

The International Community

The international community was slow to respond to the African famine. Some of the death and suffering would have been averted had early warnings been heeded. In making such a candid assertion, we must not lose sight of another more hopeful reality: when finally confronted with the human disaster, the global village did respond. Berhane Deressa, Deputy Director of Ethiopia's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, described the response to a group of Canadian Inuit who visited his country last December:

There is a human bond that ties us together regardless of the distance that separates us. We are all human beings. All the relief efforts in this country have been one great human experience in which people from different countries, backgrounds, civilizations, languages and races have come together with one common objective — the objective of being useful to fellow human beings.

During the past year and a half these human bonds were transformed into an extraordinary partnership between the African peoples, governments and organizations and the international community — governments, international agencies and a wide variety of non-governmental organizations. The United Nations played a key role in all of this.

A solid core of expertise had earlier been built within a number of member organizations of the UN following the 1972-73 African famine and Sahelian drought. By the end of 1984, however, it became imperative to better coordinate the work of all these agencies. In December, the Secretary General of the United Nations established the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA) to coordinate the identification of needs, to mobilize resources, and to help the governments of famine-affected countries ensure the delivery of relief supplies to those in need. Links were established between the OEOA and local UN agency offices

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- * CIFAD — Comité international de femmes africaines pour le développement
 - CILSS — comité permanent interétats de lutte contre la sécheresse dans le Sahel/Permanent Inter-state Committee of Drought Control in the Sahel (PISC)
 - SADCC — Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference/Conférence pour la coordination du développement en Afrique australe (CCDAA)
 - IGADD — Inter Government Authority on Drought and Development