05 Emergency Responses and Humanitarianism

Being involved in the responses of NGOs to humanitarian crises was more or less expected of ACFID from its early years. Responding to these disasters is an integral part of most NGOs' work, and ACFID has had a central coordinating and fundraising role in emergency work for 20 years from 1973 to 1993 through its International Disasters Emergency Committee (IDEC). This was then replaced by an Emergencies Forum, which then became a Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG), neither of which had a fundraising role. In the UK the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC), the model IDEC initially adopted, went in a different direction and became an emergencies fundraising juggernaut, with its own media agreements against which individual agencies could not compete. In Australia the ACFID member agencies were nervous about this approach, and did not allow IDEC to institutionalise itself to anywhere near the same degree as in the UK. Perhaps Australia was too small a market for a permanent agency like DEC, and so IDEC ultimately folded.

Given the complexity involved in coordinating emergency appeals, it was a wonder that IDEC managed to last as long as it did, but at its peak in the 1980s IDEC appeals raised tens of millions of dollars. Three major events defined IDEC: the crisis in 1971 that led to the formation of the independent state of Bangladesh; Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia to overthrow the Pol Pot regime in 1979, and the associated famine response and rebuilding required; and the Ethiopian famine of 1984–85 and the role IDEC played in coordinating the Australian leg of Bob Geldof's Live Aid phenomenon. In the last two events, IDEC showed a huge capacity for coordination and management, which no individual agency could undertake. It was also a symbol of unity among agencies in that they were not seen to be competing: IDEC 'is a fundraising body for the agencies but not of the agencies' (IDEC 1981, p. 3).

Emergency responses often have to deal with complex emergencies where armed conflict, civil war, government inaction or cruelty is at the heart of the problem. While these issues did not come to haunt IDEC directly, as its members had the task of dealing with them, ACFID often had to take policy and advocacy

positions about them. There were many mistakes made and lessons learnt in some of these humanitarian crises: Biafra (1969); Bangladesh (1971); Cambodia (1979); Ethiopia (1984); and Rwanda (1994). Alex De Waal rather unfairly refers to these mistakes as 'famine crimes' (De Waal 1997). Didier Fassin (2007) refers to them more pragmatically as the 'politics of life', where difficult choices are made on an almost daily basis in dealing with complex emergencies. This chapter will explore these often ethical issues in the context of the emergency work of ACFID and IDEC, and how they were managed.

NGOs and emergency work

Many of the major Australian and international NGOs were formed as part of a community response to emergency work in areas of armed conflict (OECD 1988; Smillie 1995; Barnett and Weiss 2008; Barnett 2011).[1] It was natural then that NGOs would continue the humanitarian principles of providing relief of suffering, even though much of their work was generally in long-term development. The number of NGOs and the public interest in emergencies, mainly through improved communications, led to a number of attempts in the 1960s to coordinate NGO emergency work so the public were not bombarded by appeals from a plethora of agencies, a concern of ACFID in the late 1960s (ACFOA 1967c, 1968a, 1971a).

In the UK a committee of five agencies was set up in 1963 to be an information source and coordinating body. This was at a time when there was a need within NGOs and government to work together to provide emergency relief for disasters overseas but no government departments dedicated to overseas aid. The first members of the new committee were the British Red Cross, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (now Oxfam); Inter-Church Aid (now Christian Aid); War On Want; Save the Children Fund; the Foreign and Colonial Offices; and the Refugee Council. Their main task was to quickly exchange information during a crisis, and to see how they could receive support and logistical help from the military, and medical and surgical aid from the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Surgeons (DEC 2012).

It was the advent of television that made large-scale emergency appeals possible, with the British NGO War on Want's successful television appeal following a disastrous cyclone in Sri Lanka in 1963. This success prompted UK agencies

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1   This list was covered in Chapter 2: the Red Cross from the human suffering on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859; Save the Children from the allied blockade of Germany in 1919; Oxfam from the British blockade of Greece in 1943; CARE from the relief program to the displaced in Europe following World War II; and World Vision from looking after Korean war orphans in 1950.

to think about working more closely together to use the power of television to bring the immediacy of disasters to the general public, something that hitherto had not been possible. This was hurried along by a BBC threat not to publicise appeals for multiple agencies, and so they asked the committee to nominate a particular agency for a specific appeal (Taylor 1982). The Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) came into being in 1964, with the same membership as the coordinating committee plus the addition of the Catholic agency CAFOD, and both the UNHCR and government having observer status. DEC was also recognised by the Charities Commission as an 'operative agency', which enabled it to raise funds. The chair of DEC was independent of its members and it had a secretariat (initially from the Red Cross). Key to its success was a close relationship from the outset with two major television networks, the BBC and ITV, which were included in decisions as to whether there would be an appeal or not. Donors were also able to make donations at selected banks and all Post Offices — a world first.

The division of the appeal funds was based on an equal amount going to each of the five DEC members, which were then free to spend it according to their own priorities. This way money could be raised rapidly and made available to agencies quickly; it also enabled anonymity of the donor if they wished (Disasters 1977). The first joint appeal was launched in 1966, raising £560,000 to help the survivors of an earthquake in Turkey which killed more than 2,300 people and caused massive destruction. Over the following 10 years DEC raised £8.5 million for disasters, but not without some controversy. This was mainly due to the fact that many emergencies are a result of armed conflict and are by definition political in nature, a theme that was to recur all too frequently.

The Biafran emergency

The Biafran emergency was the first very large-scale conflict-based emergency since World War II to which a large number of NGOs coordinated their response. In Australia a public appeal among a number of agencies raised a relatively modest $500,000 (Hayes 1970c); while in the UK the Biafran relief effort was the largest public response since DEC was established. It was soon to be a source of major controversy (Chandler 2001). An NGO consortium led by Oxfam and the Christian Churches, and in defiance of the British government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and without agreement from the Nigerian government, organised over 5,000 night flights in 1968 and 1969 with relief goods across Nigerian government lines to besieged Biafran civilians (Smillie 1995). Inevitably, the Biafran rebels benefitted from this: they were able to fly in arms in the shadow of the relief flights; and they received

foreign exchange from the cash provided by NGOs for local purchases and the exorbitant landing fees NGOs were charged, which enabled the purchase of arms (Burnell 1991; Smillie 1995).

The DEC committee was divided and so did not launch an appeal, but the other agencies that supported the Biafran airlift had their own combined agency appeal (Burnell 1991). The general belief after the emergency was that the rebel commanders manipulated the situation to ensure continuing political support for their cause (Smillie 1995; De Waal 1997; Franks 2005; Cumming 2013); and there is no hard evidence that the Nigerian government would have stopped either humanitarian aid being provided or prevented refugees leaving. As a result, British and other NGOs have had to endure ongoing criticism that they were dupes of the rebel regime and extended the war by as much as 18 months (Burnell 1991; Smillie 1995). Alex de Waal referred to the NGO response to Biafra as 'a heroic debacle' (1997, p. 78) and Ian Smillie as 'an act of unfortunate and profound folly' (1995, p. 104). The most tragic part was that the Biafran emergency remained a humanitarian problem rather than a political one and so 'excuse[d] the UN and Western governments from direct involvement' (Smillie, p. 106).

The Biafran emergency and response also firmly established the role of NGOs as humanitarian players able to operate outside the control of government and speak out for what they saw as fundamental humanitarian injustices. The humanitarian agency Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) had its origins in French doctors who, returning from Biafra and disillusioned with the ICRC response, set up their own agency. MSF moved away from the notion of neutrality that had hamstrung the ICRC in favour of 'testimony in favour of the victims' (Fassin 2007, p. 516; Givoni 2011).[2] The situation in Biafra also introduced the idea of the complex humanitarian emergency, which was to dominate emergency thinking through to Rwanda nearly 30 years later. Complex emergencies challenge conventional views on development and what Duffield refers to as:

> [the] assumption of the universality of social progress, [as] a series of interconnecting movements leading from poverty and vulnerability to security and well-being: shared progress is the normal and long-term direction of all social change (Duffield 1994, p. 39).

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2   Givoni goes on to argue that the formation of MSF was an 'outgrowth of the legitimacy crisis of the medical profession, and that its practice of witnessing has ultimately been a mode of ethical self-cultivation by means of which physicians could fashion themselves as more enlightened personae' (p. 43).

These complex emergencies involve contested politics and political movements which do not sit easily within the development ideals; and they ask aid agencies to make difficult choices in how resources are distributed among conflicting parties.

The background to IDEC

In Australia IDEC had its origins in the formation of ACFID in 1965, and the idea of a relief and development commission to have a coordinating role in relief work, with the British DEC Committee being in people's minds at the time as a model (see Chapter 2). When the relief and development commission folded in 1970 in favour of a simpler ACFID structure, it had already been directly involved in emergency appeals, the first of which was the ACFID–*Age* newspaper Vietnam Appeal in 1968. While this was not a large appeal by the standards of the time ($72,000), it was important as it leveraged government support for the ACFID secretariat in its early years. It also provided some ideas for a Disasters Relief Committee (ACFOA 1968a, 1968b), which the three larger agencies ACC, ACR, and the Red Cross supported but the other ACFID members were less enthusiastic (ACFOA 1968c). As there was little coordination of the separate agency appeals for Biafra, and later Bangladesh in 1971, the various appeals tended to alienate the public. The argument was growing for a separate, single appeal disaster mechanism which brought all the agencies concerned under a single umbrella, much like DEC in the UK (ACFOA 1971a, 1971c; Tiffen, et al. 1979).

Bangladesh and the beginning of IDEC

While ACFID was not directly involved in running appeals until 1974, it was very much involved in emergencies and provided information to agencies. For example, ACFID was the conduit for information on the Bihar famine of 1967, and it developed guidelines for material aid for the Peru earthquake in 1970 (ACFOA 1967c, 1970b). But it was the civil war in East Pakistan in 1971 that led to the formation of Bangladesh, and the related emergency when India was host to nearly 10 million refugees that led to a more hands-on role for ACFID.

Tensions had been building in East Pakistan for some time over how it was ruled from the Pakistan government based in West Pakistan. This came to a head in March 1971 when the West Pakistan-based government refused to accept the result of Pakistan's first democratic election in 1970, won by the Awami League

from the East[3] (O'Dwyer 1971a; ACFOA 1971b; Zaheer 1994). East Pakistan then unilaterally declared independence with the name Bangladesh. The Pakistan military responded by brutally suppressing the nascent uprising and forcing the provisional Bangladesh government into exile. This brutal attack led to a breakdown of markets, food hoarding, and all the other elements that inevitably lead to a famine (Zaheer 1994; Raghavan 2013). There was a mass outflow of refugees from May 1971 so that by October of that year there were nearly 10 million refugees in camps in India and 30 million displaced internally (O'Dwyer 1971a; ACFOA 1971b; Zaheer 1994). The actions by the West Pakistan government were roundly condemned internationally, including a motion in the UK Parliament accusing West Pakistan of genocide (Zaheer 1994). The refugee flow over these months was greater than all refugees to India to that point, including those during Partition (Government of India 1971; Smillie 1995). This situation was intolerable and the immediate crisis was only alleviated when India invaded East Pakistan in mid-November 1971. The war came to an end a little over a month later at the end of December (Zaheer 1994; Raghavan 2013). The provisional government, which had been operating in exile in India, took over and on 11 January 1972 the newly independent nation formally changed its name to Bangladesh.

The international aid community had been in place in East Pakistan dealing with the aftermath of a cyclone and so were in a good position not only to provide relief assistance but also to report on the atrocities of the Pakistan authorities and undertake the massive rehabilitation program that was required (Smillie 1995). Coming so soon after Biafra, 'Bangladesh was perhaps the beginning of a recognition that major emergencies were likely to be a continuing phenomenon' (p. 107), and that NGOs would be an integral part of any response. It also marked the beginning of the development of strong national NGOs in developing countries, when Faisal Abed returned to Bangladesh from London in January 1972 to rebuild villages in the district of Sullah. In one year, 14,000 houses were built, and Abed registered the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), now the world's largest NGO (Ahmed and French 2006; Ahmed et al. 2012).

This crisis galvanised the public in Australia so that by August 1971 $1.1 million had been raised, double the Biafran appeal (Hinton 1971). The Australian government was lukewarm to providing support to alleviate the refugee crisis, probably due to its alliance with the US and their continual support of Pakistan throughout the conflict. It avoided public comments, providing only $500,000 in emergency aid to India despite a strong bilateral aid relationship. General

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3   At the time Pakistan was geographically divided into two parts separated by India as result of the 1947 Partition: East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The centre of power was in the West but the larger population lived in the East.

Cullen as chair of ACFID visited the refugee camps in India in mid-1971 and found the situation deplorable; he felt that the Australian government response was 'sorely lacking' (Cullen 1971). The public backlash at government inaction was such that cabinet spent five hours on it, possibly the first (and only) time that a specific aid appeal had been thrashed out at that level. Further pressure was added through a hunger strike and a very large demonstration at Parliament House in Canberra (ACFOA 1971b). The issue of a humanitarian response to a crisis on a large scale was very new to government in a postcolonial environment, and it seemed unable to either judge the public mood or see itself as having responsibility to respond, particularly as India was the largest recipient of Australian aid at the time. This was a far cry from the 2010s where humanitarian responses are an everyday role for defence forces, and the Australian government is usually among the most generous of donors (Hollway et al. 2011; Kovács and Spens 2011; Rolfe 2011).

It was the Bangladesh crisis that forced ACFID members to reconsider the earlier idea of setting up a disasters emergency committee to coordinate agencies' fundraising (O'Dwyer 1971a). By late 1971 ACFID was in the process of forming IDEC (ACFOA 1971b; O'Dwyer 1971d). The NGOs were initially sceptical, and the issue of which agencies would be in IDEC was, and continued to be, an ongoing source of tension (ACFOA 1975e). In early 1972 an interim IDEC committee was set up. It employed a consultant to lobby government for more support for Bangladesh, which by then had been established as a newly independent country (ACFOA 1972a). In April 1972 an Oxfam UK representative briefed ACFID on how DEC functioned. But the simple proposition that five agencies were to receive the funds, whether they had any programs in the disaster area or not, was not seen as viable in the ACFID context (Taylor 1982). It was in October 1972 that IDEC was formally established (ACFOA 1972c), with the founding members being Austcare, ACR, ACC, CAA, AFFHC, and the Red Cross. In 1974 IDEC became a permanent standing committee of ACFID (ACFOA 1974a).

The first major appeal for IDEC was the Ethiopian famine appeal in 1974, referred to by some as the 'hidden famine' as the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie did not want it publicised. In mid-1973 the Ethiopian government was aware of the situation but would not allow public appeals. However, it accepted shipments of food under the condition that the shipments were not publicised; but leaks to a newspaper and a BBC documentary showed that one million people were in dire need (Keller 1992, p. 611). This famine took the lives of 200,000 people by the end of 1973, and led to the overthrow of the Haile Selassie regime by military coup in 1974. The events of 1973 and 1974 were to be tragically repeated again 10 years later when the military government themselves were responsible for hiding the story of a famine.

In 1974, a full-scale relief effort was underway and the associated IDEC appeal raised $1.2 million. This was the first appeal that enabled direct deposits to selected banks, which proved a great success, with nearly half of the appeal income coming through the banks. The issue to dog IDEC throughout its life was poor coordination among the Australian state branches of IDEC members, which were given the job of promoting the appeal in those states (Evans 1974). Overall, however, the appeal demonstrated the success and efficiency of the model, with the Ethiopian Appeal having a cost of fundraising of less than 5 per cent of funds raised (ACFOA 1975g). It is worth noting that the cost of fundraising always presents problems in appeals as people expect their money to go to the appeal and do not expect there to be a fundraising cost, or at least one that they should bear. This was taken to the rather absurd limit when Bob Geldof promised zero administration cost in the 1985 Live Aid appeal. This meant that the program was run by well-meaning but inexperienced volunteers, which inevitably led to waste, poor judgements, and avoidable mistakes (De Waal 2008).

In 1975 the IDEC structure was streamlined with a standing committee made up of representatives of the five major agencies – the Red Cross, ACR, ACC, Austcare, AFFHC – plus two other members who were on the committee on a personal basis elected from council. There was also a promotions/marketing committee for IDEC and provision for a government observer, given that government was also becoming a source of IDEC appeal funds. As for the vexed issue of which NGOs were to get the funds, and in what proportion, it was agreed the five permanent member agencies would receive half of any appeal (down from the earlier 75 per cent) with the balance open to all, including the original five agencies, on a competitive basis. The criteria were the quality of the agencies' projects and their capacity to deliver in a particular country or context. This shift from 75 per cent of the appeal going to the major agencies to only half sowed the seeds for the ultimate demise of IDEC, as it was the reputation of the larger agencies which IDEC depended on; but these larger agencies felt they were in effect subsiding the smaller ones and could possibly do better with their own appeals.

East Timor

The East Timor crisis of 1975 was the first real test for IDEC and how it functioned. East Timor had been a colony of Portugal until 1974 when, rather than having a staged decolonisation process, Portugal effectively abandoned East Timor after its revolution that year. While the left-leaning Fretilin party had won local elections in March 1975 and had been able to form a shaky coalition with the right-leaning UDT party to govern East Timor, this broke down in May 1975 following Indonesian pressure on UDT. A civil war between Fretilin and UDT

broke out in August leaving up to 3,000 dead. Indonesia responded with an invasion in December 1975 and formal annexation in July 1976 (Carey 1999; Cotton 2001; Cabasset-Semedo and Durand 2009).[4]

A humanitarian crisis emerged throughout 1975. In September, as the crisis deepened, ACFID called on the Australian government to help end the crisis and assist humanitarian refugees (ACFOA 1975j) (see Chapter 6). At the time, IDEC considered an appeal but the Red Cross, which chaired IDEC at the time, objected on the grounds that this would mean helping Fretilin and so be seen to be partisan in the conflict. Other IDEC agencies as well as non-IDEC member World Vision launched their own appeal under the auspices of ACFID. The fact that non-IDEC members were part of this appeal pointed to the tenuous position the Red Cross had taken, but they stood firm on what they saw as a neutrality issue and withdrew from ACFID in January 1976 (ARC 1976), but still remained a member of IDEC (Taylor 1982). With the funds raised, the NGOs chartered a barge with relief supplies from Darwin in mid-November 1975. The appeal was coordinated by an ACFID staff person in East Timor (Richards 1975; ACFOA 1975k; Sullivan 2013). The review of ACFID in 1979 found that 90 per cent of member agencies agreed with the ACFID position on East Timor and the associated appeal, making it one of the least divisive of the issues that ACFID faced at the time (Tiffen et al. 1979).

While the East Timor appeal was not large by IDEC standards – $350,000 – and only half of that was from the public (ACFOA 1976h), the experience highlighted the fragility of IDEC when a member could have the right of veto. By 1977 IDEC appeals were beginning to wane, perhaps because there were too many of them, or because support from the press and the public was not adequately assessed before launching an appeal. The Indian cyclone appeal in 1977 raised only $172,000, even with the advantage of benefitting from a non-IDEC World Vision TV crew raising the profile of the appeal in the last week (ACFOA 1977b; Werner 1978). Another appeal for Africa, also in 1977, was rejected by the Red Cross, but it went ahead and used the IDEC post box, with other agencies being recipients.

The experience from the East Timor appeal prompted a generally positive review of IDEC in 1977, but there were three issues of concern: which emergencies were suitable for IDEC appeals and which were not; there was little feedback from the recipient agencies of the IDEC grants; and, finally, some of the goods that were sent under the IDEC umbrella were not appropriate to the particular context (Tiffen et al. 1979). Not having favourable media coverage was a bugbear for IDEC, as it was those issues that attracted media attention, particularly with

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4   For a full account of the international manoeuvrings around the process for Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, including the US and Australia's complicity, see James Cotton (2001).

a celebrity involved, that were successful and attracted public support, but did not necessarily reflect the most pressing need (Werner 1978). The issue of the risk involved in starting an appeal was eased to some extent in 1978 when AusAID agreed to provide $20,000 in seed funding for promotions for each appeal to help get them off the ground (Taylor 1982). In 1981 the rules were changed so that the vote for launching an IDEC appeal went from being unanimous among members to a 75 per cent majority; and, further, that after six weeks of an IDEC appeal, member agencies could then run their own appeals (ACFOA 1981e). There was also a rule of thumb that if a story was on the front page of national papers for three days running then it was worth opening an IDEC appeal, but this practice was not always followed (Vincent 2012). It was the appeals of Cambodia in 1979–80 and Ethiopia in 1984–85, which showed the power of media and celebrity coming together, that were to be the big success stories for IDEC.

Cambodia

The background to the crisis lay in the brutal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia from 1975–79, which was involved in border disputes with Vietnam, leading to a flood of refugees into Vietnam. This led to a series of Vietnamese military incursions into Cambodia in mid-1978, a full-scale invasion in late December to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government, and the capture of Phnom Penh on 7 January 1979. A new government of Khmer Rouge defectors supportive of Vietnam was installed and the horrors of the Pol Pot regime were exposed to the world's media (Fein 1993). Not only was there genocide throughout the previous five years, but the Khmer Rouge also destroyed all food crops and grain stores in its retreat. While there was some debate as to whether this destruction by the Khmer Rouge caused a famine, from mid-1979 there were certainly serious food shortages, and at one point a fear of three million people starving (ACFOA 1979g; Murlis 1980). This prompted a massive international humanitarian response on an unprecedented scale.[5]

In Australia, IDEC set up a Kampuchean emergency appeal in mid-September 1979, with television personality Leonard Teale as its chair. Teale went to Cambodia in October on an IDEC emergency charter with a television crew, and a barge with relief supplies from Singapore followed shortly after (ACFOA 1979a). The Australian public's response was such that within two months it had raised $6 million. Within one year this had grown to over $10 million, the largest humanitarian appeal up to then, with only 3 per cent in administration and fundraising expenses (ACFOA 1979h, 1980a; Touche-Ross 1980; Alston

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5   For example, in the UK, the Oxfam Relief Consortium for Cambodia grew to 32 international NGOs, and in period 1979–80 provided $75 million worth of assistance (Burnell 1991).

1980b). The $10 million was also matched by $14 million from the government, bringing the overall appeal to $24 million, making it the largest appeal IDEC was to have (Ross 1980; ACFOA 1980a). Even after the emergency period was over in 1981, and despite the exclusion of Cambodia by the UN and Western aid community at the time, foreign affairs minister Andrew Peacock had made it known to ACFID that the government was prepared to provide aid to Cambodia through NGOs, despite the government's public pronouncements at the time (Vincent 2012).

Figure 9 Christine Vincent from IDEC and Christine Brown from ACC reporting on relief to Cambodia.

Source: Fairfax Media.

Of course the Cambodian Appeal was not without controversy, the most significant being the withdrawal of the Red Cross from IDEC in December 1979 following ACFID and ACFID agencies making statements of a 'political nature' in the context of the Cambodian Appeal (Alston 1979). This may have been to do with ACFID tacitly supporting the Vietnamese invasion when it was critical of Australian government calls for Vietnam to withdraw and the suspension of aid to Vietnam following the invasion. ACFID was also quick to note the government's inconsistency when it continued aid to Indonesia following its invasion of East Timor in 1975 (ACFOA 1979a, 1979b, 1979d, 1979h). ACFID was to continue its advocacy on Cambodia through the 1980s, particularly on

the issue of the Khmer Rouge holding a seat at the UN (ACFOA 1981f). The issue of continuing to recognise the Pol Pot regime was something which divided the government as well, with foreign minister Peacock and the department arguing against the suspension of aid to Vietnam and the continuing recognition of the Pol Pot regime at the UN, while Malcolm Fraser, the prime minister, did not want to alienate his US and ASEAN allies by taking the more pragmatic approach of condemning Vietnam. It reached the point that foreign minister Peacock twice offered his resignation to the prime minister (Kelly 1980; Radok 1981).

Like all humanitarian action in such a politically charged field, both sides of the conflict used some of the aid to prosecute the war, most notably in the Khmer Rouge-controlled camps in Thailand (with some Thai complicity), as did those backed by the Vietnamese government. As McFarlane points out: 'It is hard to escape the conclusion that humanitarian action contributed greatly to the consolidation of both sides in the conflict, sustaining and increasing their capacities to continue the conflict' (1999, p. 546), which harks back to the events in Biafra. In the context of Cambodia, however, there had to be a humanitarian intervention as doing nothing was not an option. It was really up to the Thai and Vietnamese governments – and their great power patrons the US and the Soviet Union – to more actively support humanitarian principles and give the NGOs a better space in which to operate.

Given the scale of the response over a very short period of time, ACFID was severely stretched. Almost all ACFID staff were involved and, as it had been two years since the previous IDEC appeal, some of the procedures and structures had lapsed. While IDEC had little choice given the circumstances, a review found that the appeal had been launched in haste with insufficient preparation, so some of the procedures were sloppy or poorly implemented (ACFOA 1981f).[6] Overall, however, the appeal was a huge success and set the groundwork for a longer term engagement of Australian NGOs in Cambodia for the 10 years before the final political settlement of 1991. From 1983 the immediate disaster was over and NGOs were involved in rehabilitation programs. Given the protracted negotiations for a political settlement, they were effectively acting as proxies for governments (Brown and Zasloff 1998; Pierdet 2012). The Australian government kept its links to the Cambodian regime open through a large rehabilitation funding package for NGOs each year from 1984, as it was their way of maintaining contact through the period of the international standoff until the UN transition process in 1990.

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6   For example, some agencies seemed to have appropriated the IDEC donor lists. World Vision received IDEC money without being a member. The record of numbers of people who donated to banks was not captured, and AFFHC did not spend its funds on the emergency but held them until the rehabilitation stage, which caused tensions among IDEC members on the slow rate of disbursement (ACFOA 1981f).

Ethiopia and Live Aid

The two IDEC appeals for the Ethiopian famine from late 1984 to 1985, taken together, were on a similar scale as the Cambodian appeal and raised over $10 million. Like Cambodia, the Ethiopian famine was complex in its causes and was also a result of Cold War-related conflict as much as drought. Unlike Cambodia, however, it took nearly two years and the passion of a minor rock star Bob Geldof for the situation in Ethiopia to strike a chord with the public. IDEC had its first African Appeal with a focus on Ethiopia in 1980 at the same time as the Cambodian Appeal was still running. Despite parallel appeals, it raised $660,000 (IDEC 1980; Taylor 1982). In 1983, as the situation worsened, there was another appeal for Ethiopia in July, but it was not a success due to a lack agency enthusiasm (IDEC 1983; ACFOA 1983c). While the rains had failed in 1982 and 1983, these were in the northern parts of Ethiopia where the conflict was. While donors were sceptical of Ethiopian government reports, the Ethiopian government still refused to let independent media cover the story (Keller 1992; Dercon and Porter 2010). At the same time the US government, under the Reagan administration, had cut their food aid to Ethiopia in 1983 and completely stopped it in 1984, possibly in order to topple the Soviet-allied Marxist regime (Clay 1991).

The famine was also a function of the counterinsurgency strategies employed by the Ethiopian government involving the denial of people's access to their land through 'villagisation' (confining them to restricted 'village' areas), thus limiting the support the insurgency could rely upon. This effectively 'tipped a chronically poor peasantry over the edge into outright starvation' (De Waal 2008, p. 44). The Ethiopian government were also deliberately attacking food supplies in the rebel-held areas (Keller 1992, p. 620). From mid-1984 the Ethiopian government began to resettle 1.5 million people from the north (the source of the insurgency) to the south, to collectivised farms (Niggli 1986; Keller 1992). It was this counterinsurgency operation that triggered the famine, which in turn gave an excuse for more resettlement. De Waal (1991, p. 5) estimates that the resettlement program killed 50,000 people, and 400,000 people died in the famine. Half of these deaths were due to human rights abuses that caused the famine to strike earlier and harder than would otherwise have been the case.

As the Ethiopian government was 'starving out the rebels', it was not until September 1984, after the 10th anniversary of the overthrow of Haile Selassie, that the media was let in (Clay 1991, p. 149). By then 300,000 people had died as a result of drought and the counterinsurgency policy of the Ethiopian government, prompting the Michael Buerk BBC documentary, which led to the mass appeals and responses in late 1984 and 1985. This television report resulted in Bob Geldof, from the little-known rock band the Boomtown Rats, and Midge

Ure, from the much better known Ultravox, to write the song 'Do they know it's Christmas'. Geldof quickly put together a 45-member super group, Band Aid, to record the song in November 1984. It became the biggest selling record of the time, with 3.5 million copies sold and over $9 million raised globally from record sales alone (McDougal 1986; De Waal 2008). This success prompted another round of famine appeals, culminating in the Live Aid concerts in mid-1985.

Figure 10 Bob Geldof and Midge Ure arrive to record 'Do they know it's Christmas', November 1984.

Source: Larry Ellis, Getty images.

De Waal argues that the Ethiopian government was very successful in manipulating foreign donors and the media in the Ethiopian appeals of 1984 and 1985. While the government was using the 'famine' as a weapon in its war with rebel provinces, the donors either did not understand this or turned a blind eye to what was going on. For example, food aid to government-held areas of Eritrea and Tigray in 1985–86 provided perhaps 5 per cent of the diet of the famine stricken population; 20 per cent of the townspeople's needs, and 100 per cent of the militia's food needs (De Waal 1997, p. 136). This harks back to Catholic Relief Services channelling USAID food aid to the South Vietnamese military and their families in 1968 during the war in Vietnam (Lissner 1977). This still left a significant proportion of those in need without food 'behind the lines' in the bitter conflict, so part of the relief effort was to ensure that these

people were not left out. A cross-border operation of shipping food and other relief needs from Port Sudan through a clandestine route across the border into the rebel held areas of Tigray and Eritrea in the North of Ethiopia was set up.[7]

It was in this complex political context that IDEC held another appeal for Ethiopia in October 1984, but it was not until December 1984 that the IDEC Ethiopian famine appeal gained real traction, on the back of the Band Aid phenomenon, and raised $3.3 million (ACFOA 1985a). Live Aid followed in mid-1985 with concerts in the UK, USA and elsewhere (including Australia) telecast globally as a massive fundraising event. In Australia it was agreed that the Live Aid funds would go to IDEC. Russell Rollason, ACFID executive director at the time, recalls a series of often colourful evening phone conversations with Geldof, when he argued against the money raised in Australia going directly to the Band Aid Trust which would then implement projects. Geldof argued that the Australian agencies could not be trusted not to waste it. Rollason countered that there would be no tax relief for the donors if the money did not go through Australian agencies, and this is what changed Geldof's mind (Rollason 2013; IDEC 1985a).

IDEC set up an Oz for Africa Telethon which stretched ACFID's resources to the limit. The bulk of the Oz for Africa income was on the night of the concert unlike earlier appeals which ran over at least six weeks or even longer (ACFOA 1985a). Over the following days the donation letters overwhelmed even the Canberra GPO, and IDEC had to use an unoccupied office in the building as a makeshift mailroom. Christine Vincent tells the story that in the centre of the room was a box into which anonymous cash in envelopes were thrown, and at the end of the day when this was tallied it was over $30,000. Another $1 million came in later in the year in a follow-up appeal so that when the Oz for Africa appeal was closed it had raised $6.5 million (IDEC 1988). The more complicated part of the appeal was the division of money: IDEC simply could not use the existing IDEC rules. Rather, the project submissions went to the UK and, as it was before the age of email, the proposals were sent by very long telexes which were then approved by the Live Aid project committee. Generally, what the Australian agencies put up was accepted by Live Aid.[8]

Another, less successful, part of the Live Aid phenomenon was related to Live Aid's focus on funding the logistics of delivering relief aid. Bob Geldof came out to Australia in 1985. In the process he met the prime minister, Bob Hawke, and persuaded him to donate to the Red Cross two military Hercules transport planes destined for the scrap heap with refurbishment and running costs paid for with Oz for Africa funds (Collier 1985). It was not until March 1986 that

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7   The author coordinated the Australian contribution to this operation from 1985–89.
8   The only project rejected was $200,000 for truck tyres, as Live Aid had already purchased what they thought was more than enough.

one of the Hercules made it to Asmara in Ethiopian-controlled Eritrea with a film crew in tow to make the film *Wings Over Africa*, and depict the role of the Australian Hercules in the relief effort (Fogarty 1986a; IDEC 1986b, 1986c). In the end the plane flew and the film was made and broadcast,[9] and most of those involved relieved that the very expensive saga of the Hercules was over.

Figure 11 Oz for Africa Hercules being handed over.
Source: ACFID.

The third part of the Geldof appeal was Sport Aid in mid-1986, which raised a further $37 million and took place in 89 countries simultaneously, with the money raised in Australia also to come to IDEC. In Australia, Sport Aid was to prove an expensive failure when the TV sports shows failed to pick it up to garner pledges through their endorsement and promotions. IDEC paid out $232,000 in expenses for a return of $540,183 (IDEC 1986a). In 1988, when it was proposed to run Sport Aid again in Australia, there were no takers to run it: too many fingers had been burnt (Rollason 1988). This pointed to the inherent risky nature of global fundraising events: when they work, they work well, but the risks can be very big indeed.

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9   The postscript to the story, however, was that the co-pilot was accused of spying in August and the plane grounded (Fogarty 1986b). The filmmaker entered a two-year dispute with IDEC over a final payment before being settled (Butterworth 1987).

Globally, the Band Aid phenomenon was a great success with a total of $144 million raised for relief work in Africa when it was wound up in 1990 (Geldof 1991).[10] Kenyon observed at the time that its success was a mix of the market and altruism: 'the facility of the enterprise to derive advantage from the moral ambiguities attending good works and chartable actions' (Kenyon 1985, p. 3), which raise some uncomfortable questions around celebrity marketing (Davis 2010). George Harrison and Ravi Shankar attempted a similar event 12 years earlier with the Concert for Bangladesh, but it did not have the same global impact. It may have been the mix of perceived need, communications technology, and the sheer drive and certainty of Geldof that made Band Aid work. Speaking of his trip to Africa in 1985 Geldof said:

> The journey was not some jaunt into a personal heart of darkness nor was it a dilettante's voyeuristic dip into the pitiless pain and degradation of others. It was a trip to refocus my outrage (Bob Geldof quoted in Regan 1986, p. 75).

In its own way, Band Aid spelt the end of IDEC. The all-absorbing workload put a strain on ACFID resources, which had essentially started with the Cambodia crisis in 1979 and had not let up for the following seven years. Among ACFID members there was dissatisfaction with what was referred to as the 'gezinter'[11] method of dividing funds more or less equally among an increasing number of agencies, and the part-time nature of the IDEC secretariat meant that mistakes were made. Talk of a full-time secretariat similar to DEC in the UK, and matched grants for distribution (to ensure agencies put their own resources in) came to nothing (IDEC 1985a, 1985b, 1986b, 1986d, 1991b). A number of appeals in 1988 and 1989 were unsuccessful, with the final IDEC appeal, the 1991 African Crisis appeal, raising $171,000 but costing $110,000 to run (IDEC 1992). The Red Cross again withdrew from IDEC as did CAA, which would only participate if there was a full-time secretariat (Rollason 1991; Armstrong 1991b); and AusAID stopped using IDEC as a channel for its relief money, preferring to go through agencies directly (IDEC 1991a). Even the Rwanda genocide and the massive relief appeal that followed in 1994 could not spur IDEC to reform.

The issue with which IDEC struggled was having a formula that worked. When the Band Aid largesse was available, membership of IDEC grew very rapidly, which upset those agencies that were specialist relief agencies. A number of proposals were put forward, including splitting the funds from an IDEC appeal equally between those that had international capacity, like the Red Cross or Oxfam, and those that had a local capacity in the country concerned, and

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10   Band Aid raised $8 million, Live Aid $80 million, Sport Aid $30 million, as well as spin-offs such as School Aid and Fashion Aid.

11   A contraction of 'goes into', that is, divided equally.

be proportionate to their income from the Australian community (Henry 1985), and other ideas which were variations on that theme. IDEC struggled on with a number of small appeals that did not bring in much money relative to their costs until the disastrous African Crisis appeal of 1992, after which nobody wanted to call another appeal. All of the proposals for reform involved some agencies giving up their influence and income from IDEC. It seemed to reach a point where if particular agencies could not benefit then no one should. Also there was a lack of hard-headedness about whether an appeal would gain traction, and for this strong media links were required, but after a decade of more or less continuous African appeals the public interest had waned. So when the Rwanda crisis occurred in 1994, even though IDEC was still 'on the books', it played no part in it despite Rwanda's important role in redefining humanitarian responses for NGOs.

Questioning NGO humanitarian responses – the Rwanda crisis

By the time Rwanda and the Great Lakes crisis came in 1994 IDEC was out of the picture, but ACFID was certainly involved. Like the development debates, the critiques of humanitarianism which were less prominent in the 1970s and 1980s were starting to emerge (De Waal 1997; Macrae 1998; Stockton 1998). While many myths had been built about humanitarian NGOs and their competence, more serious questions were now being asked about the nature of their response and NGOs' responsibility in humanitarian crises. Like Biafra in the 1960s, and Cambodia and Ethiopia in the 1980s, NGOs found themselves on different sides of ongoing and complex conflicts, which had at times unsavoury international dimensions with realpolitik and the Cold War determining many donor state responses (Macrae 1998). This was no less the case in Rwanda, where much of the relief work was with refugees and those displaced from the community that perpetrated the genocide; this led to many questioning the nature of the humanitarian response (Pottier 1996; Storey 1997).

The key question was what role do NGOs as humanitarian organisations have in these complex emergencies? In Biafra in 1969 it was to run an 'unauthorised' airlift to the population in rebel areas against the wishes of both the Nigerian and British governments; in the case of Cambodia the new government of Cambodia was not recognised by the West but NGOs worked with it; and in the case of Ethiopia most of the people in need were in areas controlled by the rebels, and the Ethiopian government used aid as a weapon. On top of this, the messages of celebrity fundraising generally avoided discussing the inherent political

complexity (De Waal 2008; Richeya and Ponte 2008). The next big disaster in Rwanda pushed these ethical dilemmas to another level and led to some major changes in how humanitarian aid was delivered.

The Rwanda crisis is among the worst genocides on record in terms of the percentage of the population killed as result of direct government policy (Dallaire and Dupuis 2004). It had its origins in an ongoing civil war that had been underway since 1990. In April 1994 the Rwandan government seized an opportunity, and over the following three months the army and government-run militias initiated and led the massacre of between 800,000 and one million Rwandan people, or 20 per cent of the population (Storey 1997; Dallaire and Dupuis 2004). Most of the dead were from the Tutsi ethnic minority, hence the reference to the massacre as genocide. However, members of the majority Hutu group opposed to Hutu extremists were also killed. As a result a rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which had been at war since 1990 with this regime and its predecessor, restarted its offensive to take the country and ultimately succeeded in defeating the government forces and taking power shortly after the massacres in July 1994 (Reyntjens 2011). This led to a massive 'refugee' crisis as members of the former regime and their supporters fled to neighbouring Zaire and Tanzania, as part of an organised program by the defeated government so a base to regroup could be developed (De Waal 1997, p. 195). These camps quickly came under control of the former regime's forces and were run by committees made up of former government, military and business leaders who had been responsible for the genocide. This was something that aid workers were slow to grasp in terms of the dynamics of camp politics (Storey 1997; Pottier 1996). The focus of the relief effort was to these camps, rather than the situation inside Rwanda, and it overlooked the genocide itself. By late 1995, 20 times more aid was going to refugees outside the country rather than to displaced persons and rebuilding communities within the country.

> In a number of ways, some NGOs (as well as official donors, such as the UN agencies) lent support to the forces of the deposed genocidal regime, especially after they had fled to neighbouring countries. This support was manifest in the following ways: the choice of where to work; the type of support offered, and the structures and people with whom the NGOs worked and some public statements made by NGO representatives [which portrayed the genocide merely as an ethnic squabble] (Storey 1997, p. 386).

There were questions of prolonging the conflict and giving succour to murderers with a disproportionate amount of aid going to these camps, such as in Goma, rather than for rehabilitation inside Rwanda (De Waal 1997; Storey 1997). De Waal argues that Oxfam's and other calls for a ceasefire at the time were inconsistent with international law obligations to stop the genocide, and that

defeating the military perpetrating it was the only way it would stop. This was a clear case for a 'just war'. De Waal went on to argue that Oxfam's view of providing relief before, or at least at the same time as, providing justice and dealing with the genocide, meant the agencies effectively 'fulfilled a charitable imperative but violated the spirit of international law' (1997, p. 198). This caused a lot of questioning in the NGO community as to how they ended up in a situation where attacks on NGOs and the humanitarian framework they had adopted could happen (Macrae 1998).

> At issue is not only protecting the quality of [food] rations, but the basis of rights and international responsibilities; protecting these values, not simply cash flow, is likely to be the major challenge for the relief community in coming years (p. 315).

The intense competition for funding and media coverage among international NGOs in the camps in Goma 'undercut the collective action necessary to protest the misuse of aid' (Cooley and Ron 2002, p. 7). Two hundred NGOs descended on the Goma camps, which held 800,000 refugees, and competed for $1 billion in relief funds. Given the scale of the operation there was little space to raise concerns about who was running the camps, and whether NGOs were effectively offering protection and safe havens to the perpetrators of the genocide, suspected war criminals, and the re-emergent Hutu militias (Cooley and Ron 2002).

Hugo Slim, however, reminds us that the negligence or inaction of NGOs in these contexts is because of the negligence and inaction of those in political power:

> It would therefore, be morally negligent if excessive agonising by or about relief agencies (the groaning of the white man and his burden) shouted out the accusations of blame which should be put squarely where they are most obviously due: with the killers, the rapists, the dispossessors and their political leaders who initiate and sustain the policies of excessive and unjust violence in today's wars and genocides (1997, p. 247).

Humanitarian codes of conduct

The NGO community responded to these ethical dilemmas by adopting the Red Cross Code of Conduct, which included principles of impartiality and neutrality, and the Sphere standards, which covered standards of service delivery to refugee camps and the like. The problem is that the Code of Conduct seems to avoid what it was meant to address and that is the political nature of most humanitarian emergencies: 'humanitarian action is political action … [and] human rights abuses are invariably an intimate part of famine creation' (De

Waal 1997, pp. 1–2). While the Sphere standards probably made sense, asking all NGOs to take the same stance of neutrality and impartiality seemed odd and often at conflict with human rights law and rights-based approaches to development, which argue for giving voice and advocating against injustice. Given the history of ACFID and Australian NGOs supporting 'liberation' movements through the 1970s and 1980s, and the withdrawal of the Red Cross from ACFID over perceived partisan humanitarian interventions in various conflicts, reconciling people's human rights in conflict situations with helping perpetrators of injustice (as what happened on the borders of both Cambodia and Rwanda) can lead to deep ethical dilemmas, and possible irreconcilable differences among NGOs.

The Emergencies Forum and the Humanitarian Reference Group

Following the demise of IDEC the Emergencies Forum was established in the early 2000s. It had a coordinating role rather than a fundraising or operational role, and it later became the Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG). It was during the mid to late 1990s that emergencies such as the East Timor crisis (ACFOA 1999b), Bougainville (through the 1990s), and the PNG Aitape Tsunami (1998) occurred. ACFID took a lead in coordinating the emergency response to all of these and, similar to the 1975 response to East Timor, set up a temporary office in Darwin in 1999 to coordinate NGO relief efforts with the UN. This included the response of global partners of Australian NGOs, which was challenging in terms of a number of issues such as which agency was the lead in the response.

The Emergencies Forum became the HRG to provide a more formalised structure for agencies to share information, improve coordination between agencies, and develop tools/events to share with the wider humanitarian sector. The HRG has members approved by the ACFID Executive and is the primary NGO coordination mechanism for emergency appeals and responses (ACFID 2014b). Teleconferences are convened in response to an emergency and are attended by AusAID as well as by regional counterparts such as New Zealand agencies upon request and need. Regular teleconferences are not only a mechanism to facilitate a coordinated emergency response but they also provide a forum for discussing particular NGO capacity, local needs and how they may be delivered, funding issues and opportunities for joint messaging (Lipner 2010).

Figure 12 Cartons of emergency supplies piled high, with RAAF aeroplane in background, during the relief operation to assist Aceh, Indonesia.
Source: Dan Hunt.

The Indian Ocean tsunami

It was the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami with 230,000 lives lost and over one million left homeless which brought the HRG into its own. The scale of the disaster and the public response was even greater than that of the 1980s Cambodia and Ethiopian appeals, but without the same level of political complexity (Athukorala and Resosudarmo 2005; Rodriguez et al. 2006; Telford and Cosgrave 2007; Kilby 2008; Jayasuriya and McCawley 2010). One hundred million dollars was donated within the first 10 days. When the appeal was over the total was $377 million, of which World Vision alone raised over $110 million (ACFID 2006; Abraham 2007; Clarke 2007). This completely overwhelmed the agencies, which had never experienced this level of support for an emergency, and many had to set up separate sections internally to manage the tsunami program for a number of years. While there was no consolidated IDEC-type appeal, ACFID took on a coordinating and, most importantly, a public accountability role for the NGOs. As foreign minister Downer said at the time: 'we are in this together

… like peas in a pod' (O'Callaghan 2013). The scale of funding was so great that both the government and ACFID were mindful of putting reporting processes in place to ensure maximum accountability and reducing opportunities for media scandals to put at risk the reputation of the response. This resulted in the ACFID secretariat doing more than information sharing and coordination, but also collating and reporting on the work of all agencies involved in the response on a quarterly basis to the public and government (ACFID 2006).

There were also longer term effects.

> The 2005 Asian tsunami transformed the aid and development sector. It placed unprecedented demands on many agencies to manage effective humanitarian response and reconstruction efforts, dramatically lifted public donations and increased media scrutiny of how those donations were spent (ACFID 2010a, p. 3).

Of course the irony was that in the past IDEC bore most of the pressure and demands at these times, but it was too long in the past for the NGOs to remember the role it played. The role of the HRG groups was beefed up in 2008 to become a more formal ACFID advisory committee in response to the increasing operational and policy challenges in this area. Its work was:

> to coordinate emergency response systems, work closely with ACFID's Executive Committee on policy and advocacy, and further collaborate on operational activities/policy such as disaster risk reduction, protection, civil military coordination and human security issues (ACFID 2013c).

By 2010 there was even talk of a return to an IDEC-type arrangement with a joint funding/consolidated funding mechanism. Many 'argued that this approach would help enhance NGO credibility in the eyes of the public' and would also hold NGOs more accountable for their actions, decrease competition, and increase the potential for a more complementary response, thereby enhancing efficiencies of scale and scope (Lipner and Henley 2010, p. 22). By ACFID's 50th anniversary in 2015, however, nothing had come of this idea.

Conclusion

The 50 years of ACFID's engagement, and that of its member agencies, in humanitarian work has seen it involved in the major emergencies of the time; from the controversial Biafran airlift in 1968 to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, and a number of large-scale emergencies in between: Bangladesh, East Timor, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Rwanda and others. Each of these posed its own unique challenges, and in many ways each challenged the nature of humanitarianism.

As Fassin put it, the 'politics of life' are where difficult choices and decisions are made. These 'politics of life' decisions can often compromise the values of an NGO and sometimes the integrity of a particular intervention, and can create ethical and moral dilemmas for NGOs and their staff. ACFID did not shy away from these debates, nor did it resolve them, as they are the enduring legacy of humanitarian interventions. While ACFID's hands-on role through IDEC may have lasted only 20 years, and may not have been the great success expected, ACFID still continues to be a leading source of information and networking on humanitarian issues for its members and the government.