Food as an Instrument of War in Contemporary African Famines: A Review of the Evidence

JOANNA MACRAE and ANTHONY B. ZWI

Famine is conventionally portrayed as a natural disaster expressed in terms of food scarcity and culminating in starvation. This view has attracted criticism in recent years as the political, legal and social dimensions of famine have become more clearly understood. This paper draws upon these criticisms to understand the particular conditions of famine creation in conflict situations. Following an examination of six contemporary African famines, it is suggested that the use of food as a weapon of war by omission, commission and provision has contributed to the creation of famine in recent decades. Despite the optimism for peace engendered by the demise of the Cold War, the momentum for conflict would seem to be sustained by internal factors, including economic and environmental decline, political instability and ethnic rivalry. Within these conflicts, the strategic importance of food is likely to remain central. This study highlights the need to link concerns with food security and public health to those of development, human rights and international relations.

Africa has become synonymous with famine in recent decades. It has also been the battleground for some of the world’s most bloody and intractable conflicts. In this article we explore how conflict and food security are related, and suggest that the deliberate targeting of food production, consumption and distribution has played an important part in creating and exacerbating recent famines.

The work draws on a three month research project, which reviewed published and unpublished literature concerning the nature of famine and conflict in Africa. Case study material from human rights agencies, governmental and non-governmental agencies and academic sources was collected regarding the use of food as a weapon by omission, commission and provision, and six country studies prepared for Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Somalia and Sudan, each of which has experienced severe famine and prolonged conflict, and has been considered to be under threat of famine in 1991/1992. Countries which have previously experienced both famine and conflict, such as Uganda and Nigeria, but which are not currently at risk of famine, were not the focus of the work. The authors then sought to examine the ways in which the international community has responded to conflict-related famines and to explore the limitations of existing international legislation and policy.
The article is divided into two major sections. The first is a summary of the findings of the country studies in which the use of food as a weapon by omission, commission and provision is outlined. The second is a discussion of the policy and planning issues arising from conflict-related famines.

CONFLICT IN AFRICA: A SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Conflict in Africa has changed fundamentally since the colonial period. The traditional rules of war and local means of conflict resolution have come under acute strain as the stakes of conflict have increased under dramatic environmental and political pressures. The instability of subsistence life throughout Africa has been caused by a multitude of factors, some predating colonialism, others following in its wake; while still others represent the product of climatic change and environmental degradation. This instability has been accompanied by an increase in violent conflict.

While resource questions underlie many conflicts, the causal link between environmental change and violence must be understood within a wider political and cultural framework. Access to, and control over, resources is the key to the maintenance of a particular way of life, including cultural and political identity. It follows, therefore, that threats to the physical means of production which occur in violent conflicts may have severe repercussions for the overall survival of communities and their way of life (Duffield, 1990a; Turton, 1989).

Changes in the mode of governance and the emergence of nation-states have resulted in the nationalization of localized conflict, as governments seek to protect particular economic and political interests (Duffield, 1990a). This trend has been maintained by international forces, which have incorporated nationalized conflicts into global struggles to gain political hegemony. Military and economic support by the United States, the former USSR and, in southern Africa, South Africa, has sustained the internal and inter-state conflicts which have haunted the continent.

A diverse range of conflicts have been spawned under these conditions, leading governments to mount violent counter-insurgency campaigns among their own populations. Counter-insurgency wars throughout the world seek to inflict not simply a military defeat, but to disempower the opposition, to deny it an identity and to undermine its ability to maintain political and economic integrity (Summerfield, 1991). This remains true of civil wars and those where external forces seek to undermine the legitimacy of governments such as those in Angola and Mozambique. Schutz & Slater (1990) have referred to struggles of this latter type as 'anti-Marxist insurgencies'. Attacks on food are often accompanied by attacks on health services, as experienced in Mozambique (Cliff & Noormahomed, 1988) and in Sudan and Uganda (Dodge, 1990). The conditions of war also threaten the future ability of communities to participate in the economic and political life of the country, as whole generations of children are deprived of access to education. The violation of women by rape and the re-emergence of slavery have further contributed to the process of social dislocation and the disempowerment of war victims.

The demise of the Soviet Union may have irrevocably changed the nature of such superpower-related conflicts, but there is little to suggest that other forms of conflict, equally devastating, will not emerge as part of Africa's legacy. Conventional approaches to conflict analysis have tended to focus on the international, macro-level dimensions, ignoring the local level rationale, and the impact of low-intensity strategies on households and individuals (Deng & Zartman, 1991; Stockton, 1989). Without an understanding of the local political and
cultural complexities, and of the motivations of individuals and groups for sustaining struggles, the means of preventing and resolving them, as well as of relieving their effects, will remain elusive.

This lack of political analysis has been paralleled in recent approaches to food security issues in Africa. The human rights dimension of famine has also been underplayed in favour of environmental factors, seen as politically neutral. The public face of famine is thus maintained primarily as an enviro-economic crisis, rather than that of a legal, social and political disaster. Although each conflict and its effects are unique, some common trends in the aetiology of conflict-famines in Africa are discernible.

Food serves three primary functions in insurgency and counter-insurgency (‘low-intensity’) wars: political, economic and military. By undermining the ability of communities to produce and procure food they are rendered destitute, dependent on the state or welfare agencies, and thus politically compliant. Attacks on the food supply may also serve economic interests. Rangasami (1985) has pointed out that in all famines there are both victims and beneficiaries. Merchants and other powerful groups, often allied to political and military interests in conflict situations, may make substantial profits out of scarcity. The military function of attacks on food is the most obvious use of food as a weapon in low-intensity wars. Rebel forces are dependent upon civilian populations for food and shelter: in the eyes of a threatened state, the distinction between opposition military personnel and the civilians who provide them with support becomes blurred. As a result, civilians come to be seen as a legitimate target for attack: this is part of the explanation for the rising proportion of civilians killed in conflict in the latter part of this century. Civilians may be forced to leave their homes and fields in search of food and security.

Comparing different famines in different wars in different countries, each with their own histories, must be a cautious undertaking. With the exception of Liberia, and the most recent phase of the conflict in southern Somalia, it is the similarities of the African conflict-famines examined, rather than their differences, which stand out. In each of the other five country studies, famine was not simply a consequence of conflict, but represented its goal (Duffield, 1990a). In the country studies we categorized attacks on food under three headings: omission, commission and provision.

Omission

Omission describes instances of food misuse where governments fail to monitor adequately and plan for food security in all sections of a country; it identifies the failure of governments to manage food reserves and to instigate and facilitate appropriate emergency measures.

Facilitation of relief operations

In 1988, the United Nations passed a resolution urging governments to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the victims of disasters (UN resolution 43/131). It invited all states to profit from the international community’s ability to provide aid and assistance, and identified the need for cooperation from national governments in coordinating and expediting aid to their citizens. In both this and a subsequent resolution (UN45/100), the UN’s right to intervene remains compromised, however, by the continued acknowledgement of the primacy of national governments, whose sanction is required to mobilise humanitarian assistance. Where governments operate in the interests of the broader community this may present few difficulties, but where governments fail to protect the interests of the mass of the people, or worse still, are repressive or discriminatory,
this creates substantial problems in making relief available.

Perhaps the most famous example of government non-cooperation in delivering relief assistance, was the refusal of Ethiopia’s President Mengistu to allow relief assistance to flow into Eritrea and Tigray during the 1984 famine (Jansson et al., 1987). Donor unwillingness to violate national sovereignty and channel assistance across the border was partially responsible for the displacement of over 400,000 Tigrayans alone across the border to Sudan (ibid).

In 1988 the government of Sudan refused agencies access to war-displaced communities in Southern Kordofan; tens of thousands of people, weakened by the conflict-famine, were denied aid, leading to some of the highest starvation death rates ever reliably recorded, with 7.1 per cent of the displaced population dying every week at the peak of the crisis in Meiram (Keen, 1991). In 1990, the World Food Programme estimated a shortfall of 1.2 million metric tonnes of grain in Sudan, while the government acknowledged a national shortfall of only 75,000 metric tonnes (Sudan Update, 1991). It would appear that the war-displaced around Khartoum and conflict-affected communities, particularly in the Nuba mountains, have been severely affected by this omission to declare a food emergency and facilitate the delivery of aid.

In Angola, the government blocked attempts to establish a safe corridor for relief supplies which traversed rebel-held areas on a number of occasions. The delay in implementing the Special Relief Program for Angola (SPRA) slowed the establishment of village-level relief operations, forcing communities to move to the towns.

The importance attached to sovereignty enables governments to withhold the right to assistance which their citizens could otherwise claim from the UN and other humanitarian agencies. Without government consent, bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies are unable to operate within a nation’s borders. Similarly, NGOs who seek to provision famine-affected areas despite government policy may face expulsion or other penalties, jeopardizing their operations in other areas of the country. If they remain committed to providing assistance, they may seek to channel assistance through a third party. The Emergency Relief Desk (ERD), based in Khartoum, Sudan, provides one such example; the ERD channelled assistance across the border into rebel-held territory in neighbouring Eritrea and Tigray from 1985 to 1991, without the permission of the Ethiopian authorities. The identity of the NGOs who managed the consortium remained confidential throughout its operation, thus protecting their interests within government-held areas of Ethiopia (Hendrie, 1989).

While in some areas opposition forces have established relief organisations which have successfully channelled food aid, in all the conflicts studied rebels share responsibility for omissions which have led to famine. Their failure to participate in cease-fire agreements has limited the implementation of effective relief programmes. Such failures are particularly important in those famines which coincide with a total collapse of government: in Liberia, and more recently in Somalia, the peaks of the food crises have coincided with the failure of governmental structures. It is unclear in such situations who is responsible for ensuring the legal right to adequate food. In these circumstances rebel forces, who control large areas of the country, have a particular responsibility for providing the citizens under their control with access to humanitarian supplies.

Management of existing food resources

Governments also have a responsibility to prevent famine by utilizing national surpluses effectively and encouraging accurate national food security planning. In Sudan
the government has failed on both fronts. The export of the strategic grain reserve prior to the 1991 harvest created a dependence on the import of grain to meet the nation's food requirements. The income generated by these export sales was channelled to the military, leaving the government with insufficient funds to import food to meet the deficit (Afria Watch, 1990a). By blocking aid, the only alternative means of breaching the food gap and of re-building strategic grain reserves, was withheld. There have also been suggestions that government staff responsible for preparing agricultural reports and monitoring food security worked in a climate of fear: their findings were politically sensitive, and they perceived themselves to be at risk of imprisonment or of losing their jobs if they delivered reports contradicting government policy (Buchanan-Smith et al., 1991).

Governments have exploited the structural vulnerability of regions such as Eritrea (Bondestam et al., 1987), Tigray (De Waal, 1991) and Southern Sudan (Keen, 1991), which have traditionally depended on imports of grain from other areas of the country. By blocking commercial and relief grain flows into deficit areas, governments have created actual scarcities of food, resulting in the collapse of marketing systems, forcing communities to move out of the regions.

De Waal (1987) has estimated that in the 1984–1985 famine in Darfur, food aid met only 10 per cent of food consumption needs, the remainder coming from the depleted harvest, wild fruits and grasses and that bought with wages from labouring and the sale of assets. Insufficient research has been carried out to assess the role which food aid plays in preventing starvation in counter-insurgency famines. It is clear, however, that the creation of absolute scarcity, which results from attacks on production and marketing systems, as well as on the means of coping with such crises, may render civilian populations in conflict-famines more dependent on food aid than those affected by environmental disasters. Thus, the failure of governments to initiate appeals and facilitate relief operations in sufficient time constitutes a major abuse of the right to adequate food.

Commission

We define acts of commission as attacks on the means of producing and procuring food. Actions which undermine agricultural production and hinder coping strategies, including attacks on relief convoys, safe corridors and markets, are also listed in this category. Campaigns of terror, designed to depopulate specific areas, are not explicitly included, although their negative effects on the food security of those forced to abandon their assets and means of livelihood cannot be over-emphasised.

Attacks on food production and consumption are central to the process of famine creation. The tactics employed in the different conflicts studied showed alarming similarities. The most important feature of these attacks is that they quicken the pace of destitution by blocking coping strategies, thus pushing communities further from the threshold of survival. De Waal (undated) has suggested that food aid is less important than peace in relieving famine. For example, the cease-fire that accompanied Operation Lifeline in 1989 enabled communities to plant and to implement other strategies to survive the famine.

Attacks on Production

Scorched earth tactics have been widely employed both by ground troops and by aerial bombing. Accurate data concerning such attacks are difficult to collect and assess; De Waal (1991) has, however, reported that 142,000 hectares of land in Tigray were destroyed by Ethiopian government forces in only 2 months in 1980, while Bondestam (1987) records a further 90,000 tsimdi of land destroyed in Eritrea in 1987.
These figures provide an indication of the impact of crop burning by ground troops and aerial bombardment with incendiary devices and napalm in recent African conflicts.

The threat of aerial attack forced farmers in Tigray and Eritrea to cultivate at night, thus limiting their productivity (Hendrie, 1991). In Angola the threat to peasants working in their fields was so acute as to prompt the army to insist that they accompanied workers to the fields; when military escorts were not available, farmers were not able to tend their crops. Grain stores have also been subject to attack by both government and rebel forces in all countries; these attacks have acted as a disincentive to community efforts at establishing grain stores, a traditional feature of food security structures (Spooner and Walsh, 1991).

In southern Sudan the most important attack on production was the confiscation and killing of large numbers of livestock, the central feature of the rural economy. The long-term effects of these raids may be more severe than those of one-off attacks on sedentary farmers. Pastoralists exchange livestock for grain, and in drought years are severely affected when the terms of trade decline as the market becomes swamped with crisis sales. These sales are, however, managed by herders who usually selectively sell livestock according to age and sex in order to protect the core of the herd, which acts as a base for future production. Raiding and killing of livestock is not selective and may severely deplete herds, plunging communities into destitution. Thus pastoralist communities may be forced out of subsistence production permanently if they lack sufficient resources to rebuild their herds.

In Somalia, government troops attacked herders at wells and watering points. Wells were frequently poisoned and water tankers destroyed. These attacks forced pastoralists to move their herds nearer to towns in search of water and protection; this has occurred also in Sudan. This has resulted in abnormal concentrations of livestock in certain areas, intensifying environmental degradation and increasing the threat of disease (UN/GoS, 1990). Changes in grazing patterns have also been recorded in Eritrea: Bondestam et al. (1987) records how the war cut off some of the best grazing, forcing communities to move to new pastures, which were often unsuitable for the particular kind of livestock, traditionally grazed in lower areas. The imposition of curfews in government-held areas further limited the range of grazing as people were unable to look for stray animals after dark (ibid).

The use of mines has had a devastating effect on the agricultural and pastoral economy of large areas of Africa. In Eritrea 10 per cent of agricultural land had been taken out of production by 1987 because of mines (Bondestam et al., 1987). Over 1 million mines have been planted in Somalia (SCF, 1991), and Angola is home to one of the largest number of mine-disabled people in the world. Like UNITA, Renamo has also used anti-personnel mines with devastating effect: mine-related injuries, like direct atrocities, reinforce community awareness of Renamo presence, and place a substantial burden on already overstretched medical resources (Vines, 1991). Mines represent a threat to sedentary farmer and pastoralist alike, and large numbers of livestock have joined the human victims. The laying of mines represents a serious threat to future production — their deactivation is a skilled and hazardous job. In Afghanistan those trained in the art are often unwilling to utilize their skill, recognizing the danger (McGrath, 1990); Ahlstrom (1990) estimated that one person would die and two would be injured for every 5000 mines deactivated, let alone those accidentally detonated by the unwary.

Mines also limit the ability of communities to migrate, yet movement is often the
key to survival in production crises, as it
enables people to seek wild foods, grain,
markets, employment and security. In
southern Sudan access to wild foods was
curtailed, particularly around garrison
towns (Africa Watch, 1990a); people were
unable to leave the towns because of road
blocks and mines, and trees and bushes, the
source of berries and bark, were felled to
deny opposition forces access to cover.
Garrison towns were encircled by double
rings of mines, the first laid by the army,
the second by rebels: those attempting to
flee risked explosion or being shot by both
sides (ibid).

Wild foods also serve as a means of
exchange for other commodities, including
grain. In southern Sudan, those most
affected by the famine frequently had their
wares confiscated, thus denying them a
potential source of income (Hutchinson,
1991). Similarly, in Eritrea, collection of wild
foods was reserved for army forces who
lacked other sources of provisions (Africa
Watch, 1990b). In Angola, community
attempts to gather wild foods were blocked
by UNITA (Africa Watch, 1989).

Restrictions on movement affect groups
differentially according to age, gender and
wealth. Men may avoid movement to par-
ticular areas to avoid enforced conscription,
detention or harassment by opposition
forces. Women may face assault and rape,
and their perception of this threat has
limited their freedom to move. Fear of
harassment by government troops was cited
as the primary cause of restriction on
movement by Eritrean populations inter-
viewed by Bondestam et al. (1987). Tigrayan
fear of resettlement and forcible conscrip-
tion similarly led to their opting to walk for
4–6 weeks across the Sudanese border,
rather than seek relief in government held
towns, 2–3 hours away.

Those fleeing attacks on their homes
and property have also been subject to
further military action by aerial bombard-
ment and by ground troops. Refugees
returning to Sudan from Ethiopia were
greeted by aerial attacks. The strafing of
refugees has also been reported in Tigray
(Hendrie, 1991), Eritrea (Africa Watch,
1990b) and Somalia (Africa Watch, 1990c).

Road blocks are often established with
soldiers attempting to extract bribes which
the poorest may be unable to afford. In
Ethiopia, taxes and ‘voluntary contributions’
were forcibly sought from populations
seeking food and refuge in government-
held areas; these acted as a further disincentive for people to travel (Hendrie, 1991). In
Liberia, displaced rural communities were
stripped of their food and remaining assets
by rebel troops before being allowed to
enter Monrovia (Africa Watch, 1990d).

In periods of production failure, subsist-
ence communities’ dependence on markets
intensifies, as households seek to realise
assets such as livestock and jewellery in
exchange for grain. Markets also provide
employment and trading opportunities, and
act as important centres for the exchange of
information, vital to the decision-making
process which determines survival. The
collapse of markets, therefore, serves as a
key indicator in assessing the impact of
counter-insurgency wars on food security
(De Waal, 1990b).

Restrictions on movement contribute to
the breakdown of the marketing systems,
as merchants fear transporting produce into
insecure regions. Markets have also been
the direct targets of attack as military forces
seek to disrupt the social and economic
cornerstone of rural communities. Opera-
tion ‘Red Star’ in Ethiopia in 1982 is, per-
haps, the best example of such tactics, as
the army sought to isolate Eritrea from
surplus-producing areas within Tigray, and
to block flows of food from Sudan (Hendrie,
1991). The threat of such attacks prompted
the rebel forces to hold markets on only
one night each week, on the assumption
that the air force would be unable to bomb
all markets simultaneously. This meant
that merchants were unable to effectively
circulate between markets, and spent several idle days each week. Holding markets under cover of darkness brought other problems, as people could not clearly see what they were buying, nor how it was measured. Aerial and ground attacks also destroyed scales and grain mills vital to the maintenance of the grain trade (De Waal, 1990b).

Sieges of key towns and cities represent one of the most dramatic restrictions on movement and the ability of populations to secure adequate food. Towns typically provide the base for government troops within the conflict zone; their incursions into the surrounding rural areas may force civilians to seek refuge and employment in towns, bringing them under government control. Government-held towns are subject to siege by opposition forces who may seek to starve the military into submission by restricting flows of food into the town. A particularly lengthy siege took place around the Eritrean capital of Asmara, as the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front sought to recapture the city, and lasted a little under a year, causing unknown numbers of civilian deaths (Africa Watch, 1990b).

Within towns, military and commercial interests may become allied; profiteering has been widely reported in garrison towns in Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. Such practices further inflate grain prices, restricting the entitlement of the poorest to staple foods. Attacks on relief supplies by military personnel to maintain grain prices is reported to have occurred in Torit, southern Sudan in September 1988 (Africa Watch, 1990a). Keen (1991) also describes the complex series of commercial and private interests served by maintaining the blockage on food into the region. Civilians living within garrison towns are also liable to have their property and food looted, as was experienced in Monrovia (Liberia), Asmara (Eritrea) and Hargeisa (Somalia).

Garrison towns are also often centres for relief, as governments may restrict the delivery of food aid into rural areas held by rebel forces. Food aid has been attacked in all the countries studied. Both government and rebel forces frequently argue that their attacks on relief convoys are justified because they serve as a cover to supply the opposition forces with weapons and other provisions. This problem becomes particularly acute if food aid does indeed move as part of a military convoy. In southern Sudan the military insisted that relief trucks required protection from rebel attack, and humanitarian supplies often became incorporated into military convoys, which were moving army personnel and military equipment. The threat of aerial attack on relief convoys in Eritrea and Tigray led to lorries travelling at night, slowing their movement considerably, and reducing their coverage and efficiency by half (Hendrie, 1991).

Feeding centres have also been targeted. Camps in Somalia, which house Ogadeni refugees, have been frequently attacked by Somali National Movement rebels, on the grounds that opposing Western Somali Liberation Front troops are provisioned within the camps. The attacks were selective according to age and gender — with a larger proportion of young men killed, but they undermined the sense of security of the entire community. The militarisation of the camps led to the withdrawal of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 1989 (Africa Watch, 1990c). Similarly, Ethiopian air-force MIG bombers strafed ICRC feeding camps in Tigray, dropping incendiary devices and napalm, killing 52 people and destroying an orphan centre (Hendrie, 1991).

Forced Resettlement

The military activities of both government and rebel forces have displaced large civilian populations. All displaced communities, particularly those within camps and towns, are at risk both from the lack of access to their lands and means of subsistence, and from the changed disease environment.
Where people maintain their freedom to move in and around the area, however, they can trade grain for other commodities, and may be able to supplement rations with wild foods. They can also take advantage of employment and trade opportunities, or claim patronage from kin, and may thus be able to access health and other welfare services.

Forced resettlement of populations has been characterised by high levels of violence, inadequate logistical and health planning, and restrictions on people’s ability to diversify their sources of food and income. Ethiopia’s resettlement programme is the most publicised example of such a policy (see, for example, Clay & Holcomb, 1985). One of the aims of the programme was to depopulate large areas of northern Wollo and southern Tigray, areas of rebel activity. Transport arrangements were appalling, with large numbers of people dying from crush injuries and dehydration. The lack of adequate food and health services in host areas placed enormous stresses on the indigenous communities.

In October 1990, the Sudanese government forcibly removed the population of Hilat Shook, a settlement around Khartoum for displaced southerners. They were relocated 25 miles away from the city centre and left without adequate access to water, food and employment. In Angola, Africa Watch (1989) estimated that the majority of the 600,000 people living in UNITA-held areas had been abducted and forcibly resettled. Government forces also moved hundreds of thousands of people out of rural areas into militarized towns, ostensibly for ‘their protection’, but also to deny UNITA a base and prevent communities from providing details of government troop movements (Africa Watch, 1991). More recently, UNITA has been accused of failing to allow displaced populations to return home in order to ensure that relief aid is channelled through the organisation, and thus maintain the population’s dependence upon it (Brittain, 1992).

In Mozambique, Renamo has brutally enslaved large sectors of the population, forcing them to work as agricultural labourers or porters. The Mozambican government relocated substantial numbers of people: initially in an attempt to collectivise agriculture but, as the war progressed, also in an attempt to provide security and services to these populations. In certain areas the resettlement programme may have been motivated by the desire to remove potential sources of support from the insurgents.

Such population movements undoubtedly represent one of the most severe health and nutritional risks to war-affected communities. They also constitute a threat to future food security, as it will take considerable time for farmers to rehabilitate their farms after prolonged absence. If others settle their land this may provide a recipe for future conflict.

Displaced communities are among the most vulnerable groups in counter-insurgency famines. Populations forced to move away from their homes by the dual pressures of hunger and violence have often been stripped of their assets and suffer harassment as they attempt to move in search of food and security. They become dependent on the goodwill of their host communities to provide employment and to facilitate their access to food supplies, including food aid. This dependency renders displaced communities vulnerable to exploitation — the re-emergence of slavery in southern Sudan is the most extreme example of this. Slaves are often inadequately fed, or may receive no food in return for their labour, and risk severe punishment or even death if they try to escape (Keen 1991; Hutchinson, 1991).

Provision

Food may be selectively provided to government supporters, to those from
whom support is sought, or to lure sections of the populations to areas controlled by the military. Selective provision of food is poorly documented, perhaps reflecting donors' reluctance to publicise the abuse of food aid, as well as the difficulties of distinguishing between abuses as part of a 'hearts and minds' campaign, and the humanitarian activities of either side.

Differential provisioning of military and civilian populations has been reported in Somalia where food aid, donated by USAID, was regularly diverted to the armed forces and government bodies. Only 12 per cent of the food aid reached the civilian population for whom it was destined (Askin, 1987).

In garrison towns held under siege, differential provisioning is commonplace. In Wau, southern Sudan, Fertit people were encouraged to steal grain at the expense of Dinka communities (Africa Watch, 1990a). Similarly, merchants in Meiram refused to sell grain to displaced Dinka, despite their severe undernourishment; food aid in the area was diverted to Baggara herdsmen to use as fodder (Keen, 1991). In Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, the government militia were paid in grain, and all military personnel received larger rations than civilians (Africa Watch, 1990b).

Food has been used to lure civilian populations into areas controlled by government or rebel forces: in Tigray, for example, feeding centres acted as collection sites for the government's resettlement programme. Similarly, by blocking relief aid into rural, rebel-held areas and centring relief efforts in garrison towns, famine-affected populations may be forced to move into government-held areas.

Food is regularly used as part of propaganda campaigns. Thus in Liberia, Charles Taylor sought to regain the support of Mandingo muslims by distributing sheep and extra rations of grain (West Africa, 1990a). The differential provisioning of refugees from the Ogaden proved a major source of conflict among the indigenous communities, reflecting the importance of providing compensatory aid for host communities (Duffield, 1990a).

Main Findings From Country Case Studies

The country studies aimed to establish whether strategies of 'low-intensity' warfare had contributed to contemporary famines in Africa. It can be seen from the literature reviewed that deliberate interventions in food marketing, distribution and aid flows and attacks on production have contributed to, and in some cases caused, successive famines in Ethiopia, Angola, southern Sudan, Somalia and Mozambique. In many of the famines identified, terror and attacks on food systems were superimposed on natural disasters such as drought. In Liberia, the initial phase of a counter-insurgency war gave way to widespread banditry; here food was not systematically used as a proxy weapon, but the small size of the country and comparative accessibility of rural areas enabled rebel and government troops rapidly to depopulate large swathes of the country-side, precipitating a food security crisis among the displaced communities and in urban centres.

It is not always possible, however, to ascertain whether it is fear or hunger which ultimately drives war-affected people to flee their homes and farms: in most cases one can safely assume a combination of the two. Much of the work reviewed is descriptive and lacks quantitative estimates of the impact of conflict on food supply. It also tends to be selective and the stories of many communities have not been documented. Such weaknesses are inherent within such violent and unstable environments, and much more work needs to be done to establish more effective systems for monitoring food insecurity in conflict areas.

The work of De Waal (1990a) and
Duffield (1990a) does, however, offer the beginnings of a model which traces the complex impact of low-intensity war on the socio-economic structures which support food production and distribution. Attacks on health care, the denial of education and technical services, and the traumatization of large sectors of the civilian population all compound this negative impact.

Migration patterns associated with flight from terror differ from the coping strategies normally employed during enviro-economic crises. The magnitude of these population movements brings particular health risks, and the absence from conflict areas is often longer-term than those incurred during enviro-economic disasters, where families seek to return quickly to their homes and farms to plant (De Waal, 1987). The tactics of low-intensity warfare aim to control civilian populations, by restricting movement and rendering communities destitute through asset-stripping: the choices open to famine victims are steadily narrowed, and they are rendered more dependent upon a potentially hostile commercial sector and market economy to sustain themselves and their families.

Mark Duffield (1990b) has argued that this process of commercialization may not be easily reversed once there is peace. He has suggested that in the case of Sudan, the decapitalization of Dinka assets and their enforced dependency on the labour market served powerful political and economic groups, who will have an interest in protecting the newly established status quo.

It is no longer sufficient to analyze the shorter-term sequelae of counter-insurgency warfare and the impact of the use of food as an instrument of war on the aetiology of famine: the implications for conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation also require urgent consideration.

**POLICY & PLANNING ISSUES**

**Existing legislative structures**

The country studies reveal the role of rebel and government forces in actively promoting famine, as well as demonstrating the failure of governments to prevent famine within their own borders. These actions represent a severe abuse of the right to food encoded in the 1977 United Nations Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They also contravene the Geneva Conventions governing the protection of civilian populations and the protection of humanitarian supplies [Additional Protocol 1, Article 54(1); Protocol 1, Article 54(2); Additional Protocol 1 Article 70; Additional Protocol II, Article 18] (Mourey, 1991). UN resolutions 43/131 and 45/100 sought to strengthen the sanction against governments who failed to assist victims of disasters and other emergency situations. The use of food as a weapon also contravenes Article 3 of the Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Furthermore, Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) defines genocide as ‘... any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group such as, the killing of members of the group, the causing of serious bodily or mental harm [and] deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, ...’ (emphasis added).

**Policy approaches to conflict-related famines**

Donor nations are paying increased attention to the role of good governance in promoting development, and are including human rights on the conditionality agenda. The aid conditionality debate draws on two
parallel historical trends. The first was primarily economistic: the Bretton Woods institutions sought to respond to the debt crisis and economic decline in the Third World by introducing a series of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which aimed to support the free market economy and stabilise national expenditure. The maintenance of aid was conditional upon the acceptance of structural adjustment programmes, yet their imposition led to major negative outcomes, including an apparent decline in the health and nutritional status among the poorest (Green, 1989).

In parallel with the economic rationale for the adoption of structural adjustment programmes, there has been a deeper political motivation for the adoption of particular criteria of good governance. The introduction of market reforms has been seen as contingent upon the adoption of Western-style democracy, which would boost private investment and increase the accountability of the state. The human rights records of Third World governments have come under closer scrutiny and served as a proxy indicator for levels of democracy. Conditionality policies increasingly seek to reward ‘good governments’ with additional development funds and to support legislative, constitutional and penal reform (Chalker, 1991). Those governments which fail to conform to donor criteria may be subject to cuts or suspension of aid until suitable reforms are implemented. It is important to recognise, however, that democracy per se does not guarantee accountability or prosperity (Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 1992). The maintenance of elected parliaments rests upon economic stability, and the ability to resolve conflicts which may emerge as different groups claim their right to increased autonomy or secession (Rupesinge, 1990).

Increasingly, levels of military expenditure are also being included in aid conditionality criteria (Chalker 1991). While this is welcome in many respects, it has been argued that the levels of actual military expenditure are relatively low in Africa, and that this has left African states vulnerable to outside intervention, particularly from South Africa (Eboe Hutchful, quoted Awu-Asmoa, 1991). While there are grounds for optimism that such external interventions will decline as apartheid is dismantled and the East-West thaw continues, it remains an important ethical and legal question whether the right to defend state borders and to maintain internal security applies differentially between North and South. Furthermore, the conditionality debate does not address the responsibility of Northern governments for decreasing global military expenditure levels, or controlling the development and expansion of its military-industrial complex (Zwi & Ugalde, 1992). Indeed, concern has been expressed that the demilitarisation of the North could lead to the dumping of excess military equipment in the Third World (Awua-Asmoa, 1991). Absolute expenditure on military equipment may not serve as an accurate indicator of the levels of militarisation if cheaper sources of military technology become available through Third World military suppliers such as Chile and Egypt, or if non-conventional technologies such as chemical weapons remain available on the world markets. Careful monitoring of such transactions, matched by effective means to block sales which contravene international law, are therefore vital.

The inclusion of human rights on the aid agenda is a welcome and long-overdue development. Dreze & Sen (1989) in their now seminal work have clearly demonstrated the role of democracy and press freedom in famine prevention, pointing to the political risks to an elected parliament of widespread starvation. However, it is as yet unclear whether conditionality will be evenly enforced and whether foreign policy considerations will continue to outweigh those concerning human rights.
To date the human rights dimension of the conditionality debate has remained secondary to broader economic policy pursued under adjustment programmes. Where human rights issues have been addressed, concern has focused on the monitoring of individual civil and political rights. The remit of human rights agencies such as Amnesty International and the UN Centre for Human Rights in Geneva reflect this concentration on the protection of largely 'negative' rights, that is those which seek to limit the state's control over the life of the individual. Far less donor attention has been paid to the importance of protecting 'positive' rights, such as the right to adequate food, health and education. The failure of the donor community to address this broader human rights dimension has been attributed to their reluctance to accept the costly obligations associated with the Right to Development.

So far, conditionality has taken the form of a one-way dialogue, which omits international responsibility for improving the global environment within which national policy must operate. Conspicuously absent from the agenda are economic obligations on the industrialised countries to ensure fair trade, to reduce the Third World's debt burden and to improve measures to protect the global environment. All of these factors may have a substantial impact on a nation's ability to create the political, economic and environmental conditions within which its population can thrive.

It is important, therefore, that the playing of the human rights card in controlling aid allocations does not serve as a screen, behind which donors can shift their interests according to new political considerations. This is of particular significance at a time when Western interests are diverting attention away from the South towards Eastern Europe and the states which once constituted the Soviet Union. It is also important to evaluate human rights and democracy criteria within the African context and with reference to the particular difficulties associated with high rates of illiteracy, poor infrastructural and transport systems, the high levels of militarisation of certain regions and the lack of indigenous human rights institutions.

The British Government excludes humanitarian assistance from ODA conditionality believing that '... ordinary people should [not] suffer twice' (Chalker, 1991). In practice, however, the separation of emergency relief from long-term development aid (and the subsequent differential application of conditionality criteria) is problematic. Firstly, it suggests that the withdrawal of development aid does not increase populations' vulnerability to disasters such as famine, and that people do not therefore 'suffer twice'. Secondly, by excluding relief aid from the political agenda it suggests that the provisioning of food aid is an apolitical act, motivated exclusively by humanitarian concerns. Clearly, however, donors are aware of the vital political role of food aid and have used it to political ends. In 1984, despite the failure of the Nimeri regime to declare a famine, USAID mobilised food aid to avert a crisis for the Sudanese government. In 1985, USAID was willing to support the cross-border operation into the northern region of Ethiopia, despite its questionable legality, in order to remove the potential destabilising influence of nearly 4 million Eritrean and Tigrayan refugees from Sudan (Hendrie, 1989). By 1990 the complexion of the Sudanese government had changed, and donors were no longer willing to bypass conventional protocols about waiting for formal declaration of the famine within Sudan; it has been suggested that donors were using food aid as a political weapon to cause a major food crisis, and so undermine the government (Sudan Update, 1991).

In 1983, many if not most of the 100,000 famine deaths occurring in Mozambique could have been averted had food aid been provided by risking personnel and vehicles...
in areas under attacks from Renamo or by providing food to the Mozambican government to distribute (Green, 1986). The aid agencies had made a political decision, however, not to grant such aid: when they did a year later, in a more adverse security situation, deaths were sharply reduced. If such informal conditionality does operate on relief aid, donors have a responsibility to acknowledge the policy and to defend it publicly.

While donors apparently seek to encourage greater accountability of recipient governments, they are increasingly bypassing governmental structures in the belief that alternative structures offered by non-governmental organisations are more responsive to the needs of Third World communities. Between 1975 and 1988, the British Overseas Development Administration (ODA) increased its support for NGOs from £5 million to £42 million (Duffield, 1990a). The accountability of NGOs to their clients may be no better than that currently offered by governmental structures. Beneficiaries are rarely included in the planning and evaluation of relief programmes, and have no direct route to the agencies who fund NGO activity to voice their concerns or frustrations with a particular initiative (Hanlon, 1991).

In countries where bilateral development aid has been suspended, donor relief aid is commonly provided through multi-lateral agencies such as the World Food Programme and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Northern NGOs (NNGOs), such as CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children Fund. NNGOs are seen as neutral channels for humanitarian assistance without political allegiance, and may implement operations which, under international law, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies might not wish to support directly. However, many NNGOs also fear alienating national governments in order to protect their long-term development and relief interests in government-held areas of the country. Thus, they too may be forced to seek a third party through which they can channel aid to famine-affected areas, as occurred with the Emergency Relief Desk.

The reliance of the international community on private agencies to implement disaster relief programmes may exert a pressure on NNGOs to refrain from publicising the conditions which have created famine and which block relief operations. It has been suggested that NNGOs' role as contractors to bilateral and multi-lateral agencies may serve to maintain their silence if they fear that their comments are likely to elicit sanctions (Duffield, pers. comm.). Within their home countries NNGOs may face constraints in publicising the political causes of contemporary famines. In Britain the charity laws limit the advocacy work of agencies to 'apolitical' campaigning activities, and charities may fear alienating their constituents if they reveal the full extent of human involvement in the process of famine creation. There is thus a need to develop appropriate development education messages to reach the public in the industrialised countries.

Northern voluntary agencies often rely upon indigenous relief agencies, such as the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA), the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) and the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) in southern Sudan, to deliver relief into rebel-held areas. Such groups may have clear political allegiances. The provision of food into rebel-held areas may serve numerous functions over and above the humanitarian: by maintaining food supplies civilian communities are able to remain in their homes, or at least within the region. This is significant not only for their own health, but also serves to legitimise the rebel force. The ability of such forces to feed the people under its control is a primary concern in wars which depend on popular support. As Green (1986) puts it '... providing food aid saves lives and bolsters the authority of the political institutions
through which it is provided. Not providing it kills human beings and erodes the political strength of those who are unable to feed their people . . .' (p. 301). Secondly, food aid may be used to feed military personnel. While this may help reduce the likelihood of grain stores being plundered or homes raided, food aid which sustains a particular fighting force can determine the outcome of the conflict. Interestingly, the UN agencies have recently agreed to provide food for both government and UNITA forces in Angola. Where rebels do not benefit from the legitimising role of food aid they may be forced to accept a premature or unfavourable settlement as occurred in Biafra (Gorndeker & Weiss, 1989), and in Zimbabwe (Sanders, 1982).

NNGOs and organisations such as the ICRC are increasingly being forced to bear the public face of donor policy as they become the proxy means of maintaining aid flows. They face a multitude of ethical and political influences, yet their programmes are not subject to open scrutiny and public accountability, nor are they bound to evaluate the impact of their programmes. Most important of all, there is no international ombudsman to whom the intended beneficiaries of such programmes can appeal if they have reason to complain. The criteria according to which donors decide on the suitability of provisioning particular forces or the means of delivering aid are not always guided by international law, and are only subject to scrutiny by their home parliaments.

Agencies may also face dilemmas about which rebel-held areas they choose to supply. For example, would humanitarian aid in Renamo-held areas of Mozambique be as appropriate as that given to ERA in Eritrea? Which populations should suffer the ‘double punishment’ of violence and hunger? Some agencies such as the ICRC are bound under their constitution to be impartial in their provisioning of aid and therefore attempt to provide relief to both sides. In an attempt to be ‘neutral’, however, such action may inadvertently lend support to forces which do not operate in the interests of the community, but which nevertheless gain some credibility by being seen to be associated with the provision of food to the population.

The contradictions in donor attitudes are compounded when they refrain from delivering developmental inputs into rebel-held areas, on the grounds that by developing infrastructure they would be seen to be supporting a particular faction. However, Hendrie (1989) has remarked that because food aid can be monetarised and serve non-humanitarian purposes, it may serve military functions more readily, whereas programmes which support agricultural rehabilitation are less susceptible to military manipulation.

**Intervention**

In some instances bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors have been prepared to run the gauntlet of overtly supporting cross-border operations, despite the lack of government approval. Such transgressions of national sovereignty include the EC’s and USAID’s funding of the cross-border operation into Eritrea and Tigray.

There have been few international attempts to intervene militarily in peacekeeping operations in Africa, following the contentious role of the UN in Zaire in the 1960s. The armed intervention of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) has been limited to Chad in 1981, which subsequently failed, leading to the re-introduction of French troops the following year (Awua-Asmoa, 1991). More recently, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) dispatched a peacekeeping (-making) force to Liberia. Despite the numerous problems the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has faced, it has played a valuable role in restoring peace and stability to the country.
October 1991 French and Belgian troops arrived in Zaire, apparently to protect their own nationals, but they have also played a role in protecting those seeking to flee the violence in Kinshasa, and probably played a part in keeping Mobutu in power.

The European Community and United Nations have been attempting with little success to slow the increasing cycle of violence in Yugoslavia. It is clear that there are no easy answers. The establishment of a temporary safe haven for Kurdish communities after the Gulf War demonstrated the clear interface between security and providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of conflict and persecution. Yet it also illustrated the difficulty of sustaining such interventions without major changes in national political conditions. The Kurdish example does, however, provide an example of the international community justifying humanitarian intervention on the grounds that the government was unfit to provide for and protect its own people. Such actions have yet to be incorporated into permanent international legislation regarding the protection and provisioning of victims of disasters, and it is unlikely that in less visible conflicts donors would be willing to repeat the Kurdish experience, which was mounted at a huge financial cost. However, there have been recent calls for the establishment of a safe haven for the displaced in Southern Sudan (Sudan Update, 1991); similar calls have been made for the delivery of relief to those besieged in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia.

Conflict Resolution

The international community has also been slow to participate in conflict resolution. The UN Security Council has rarely been active in mediation, and conflict-resolution in Africa has more commonly been associated with the withdrawal of a regional power than with the offices of the United Nations (Rupesinge, 1990). With the East-West thaw, there is the potential for the UN Security Council to adopt a more coordinated and consensual approach to conflict resolution. However, following the Gulf War, it is uncertain what form such conflict-resolution may take.

A major obstacle to conflict resolution to date has lain in the sacrosanct nature of national sovereignty, and the reluctance of the international community to facilitate the division of nation-states along secessionist lines. The effectiveness of UN efforts at mediation in the future will depend upon achieving a flexibility of response in the resolution of conflicts, which should not exclude options such as secession and independence. These options are of limited appeal to its members, many of whom face similar secessionist claims in their own countries. However the emergence of important precedents in the Baltic States and Eritrea are dramatically challenging the notion of the primacy of maintaining nation-states in their existing form. It is also important to bear in mind that the politics of the UN, where a state or set of states dominate policy, may mean that not all claims will be treated equally.

It is therefore especially important that regional methods of conflict resolution are strengthened and maintain a degree of autonomy. The OAU, ECOWAS, and SADCC all provide potential structures for active mediation and peace-keeping roles, and may serve as powerful voices at the United Nations to support proposals for change. Allied to such attempts at regional conflict resolution should be attempts to stimulate regional demilitarisation, regional development activity and other forms of regional cooperation (UNDP, 1991).

NGOs have played a mediating role in some recent conflicts, particularly in negotiating cease-fires, the most notable example being the successive cease-fires under Operation Lifeline in southern Sudan. NGOs can also play a role in local conflict resolution. An Oxfam project in
southern Sudan provided a livestock vaccination programme which cut across ethnic lines, providing an incentive for peace. Similarly in Kitgum, Uganda, the avoidance of strict targeting of relief aid allowed whole communities to rebuild their lives without generating further conflict between the different ethnic groups (Duffield, 1990a).

**Conflict — a policy and planning issue**

Both actual and potential conflict need to be included explicitly in policy and planning approaches. Agencies such as the World Bank and IMF have avoided accommodating the impact of conflict in their planning; this has been attributed to their desire to remain neutral and to avoid interfering with military budgets (Green, 1987). If adjustment programmes are to consider military expenditure in future, this should be accompanied by sensitive planning which in analyzing the social and economic conditions in the country takes account of the impact of actual or potential conflicts.

An example of the failure to include conflict in policy and planning measures is the World Bank’s removal of food rationing and subsidies in Mozambique. This is a conventional item in structural adjustment policy: in areas not affected by conflict, the removal of subsidies is thought to boost production and stimulate the market. But in Mozambique the reasons for low production levels lie not simply in poor agricultural and marketing policies, but in the interruption of production and marketing by the war, especially through direct targeting by Renamo. Thus peace, as well as reform, is required to restore food security.

The dearth of quantitative data regarding the macro- and micro-economic impact of conflict compounds the difficulty of effective planning in pre-, present and post-conflict situations. Few studies match that of Bondestam et al.’s (1987) detailed analysis, which quantifies the number of livestock lost and the acreage of land out of production because of conflict. Yet this information is as crucial as weather-monitoring in determining actual and potential harvests. Early warning indicators in counter-insurgency famines would require the monitoring of forcible resettlement, differential employment opportunities and military attacks on markets. Human rights surveillance (where it includes food issues) is not systematically incorporated into famine early warning and relief, and the two fields remain locked in parallel rather than interacting. Collection of such data is dependent upon local security conditions and the availability of a network of trained informants at the local level, who can combine details of the impact of natural shocks with information about the current security situation. Encouraging local participation in famine early warning systems need not be confined to low-intensity war famines, but in such famines it may provide the only logistically feasible way of collecting data in a volatile and insecure environment (D’Souza, 1989).

There are undoubted political constraints to combining the two issues at the local level; assessments of the impact of attacks could be liable to manipulation on both sides. However, the testimony of war-affected refugees has been used to justify the suspension of development aid: Gersony’s reports on Somalia, and Survival International’s report on resettlement and villagisation in Ethiopia are but two examples. Testimony could then serve as an important source of qualitative and quantitative assessments of immediate and future food security within countries.

The effectiveness of local early warning systems depends on both the training of local workers to translate anecdotal material into quantitative estimates of need, and the willingness of donors to trust indigenous assessments rather than relying exclusively on highly technical reports, often prepared by expatriates. The relative cost-effectiveness
of such systems in identifying famine at the early stages may encourage donors to accept them as the most economically effective (D'Souza, 1989).

For such systems to be truly effective, donor concepts of famine will need to shift away from that of starvation towards understanding and responding to broader concepts of food security and insecurity. Prevention of the terminal stages of the famine process would include supporting coping strategies, further analysis of the benefits of cash versus food aid (Wilson, 1991) and disease control. More important still are measures which address the underlying causes of famine, including conflict, and promote development on an equitable basis.

Local participation in rehabilitation planning is also important. Earlier it was suggested that the tactics employed in low-intensity wars sought to disempower particular groups. The trauma and destitution accompanying conflict present development planners with a particular challenge. It is vital that needs are analyzed within the gender context: large numbers of female-headed households characterise war-torn populations, and women face greater difficulties than their male counterparts in gaining access to development resources and in securing adequate land to meet their families' needs. Famine affects women harder than men; in addition to their agricultural responsibilities they collect water and fuel, a time-consuming and dangerous task in areas affected by both drought and conflict.

Demobilisation of troops is also a major issue, and the establishment of effective policing to discourage and control banditry are also important in maintaining future food security and averting conflict. Green (1987) has described the important macro-economic impact of the development of a parallel economy, associated with high levels of banditry and violence, in Uganda. Duffield (1992) too has drawn attention to this issue. There are concerns that similar patterns will emerge in Mozambique. Renamo's support of smuggling and other criminal activities in the north of the country could become permanent features of the post-conflict economy (Ken Wilson, pers. comm.). The threat to food security lies in communities becoming isolated from the mainstream economy and from development programmes because of the high levels of violence. The development of a black market economy also constitutes a threat to macro-economic stability if governments are unable to control and tax trade in natural resources and other commodities. Populations may fear to farm, or their labour be controlled by force. Demobilisation and demilitarisation must be seen, therefore, as a development cost which contributes to future food and personal security.

In addition to developing a model which reacts to the crises prompted by conflict, there is a need for a proactive response to the causes of conflict and the factors which sustain it. Prevention of conflict must be included within the design of development projects. Implicitly this may already be included in terms of considerations of equity, yet explicit acknowledgement of actual tensions between ethnic, religious and political groups may be vital in ensuring that violent conflict is avoided. Nnoli (1990) and Horowitz (1989) have urged development planners to recognise the effects of differential development patterns in creating sources of tension among communities who are under environmental and economic stress. The example of northern Somalia or southern Sudan should act as a powerful reminder to development planners of the perils of differential development and relief inputs.

Public Health Issues

The role of public health in preventing excess famine deaths is increasingly acknowledged (Shears, 1991; Toole and Waldman,
The changed disease environment associated with massive social upheaval (Prothero, 1977) may be more significant than moderate malnutrition in causing excess famine deaths, and therefore demands appropriate preventive health measures. Lechat (quoted in Shears, 1991) has identified different types of disaster, which may have a rapid or slow onset, and be either natural or man-made. Shears (1991), in describing the health and nutrition features of different types of disasters, indicates that man-made political disasters with a slow onset, such as low-intensity war (unlike high intensity wars or natural disasters such as earthquakes which have a rapid onset), lead to low early mortality, high levels of malnutrition, and are characterised in the later stages by high morbidity and mortality. The late mortality reflects health problems often associated with large outbreaks of communicable diseases in crowded camps, and the decline in nutritional status because of interrupted food supplies. The inter-relationship between malnutrition and susceptibility to disease remains poorly understood and there is an urgent need for further research in this field.

In descriptive reports of the health conditions in a variety of famine and refugee populations, particularly those in relief camps, diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections, measles and malaria have consistently featured as the principal causes of morbidity and mortality (Shears, 1991). Morbidity and mortality are thus shown to result from conditions already common in the populations affected: the rates are, however, increased, and the resistance of those affected is reduced.

According to De Waal (1989), two opposing models can be put forward: the 'food crisis model' which states that starvation is the main cause of death, and the 'health crisis model' which suggests that increased transmission of communicable disease, independent of nutrition status, leads to most mortality. Emphasis mainly on the 'food crisis model' may lead to inadequate attention being devoted to other public health inputs such as immunisation and communicable disease control, water supplies and sanitation, and primary health care services. These models and their implications warrant further research. The development of effective surveillance systems will be part of the requirement for understanding the impact of conflict and population movement on health.

Special attention to the problems of women in famine situations is required from relief planners and epidemiologists. Rivers (1982) has noted that although women are physiologically more resistant to a decrease in caloric intake, they often experience higher rates of malnutrition than their male peers. Female children in pastoralists groups in Africa were 50 per cent more likely to suffer from wasting than their brothers. In the Punjab, second and third degree malnutrition in girls exceeded threefold that found in boys. This observation suggests that selective distribution of food takes place within families.

Even less attention has been paid to the epidemiology of violence and its health impact (Zwi and Ugalde, 1989; 1991). The study of the nutritional status of counter-insurgency famine victims remains largely limited to those areas where relief programmes functioned, illustrating the importance of health workers documenting rates of starvation and severe malnutrition. Conflict may generate specific patterns of disease, which demand particular health and health education inputs. One under-recognised example is that of rape by military personnel, widely reported in many conflicts and bringing with it the threats of sexually transmitted disease, including HIV infection, unwanted pregnancy and untold stress for the victims. Similar problems confront women forced into transactional sex as the sole means of providing for their families, often as a result of conflict (Zwi & Cabral, 1991).
Mental health needs of conflict-affected communities requires more attention from health workers. The trauma of war compounds the physical losses: Summerfield (1991), for example, describes the impact of conflict on the mental health of Nicaraguan villagers and demonstrates mental health morbidity lasting for many years. Although little research has been done, it is clear that the effects of trauma may have an important effect on the ability of communities to re-establish their homes and farms. Furthermore, children who have been active in combat, or who have witnessed atrocities may be more prone to resolve future conflicts — domestic or political — by violence, an effect of brutalization and deindividuation.

Health workers and services have been the target of military action in many of the conflicts studied. Health professionals outside the conflict area must therefore remain alert to the threats that violence poses for their colleagues, and seek to defend their rights. It is also important that health workers recognise the role that violence plays in creating famine and promoting health crises and that they analyze the causes as well as the effects of conflict. The development of appropriate teaching materials and the inclusion of human rights issues on medical and paramedical curricula will be crucial to achieving this objective (Zwi & Ugalde, 1989; 1991a).

CONCLUSION
Insurgency and counter-insurgency wars by their very nature will primarily affect civilians and threaten their food security. The logic of military strategy allows for the provision of rules (Hampson, 1989), but their enforcement is another matter entirely. The drafting of more appropriate legislation, which acknowledges the presence and rationale of internal conflict, could, however, provide more adequate guidelines for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the civilian victims of war (Duffield, 1990a).

For those communities faced with violence, whether committed by their own governments or perpetrated by external forces, the resort to armed conflict may represent the only apparent option for collective survival. Anti-government forces are rarely able to mount conventional wars; but their placing of civilian populations at centre stage raises ethical questions and dilemmas and places a responsibility on them to protect the communities they seek to represent.

Opposition to forms of structural violence represents a survival strategy for vulnerable populations seeking to maintain their social, economic and political integrity. All survival strategies carry an element of risk. Only those communities affected by, or participating in, the conflict concerned can judge whether such risks are justified; it is therefore vital that they are consulted by donors and implementing agencies who seek to assist the victims of famines associated with low-intensity war.

Food production and consumption lie at the heart of social and political identity. By acknowledging the role food plays in the systems which define social and economic integrity, donors and implementing agencies must publicly acknowledge that food, far from being politically neutral, is the very symbol of the right to life and to livelihood. By making disaster assistance subject to conditionality, however informal, and by transferring the political and ethical dilemmas associated with implementing relief operations into the private domain, donors abdicate their responsibility for monitoring the misuse of food and for assessing appropriate interventions. Similarly, by denying their obligations to prevent famine through adequate development inputs, environmental security and a reduction in the arms trade, the industrialised countries abrogate their responsibility to prevent further conflict.

DISASTERS VOLUME 16 NUMBER 4
The interface between famine prevention and the prevention of conflict has received little attention. Since the end of World War II, conflict has taken place almost exclusively within the Third World (Sivard, 1991). Rupesinge (1990) has estimated that 1 billion people throughout the world will not escape the poverty trap over the next two decades. Nnoli (1990) and Horowitz (1989) have both predicted future conflict in drought-affected West African states, and have urged donors to address the underlying factors of poverty and disempowerment—of subsistence producers. According to Schutz and Slater (1990) Third World instability will persist. Intensifying urbanisation, declining quality of social and economic life, the political emergence and activism of ethnic minorities and continuing endemic violence ensure the likelihood of more revolutionary activity directed against Third World regimes. Just as conflict presents a serious obstacle to development, so lack of development will present an obstacle to peace.

The adoption of concepts of famine which identify the onset of a crisis before it comes to its climax, and the inclusion of famine victims in the diagnostic task would enable the structures of famine prevention to be integrated within development programmes. Determining adequate responses to these complex humanitarian disasters will not be an easy process. Finding any solutions will, however, be contingent upon including the subjects of the arguments within the debate. Donors and relief agencies have much to learn from those who have survived low-intensity war-famines. By supporting local rehabilitation and conflict resolution efforts, the cycle of violence may be broken. The success of such initiatives will be dependent upon international recognition of the pre-conditions of conflict, and a willingness of donors to accept their obligations to protect the economic, social and cultural rights of communities throughout the Third and Fourth Worlds.

Note
An earlier version of this article was tabled at a Working Meeting, 'Conflict and International Relief in Contemporary African Famines', organised by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (Health Policy Unit) and Save the Children Fund UK, 26th March 1992. The study on which it is based was carried out with financial support for Joanna Macrae from Save the Children Fund. The authors take sole responsibility for the contents of the article which do not necessarily reflect those of Save the Children Fund. Linda Agerbak, Mark Duffield, Catherine Spencer and Alex de Waal reviewed earlier versions of this material for which we are grateful. Correspondence should be addressed to Anthony Zwi at the address below.

References


Prothero, A.R. (1977) *Disease and Mobility: A


West Africa (1990b) *'Refugees Cry Out'* , 20–29 August.


