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APPROPRIATENESS OF DISASTER AID MORE IMPORTANT THAN QUANTITY

When a serious natural disaster occurs anywhere in the world these days, the international reaction is swift and generous. Moreover, in the last ten years or so, the spotlight which has been turned onto disaster relief operations has resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of the aid sent.

There is still a great deal of scope, however, for examination of the principles, policies and practices which dictate the exact form which international disaster assistance takes. Food aid, for instance, is hedged around with a mass of issues which demand great sensitivity in its application. An article by Dr Bill Stent in this issue of the AODRO NEWSLETTER canvasses these issues in a way which has an application both to development and relief assistance.

This NEWSLETTER also records two developments which are bound to have a practical effect on the appropriateness of disaster intervention in our region. These are the founding in January 1986 in Bangkok of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre and the inauguration, in the same month of the Tropical Cyclone Committee for the South Pacific. AODRO, for its part, is planning a seminar for mid-1986 on the "Socio-Economic Impact of Disaster Emergency Aid in Developing Countries". One theme of this Seminar will be "Appropriate Intervention".

Dr Russell Blong's article is possibly the first comprehensive analysis of the Nevado del Ruiz disaster to be published in Australia. As yet, there is insufficient information available on which to base an assessment of the post-eruption intervention operations, but Dr Blong makes some extremely important points about the effectiveness of the prediction and warning and the reaction to them.

Sound and well-utilised background information and an efficient system for handling real-time information on the event, added to good judgement of course, must surely be the most valuable aid to appropriate intervention. To a large degree, AODRO has built its coordination and advisory services to the Australian NGOs on this principle. Dr Neil Britton of AODRO's staff has used the AODRO system as a case study for his article on information requirements for reaction to disasters.

The NGOs in Australia and elsewhere can provide a massive quantity of relief aid when called upon. It is an important part of AODRO's mission to help ensure that this aid is as appropriate as it can be in all circumstances.

Members: Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Austcare, Australian Baptist World Aid & Relief Committee, Australian Catholic Relief, Australian Council of Churches, Australian Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Australian Institute of Radiography, Community Aid Abroad, Foundation for the Peoples of the South Pacific, Health Emergency Workers, Lutheran World Federation, Mr. A. Martin, Multiple District 207 Council of Lions Clubs International, National Council of YMCA of Australia, Royal Australia Planning Institute, Salvation Army, Save the Children Fund Australia, Major-General R. J. Sharp, St. Vincent De Paul Society, World Vision of Australia.

ADRA's INVOLVEMENT IN FIJI TROPICAL CYCLONE RELIEF

W P Truscott

[Peter Truscott commenced work with ADRA's Sydney office in January, 1986, having previously been involved in teaching and educational administration. Interest in ADRA grew out of his involvement in Pacific islands' education. This involvement started in 1967 when he was appointed to Baulah College in Tonga, first as Deputy Principal, then as Principal. Other island appointments followed, at Vatuvonu Junior Secondary School and Fulton College in Fiji. Following eight years in Brisbane and Christchurch (NZ), his next appointment was as Education Director for the SDA church in the Central Pacific area, taking in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and French Polynesia.]

Because of its well-developed local volunteer network, Fiji was able to provide extensive clothing distribution services following tropical cyclones "Eric" and "Nigel" in January 1985, repeating its earlier relief performances with cyclone "Oscar" in 1983. The Fiji Government through EMSEC (Emergency Services Committee) provided the bulk of the required transport which enabled 170 Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) volunteers to distribute over 206,000 articles of clothing throughout the disaster affected area. Overall, ADRA volunteers put in some 6,720 hours of time in helping deal with the effects of these hard-hitting cyclones.

Government officials spoke very highly of the efficiency of this distribution system, particularly the promptness with which it was able to begin, and made it quite clear that ADRA would be called upon to play a major distribution role in future emergencies as part of the Government's overall strategy for relief and rehabilitation. The coordinating role of NGO's in Fiji is played by FCOSS (Fiji Council Of Social Services) which acts under the direction of EMSEC. ADRA's Fiji director, Aisake Kabu, is currently Deputy Chairman of FCOSS.

ADRA's experience after "Eric" and "Nigel" highlights a number of key ingredients for effective disaster relief. These are:

1. A well organised local stockpile of clothing, blankets and other emergency needs.
2. A clearly understood coordination plan to ensure adequate distribution of needs without undue duplication.
3. The use of well prepared volunteers in each local district who have both local knowledge and a good liaison with the national distribution agency.

ADRA's enhanced ability to cope with disasters probably originated in 1981, when, following the closing down of a local printing press, Kabu was able to obtain the use of a substantial modern concrete block building, with the initial intention of refurbishing it to serve as a community education and welfare centre. By May 1982, the transformation of the building was well under way and instruction in crafts, homemaking skills, and health and nutrition soon commenced.

When TC "Oscar" struck Fiji in March 1983, the large basement of the welfare building, which had previously housed the printing presses, was used as a central receiving and despatch warehouse for the 200 bales of clothing, 20 bales of blankets and 40 family tents which were air-lifted in from ADRA headquarters in Australia and USA, as well as other relief supplies from other organizations. A relatively small supply of clothing and blankets had been stored locally, but these were rapidly exhausted and there was the inevitable time lag between disaster and relief - the crucial two or three days needed to obtain and fly in urgently needed material from overseas.

In discussions following "Oscar", George Laxton, Director of ADRA Australia, and Aisake Kabu, jointly decided to organise a large stockpile of blankets, clothing and other emergency supplies in Fiji against the possibility of future cyclone impacts. Work on this project commenced immediately, and by the time "Eric" and "Nigel" forced their unwelcome presence on the Pacific less than two years later, the warehouse was in readiness for immediate disaster response.

Within hours, the first relief supplies were in the hands of some of the victims. The network of volunteers, coupled with the invaluable transport provided by EMSEC and supplemented by voluntary local drivers meant relief work could commence when it was most needed. Although "Eric" struck on 17 January 1985, the first significant shipment

of clothing from overseas sources (which was sent very rapidly by ADRA Australia, St Vincent de Paul, and the Marist Brothers) arrived in Fiji on the 22nd of January. During this five day gap, ADRA volunteers were inundated with requests for assistance and in total managed to meet or help meet clothing replacement needs in 202 villages. Meanwhile, other relief agencies, both Government and private, were working with tremendous energy and drive, and the morale and spirit of cooperation between the various responding organizations was excellent.

Immediately following these cyclones, and with the benefit of further experience, ADRA commenced restocking the Fiji depot and began organising for even more efficient distribution in the future. In late January 1986, a further two shipping containers of disaster preparedness supplies were despatched to Fiji. Included in this shipment were a large number of primus "Power Packs", each containing an emergency cooking stove and gas light plus extra disposable butane gas cylinders. ADRA would like to thank Nelson and Company for their very generous support in making these available, and the Pacific Forum Line for kindly making shipping available at reduced rates.

ADRA, along with other member agencies of AODRO, is ready to respond to the emergencies which we hope will not occur.



This Fijian dwelling was completely destroyed by tropical cyclone "Oscar" in 1983. Many other Fijian families lost all their possessions two years later when, in 1985, cyclones "Eric" and "Nigel" swept over Fiji.

FOOD-AID POLICY AND LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT: AUSTRALIAN INVOLVEMENT IN OVERSEAS ASSISTANCE.

William R Stent

[Dr Bill Stent, formerly a Senior Lecturer in Economic Development at La Trobe University, is now in the Victoria Public Service. He is a Member of the Board of TEAR Fund (Australia) and on the Projects Committee of Community Aid Abroad. The following contribution is an edited version of an introductory address by Dr Stent, titled "Food-aid: Directions for Australian Aid Policy", presented to the seminar on Food Issues in the North/South Debate, held in Sydney, 23 February 1985. The full text of this paper will appear in the Proceedings of the Seminar on Food Issues in the North/South Debate, conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and published by the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, due for release in late February, 1986. Permission by the Department of Foreign Affairs and the author to publish this edited article in the AODRO Newsletter is appreciated.]

INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of this paper is to advance the notion that Australia's food-aid should be allocated in accordance to the basic needs approach to development. This approach, in the main, has not been pursued by past Australian Government decision makers. Rather, the general policy of food-aid allocation has been based on political and diplomatic purposes, and not for development purposes. If, in future, food-aid is to be used for development purposes then considerably increased managerial resources will need to be devoted to the design and management of the projects in which it is employed.

THE GOALS OF AID

According to the Jackson Report, "aid is given primarily for humanitarian reasons to alleviate poverty through economic and social development (1984:3). Furthermore, the Report states that, "aid also complements strategic, economic and foreign policy interests, and by helping developing countries to grow, it provides economic opportunities for Australia" (1984:3). The Report goes on to identify various sectional

contribution to development. This is especially so of the food-aid given by the United States, the largest of all donors of food-aid. Even though this food-aid has usually been allocated for political reasons, there are indications that, between 1963 and 1975, food-aid raised nutritional levels in some recipient countries (see Schubert, 1981). However, if these are to be permanently raised, it is essential that the gifts of food-aid be associated, directly or indirectly, with development projects. This requires that much care be devoted to the design and management of food-aid delivery, ensuring it is part of an overall development program.

Food-aid is sometimes used in food for work projects. To ensure that these projects lead to long-term development, it is necessary that a full range of inputs, in addition to food, be incorporated in them. Food provided in this way need not lead to a reduction in market prices, because the expenditure in the region will have been raised as a result of the project, and market prices might even increase. In summary, there are many problems associated with the effective employment of food-aid in the development process, but, provided that both the recipient and the donor countries agree, and provided that the goal is to achieve basic needs, food-aid can be of real value to the people of the recipient country.

AUSTRALIA'S FOOD-AID POLICY

Australia has bound itself under an international agreement to distribute a minimum of 400,000 tonnes of food-aid annually, not for humanitarian reasons, but for politico/economic reasons. Australia has signed the Food Aid Covenant (FAC) as part of its commitment to establish an International Wheat Agreement which has trade stabilisation, rather than more directly humanitarian goals as its primary concern. Not surprisingly therefore, the FAC is more concerned with the orderly disposal of surplus stock than with the design of development projects. The convention does, however, seek to ensure that an increasing proportion of food-aid be channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP). In accord with that aim, Australia has increased the proportion of its food-aid channelled through the WFP from 20 percent in 1981-82 to 50 percent in the 1984-85 financial year.

The Jackson Committee reported that the WFP "has a relatively efficient headquarters organisation and has attempted to use its food for work programs developmentally" (1984:70). However, its field success has been subject to much criticism. To a large extent these stem from the fact that the WFP is a "program" and not a development agency. It is therefore not responsible for the overall design or administration of the projects it supports. But it is in these very areas that projects are so often deficient. Because of this, one of the most outspoken of the WFP's critics has written that "the guiding principle in future must be that the quality of projects should have clear priority over the quantity. This would undoubtedly lead to a shrinking of the Programme in terms of the tonnage of foodstuffs used in such projects. On the other hand, a more costly and of course considerably better and more efficient apparatus would have to be created for the implementation of the projects" (Bethke, 1980:335).

Even though the Australian Government (or at least ADAB's Food Aid Unit) was certainly aware of Bethke's criticism, it has increased the volume of food-aid going through the WFP by 250 per cent! The Food Aid Unit of ADAB has an establishment of only 5 and has suffered a very high rate of staff turnover in recent years. It is likely that it has scarcely been able to ensure that the administrative requirements of the FAC are met, let alone monitor the effectiveness of the projects which have used Australian food-aid. Increasing the proportion of Australia's food-aid going through WFP will have certainly reduced the administrative burden on an overworked section of ADAB, but it is most unlikely to have been linked to any assurance that the quality of WFP projects has recently improved.

In 1983/84 Australia gave 267,158 metric tonnes (wheat equivalent) of food as bilateral aid. Of this,

- 11,025 MT were used directly in a WFP Vulnerable Group Feeding Project in Bangladesh,
- 11,600 MT were used in a food for work project in Ethiopia, and
- 4,400 MT was made available for two Australian non governmental organisations working in Ethiopia.

All the rest was sold, either on the open market or directly to government agencies,

with the counterpart funds being ostensibly used for "development purposes". These might include nominated projects conducted entirely by the domestic government, by bilateral or multilateral agencies, or by approved NGOs. In 1983/84 no Australian food-aid was incorporated as an integral component of any long-term development project. Indeed, that would not be possible for the aid is given only on a year to year basis and recipients can therefore have no certainty as to either the quantity that they will receive or its date of arrival. These problems are especially serious in the case of relatively small projects which have little capacity to adapt if their supplies are interrupted. One thousand tonnes of the food-aid given to NGOs in Ethiopia was for a World Vision development project which involved supplemental feeding for 700 families. The success of the project was considerably undermined when the shipment of food, over which World Vision had no control, arrived four or five months late.

Although no food-aid, as such, has been used in any of Australia's bilateral development projects, some of them have incorporated food into the "wage packet" paid to workers. The Nusa Tenggara farming development project in East Timor is one such project. Its managers, ACIL Australia, report that though the provision of food "rations" was at first resisted by the labour force, it has now become very popular and also led to a marked increase in labour productivity.

CONCLUSION

Australia's food-aid has not been used to achieve long-term development. If Australia's policy makers are committed to using it for those purposes, and not just as a sop for domestic lobby groups or a ploy in international politics, then it is essential that our food-aid be incorporated into development projects. In that case, the food will be only one of many imports, the most important of which is management. To ensure that this can be done, more and better qualified staff must be appointed within ADAB. They are needed not only to assist in the design and appraisal of projects, but also in monitoring and evaluating projects. Some of them should be appointed to posts in Canberra, but more to embassies and "field" positions overseas. Whether such appointments are made or not will be a very good indication of whether the Government is committed to real aid, or simply to its use for cynical political

purposes.

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USED MEDICAL EQUIPMENT GOES OVERSEAS

Since early 1985, AODRO has been able to offer assistance on several occasions to an aid organisation specialising in the supply of used medical equipment to developing countries.

The Samaritan's Ltd. (formerly The Samaritan's Purse), founded in Lismore in 1984 by Wayne Taylor, who remains its Director, has now gained a strong base of community support in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. Its aim is to collect any useable medical and hospital equipment being discarded by the New South Wales public health system and arrange for it to be given to hospitals in developing countries. AODRO's role is to arrange shipping and provide documentation services. So far, consignments have been sent to Fiji and India.

A recent grant from ADAB provided funds for The Samaritan's to take on two employees and to secure some storage facilities in Lismore. The operation is expected to build up steadily from now on.