

EvSum425

ODA EMERGENCY AID TO AFRICA 1983-86

[Background](#) - [The Evaluation](#) - [Overall Conclusion](#) - [The Main Findings](#) - [Lessons](#)

Background

Between January 1983 and September 1986 Britain provided approximately £240m in "drought related" assistance to Africa. Of this, £13m was provided by the Ministry of Defence as their share of the cost of the RAF airlift in Ethiopia, and the remainder was provided by ODA. Assistance was provided as food aid, grants to NGOs and international agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Britain's contribution to the EC assistance programmes and cash, goods and services provided by the Disaster Unit.

The Evaluation

The evaluation was carried out by a team from the Relief and Development Institute, an independent development research charity based in London. The terms of reference included examination of how ODA assessed the onset of the crisis, how its growing appreciation of the problem was transmitted into commitments of relief aid and an examination of the appropriateness, speed and cost-effectiveness of the response.

Overall Conclusion

Successful. The evaluators judge that, within the constraints imposed by the nature of its response system and the resources available, ODA performed well and that it is reasonable to conclude that ODA assistance contributed to the saving of thousands of lives.

The Main Findings

- In the years before the African emergency, when the primary requirement was for rapid response to comparatively small-scale, sudden impact disasters, ODA developed a system for responding which involved limited investment in administrative capacity within the Head Office and the Posts. Embassies and High Commissions lacked the capacity to provide ODA with a comprehensive internal assessment of the evolution of the crisis and likely relief needs. ODA's approach therefore involved relying heavily on other agencies both to identify needs and to administer the assistance provided.
- The African emergency placed unprecedented demands on this system in that it involved a slow build-up to a continent-wide crisis, with several national food

crises occurring almost simultaneously. Despite this gradual intensification there had been little contingency planning by governments of the affected countries or donors, including ODA.

- ODA's initial response was late in three of the four case study countries, due largely to its reliance on the international relief system for information and the disappointing performance of this system in some key respects. ODA looked to the FAO to provide early warning. While there was some recognition that the overall situation was deteriorating during 1984 ODA did not feel it was well placed to second-guess FAO.
- The level of administrative capacity allocated to emergency relief in ODA Head Office and Embassies and High Commissions, and the dramatic increase in workload, meant that staff had to concentrate on the immediate response. The administrative resources available did not permit adequate attention to be given to forward planning of or to monitoring the implementation of relief actions funded or assisted by ODA.
- ODA relied on British NGOs to implement a significant proportion of the assistance it provided. The effectiveness of ODA's response might have been improved if there had been a closer working relationship with these agencies before the onset of the crisis.
- In responding to this exceptional crisis ODA performed well with the resources available from its own budget, given that it was obliged to rely heavily on other agencies to identify needs and implement assistance. It correctly focused its resources on the three worst affected countries (Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan); the interventions it supported were sensible; and for the most part assistance was provided promptly to implementing partners. Although it is not possible to measure the impact exactly, it is reasonable to conclude that ODA assistance contributed to the saving of thousands of lives. The commitment and energy of ODA's personnel was an important factor in achieving this result.

Lessons

- ODA is considering how to apply the lessons learnt from the evaluation.