

THREE YEARS AGO, WHEN FAMINE STRUCK, WE SAW IMAGES OF DESPAIR AND SCENES OF HUMAN SUFFERING THAT HAUNTED OUR MINDS: MEN AND WOMEN REDUCED TO SKELETONS, AND - THE ULTIMATE HORROR - CHILDREN DYING ON CAMERA. THIS TIME, THOUGH LIVES ARE CERTAINLY AT RISK, THE CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE SEEMS MUCH BETTER. IN GENERAL, THEY APPEAR TO BE IN FAIR PHYSICAL SHAPE, AND IN GOOD SPIRITS. IT WAS ENCOURAGING TO NOTE THAT, THIS TIME, THERE IS AN ORGANIZED BABY-WEIGHING PROGRAM TO DETECT SIGNS OF MALNUTRITION.

FAMINE RELIEF WAS NOT THE ONLY WAY I SAW FOOD AID BEING USED. IT IS ALSO SERVING THE CAUSE OF LONGER-TERM DEVELOPMENT. SPECIFICALLY, WE VISITED A FOOD-FOR-WORK PROJECT, ALSO AT WUKRO. THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE ARE WORKING WITH HAND TOOLS, BUILDING EARTH DAMS ABOUT SIX METRES HIGH AND TWO TO THREE HUNDRED METRES LONG. THESE DAMS WILL TURN DEPRESSIONS IN THE TERRAIN INTO RESERVOIRS TO HOLD THE RUN-OFF WHEN THE RAINS DO COME. THE WORK OF THESE THREE THOUSAND IS PAID IN FOOD, WHICH KEEPS THREE THOUSAND FAMILIES GOING - AND THESE PEOPLE ARE CREATING A BASIC SYSTEM TO IRRIGATE MORE THAN SEVENTY HECTARES OF LAND.

I ALSO WENT SOUTH, TO WANDA GENET, AND THEN TO AWASSA TO VISIT A CANADIAN-SPONSORED WATER PROJECT. I CAN REPORT SEEING MUCH THAT GAVE ME A FEELING OF RELIEF... AND OF HOPE. I SAW EXCELLENT COOPERATION BETWEEN CANADIANS AND ETHIOPIANS... REAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE PROJECTS... AND FINE WORK BY NGOS (NOTABLY THE VANCOUVER-BASED HOPE INTERNATIONAL). TRUE ENOUGH, I HAD SEEN EVIDENCE OF THESE THINGS IN THE NORTH, TOO... BUT IN A SETTING WHERE HOSTILE NATURE AND CIVIL STRIFE MADE PROGRESS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE. IN THE SOUTH, THE SAME FACTORS, WORKING IN A MORE BENIGN ENVIRONMENT, WERE PRODUCING VISIBLE PROGRESS. I WAS VERY IMPRESSED BY THE DEGREE OF ORGANIZATION AND DETERMINATION SHOWN BY THE ETHIOPIANS. THEIR CONCERN FOR THE LONGER TERM WAS QUITE OBVIOUS - IN, FOR INSTANCE, THEIR CREATION OF A WATER TRAINING INSTITUTE.

THE MOST STRIKING THING ABOUT THE TRIP TO THE SOUTH WAS THE PHYSICAL CONTRAST WITH CONDITIONS IN THE NORTH. BROWN GAVE WAY TO GREEN. WE SAW FERTILE LAND AGAIN. AND WE REALIZED THAT, COMPARED TO THE DRY, BROWN NORTH, OTHER PARTS OF ETHIOPIA HAVE MUCH BETTER AGRICULTURAL AND WATER POTENTIAL.

I AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE FOR MYSELF, FIRST-HAND, SOME OF THE REALITIES OF A MOST DIFFICULT AND OFTEN TRAGIC SITUATION. I LEARNED SOME VALUABLE THINGS - SOME OF THEM CAUSE FOR CONCERN, OTHERS CAUSE FOR HOPE AND EVEN A DEGREE OF SATISFACTION.

FIRST, OVERALL CONDITIONS ARE MUCH BETTER THAN IN 1984-85. A GOOD BASIC ORGANIZATION IS IN PLACE TO COPE WITH THE PRESENT EMERGENCY. IN GENERAL, IT IS WORKING EFFECTIVELY - ALTHOUGH THERE ARE PLACES, SUCH AS KOREM, WHERE IT WORKS LESS WELL.