritrea and Tigray.⁶⁶ War on Want had also developed an ideological conviction to Eritrean independence in the 1970s. The agency openly campaigned for increased aid to the two war-plagued Northern provinces throughout 1984, frequently attacking the Ethiopian government for its role in creating famine. In December 1984, War on Want General Secretary George Galloway stated in the *Times* that ‘long drought and consequent famine in Ethiopia is now, thanks to television, widely known... Much less well known, however, is the culpability of the Ethiopian government both in the scale of the hunger and in its politically-motivated obstruction of the relief effort’. Galloway pulled no punches, writing that:

⁶⁵ For more on the cross-border operations, see: Ondine Barrow, ‘International Responses to Famine in Ethiopia 1983-85’, in Ondine Barrow and Michael Jennings (eds.), *The Charitable Impulse: NGOs and Development in East and North-East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001, pp.63-80); de Waal, *Famine Crimes*, pp.127-132 .

⁶⁶ For more on these Consortia, see: WOWA: Box 251: Eritrea Inter Agency Consortium, ‘Funding Development Programmes in Eritrea’, July 1986; WOWA: Box 251: Tigray Transport and Agriculture Consortium, ‘Funding Development Programmes in Tigray’, April 1986.

‘A ruthless military government in Ethiopia is, in fact, presiding over a famine of historic proportions, deliberately starving out whole areas of its country... oiling the wheels of its near-bankrupt economy with the proceeds of black market sales of free western food aid, and steadfastly refusing any international involvement in the supervision of its famine relief operation’.⁶⁷

However, press reports such as these were a rarity, and failed to impact upon the overwhelming public perception of the famine and its connected relief efforts. War on Want was also hindered by its marginal status, receiving far less publicity, public support and funding than the DEC agencies. Crucially, the leading NGOs also declined to publicly support War on Want, which included rejecting the agency's request to be included in the July 1984 DEC appeal.⁶⁸ ODA officials notably referred to War on Want as ‘the *enfant terrible* of the major British development agencies... a thorn in the side of the Ethiopian government’. The ODA added that their visibility ‘causes some risk for the work of voluntary and international agencies in the contested areas’.⁶⁹ Galloway revealingly commented in a further press article that War on Want had been criticised by other NGOs for ‘rocking the boat’, stating that ‘there comes a time when to pretend that the famine relief effort is going well is to render a disservice to those people in Ethiopia who are most in need’.⁷⁰

What this all suggests is that Band Aid's deliberately simplistic and apolitical approach was following a model for successful emergency fundraising embedded in the British humanitarian sector by the DEC and its members. The criticisms made of Band Aid by the established NGOs for having ‘no educational element’, and no attempt to ‘look at the causes of the situation’, were actually very similar to criticisms made of the DEC by

⁶⁷ George Galloway, ‘Why do we take this sitting down?’, *The Sunday Times*, 2 December 1984, p.16.

⁶⁸ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/6: George Galloway, ‘Letter to Pam Pouncey’, 17 July 1984.

⁶⁹ TNA: OD 53/11: M.C. McCulloch, ‘Famine in Ethiopia’, 17 December 1984.

⁷⁰ Thomson Prentice, ‘British charity “rocks boat”’: Ethiopia accused of misusing famine aid’, *The Times*, 3 December 1984, p.6.

War on Want in the late 1970s. Notably, War on Want's calls to modify the Committee then were not supported by the other members, including the increasingly political Christian Aid and Oxfam.

The NGO sector also exacerbated the impact of Band Aid by rushing to ape its publicity methods, and entering into increased competition with one another for public donations. There was a detectable sense of awe within the humanitarian community at the massive popular response to Live Aid, neatly voiced by the Director of Christian Aid's simple observation that 'yes - the world is changed'.⁷¹ A report prepared in 1986 for the Central Appeals Advisory Committee (CAAC) captured this feeling, stating that Live Aid had contributed to a 'transformation in the image of charitable giving and appeals':

'Charitable giving has shed its image of a largely individual, 'amateur' and upper class activity centred around balls, lunches and jumble sales and taken on some of the classless glamour, excitement and interest of those are who seen publicly to represent it. Charity has moved from being worthy, boring and patronising, to being newsworthy and exciting - as Geldof has put it, "making compassion hip"'.⁷²

A number of scholars have supported this depiction of Live Aid fuelling a 'transformation' in philanthropy, giving rise to a new era of slick, media-friendly celebrity humanitarianism.⁷³ What such accounts fail to capture is a longer history of celebrity involvement in charitable causes⁷⁴, as well as how humanitarian NGOs had been unceasingly professionalising their publicity practices since the 1960s, if not earlier. Band Aid did however provide further impetus to these trends, as the established aid agencies

⁷¹ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Martin Bax, 'Post Live Aid', 17 July 1985.

⁷² ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/01070, file 5002/5 (vol. 3): Diana Leat, 'Broadcast Appeals: Report of an Explanatory Study Conducted for the Central Appeals Advisory Committee', December 1986.

⁷³ Richey and Ponte, *Brand Aid*; Müller, "'The Ethiopian famine" revisited'; Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism*.

⁷⁴ Ami V. Shah *et al.*, 'Bono, Band Aid, and Before: Celebrity Humanitarianism, Music and the Objects of its Action', in Gavin J. Andrews *et al.* (eds.), *Soundscapes of Wellbeing in Popular Music* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014, pp.269-288).

looked to capitalise on the initiative's populist appeal. Typical proposals included the Christian Aid campaign designed 'with Live Aid in mind, to appear in the popular and music press, and *Time Out*'.⁷⁵ War on Want overhauled its approach to fundraising after Live Aid, to place stronger emphasis on 'the use of the media, presentation, style and ambition'. Recommendations for putting this into practice included closer relations with the press, associating with local or national celebrities, and building campaigns around simple slogans and 'theatrical' images.⁷⁶ More broadly, voluntary organisations from a variety of sectors further incorporated these principles of corporate promotion and marketing into their communication practices in the immediate post-Live Aid years. This broader professionalisation of voluntary action contributed to the IBA relaxing its restrictions on charity advertising in 1989, which permitted British NGOs to appeal for funds and promote their aims in paid-for advertisements in the broadcast media.⁷⁷

This maturation of a professionalised humanitarian aid industry also heralded a more competitive and growth-oriented environment for aid agencies. Increased competition also impacted upon the effectiveness of advocacy efforts, as market pressures encouraged NGOs to prioritise their own material interests. This competition was especially evident in relation to the DEC, as the sheer scale of the donations received for Ethiopia by its members gave rise to an organised challenge to the Committee's oligarchy by a grouping of five external agencies. This group, comprised of Action Aid, Help the Aged, the Salvation Army, UNICEF UK and War on Want, persistently lobbied the broadcasting authorities throughout 1985 to end the 'monopoly of television time enjoyed by the DEC'. A letter from Action Aid to the CAAC captured how the cartel-like behaviour of the DEC was a long-running issue:

⁷⁵ CAA: Box CA4/A/16, file CA4/A/16/7: Kate Phillips, 'Live Aid', 19 July 1985.

⁷⁶ WOWA: Box 110: Untitled document and author, 1985.

⁷⁷ ITA/IBAA: Box IBA/00943, file 8072 (vol. 1): Independent Broadcasting Authority, 'Charities given the right to advertise on independent television and radio', 4 September 1989.

‘The present arrangements would be less discriminatory if other agencies could join the DEC, but this has proved virtually impossible in practice. The only change in the make-up of the DEC since its formation over twenty years ago is that CAFOD has replaced War on Want - all other approaches by other reputable agencies have been rejected’.⁷⁸

For these organisations, the DEC mechanism had come to represent a ‘form of censorship’ which deprived non-members of access to television, and provided the DEC agencies with a level of free public exposure that others could not match. For the non-members, this was an inequitable situation which the DEC had deliberately perpetuated, stating that the Committee had shown ‘no inclination of sharing the great advantages accruing from their position’, instead choosing to ‘refuse applications from outsiders without discussion and with little sign of serious consideration’. The five organisations therefore demanded that the BBC and ITV ‘terminate forthwith the monopoly accorded to the DEC and negotiate an arrangement giving equal access to a new Committee of charities concerned with overseas relief’.⁷⁹

The DEC responded by strongly resisting any calls for expanding the membership, in which they were aided by the reluctance of the broadcasters to involve themselves in inter-agency politics (who instead emphasised their ‘full support’ for the Committee).⁸⁰ DEC Chairman Lord Hunt commented to the BBC that the DEC system had ‘worked reasonably well over the years and has wide public acceptance’. Lord Hunt added that it would ‘be a pity to upset this and it may be therefore that nothing needs to be done about the frustration felt by some non-DEC charities over the Famine in Africa appeal’.⁸¹ Without the support of the broadcasters the five non-members faced an uphill struggle, yet they continued to challenge the Committee throughout 1985. Now represented by former

⁷⁸ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Roger Lees, ‘Letter to Lady Marre’, 17 January 1985.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Minutes of the meeting of the Chief Executives’, 19 April 1985.

⁸¹ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Lord Hunt, ‘Letter to John Wilkinson’, 26 March 1985.

Oxfam Director Leslie Kirkley, the five external NGOs continued to lobby the broadcasters on the grounds that ‘new organisations have developed in the overseas disaster/relief field in this country during the 22 years since the DEC was created’. For these agencies, a Committee membership of only five NGOs could ‘no longer be regarded as nationally representative of the many charities now heavily involved in such situations... its operations have become a monopoly which handicaps others’.⁸² Kirkley also went on to set out just how influential the DEC mechanism had been in shaping the sector, stating that its members had been able to raise through the DEC ‘more than 25% of their total annual income’, while ‘the currency of a DEC appeal’ had resulted in ‘a refusal of any mention of other organisations programmes in the same area of activity’.⁸³

Despite this pressure, the broadcasters still refused to involve themselves in the dispute, instead stating that ‘neither the BBC nor the CAAC are themselves in a position to judge which charities may be eligible to join the Committee’. Any decision to change the DEC membership was therefore ‘a matter for the DEC to decide alone’.⁸⁴ Without the support of the broadcasters, the organised challenge of the non-members was effectively over. Instead, three of the five (Action Aid, Help the Aged and UNICEF UK) elected to apply directly to the DEC for membership. The response of the Committee to these applications in 1986 once again reflected its oligarchical outlook:

‘We have reluctantly reached the conclusion that even on the most liberal interpretation of the existing criteria neither Help the Aged nor Action Aid qualify for membership at the present stage of their development. We also feel that we have to rule out the UK Committee for UNICEF completely, on the grounds that it does not have direct control over funds raised in this country’.⁸⁵

⁸² BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Sir Leslie Kirkley, ‘Letter to Stuart Young’, 29 May 1985.

⁸³ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Sir Leslie Kirkley, ‘Letter to Stuart Young’, 22 July 1985.

⁸⁴ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: ‘Minutes of the meeting of the Chief Executives’, 19 April 1985; BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Stuart Young, ‘Letter to Roger Lees’, 17 June 1985.

⁸⁵ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Lord Hunt, ‘Letter to G S Jones’, 16 July 1986.

Instead, the Committee proposed offering a limited form of access to Action Aid and Help the Aged as ‘associate members’. Under this new designation, these NGOs would be attached to the DEC and entitled to attend operational meetings. They would also receive ‘automatic consideration for participation in DEC appeals for countries where they have declared an interest’. However, the established members still retained their authority over the mechanism, as the decision to include associate members in any specific emergency appeals was still at their discretion.⁸⁶ Action Aid and Help the Aged accepted associate membership of the Committee in December 1986, with the agreement of the television broadcasters. This brought to an end the challenge to the DEC's oligarchy, although dissatisfaction with the Committee continued to exist within the sector as a whole.

The commitment of the DEC members to maintaining their humanitarian cartel also demonstrated how Band Aid could not be held solely responsible for generating increased competition within the sector. As much as Band Aid undermined public support for political campaigns, this outcome was also exacerbated by the deliberate decisions of leading NGOs. Despite a stated commitment to tackling the root causes of global poverty and suffering, the principal aid agencies also subverted these aims by prioritising their own institutional self-interests.

Conclusions

Ethiopia was clearly an important period in the history of modern non-governmental humanitarianism. The intensive financial growth of NGOs, coupled with the further development of corporate marketing techniques post-Band Aid, marked a rapid expansion and professionalisation of the humanitarian sector. The high visibility and resources

⁸⁶ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Lord Hunt, ‘Letter to G S Jones’, 16 July 1986; BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Disasters Emergency Committee, ‘Annual Report 1986’, January 1987.

commanded by NGOs in this period, and their closer enmeshing with donor governments, foreshadowed the prominent role they would attain in humanitarian interventions in the post-Cold War period. However, this chapter has also argued that Ethiopia was not a watershed in the history of non-governmental humanitarianism, as widely assumed.

Rather, the 1984-85 period marked the culmination of a long-running trajectory of humanitarian NGOs building up their capacities and public support for emergency relief. The principal aid agencies did so despite internal discomfort concerning how this impacted upon their educational and advocacy activities. The channelling of bilateral humanitarian aid through the DEC by the British government for Ethiopia was also a continuation of ongoing integration between the sector and the state. These trends all contributed to the acceleration of a professionalised and technocratic disaster relief industry in Britain, in which the leading NGOs were enrolled as prominent agents.

Development agencies were well aware of the problematic foundations on which their growth was built. The perpetuation of graphic media images of starving Ethiopian children also gave added momentum to the critique of this form of representation, which had gathered pace within the development community since the 1970s. In 1985 the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) initiated a joint project with European and African NGOs to examine information material dealing with Africa. Oxfam coordinated the project in Britain, publishing its findings in 1987. This landmark report concluded that the dissemination of famine images by the media and NGOs in 1984-85 had created a 'particular public consciousness of Africa', rooted in colonial conceptions of Africans as barbaric, primitive, and underdeveloped.⁸⁷

This self-examination resulted in the formulation of various internal guidelines and Codes of Conducts within aid agencies, to encourage ethical and responsible practices of

⁸⁷ Nikki van der Gaag and Cathy Nash, *Images of Africa: The UK Report* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1987).

representation. A number of NGOs also underwent structural reorganisation to reduce the tension between their fundraising and campaigning staff. After 1987, many organisations aspired to utilise more ‘positive’ imagery which moved away from a reliance on stereotypical images of starving babies.⁸⁸ However, the continued recycling of negative imagery by aid agencies in the years since, especially in the immediacy of responding to major disasters, attests to the enduring attraction of this form of representation, despite its problematic dimensions.

The Band Aid phenomenon is ultimately crucial to understanding this period. Band Aid's populist appeal and slick, celebrity-driven presentation of charity worked to further fuel the long-running professionalisation of humanitarian marketing practices. In the process, Band Aid contributed to a further tilting of international aid towards emergency relief, and away from long-term development and advocacy. However, as this chapter has argued, humanitarian NGOs were also implicated in this process, which they exacerbated through deliberate short-termist decisions. In retrospect, this titling can also be interpreted as a reflection of broader societal shifts of the 1980s. The successful implementation of neoliberal public policies by the Thatcher government shifted responsibility for welfare from the state to the individual. This rationale also contributed to substantial increases in official funding for NGOs. As the neoliberal project involved a deliberate effort to construct its principles as ‘common-sense’, this approach to welfare also arguably impacted upon the legitimacy of the entire practice of voluntary action. This could be detected in the increased public support for individual, consumer-driven philanthropy (as embodied by Band Aid), and the corresponding decline in support for more structural, statist solutions. While the rise of a neoliberal approach to long-term

⁸⁸ Nandita Dogra, *Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp.6-7.

development and humanitarian aid would impact much more forcefully upon NGOs in the 1990s, its effects were visible in the 1980s.

Conclusions

This investigation has documented how the expansion and rise to prominence of the modern British humanitarian NGO sector was driven by a perpetual cycle of major disasters in the global South. Responding to these emergencies granted the leading aid agencies access to the media, public visibility, and a popular fundraising base. Over time, a complex and technocratic infrastructure for humanitarian aid emerged in Britain, in which NGOs were embedded as suppliers of humanitarian aid in close collaboration with the state. This growth of NGOs on the basis of emergency also overlapped with a number of principal agencies taking up the cause of international development, beginning in the early 1960s. In their attempts to address hunger and poverty in the global South, these organisations came to realise that aid projects alone would not bring about long-term change.

Instead, development NGOs gradually accepted the need for an overt political advocacy role, targeting the structural forces which created and perpetuated global inequality. The articulation of a distinctive NGO advocacy agenda also encouraged a critique of humanitarian aid from within the development community, for not addressing the root causes of distant suffering, and arguably preventing political solutions from being articulated altogether. The humanitarian NGO sector thus came to be characterised by a paradox over the course of this period. While many aid agencies self-identified with long-term development programming and campaigning, their expansion and public recognition was the result of continued involvement in responding to major disasters.

Previous chapters have systematically set out the contradictory trajectories of NGOs towards both emergency relief and development, and discussed why the sector acted in this Janus-faced manner. Clearly, the institutional and technological development

of the mass media was of crucial importance, especially television. The spread of television ownership, coupled with advances in communications and filming technologies, brought a new immediacy to distant suffering and stimulated humanitarian empathy within Britain. The fundraising reach of the DEC reflected how the leading aid agencies could harness this power of the media for material gain. However, television news and current affairs programmes also significantly simplified overseas disasters and crises. Dramatic, visual images of human suffering received considerable attention, while the broader political context and structural causes of this suffering were obscured. The impact of such images upon the public ensured a constant stream of income for humanitarian NGOs. Indeed, at times the DEC mechanism amounted to little more than ‘putting up an address’, as the Committee responded to public sympathy already generated by television news coverage.¹ By contrast, aid agencies engaged in long-term development found it immensely challenging to generate any substantial media interest in their less glamorous development programmes and advocacy campaigning. The television broadcasters played an active role in this through their own interventions in the sector, to prevent the transmission of any content they deemed to be unacceptably ‘political’ in televised appeals.

These trends reinforced a widely held public conception of aid agencies as being concerned solely with disaster interventions. For all the efforts of NGOs in pursuing an alternative path to development, throughout this period the British public was simply far more responsive to evocative depictions of large-scale human suffering, especially when these involved starving children. Development agencies were aware of this constraint on their activities from very early on. For instance, the massive public reactions to emergencies in Biafra and Bangladesh in the late 1960s and early 1970s also coincided

¹ BBC WAC: file B420-4-1: Denis Mann, ‘Note on a meeting between Lord Hunt of Tanworth, Colonel Terry Palmer, and Mr. Lewis Waddilove’, 10 February 1982.

with lukewarm reactions to advocacy campaigns by the Haslemere Group and the World Development Movement. Similarly, War on Want's descent into financial crisis after exiting the DEC in 1979 revealed how the organisation had been overly reliant on disaster appeal income for a number of years, failing to build a sufficient fundraising base through its public campaigning and development work. Indeed, opinion polling undertaken from 1969 onwards indicated that public support for overseas aid was largely motivated by moral and humanitarian concerns, and understanding of development issues was comparatively low.² Large sections of the public assumed development aid to be the same as humanitarian aid, a blurring that was recognised by both NGOs and government officials as early as the 1960s and 1970s. This lack of popular enthusiasm also suggested that the educational and advocacy initiatives of development NGOs were ineffective at the national level. While the principal NGOs were apt to bemoan this state of affairs, they were also complicit in reinforcing this public ignorance through their simplistic appeals and publicity.

Crucially, the role of NGOs in providing disaster relief was extended and consolidated by the British government. There is a long history of collaboration between the state and the humanitarian sector, and in the 1970s this relationship was formalised and rationalised through new institutional structures and co-financing arrangements. Under pressure to visibly respond more effectively to overseas emergencies, the government created a specialist Disaster Unit within the Ministry of Overseas Development in 1974 to function as a focal point for relief. The Disaster Unit deliberately targeted closer integration with the leading NGOs, using the DEC as a vehicle, and in subsequent years channelled significant financial and logistical support through the Committee. While this support granted increased authority to the DEC at the

² Ida Mc Donnell, 'United Kingdom', in Ida Mc Donnell *et al.* (eds.), *Public Opinion and the Fight against Poverty* (Paris: OECD, 2003, pp.217-224).

governmental level, it also enrolled its members as instruments for the delivery of relief in an integrated and technocratic humanitarian infrastructure. This channelling of official aid through the DEC became more overt in the 1980s, as the Conservative government downgraded the significance of long-term development and increasingly contracted out services to voluntary organisations. This all worked to consolidate a depoliticised approach to humanitarianism which contradicted the political advocacy agenda also being articulated within the sector.

These interconnected factors all collectively shaped, fuelled and restricted the development of the humanitarian sector. However, the leading NGOs also exacerbated these trends further, through their own deliberate and short-termist decision making. Despite a discernible will within the development community to move away from charitable relief, the DEC agencies all recognised that dramatic emergency appeals in the media were unrivalled at provoking a public reaction. Provocative images of suffering children may have been unethical and exploitative, but they were also a highly effective and efficient method of driving fundraising and organisational growth within a competitive humanitarian marketplace. The long-standing resistance of the DEC agencies to admit other organisations into the Committee also suggests that, while many of its members may have been uncomfortable with the characteristics of disaster relief, it also provided them with valuable institutional benefits. War on Want's sustained critique of the DEC throughout the 1970s, which called for the Committee to take up development education and advocacy, was revealingly not supported by the other organisations. Indeed, NGOs such as Christian Aid and Oxfam arguably recognised that public association with apolitical disaster relief was a largely uncontroversial activity, which deflected attention away from the problematic issues connected to becoming more overtly political.

The Ethiopian famine and Band Aid fundraising events were followed by a rapid financial and institutional expansion of the humanitarian sector in the late 1980s. This marked the culmination of a long-running trajectory of NGOs towards building up their capacity and popular appeal on the basis of major, high-profile emergencies. This trend both continued and intensified in the period that followed, as aid agencies further professionalised and proliferated, developed more sophisticated media techniques, and gained increased prominence within the international system. In this regard, NGOs benefitted from a broader shift to a new stage of international humanitarianism inaugurated by the end of Cold War (what Michael Barnett has termed the age of ‘liberal humanitarianism’).³ The collapse of the bipolar system triggered rapid economic and political globalisation, as well as unleashing a flurry of violent conflicts and ‘complex emergencies’ in former superpower client states. In this new global environment, conceptions of security have emerged which grant less authority to state sovereignty. The international community has gradually demonstrated a new willingness to intervene in the internal affairs of nation states on the grounds of human rights abuses and humanitarian crises.⁴ As a result, total international expenditure on emergency relief has increased dramatically since the early 1990s, substantial proportions of which have been channelled through NGOs, who have increasingly become the preferred channel for donor publics, western governments, and UN agencies.⁵ A recent account of the contemporary aid

³ Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), p.161.

⁴ Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); John Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders: The International Politics of Natural Disasters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention* (2nd ed.: Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

⁵ James D. Fearon, ‘The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid’, in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, pp.49-72); Peter Walker and Daniel Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp.117-135.

industry thus describes NGOs as forming ‘the backbone of the delivery mechanism of the international humanitarian system’.⁶

For all that the humanitarian landscape has changed in the post-Cold War period, the key issues raised by this study are however still very much apparent. Competition between aid agencies remains a major issue, regularly highlighted in contemporary publications. The number of individual relief NGOs has mushroomed since the late 1980s and early 1990s, fuelled by the increasing availability of funding, the creation of niche agencies for specific humanitarian needs, and the internationalisation of many leading NGOs. Major global actors such as CARE, MSF and World Vision all notably established British entities during this period. Proliferation of aid agencies was also driven by advancements in media technologies, especially the advent of live satellite broadcasting from disaster zones, which increased the fundraising potential of any agencies visibly involved in relief efforts. While these trends have offered new opportunities for NGOs to expand in size and influence, proliferation has also heightened competition within the sector, fostering concerns over the maintenance of ethical and technical standards.⁷ As this study has shown, these concerns over competition have a longer history stretching back to the professionalisation of NGO advertising and the spread of television ownership in the early 1960s.

The long-standing critique of the DEC as a self-interested cartel lacking in accountability or transparency, voiced from within the sector as early as the 1960s, eventually culminated in a number of significant changes to the Committee. The catalyst for this was a DEC broadcast appeal for the Rwandan genocide in 1994, which raised £10 million for a region where few of the member agencies had an established capacity or

⁶ Walker and Maxwell, *Shaping the Humanitarian World*, p.119.

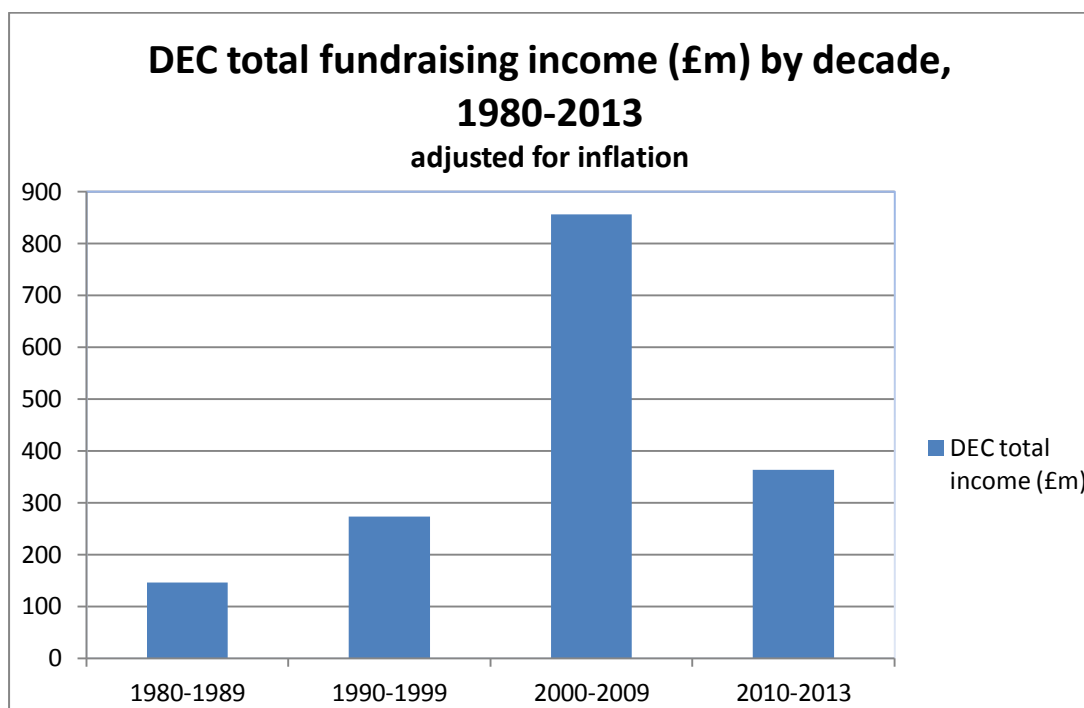
⁷ John Borton *et al.*, ‘The Structure and Functioning of the “New” DEC: A Discussion Paper’ (Overseas Development Institute, 1997).

comparative advantage. Criticism of the DEC became more public as a result, and a process of internal review and reform was initiated in 1995. This independent review examined all aspects of the DEC's operations, and resulted in the barriers to DEC membership being relaxed. The previously strict criteria was replaced by a principle of inclusion which rendered most British relief agencies eligible to join. The Committee was also formally established as a non-profit organisation with full charitable status, which was intended to further professionalise its operations and enhance its transparency. The 'New DEC' was officially relaunched in 1997, comprised of 15 members with an independent Council and more sophisticated evaluation procedures.⁸ This reconfiguration of the DEC affirmed the intensive expansion of the humanitarian NGO sector which had taken place since the Committee was originally set up in the early 1960s.

The power of the media to influence the public, generate funding, and shape humanitarian action has also further developed in recent decades. This has been driven by advances in communications technology, as well as innovative new fundraising technologies such as the use of phone networks and websites. The power of the media is particularly evident in the work of the DEC, which has continued to extend its fundraising reach at a phenomenal rate (graph 6.1). This was emphatically illustrated by a DEC appeal for the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, which raised a staggering record sum of £392 million from the British public. There is no current indication that this trend will slow down; as recently as November 2013, a DEC appeal for a devastating typhoon in the Philippines raised £68 million from the public in less than three weeks.⁹

⁸ Borton *et al.*, 'The Structure and Functioning of the "New" DEC'; John Borton, 'A "New" Disasters Emergency Committee in the UK', *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*, 8 (May 1997), available at: <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-08/a-new-disasters-emergency-committee-in-the-uk> [accessed 31 March 2014].

⁹ Disasters Emergency Committee, 'DEC Philippines typhoon appeal reaches £68 million', 29 November 2013, available at: <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals/philippines-typhoon-appeal/press-release/dec-philippines-typhoon-appeal-reaches-£68-million> [accessed 31 March 2014].



Graph 6.1: Disasters Emergency Committee total fundraising income by decade, 1980-2013, adjusted for inflation.¹⁰

In the process, the leading NGOs have continued to expand and build up an apparatus for disaster relief, increasing their humanitarian budgets and becoming more overtly instrumentalised in their relationships with official donors. Crucially, many NGOs have done so despite their stated commitments to addressing the structural, long-term causes of global poverty and suffering. Indeed, the rise of emergency relief aid in the post-Cold War period has ran concurrently with the continued professionalisation of NGO development advocacy. In Britain, this has been aided by a relaxation of charity laws since the 1990s, which now permit some degree of political activity by registered charities.¹¹ NGOs now increasingly come together in transnational alliances and networks to campaign on

¹⁰ DEC income sourced from DEC website: <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals> [accessed 31 March 2014]. Adjusted for inflation using Bank of England Inflation Calculator, 2012 rate: <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/education/Pages/inflation/calculator/flash/default.aspx> [accessed 31 March 2014].

¹¹ Gary Watt, *Equity and Trusts Law Directions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.185.

specific global justice issues, directed at specific global actors such as the World Bank or the G8.¹² The problematic relationship between emergency relief and political advocacy set out in this investigation is therefore arguably more pronounced today than ever before. Despite the successful grassroots mobilisations by iconic advocacy campaigns such as Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History, the continued public purchase of disaster imagery has consistently brought NGOs back to more simplistic, short-term emergency assistance.

The deliberate building up of an expansive and depoliticised apparatus for emergency relief by NGOs, despite a discernible will within the sector to move beyond charitable relief, raises challenging questions about non-state humanitarianism as a whole. Firstly, it implies that all the work of NGOs has been driven by the spectacle and appeal of disaster relief. For all that aid agencies aimed to promote an alternative vision of development, they have grown and proliferated on the basis of what Mark Duffield has termed the state of ‘permanent emergency’ which exists among the world's most vulnerable populations.¹³ Indeed, the history set out in this study suggests that organisations such as Oxfam and Save the Children are inherently susceptible to the particular dynamics and pressures generated by dramatic media coverage of disaster and human suffering. Successive NGO disaster relief efforts have legitimised a certain form of intervention in the developing world, which perpetuates the disaster relief industry while fundamentally depoliticising global inequality and suffering. To put it bluntly, the leading NGOs would have been unable to acquire the prominence and high levels of public visibility that they enjoy today, without the continuous cycle of severe suffering that has impacted upon the developing world.

¹² Barbara Rugendyke, ‘Lilliputians or leviathans? NGOs as advocates’, in Barbara Rugendyke (ed.), *NGOs as Advocates for Development in a Globalising World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp.1-14).

¹³ Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of Peoples* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp.74-75.

The substantial, largely ahistorical literature that addresses contemporary humanitarianism highlights a number of major issues affecting the sector today. The substantial sums of official aid channelled through NGOs, for both humanitarian and development aid, has raised concerns that aid agencies have become overly reliant on donor funding, to the detriment of their accountability, independence, legitimacy, and performance. Many observers now interpret the integration of agencies with donors as evidence of NGOs becoming sub-contractors for neoliberal policy change, functioning as basic service providers while states roll back their commitments.¹⁴ For humanitarian aid specifically, the closer enmeshing of NGOs with donor governments, militaries and UN agencies since 2001 has been interpreted as a further instrumentalisation of non-governmental humanitarianism, as assistance has increasingly been subsumed within a broader anti-terror agenda. This process has been described as a ‘securitisation’ of international aid.¹⁵ The expansive aid industry that this funding has helped stimulate has also been linked with NGOs operating in a more competitive and business-like manner, jostling among themselves for market share and losing their sense of mission and legitimacy in the process.¹⁶

¹⁴ Stephen Commins, ‘NGOs: ladles in the global soup kitchen?’, *Development in Practice*, 9:5 (1999, pp.619-622); Michael Edwards and David Hulme, ‘Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on non-governmental organisations’, *World Development*, 24:6 (June 1996, pp.961-973); David Hulme and Michael Edwards (eds.), *NGOs, States and Donors: Too Close for Comfort?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Thomas F. Carroll, *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development* (Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1992), p.18; Tina Wallace *et al.*, *Standardising Development: Influences on UK NGOs’ Policies and Procedures* (Oxford: WorldView, 1997); Tina Wallace *et al.*, *The Aid Chain: Coercion and Commitment in Development NGOs* (Warwickshire: ITDG, 1999); David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Thomas G. Weiss, *Thinking about Global Governance: Why people and ideas matter* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

¹⁵ Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War*; Joanna Macrae and Adele Harmer (eds.), ‘Humanitarian action and the “global war on terror”: a review of trends and issues’, *ODI HPG Report 14* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003); Patricia Noxolo, ‘Freedom, Fear & NGOs: Balancing Discourses of Violence & Humanity in Securitising Times’, in Mark Duffield and Vernon Hewitt (eds.), *Empire, Development and Colonialism: The Past in the Present* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2013, pp.130-145).

¹⁶ Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Business* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); David Rieff, ‘Charity on the Rampage: The Business of Foreign Aid’, *Foreign Affairs* (February 1997), available at:

While these are all deeply important challenges facing the sector today, this investigation has shown that they have a much longer history than suggested in the contemporary literature. The British government was channelling official aid through the DEC members in the 1960s, which also brought the Committee members more closely into the orbit of government. This laid the groundwork for a closer integration of aid agencies and the state in the 1970s, as the government forged a more formalised and instrumentalised relationship with the sector (reflecting broader shifts in how the state and the voluntary sector interacted). The incorporation of NGOs into a broader system of humanitarian governmentality in the post-Cold War period was thus actually set in motion two decades earlier. Indeed, the long history of interaction between the state and non-state set out in this thesis suggests that concerns over whether donors and NGOs have become ‘too close for comfort’ are misleading. In practice, the two have been intertwined for decades, to the extent that they have arguably been mutually co-constitutive. The crucial importance of the state to the history of the sector also emphasises the limitations of viewing humanitarian NGOs through a social movement perspective. NGOs may have defined themselves as ‘non-governmental’, but in practice they have always been shaped by the state to some extent.

Similarly, the rise of a competitive aid industry can also be traced back further back than the 1990s. The contours of the modern NGO sector can be seen as crystallising in the 1950s, especially after the UN World Refugee Year (WRY) initiative of 1959. WRY brought humanitarian organisations more closely together on the national stage, and elevated Christian Aid, Oxfam and War on Want into principal agencies. From this point on, competitive forces were constantly at play within the sector, exacerbated by the spread

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/52653/david-rieff/charity-on-the-rampage-the-business-of-foreign-aid> [accessed 31 March 2014]; Alexander Cooley and James Ron, ‘The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action’, *International Security*, 27:1 (Summer 2002, pp.5-39).

of television and more sophisticated publicity practices. Indeed, the creation of the DEC in 1963 was a deliberate attempt to mitigate this competition among its members, and in the years that followed it regularly acted in a manner resembling a humanitarian cartel. The huge funding that entered the sector as a result of the Ethiopian famine in 1984-85 (including Band Aid) further fuelled and exacerbated these competitive tendencies.

This thesis has shown how the expansion of NGOs has been closely linked with strong popular enthusiasm for emergency relief. Furthermore, this enthusiasm has both persisted and increased over time, despite the concerns often expressed within the sector over the prospect of ‘compassion fatigue’.¹⁷ While this enduring public support has fuelled the growth of aid agencies, it has been based on simplistic images and narratives of human suffering which restrict public awareness of the structural causes of global underdevelopment. The perpetuation of this mode of representation by NGOs reflects the competitive environment in which they operate. It also reflects the relationship these organisations have constructed between themselves and the general public. Recent research indicates that public trust in NGOs has remained very high over time, despite a widespread decline of public trust in political parties and established institutions over the same period.¹⁸ For humanitarian NGOs, this trust is integral to their operations, as it grants them legitimacy and brand loyalty in a congested market. However, it is reasonable to assume that this trust has been based on a popular conception of aid agencies as apolitical relief charities, and a corresponding lack of awareness of their broader political agendas. This contradiction has long been acknowledged within the sector. As Christian

¹⁷ Susan D. Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death* (New York: Routledge, 1999). See also: Charles R. Figley (ed.), *Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder In Those Who Treat The Traumatized* (NY: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁸ National Council of Voluntary Organisations, *Blurred Vision: Public Trust in Charities* (London: NCVO, 1998); Adrian Sargeant and Stephen Lee, ‘Donor Trust and Relationship Commitment in the U.K. Charity Sector: The Impact on Behaviour’, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 33:2 (June 2004, pp.185-202); Matthew Hilton *et al.*, *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Aid observed in 1975, there was ‘always a problem in interpreting one's actions to the wider public because there was not necessarily the understanding and background which applied to our own constituency... there were many people who felt that we only dealt with the symptoms and not the causes’.¹⁹

An awareness that the public viewed them as only dealing with ‘symptoms’ has historically acted as a formidable constraint on NGOs entering the political arena. Aid agencies have long fretted that to become openly associated with radical campaigning and propaganda could alienate their public supporter base. For instance, Save the Children's expression of ‘dismay and concern’ at the lobbying of government by its VCOAD partners in the 1960s, which was interpreted as potentially ‘causing disillusionment amongst many of [Save the Children's] supporters, to the serious detriment of their fundraising’.²⁰ One consequence of this public misconception is that moderate and uncontroversial bodies have tended to attract more support than their radical counterparts. The history of War on Want demonstrates how this trend unfolded in practice. Despite taking up a more overt campaigning role in the 1970s, and openly critiquing the entire practice of humanitarian aid, the organisation was unable to build up a sufficient fundraising base outside of the DEC.

Similarly, the leading NGOs rushed to ape the publicity strategies of Band Aid in the 1980s, despite simultaneously critiquing the Live Aid phenomenon for having set back years of development education projects. What this ultimately suggests is that, while many principal NGOs self-identify as development agencies, they have found it convenient to remain immersed in an expansive humanitarian industry. Popular demand for disaster relief is stimulated by media coverage of distant suffering and charitable

¹⁹ CAA: Box CA2/D/27, file CA2/D/27/3: Christian Aid, ‘Minutes of a board meeting’, 19 February 1975: Christian Aid policy regarding humanitarian aid in special areas (12/75).

²⁰ SCFA: Box A422: C.H. Thornley, ‘Annexure to Minutes of 271st Meeting of the Executive Committee: Minute E.4246: Voluntary Committee on Overseas Aid and Development’, 19 November 1968.

appeals, and satisfied by the highly visible interventions of leading NGOs. This in turn reinforces a one-sided relationship between aid agencies and their supporters, further associating NGOs in the public imagination with disasters. Therefore, the humanitarian sector has played an active and important role in creating a persistent problem of public engagement.

The enduring orientation of the public towards simplistic relief, rather than political campaigning and lobbying, raises further implications about the nature of political and social engagement in modern Britain. In particular, it suggests that while global hunger, poverty and suffering affects and mobilises the public, it has only ever done so in a charitable sense. This hypothesis appears to be supported by surveys of the British population. Indeed, a 2009 Parliamentary Select Committee report argues that public opinion does not even equate ‘helping poor people’ with development, due to a misconception of overseas aid as a whole as ‘short-term charity for humanitarian relief’.²¹ This suggests that the growth of support for humanitarian NGOs largely represents a lack of political engagement by the public and a form of ‘chequebook activism’, as NGOs have offered simplistic philanthropic solutions to distant suffering while casting themselves as altruistic saviours. In the process, media-driven humanitarianism has also arguably undermined more radical political projects of social transformation.

While both NGOs and the mass media are complicit in this process, it may also indicate that the public as whole fundamentally does not want a revolutionary transformation in the existing capitalist order, which is the implied end-goal of all NGO development advocacy. Such a hypothesis requires more sustained empirical research into the relationship between international aid NGOs and the public, and popular attitudes to

²¹ House of Commons International Development Committee, *Aid Under Pressure: Support for Development Assistance in a Global Economic Downturn, Fourth Report of Session 2008-09, Volume I* (London: House of Commons, May 2009), p.44.

aid and development, before it can be developed and elaborated further. Further research could also be conducted into how television has represented global hunger and poverty, as well as development issues more generally. This would ideally provide a more nuanced understanding of how mediation promotes and restricts different types of public engagement with the wider world.

The growth of public support for NGO humanitarianism also sheds light on how the end of empire impacted upon British society, as the rise of the modern NGO sector overlapped with decolonisation. The abrupt end to colonial rule generated considerable public anxiety and debate concerning Britain's place and relevance in a post-imperial world, captured in Dean Acheson's famous comment in 1962 that Britain had 'lost an empire and... not yet found a role'.²² Clearly, humanitarian philanthropy has offered one possible vision of what this role could entail. In their interventions to alleviate distant suffering, NGOs regularly reproduced and reworked familiar colonial discourses which cast Britain as a benevolent, paternal, and inherently internationalist power in its relationship with the wider world. In particular, the heavy use of starving children in NGO appeals can be viewed as a modern reproduction of traditional missionary portrayals of Africa.²³ Growing public support for NGO emergency relief in this period can thus be interpreted as a modern re-imagining of imperial charity, offering (to paraphrase Anna

²² Douglas Brinkley, 'Dean Acheson and the "Special Relationship": The West Point Speech of December 1962', *The Historical Journal*, 33:3 (September 1990), pp.599-608.

²³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.130; Marianne Gullestad, *Picturing Pity: Pitfalls and Pleasures in Cross-cultural Communication - Image and Word in a North Cameroon Mission* (NY: Berghahn, 2007), p.25; Kate Manzo, 'Imaging Humanitarianism: NGO Identity and the Iconography of Childhood', *Antipode*, 40:4 (2008, pp.632-657); Lisa Rideout, 'Representations of the "Third World" in NGO advertising: practicalities, colonial discourse and western understandings of development', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 3:1 (March 2011, pp.25-41); Emily Baughan, "'Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!'" Empire, internationalism and the Save the Children Fund in inter-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 86:231 (February 2013, pp.116-137).

Bocking-Welch) a new ‘narrative of national purpose in the wake of decolonisation’.²⁴ The populist appeal of humanitarian rhetoric also points to a longer lineage of ‘morally-inspired protest’ in British political culture, which signals the lasting legacy of imperial philanthropy.²⁵ The acquisition of a moral authority by NGO humanitarianism indicates how the potential for radical, structural solutions to global hunger and poverty has been undermined by aid agencies systematically intervening in a non-political manner.

Indeed, the rise of humanitarianism as a principal way of engaging with the wider world has arguably filled a void created by the collapse of the imperial project, and the atomisation and fragmentation characteristic of late capitalist society. Jordanna Bailkin argues that the end of empire was reborn in a ‘globally manufactured welfare state’, as decolonisation also worked to reconfigure social life, both at home and abroad, through an expanding notion of welfare.²⁶ In this context, the rise to prominence of humanitarian NGOs can be interpreted as aid agencies positioning themselves as symbols of global morality, mediating between donors at home and aid recipients abroad.²⁷ This would explain the wide acceptance of humanitarian discourses in contemporary Britain. Vanessa Pupavac observes how humanitarianism now often comes to the fore in official statements to promote a sense of ‘Britishness’, as governments struggle to articulate shared national values when trust has declined in national institutions.²⁸ Again, further research is

²⁴ Anna Bocking-Welch, ‘Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses: British Involvement in the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign, 1960–70’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:5 (December 2012, pp.879-896), p.884; see also: Helen Gilbert and Chris Tiffin (eds.), *Burden or Benefit?: Imperial Benevolence and Its Legacies* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

²⁵ Paul Byrne, *Social Movements in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.174; see also: Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: Liberal Humanitarians and Transnational Activists in Britain and the United States, c.1919-64* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.2-5.

²⁶ Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012), p.237.

²⁷ Terje Tvedt, *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats? NGOs and Foreign Aid* (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), p.2.

²⁸ Vanessa Pupavac, ‘Between Compassion and Conservatism: A Genealogy of Humanitarian Sensibilities’, in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 2010, pp.129-149).

required to explore and unpick the continuities between the imperial and post-imperial in British humanitarian thought and action.

These implications raise a number of avenues for further investigations. Firstly, the history set out in this thesis could be extended to cover the post-Cold War era, which is widely depicted as a break in humanitarian action. While this investigation has cautioned against this perspective, there is a need to locate the period within a longer history of NGO humanitarianism. To do so would require different historical methods, given the relative lack of available material in governmental, NGO and media archives for the years after 1985. Instead, such an investigation could be undertaken using published NGO evaluations and reports, as well as oral history interviews of key personnel in the humanitarian aid system. Furthermore, while this study has focused primarily upon disaster relief, this approach could be inverted to instead undertake a systematic exploration of the British NGO sector and international development. In this context, the advocacy and ‘development education’ work of aid agencies clearly warrants systematic historical investigation. Such studies could be expected to provide further insights on the major themes raised here, such as the professionalisation of NGOs, the nature of their political engagement, and their positioning within broader systems of governance. There is also a pressing need for investigation into how aid operations were actually implemented on the ground, not only to test the effectiveness of NGOs in the field, but to also understand how aid recipients have conceptualised and reworked humanitarian assistance at the local level.

This thesis has focused solely on the British humanitarian sector. The implications discussed here, however, raise further questions about how distinct the British case is in a global context. It would be illuminating to explore whether the findings of this investigation correlate or contrast with other national NGO sectors. It has been shown that

the British government played a crucial role in shaping the emergence of a humanitarian industry in Britain. The Department for International Development (DFID) is now a leading international donor of both development aid and emergency relief, and has been an influential voice in shaping international disaster policy.²⁹ Examining the historical emergence of humanitarian NGOs in countries with less interventionist states may shed further light on the nature of non-governmental activism.

Furthermore, the Disasters Emergency Committee was notably described by Jonathan Benthall in 1993 as a ‘unique system... characteristic of the British “Establishment”’.³⁰ However, similar umbrella organisations do operate in Canada, Japan and across Europe, a number of which have been explicitly modelled on the DEC's structure and co-ordinating methodology.³¹ Additionally, the two largest NGOs in the British sector - Oxfam and Save the Children - have long engaged in internationalising their operations, setting up global federations made up of numerous national entities.³² This raises the possibility that the processes and trends which have shaped the rise of the British sector have also been exported through the global aid network. The history of British humanitarianism may therefore also contribute more broadly to understanding how international NGOs as a whole have become such major players in the global humanitarian aid industry, despite the long-standing convictions of many agencies to de-emphasise charitable relief and adopt a more overtly political role instead.

It has been observed that the British public has widely supported and trusted NGOs for a number of decades. In the humanitarian field, aid agencies have historically

²⁹ Hannigan, *Disasters Without Borders*, pp.22-23.

³⁰ Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), p.42.

³¹ For more on these organisations, see: <http://www.dec.org.uk/joint-appeals-alliance> [accessed 31 March 2014].

³² As of October 2013, Oxfam International is made up of 17 national organisations, and Save the Children International is made up of 30 national organisations. see: <http://www.oxfam.org/>; <http://www.savethechildren.net/> [accessed 31 March 2014].

been perceived as heroic altruists and superior alternatives to official actors, which has largely insulated them from criticism. There are signs that these perceptions are beginning to change. International NGOs are now increasingly being implicated as part of official bureaucracies and systems of governance, rather than the alternative ‘compassionate critics’.³³ This shift can be attributed to the rampant expansion and professionalisation of the humanitarian sector, which has resulted in aid agencies increasingly resembling corporate entities and official donors. While the emergence of a public critique may negatively impact upon the material interests of humanitarian NGOs, this thesis ultimately suggests that it may also be essential to prompting a re-examination of their prominence in the technocratic disaster relief industry.

³³ Elizabeth G. Ferris, *The Politics of Protection: The Limits of Humanitarian Action* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), pp.99-100.

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