

Feature Development

NGO's Call for Change in Attitude on Aid

by Vincent Magombe

Since its establishment in the early 1940's Oxfam has been contributing to efforts to build a more equitable world. It has been helping the needy and the victims of conflict through its projects in 70 countries. As Oxfam celebrates its 50th birthday, reports Gemini News Service, awareness is growing that the problems faced by the developing countries can not be solved unless political questions are adequately addressed.

Of late, several non governmental, organisations (NGOs) have intensified their calls for new approaches to the issues of development as well as crisis-resolution in developing countries.

At the forefront are charities such as Oxfam and Save the Children, credited for their long experience of working with the poor and suffering in the Third World.

Oxfam, for one, has on its record fifty years of contribution to the global efforts directed at the building of a more equitable world.

Since its establishment in war-time Europe in the early 1940's, the charity has traversed the most difficult and dangerous of barriers, to reach the needy as well as the victims of human conflict.

Today, Oxfam has an annual income of £69 million and supports 2,300 projects in more than 70 countries.

The call for change by the NGOs comes at a time when economies of most developing countries are in turmoil, strangled by the debt-burden.

For sub-Saharan Africa alone this debt was estimated at \$175.8 billion. Meanwhile the

South cooperation.

In particular, the so-called 'donor-countries' are challenged to reassess their aid policies and priorities, which have yet to produce the desired positive effects on the way the majority of people in the 'receiver-countries' live.

In fact, the net transfer of resources from the so-called 'receiver countries' in the Third World to the 'donor countries' in the North averaged \$12.5 billion annually in the period 1983-1990, according to the latest UN Human Development Report.

The need is for the aid and investment from the developed countries to be redirected towards causes that

opment model to which equity and social justice are alien.

At the same time, governments in the developing countries are being asked to offer their people more chances for democratic and peaceful co-existence.

There is little doubt that the responsibility for the economic, social and political upheavals plaguing developing countries lies on the shoulders of local politicians. Corruption, ethnic conflicts and undemocratic regimes are common in many Third World countries.

But it is often forgotten that economic problems arising out of external debt, IMF-dictated structural adjustment programmes and an unfair inter-

looming tragedies are to be averted, much more needs to be done by those who are able to do something. But, this can only be achieved within the framework and context of political change.

As Oxfam Director, David Bryer, puts it: "Without real political commitment to change in rich and poor countries poverty will continue to grow."

It is no less important that whatever change one talks about, it should be in form of an empowerment of the people themselves to make their own choices.

Hence Oxfam's emphasis on the importance of involving local communities in aid projects. Besides, the charity plans to stress through its wide-ranging programme and influence with policy makers the key role played by women in the community and the importance of ensuring aid projects meet their needs.

It is unbelievable that while the majority of people in developing countries live in rural areas, and in effect are the major contributors to economic development, they, in most cases, are left out of the decision-making processes.

This, in spite of the fact that these decisions are meant to determine the overall nature and direction of national development.

As one development analyst, Dickson L. Eyoh, put it: "The models of agrarian change, in particular, have been such that peasants are constituted as objects, rather than subjects of their own development."

Indeed, the crisis of development in most Third World countries has sparked a serious debate about the models of development which have been applied in these countries for decades.

Whether the people and organisations presently involved in the decision-making processes have already joined the debate.

One thing is clear, though. The common people, whose voices have yet to be listened to, have been in this debate for centuries.

If the international NGO's want to be effective they must raise awareness in the North about the real causes of poverty in the South and lobby for change of policies by the Western governments.

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Feeding the needy in Bangladesh

socio-political infrastructure has been cracking as a result of persistent conflict.

The torments lived by the people of countries like Somalia is a clear testimony of the seriousness of the situation.

In the circumstances, industrialised countries are being urged to change their policies, with a view of creating a less exploitative, and more equitable atmosphere in the various spheres of North-

serve not merely the interests and aspirations of the people of the West. This, in effect, is what colonialism and later neo-colonialism were all about.

As John Clark writes in his book Democratising Development: "Official aid all too often strengthens governments whose policies and practices oppress the poor. It may support projects which provide the wrong service or which serve the wrong people, and may strengthen a devel-

national trading system make regimes powerless.

Even the United Nations has not escaped criticism from the charities. In August the British charity, Save the Children, bitterly attacked the UN over Somalia. A charity official accused the UN of being 'ill equipped, ill informed, and uncoordinated' in the way they have been handling the Somali crisis.

What the NGOs are saying is that, if the on-going and

Coconut Farms to Lure Migrant Fathers Back

by A Special Correspondent

MANY fathers in the Musi river delta here are leaving their wives and children to work the land alone.

In the Musi river delta, between south Sumatra's capital Palembang and the Strait of Bangka, an estimated 15 per cent of families are headed by women. The men are forced to seek livelihood elsewhere.

Residents of the delta are mostly former landless farmers from Java, Indonesia's most populous island, who have taken advantage of the government's trans-migration programme. The settlers now have their own land — 2.25 hectares per family.

The land is fertile and the settlers have been industrious in their efforts to forge a better life. But the vast majority remain below the poverty line.

The reason is that the tidal swamps they cultivate are inadequately drained, resulting in low crop yields. Less than half of the 13,300 households are able to grow enough food to meet their needs. Income from cash crops is insufficient to make up the balance.

In an effort to assist these families take full advantage of the area's potential, the Home-based International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), has designed the US\$28 million South Sumatra Smallholder Tree Crop Development Project. A US\$19.9 million loan agreement was signed to get the project rolling. It is the seventh IFAD-supported initiative in the country which brings the total committed amount to US\$150.9 million.

In order to enable these farming families to become more productive and self-reliant, the development of small-scale coconut plantations will greatly increase cash incomes, while food crops will not be neglected. And the key

for both lies in rehabilitating and improving drainage systems.

For this purpose, farmers' groups will be organised and trained to plan and carry out the necessary construction of field drains and raised earth mounds on which the trees would be planted. A complementary project, supported by the Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund of Japan, will undertake the major drainage works.

While this work is being carried out, nurseries for improved hybrid coconuts will be established. The self-help groups will work together to plant the trees. Grants and credit in cash and kind will be provided for rehabilitation works, as well as for such things as seed nuts, improved food crop seeds and fertiliser.

Women, who share with men in all but the heaviest farming tasks, will have a full voice in village planning committees.

They will be included in all training programmes and will receive at least 30 per cent of the credit.

Apart from increasing coconut and food crop production, the project is expected to provide a further benefit, that of bringing back many of the men who have been compelled to leave their land in search of other employment.

The delta soil is rich, the desire of the men and women to make a success of their recently acquired farms is high. So the prospects for a better life for some 65,000 poor people on the Musi river delta are good.

And the project would provide a model that would benefit many others who have settled in areas with similar problems.

— Depthnews Asia

As we approach the end of the second millennium of the modern era, we still have not developed any clear sense of our collective identity or formed any real idea of the magnitude of the problems we face. More significantly, perhaps, we are also unaware of the great potential we possess to resolve these problems.

Perhaps the world's greatest problem is poverty, accompanied by malnutrition, disease and ignorance — blights which are probably as old as humankind itself and which now afflict at least 2000 million people with extreme suffering. What is new, however, dating only from this century, is the condition of social wealth in many areas of the planet, where a majority of people have ample resources to live in security and even in superabundance. These 'affluent' individuals now number some 1000 million.

To belong to the latter rather than to the former group, or to an intermediate category whose members have few resources but are simply able to work and to eat, is largely a matter of birth and not, as some people persistently argue, a right that is acquired by perseverance and saving. If only we could grasp this fully, if only we could all understand that we might just as easily be living in the Sahel or Bangladesh and suffering from the natural disasters visited upon the populations there, it would do much to help us to find the solutions we so badly need.

This duality of our world today gives rise to the greatest happiness and the most dire misfortune. Happiness, because riches have brought tremendous technological development and built up immense wealth which ought to resolve the basic problems of the entire human race, and misfortune, because the extremes of egotism and exploitation such as we are now witnessing often produce the opposite result and propel the human race towards a seemingly inexorable fate.

Widening the Gap

The world food situation is

The Need for a Fairer World Food System

by Adolfo Chavez

the most glaring example of inequality — an inequality that is conflictual and damaging for all. Affluent populations are served by supermarkets packed with every imaginable type of food, many of which are conducive to the chronic diseases that are characteristic of these populations; while in the poor areas, paradoxically where the most food is produced, there is too little food to be had simply because people lack purchasing power.

The big food-processing companies purchase raw foodstuffs at low prices, but the prices of their finished products are inflated by processing, packaging and advertising and are therefore beyond the reach of any but the richest sectors of society. Hardly anybody stops to think where this global food policy is taking us, when in fact it is widening the gap between rich and poor.

The rich countries of the world have formally committed themselves to giving seven thousandths of their gross national products to external aid, but only the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands are actually doing so. The total amount set aside for develop-

ment assistance — US\$47,600 million — is heavily publicised but corresponds only to US\$60 per developed-country inhabitant per year.

Such an amount makes no significant difference in the face of the real and continuous flow of money from the poor to the rich countries. Faulty administration also means that this aid has no significant impact towards finding lasting solutions; the main problem is

not so much the small amount of aid as the fact that it often consists of dual investments that produce greater benefits for the 'donor' than for the recipient.

Where food is concerned, the motive behind the aid is often to dispose of a donor country's surpluses. Sometimes this means aggressive intervention in the markets of the recipient country; what is

only accentuate the divide between regions and social classes. It is difficult to understand why it is only we, in the poor countries, who have to 'adjust' our economies, matching income to expenditure and demand to supply, abolishing subsidies to agriculture and imposing controls on workers' wages, when the rich countries are not doing so.

The real health infrastructure

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A fairly sensible solution to the problem, some might argue. To the outsider, reading

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These dreary conurbations, reminiscent of Ceausescu's Romania, are a far cry from the sparkling emporia of Singapore's main shopping street, Orchard Road.

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