

ranging from 500 to 3,000 metres, depending on the weapon system being used (p. 445).

The book ends with a study of radiological and nuclear weapons.

In his conclusion, the author says that much still has to be done to make sure that the international texts on the law of armed conflicts are not limited to efforts "to manage death and suffering with scraps of paper". His image is deliberately pessimistic. It is stated in order to stress the need for unremitting effort, not for surrender.

In this sense, Lieut. Colonel Arrassen's book, abundantly documented, rich in ideas and open to the future, merits the attention of everyone interested in the use of conventional and non-conventional weapons and their legal, diplomatic and military background.

The Review

THE AID INDUSTRY UNDER ATTACK

*Reports on the African Famine **

"Dawn, and as the sun breaks through the piercing chill of night on the plain outside Korem, it lights up a biblical famine, now, in the twentieth century. This place, say workers here, is the closest thing to hell on earth."

(BBC Television, October 1984.)

How can it be, asks the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues in its book *Famine — A man-made disaster?*, that the widespread African famine remained "undiscovered" by world public opinion until the BBC television broadcast of October 1984? And, more important, why was this tragedy, which killed hundreds of thousands in some 20 African countries, not prevented?

The questions as well as the answers provided are devastating for the international aid industry. Together with *Africa in Crisis* from Earthscan, *Famine — A man-made disaster?* has been at the centre of the recent intense

* *Famine — A man-made disaster?*, a report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues, Pan Books, London/Sydney, 1985, 160 pp.

Lloyd Timberlake, *Africa in crisis*, Earthscan, London, 1985, 230 pp.

internal and external criticism of traditional North-South assistance. They prove that the social, economic and ecological crisis of African continent is not an unavoidable "natural disaster". It is the terrible man-made consequence of mistaken policies on the part of African governments, the international economic community and governmental and non-governmental aid agencies.

Traditional aid and external "experts" have often aggravated the problems, instead of preventing them. In his foreword to the Independent Commission's book *Famine — A man-made disaster?*, Commissioner David Owen observes that in the years from the famine of the mid-1970s and that of the mid-1980s, the drought-stricken countries in Africa south of the Sahara received more than \$ 44 per inhabitant in external aid (ten times more than, for example, the Asian sub-continent). In the same period there were more than 80,000 Northern "development experts" in Africa.

The willingness of donors, in the words of UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar, "to seriously reassess previous policies and approaches" has led to new recognition of the potential of indigenous development and humanitarian groups. The new school of thought questions, in particular the centralistic and non-participatory aid policies of the past, because previous generations of policymakers seem to have failed to give serious attention to the ability of indigenous groups to organise. It is, from a Red Cross/Red Crescent viewpoint, interesting to note that *Africa in crisis* concludes:

"The African crisis, while it has highlighted the failure of the governmental and multilateral aid agencies, has also highlighted the success of the NGO approach."

Examples of NGO effectiveness in Africa have also been documented in recent studies on Red Cross and Red Crescent development activities carried out at the Henry Dunant Institute. When widespread famine struck the Sahel region in the early 1980s, several national voluntary organizations took leading roles in the relief efforts. The more than fifty local committees of the Mauritanian Red Crescent Society distributed 12,000 tons of food per year from 1983 to 1985. Receiving supplies from the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, these indigenous committees knew local conditions and were thus able to reach 250,000 of their most needy countrymen.

Because funds tend to be more readily available for short-term, life-saving disaster relief than for long-term development, most Northern aid organizations specialize in short-term periodic emergency operations rather than disaster prevention and development work. According to the Nairobi-based Environmental Liaison Service, only one-third of all external aid to Africa in 1983-1985 went to long-term development. This is, says an African environmentalist, "a save-me-today-kill-me-tomorrow kind of operation".

It is, of course, important to realize that non-governmental organizations, like the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, cannot and should not replace governments and intergovernmental institutions as the

primary forces for development. The lesson from the development experiences of recent years is that NGOs are underestimated as *complementary* agents in organizing community-based development.

The strength of Third World voluntary organizations is that they not only work with, but also *represent* the local communities in need. They are, to a greater extent than external organizations or central governmental institutions, accountable to the people they serve. That makes them listen, learn and reform. When Third World groups stress almost unanimously the importance of small-scale and long-term development and environmental projects, this is an expression, in the words of the International Coalition for Development Action (ICDA), of:

“...the articulation of the illiterate, the accumulated wisdom of the impoverished and the creativity of those who have survived for generations with a paucity of resources.”

The Mauritanian Red Crescent Society is among the many indigenous organizations which, although known primarily as a disaster relief network, in reality has made long-term development and environmental projects its highest priority. The local committees have been responsible for preventing the desert and the sand dunes from advancing, for reforestation and for the creation of local vegetable gardens. The Society has established an “idea-bank” of more than 200 grass-roots projects for which it seeks external funding.

Most of the increased media interest for NGO assistance still focuses, unfortunately, on the well-funded work of the big international federations and the major Northern relief agencies. National and local Third World groups remain neglected and underrated. However, many external aid organizations now seem to realize that, in the future, they must be more ready to work with and through Third World groups, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

Africa in crisis states that uneducated and poor voluntary development workers often succeed where “highly-paid, well-funded Northern consultants with Ph.Ds in tropical agriculture fail”. Again, the prescription for NGO success would seem to be small-scale, community participation and local management for the projects of indigenous organizations, and the consequent ability to learn from mistakes.

It is a new and promising tendency that books like *Famine — A man-made disaster?* do not merely confine themselves to discussing UN and governmental development policies, but recognize that the great majority of the world’s environmental, development and humanitarian bodies are small, local and informal. There are hundreds of thousands of such self-help groups in the Third World, most of them closely linked to the traditional base of kinship and family interrelationships.

To succeed, community-based development and primary health care projects rely on acceptance and execution by such self-help groups. Based in rural communities, villages and big city slums, such groups are expres-

sions of local initiative to meet pressing socio-economic needs. It is difficult for external aid workers to learn how to work with or in the same way as self-help groups. More harm than good is done when money and materials make previously self-sufficient and informal groups dependent on external assistance and new internal élites.

After only three years of existence, the Independent Commission ended its formal mandate at the end of 1986. In this short period, it has managed to produce a remarkable series of reports on the burning humanitarian problems of our time. Several more reports on specific issues are in press, in addition to the Commission's final report. There is no doubt that these reports will have a lasting positive impact on the thinking of the Commission's main targets : governmental decision-makers, public opinion and ourselves in the humanitarian organizations.

Jan Egeland

DISAPPEARED!

Technique of terror

In recent times, tens of thousands of persons have disappeared, usually in a climate of repression and terror. The United Nations has recorded such cases in more than 40 countries. These disappearances are not mentioned as such in instruments of law dealing with human rights. But that does not make any less grave this violation of the basic principles which require respect for the individual in particular and humanity in general.

In view of the upsurge in the number of disappearances and the deep trauma which they cause, the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues was rightly concerned to bring together in a report all of the existing information—taken from both legal provisions and institutions—in order to provoke reflection and—as far as possible—to encourage action aimed at eradicating this wicked practice.

The Independent Commission's brief report *, published with an introduction by Simone Veil, a Commission member, attempts above all to help defend those whose rights and dignity have been violated. It is not meant as a guide to action, the writing of which would, at this stage, be a risky undertaking. Its aim is to inform the public and to mobilize the international community in order to find solutions to the problem.

* *Disappeared!—Technique of terror*, a report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues (with an introduction by Simone Veil), Zed Books Ltd., London and New Jersey, 1986, 107 pp.