

Military Rule Responses to the Ethiopian Agony: Famine of 1984-1985

Gizachew Andargie

Lecturer at Debre Markos University
Department of History and Heritage Management
Debre Markos, Amhara, Ethiopia
gizachew19@gmail.com or gizat21@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Ethiopian historiography corroborated that Ethiopia has a long trends of famines beginning from the ninth century. Since it has an endemic feature in Ethiopia, it had left hard dark scar in the foreign image of the country. Thus, the country is bringing into play to demonstrate the connotation of the word famine. The famine of 1984-1985 was the second occasion, after the tragic events of the people killing of 1972-1973 famine, which the Ethiopian people had died in large numbers. Everywhere in the globe drought occurs frequently but does not necessary result famine. So, it is probably faire to say that at least the mortality figure could have been abated if the military rule had acknowledges the famine at its manageable stage. Even though the peasants were applied all of their own indigenous famine survival and recovery strategies, they were not effective to overcome the 1984-1985 famine. Hence, more than sixty NGO's were participated in the relief operation. The ardent objective of this study is to provide a comprehensible historical account about the 1984-1985 famine. Methodologically, the study was conducted through document analysis, by examining different literatures. So, sure enough this article substantiates the causes, the role of media in the internationalization of the famine, relief operation and repercussions of the famine.*

Keywords: *Drought, Famine, Peasant, Relief operation, Derg*

1. INTRODUCTION

Famine has occurred throughout history and in almost every corner of the globe.¹ Ethiopia has a long and troubled history of famine. Famines in Ethiopia have had an endemic characteristic due to drought, locust invasion, cattle plague and other factors.² Sources indicate that the earliest famine in Ethiopia traced back to the ninth century. Between 1250 and 1752 A.D there were no less than twenty five major famines and epidemics in Ethiopia. Famines that ravaged Ethiopia in the first half of the fourteenth century and the middle of the fifteenth century are recorded in the chronicles of Amde Siyon (r.1314-1344) and Zara Yaqob (r.1434-1468) respectively. Travelers account or literatures of foreign witnesses are testimonies for famines that broke out in Ethiopia after the sixteenth century. Famines not less than ten are believed to have ravaged Ethiopia between 1540 and 1742.³

The major famine episodes in the country since 1800 shows that there were nine major famines from 1800 to 1892.⁴ Among these famines, the most notable one is the Great Famine of 1888-1892, which is commonly referred as *Kifu Qan* (Evil Days). It was caused by the rinderpest epidemic triggered by Italian importation of infected cattle through Massawa. The cattle plague

¹John Mellor and Sarah Gavian, "Famine: Causes, Prevention and Relief," *Science New Series*, Vol. 235, No. 4788 (Washington D.C: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1987), p.539.

²Giordano Sivini, "Famine and the Resettlement Program in Ethiopia," *Africa*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Rome: Istituto Italianao per l' Africae l'Oriente, 1986), pp. 212-213.

³Mike Zmolek, "Aid Agencies, NGO's and Institutionalization of Famine," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Mumbai: Economic and political Weekly, 1990), p.38; Seven Rubenson, "Conflict and Environmental Stress in Ethiopian History: Looking for Correlation," *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (Stockholm: Springer, 1991), p. 179.

⁴Markos Ezra, "Demographic Responses to Environmental Stress in the Drought and Famine Prone Areas of Northern Ethiopia," *International Journal of Population Geography*, Vol.7 (New York: Population Council, 2001), p. 261.

accompanied by drought and locust invasion worsened the situation. The famine perished millions of human lives and ninety percent of the country's livestock.⁵

During the times of such agonies of famines there was no organized relief operation. The operation ranges from the activities of individual famine victims to fend for themselves to provision by kings to destitute who managed to reach to their court. For instance, King Susinyos (r.1607-1632) provided 2000 "loaves of bread" and certain amount of wheat to the impoverished people who flooded his court. In another famine during his reign, Iyassu I (r.1682-1706) had fed a great number of famine victims for two months. During the Great Famine (1888-1892) a great number of people flocked to Menelik's court. The Emperor himself had distributed food to the impoverished people.⁶

A series of famines were also ravaged Ethiopia in the twentieth century; eleven famines were occurred between 1913 and 1994. Among these the major famines are the 1972-1974 and 1984-1985. Tigray and Wollo provinces were hardly hit by the former famine and these two provinces together with Eritrea were also hardly hit by the latter famine.⁷ The grand purpose of this seminar paper is to examine the 1984-1985 Ethiopian Famine. It points out the causes of the famine, role of media, relief operations (response of the Ethiopian government and NGO's) in line with their success and failures, and consequences of the famine.

2. CAUSES OF THE 1984-1985 FAMINE

Ethiopia was not fully recovered from 1972-1974 famine, when another devastating famine in 1984-1985 ravaged it. Even though the famine in 1984-1985 took place in many areas, it was most severe in the north, mainly affecting Eritrea, Tigray, Wollo and some parts of Northern Shewa. It has been believed that this famine was caused by a combination of environmental and political factors. These factors includes drought due to persistent environmentally destructive land uses, civil war, and lack of appropriate and timely measures to cope with the disaster.⁸

The drought that caused the 1984-1985 famine was the result of human abuse of the environment.⁹ The Northern provinces of Ethiopian are areas where sedentary agriculture has been practiced for thousands of years. Persistent exploitation of the land for centuries has resulted in severe environmental destruction. The region is the most exploited and environmentally degraded place in Ethiopia. Here, forests are cleared and in many parts one observes "bare rock without soil cover." As a result of deforestation soil lose much of its capacity to retain moisture and resistance to drought. This ecological degradation made peasants in northern Ethiopia vulnerable to drought.¹⁰

The drought of 1984 was a slow process that began in the late 1970's with the failure of yearly rains. Since the late 1970's, there were critical poor harvest resulted from inadequate rains. This protracted drought increased peasant vulnerability to famine through progressive depletion of

⁵Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. 2nd ed (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), p.72; *Addis Zemen*, (*Hidar* 11, 1977 E.C.), p. 9; Fantahun Ayele, "NGO's Relief Operation in Wollo, 1973-1986," (M.A Thesis in History, AAU, 1994), p. 2.

⁶Fantahun, pp. 2-3.

⁷*Ibid*, p. 6; Zmolek, p.38; Markos, p. 261.

⁸Girma Kebede and Mary J. Jacob, "Drought, Famine and the Political Economy of Environmental Degradation in Ethiopia," *Geography*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (New York: Geographical Association, 1989), p. 65;

Theodore. M Vestal, "Ethiopia's Famine: A Many-Dimensioned Crisis," *The World Today*, Vol. 41, No.7 (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1985), p. 125.

⁹Theodore M Vestal, "Risk Factors and Predictability of Famine in Ethiopia," *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (New Jersey: Association for Politics and the Life Science, 1991), p.192.

¹⁰Girma and Jacob, pp. 65-67; Vestal, "Ethiopia's Famine ...", p.126; Demel Teketay, "Deforestation, Wood Famine and Environmental Degradation in Ethiopia's Highland Ecosystems: Urgent Need for Action," *African Studies*, Vol. 8, No.1 (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2001), p. 54; *Addis Zemen*, (*Hidar* 2, 1977 E.C.), p. 2.

food stocks and capital assets. The 1984 drought was the culmination of the failure of the *belg* and *mahar* rains in 1982 and 1983, which turned the situation from bad to worse. 1984 was a year of almost complete drought which triggered famine where stocks and resources have not yet been rebuilt.¹¹ Drought was an important but not the sole contributor to the famine of 1984-1985 and its role has been believed “to be secondary or catalyst factor.”¹²

Drought frequently occurs elsewhere but does not necessarily create famine and political factors allow drought to be translated in to famine. Political factors include civil wars, trade restrictions, and lack of appropriate and timely response from the government.¹³ The civil wars fought between the Derg and the numerous insurgent groups were induced the famine. The government fought war in Eritrea with Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), in Tigray with Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF), and in some parts of Wollo and Gonder with Ethiopian Peoples’ Democratic Movement (EPDM).¹⁴ The government was adopted a counter insurgency strategy, bombing villages, croplands and markets to destroy the base of popular support of the rebel groups. For instance, in Tigre alone, the Derg embarked upon six major campaigns between 1981 and 1982. Such repeated military offensive measures taken by the army and air forces burned grain storages and villages, bombarded markets and shattered the ecosystem as trees were cut and forests were burned. Moreover, these civil wars not only disrupted agricultural production, but also the Derg was spent more than fifty percent of the annual budget of the country to finance the war and to the maintenance of military forces to suppress the rebels while five percent of the budget was spent on agriculture.¹⁵ Thus, the civil wars turned the hardship in to famine.

Trade restriction also contributed to the famine of 1984-1985. Trade was restricted with the imposition of blockages, high taxes were issued to reduce trading and commerce routes were monitored day and night. “When the grain prices increase in one part of the country, trader would go wherever grain was cheapest, purchase as much grain as they could, and transport it back to remove scarcity.” This was no longer occurring in northern Ethiopia in 1980’s. Thus, the grain price was increased at alarming rate. For instance, in August 1984, the price of a quintal of teff reached 300 birr. On the contrary, the price of livestock declined sharply. Under normal circumstances an ox used to be sold for about 300 birr. In 1984, this price drastically dropped to 15 birr. Therefore, trade restriction was increased peasants vulnerability to famine throughout northern Ethiopia.¹⁶

¹¹Fantahun, p. 28; Africa Watch, *Evil Days: Thirty Years War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), p. 136; Tobias J. Lanz, “Environmental Degradation and Social Conflict in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia: The Case of Tigray and Wollo Provinces,” *Africa Today*, Vol.43, No.2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 169; *Addis Zemen*, (Hidar 1, 1977 E.C.), p. 1.

¹²Scott Savaiano and Philip A. Schrodt, “Environmental Change and Conflict: Analyzing the Ethiopian Famine of 1984-1985,” In Carl W. Robert (ed), *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences: Methods for Drawing Statistical Inferences from Texts and Transcripts* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, 1997), p. 159.

¹³John Sorenson, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 81; Dale Jamieson, “Duties to the Distant: Aid, Assistance and Intervention in the Developing World,” *Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 9, No.1 (Delhi: Springer, 2005), p. 155.

¹⁴Girma and Jacob, p. 69.

¹⁵Vestal, “Ethiopia’s Famine ...”, p.127; Kistin A. Urbach, “Famine as Human Rights Violation: The Case of Ethiopia and the Great Famine of the 1980’s,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Rights Law*, Vol. 1, No.1 (New York: Council for American Students in International Negotiations, 2006), p. 36; Edmond J. Keller, “Drought, War and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 614.

¹⁶African Watch, p. 151; Fantahun, p. 31.

The fixed price and quota system of procurement from peasants by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation certainly played in part in famine causation. Agricultural Marketing Corporation was established in 1976, to deal with rising of grain price. It secured grain supplies for the army and towns through quota system. In the late 1970's, Agricultural Marketing Corporation obliged the Peasant Associations to deliver at least 10,000 kilograms of their annual produce at a fixed prices. In 1981, this quota was raised to 15,000 kilograms. Even though the peasants have no grain to fill the specified quota set by the Agricultural Marketing Corporation, they were sold their material assets for money that they would use to buy grain to avoid punishment for not filling the stated quota. This depleted the peasants' resource and exposed them to famine.¹⁷

Lack of appropriate and timely measures from the government to cope with the disaster was one of the major causes of the famine. The initial response of the military government to drought and resultant famine was not much different from the government's response in 1973.¹⁸ The Derg was so late to acknowledge the famine and delayed the famine relief until after celebrating the tenth anniversary of its seizure of power. Though millions of people were died of famine, the government was unwilling to divert resources, money and attention away from the preparation for the tenth anniversary celebrations. The government was spent millions of dollars in September 1984 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its Marxist revolution and the inauguration of the new communist Worker's Party of Ethiopia. It has been suggested that the government was spent \$100-200 million for the celebration, which can save the life of many destitute. Here, "the lessons of the previous decade were not learnt."¹⁹ It is undeniable that the mortality figure could have been greatly minimized if the then Ethiopian government had acknowledged the famine and at the same time done their best to fight it at its manageable stage. The combination of these environmental and political factors caused the 1984-1985 famine.

3. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE FAMINE

Media played a pivotal role in informing the world community about famines in Ethiopia; it exposed the hidden famine of the 1972-1974 and aired the devastating famine of 1984-1985. There was lack of press attention about the famine due to the Ethiopian government's refusal to allow foreign journalists to travel around the country prior to the tenth anniversary celebration in September 1984 of Haile Selassie's deposition. Later on in October 1984, foreign journalists were allowed to visit famine stricken areas. Those who came to Ethiopia in October 1984 to document the famine were David Kline, David Cairns and Mohammed Amin. David Kline's film was rejected by all major U.S. media; CBS rejected the film because the images were not strong enough and did not depict people actually dying of starvation. In Britain, David Cairns's photographs of famine victims were also rejected by his editor at the *Daily Express* as "mere Oxfam posters of no news value or interest." Mohammed Amin, a well known cameraman working in Visnews International, whose film of starving Ethiopians finally appeared on BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and sparked unexpected public response.²⁰

Here, one may ask why Amin's film was successful than others? This was one due to both Amin's talent in selecting striking pictures and his partner Michael Buerk's ability in making shocking commentary. It is clear that the western society is vulnerable to the suffering of children more

¹⁷Urbach, p. 35; Alex de Waal, "Famine and Human Right," *Development in Practice*, Vol. 1, No.2 (London:

Taylor and Francis Ltd, 1991), p. 80; Patrick Webb, et al, *Famine in Ethiopia: Policy Implications of Coping*

Failure at National and Household levels, Research Report 92 (Washington, D.C: International Food policy

Research Institute, 1992), p. 74.

¹⁸Lanz, p. 169.

¹⁹Girma and Jacob, p. 69; Paul B. Henze, *Ethiopia in Mengistu's Final Years: The Derg in Decline Volume I*

(Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2007), p. 30; Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (London: University of

California Press, 1994), p. 206.

²⁰Sorenson, pp. 77-78; Fantahun, p. 35; Jason W. Clay and Bonnie K. Holcomb, *Politics and the Ethiopian*

Famine 1984-1985 (Cambridge: Cultural Survival Inc, 1986), p. 1.

than any other sections of the population. Possibly aware of western mentality, Amin selected children as his target. In addition, his success lies in the fact that Amin took his heart breaking shots when the death rate at Korem was at its peak.²¹ The media coverage of the Ethiopian famine as an issue by BBC was selected on the basis of its “visual appeal and shock value” (i.e. Mohammed Amin’s video recording narrated by Michael Buerk) and the ideological orientation of the Derg.²²

Mohammed Amin’s film was aired first on October 23, 1984 at 6 o’clock BBC news hours. It was full of horrific images. The commentary prepared by his partner, Michael Buerk which ran along with the film was also shocking.²³ Immediately after his film was aired by BBC on October 23 and 24, 1984 it was taken by 425 broadcasting agencies all over the world with an estimated audience of 470 million. Visnews International to which Amin belonged was produced 20,000 copies of the film and distributed to it throughout the world. Amin’s film is believed to have galvanized the international community and generated enormous emergency aid to the Ethiopia famine victims.²⁴

4. RELIEF OPERATION

The Ethiopian peasants have their own survival strategies during famine times. Peasants response to famine conditions includes sale a wide variety of personal belongings such as livestock, farm tools, utensils, weapons, personal ornaments, wood and others; borrowing from relatives or neighbors; scavenging “famine food” (grass seeds, leaves, roots etc); and stealing and robbing.²⁵ But, these were not effective during the famine of 1984-1985. Then, the famine victims migrated to camps run by the government or private relief organizations in government controlled areas.²⁶

The Ethiopian government was set up Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) in 1974 “to ensure readiness in the event of another famine.”²⁷ A major function of RRC was “to aware the government and in a severe case the world community in the event of a famine.” Even though officials of RRC informed the Derg about the famine since the early period, the Derg was reluctant to deal with it and give priority to the preparation of the tenth anniversary celebration of its seizure of power.²⁸

Since October 1984, when Mohammed Amin’s film was aired, “more money has been raised for Ethiopia than for any other emergency humanitarian efforts in history.”²⁹ The crisis galvanized the international community and inspired the formation of fund raising on the part of musicians. For instance, the Irish rock musician Bob Geldof recorded what is called “Do They Know Its Christmas”, which was sold nearly 4 million copies in the United Kingdom.³⁰ He was followed by Quincy Jones who produced “We Are the World” in the United States.³¹ Geldof was also organized the Live Aid Concert, which was broadcasted from London and Philadelphia, and viewed by 1.5 billion people around the world. Musicians formed humanitarian organizations such as “Band Aid” in England and “USA for Africa” in the United States. The records and concert generated millions of dollars for famine relief.³²

²¹*Ibid*; Jamieson, pp. 153-154.

²²Sorenson, p. 79.

²³*Ibid*, pp. 77-78; Fantahun, pp. 35-36; Dawit W. Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1989), p. 181.

²⁴*Ibid*.

²⁵Waal, p. 79; Adhana Haile, “Peasants Response to Famine in Ethiopia, 1975-1985,” *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (Stockholm: Springer, 1991), pp. 186-187.

²⁶Vestal, “Ethiopia’s Famine ...”, p.126.

²⁷Zmolek, p. 40; Fassil G. Kiros, “Economic Consequences of Drought, Crop Failure and Famine in Ethiopia, 1973-1986,” *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (Stockholm: Springer, 1991), p. 184.

²⁸*Ibid*; Marcus, pp. 205-206.

²⁹Jason W. Clay, “Western Assistance and the Ethiopian Famine: Implications for Humanitarian Assistance,” In R.E. Downs, Donna O. Kerner and Stephen P. Reyna (eds), *The Political Economy of African Famine* (Pennsylvania: Gordon and Breach Publisher, 1991), p. 147.

³⁰Jamieson, pp. 153-154.

³¹*Ibid*.

³²*Ibid*; Edmond J. Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People’s Republic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 224.

Despite their awareness about the horrific Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985, the western governments were so late to provide their relief assistance. "In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, famine and famine assistance are political."³³ It has been believed that "there is a broad agreement among western relief agencies that Ethiopia was denied the help it needed on time because of its adherence to a Marxist-Leninist political philosophy, its friendship with the Soviet Union and its allies, and its unfriendly attitudes towards the West, especially the United States."³⁴ In connection to this, Jason W. Clay also argued that "the West, particularly U.S. wanted to use the famine to win Ethiopia back; humanitarian assistance might succeed where diplomacy had failed. This was not to be. Instead, Ethiopia accepted food from the West and weapon from the USSR and its allies."³⁵ For instance, in the United States, Reagan administration delayed its relief assistance to Ethiopia to realize its objective of "using food aid to support foreign policy."³⁶ There was a public movement against such action of the government in United States by advocating that "a hungry child knows no politics." As a result, the Reagan administration detached politics from the famine and made available large amount of food aid to the Derg.³⁷

Famine was reported in different ways by the Ethiopian government and rebel groups. The Derg claimed that it could distribute food to famine affected populations. On the other hand, EPLF and TPLF established their own relief agencies, Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and Relief Society of Tigray (REST), respectively. They were claimed that most famine victims were located beyond government held areas and could only be reached through their relief agencies in cross border operations from Sudan.³⁸ The UN was not only not giving recognition to ERA and REST, but also it mandated its member governments to work based on the government information only and not to accept other sources as reliable. As a result, foreign governments accepted Ethiopian claims of sovereignty.³⁹ Non-governmental relief agencies and even the United States often violated this and engaged in cross border operations to assist famine victims in Eritrea and Tigre.⁴⁰

More than ninety percent of western assistance for Ethiopian famine victims channeled through the government, even though most victims lived outside the government's control.⁴¹ Aid came in the form of bilateral, multilateral and private donations of food and other relief supplies ranging from transport trucks to antibiotics and from technical assistance to water drilling equipments. The bulk of the relief dollars and supplies were provided by western governments like Canada, Scandinavian countries, England, Italy, and United States. The delivery of this assistance was coordinated by the government Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC).⁴²

The Relief and Rehabilitation Commission together with some NGO's were established shelters mainly along the Addis Ababa-Asmara highway. The major shelters in northern Ethiopia were Ibinnat, Korem and Maqale.⁴³ As these shelters were unable to accommodate the increasing number of famine victims, people were began to live around distribution centers in "straw huts just to protect themselves from the terrible cold at night."⁴⁴ In the relief operation of the 1984-1985 famine, three kinds of relief centers were established. These were feeding stations, shelters and distribution points. Feeding centers were "established in the hardest hit areas and malnourished children, their mothers and adults with critical illness were admitted." Shelters were relief centers where famine victims receive food and cloth. Distribution centers were established to distribute grains to those famine victims who were believed to return to their villages after receiving their share. However, famine victims were not return to their home due to their physical weakness and other related factors. They were living a round shelters and distribution centers in

³³ Clay, "Western Assistance ...", p. 148.

³⁴ Girma and Jacob, p. 69.

³⁵ Clay, "Western Assistance ...", p. 149.

³⁶ Sorenson, p. 88.

³⁷ *Ibid*; Marcus, p. 207; Fantahun, pp. 36-37.

³⁸ Sorenson, p. 116; Keller, "Drought, War ...", p. 621; Kifle Abraham, *Ethiopia from Empire to Federation* (London: ELLPD Press, 2001), p. 337.

³⁹ Sorenson, p. 118.

⁴⁰ Keller, "Drought, War ...", p. 621.

⁴¹ Urbach, p. 36; African Watch, p. 3; Clay, "Western Assistance ...", p. 152.

⁴² Jamieson, pp. 153-154; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia...*, p. 224.

⁴³ Dawit, p. 139.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

Military Rule Responses to the Ethiopian Agony: Famine of 1984-1985

the overcrowded manner, which exposed them to contagious disease such as measles, diarrhea and pneumonia that took the lives of many people.⁴⁵

A part from coordinating the relief assistance obtained from different sources through its Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, the Derg set a resettlement policy as a long term famine preventive measure. The resettlement program was the government's main response to the famine, which supposed to relocate 1.5 million people from severely affected by famine in the north to the fertile lands in the southwest parts of Ethiopia.⁴⁶ Here, the program has been criticized as the government's counter insurgency strategy to depopulate the population where the rebels were active and also accused as lacking standards of human rights. During 1984-1985, around 600,000 peasants were resettled and the largest portion was believed from Wollo Provinces.⁴⁷ The program played its own part in worsening the famine situation.

Table1. Areas and features of NGO's involved in the relief operation of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985

No	NGO's involved in the relief operation	Areas and Features of their Operation
1	SCF/UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participated in the relief operation of 1972-1974 famine ✓ After 1974 transferred its office from Allamata to Dessie ✓ In 1984 it opened feeding centers in Korem, Qobbo and Bulbullo (Ambasal) ✓ It sprayed the shelters with insecticides to stop the spread of communicable diseases
2	EECMY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Distributed relief food in Yajju Awraja in 1973&1974 ✓ In 1984 started its operation in the same region ✓ Its relief centers were located at Tisabbalima, Girana, Wichale, Wurgessa, Marsa, Hara and Qobbo ✓ It participated in transporting RRC's emergency food from ports to various relief centers ✓ Most of its relief supplies were grains, edible oil, milk powder etc.
3	WVI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Between 1980 and 1982 its operation had been confined to Southern Ethiopia ✓ It hadn't participated in 1972-1974 relief operation ✓ Its relief centers were located in Lalibala, Sanqa, Allamata, Ajibar, Saqota, Ansokiya and in some parts of Gonder
4	CRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Since 1974 it distributed American surplus food earmarked "food for peace program" for developing countries ✓ 90 percent of such food furnished by the government of United States was distributed to Ethiopia by CRS ✓ In 1984 it opened relief centers at Qobbo, Allamata, Gobiyya and Woldiya ✓ It concentrated in the distribution of dry ration to needy families ✓ It donated relief goods like blankets and cloths to RRC
5	Oxfam/UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ It operated in large areas such as Kamise, Bora, Wogal Tena, Bati, Hayq, Mille, Qobbo, Allamata, Korem, Wadla Dalanta, Awsa, Ambasal and Wag ✓ It distributed thousands of tons of relief grains ✓ Unlike others, it played a considerable role in supplying water to famine victims during emergency period ✓ It built a big water reservoir at Korem

Sources. (It has been suggested that sixty-three NGO's were took part in the relief operation. I have presented here in the table form about only the five major NGO's that I have collected from different sources. See *The Ethiopian Herald*, (January 27, 1985), p. 1; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia...*, p. 225; Jamieson, pp. 152-154; Fantahun, pp. 39-70; Zmolek, pp. 40-44.)

The famine victims were absent from going to relief centers for food or other activities such as trade due to their fear of resettlement; settlers were chosen from the feeding centers. Moreover,

⁴⁵*Ibid*; Fantahun, p. 33; Kelmus Kloos and Bernt Lindtjorn, "Malnutrition and Mortality during Recent Famines in Ethiopia: Implication of Food Aid and Rehabilitation," *Disasters*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Oxford: Basil Black Well Ltd, 1994), pp. 133-134.

⁴⁶Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia...*, pp. 225-226; African Watch, p. 14.

⁴⁷Lanz, p. 172.

since the resettlement sites were very poorly prepared, the program resulted in severe malnutrition and mortality in the resettlement schemes that costs the life's of thousands of settlers.⁴⁸

A number of Non-Governmental Organizations were participated in the relief operation against the Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985, most of which were religious. Even though many in numbers, the major NGO's involved in the relief operation were WVI (World Vision International), SCF (Save the Children Fund/UK), CRS (Catholic Relief Services), OXFAM (OXFAM/UK) and EECMY (Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus). These NGO's were set up their own relief centers in different parts of famine affected regions.⁴⁹ The table shown below disclosed and summed up the features and areas of the relief operation of these NGO's.

These NGO's took part in the campaign against the famine had success and weaknesses. Their success lies in the fact that their operation saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of humans. They were considered as reliable agencies which could reach famine victims. During 1984/85, NGO's handled 54.3 percent of the total food distributed where as the RRC's share was only 45.7 percent.⁵⁰ A part from this, their unsuccessful operation was characterized by poor management, lack of cooperation and failure to use the entire donations collected in the name of Ethiopian famine victims. They were also competing each other to operate in suitable and easily accessible areas. Moreover, after the end of the relief operation they failed to involve in development projects.⁵¹ In connection to this, Dale Jamieson state that "if you give a man a fish he will eat for a day, but if you teach him how to fish he will never be hungry. Ethiopia is a good example of the world's failure to act on insight." Even though Ethiopia received more relief aid than any other country, it received very little development aid even compared to other poor countries.⁵²

Generally, the relief operations were hampered by different factors. The civil wars between the government and rebel groups' was adversely affected the relief operation. The Dessie- Maqala highway which was the main channel for the relief operation was not always safe. Because of the insurgents activities the roads leading to the major shelters like Allamata and Korem were often insecure. As a result, trucks loaded with relief supplies had "to be escorted by army convoys to protect them from ambush."⁵³ Poor port facilities had affected the relief operation. The three ports Assab, Djibouti and Massawa were unable to accommodate the food and non-food aid from the international community. Due to port congestion, the coming ships had to wait for "up to nine days before docking." The storage facilities at the port were also very poor. For instance, in May 1985, more than 10,000 tons of Canadian wheat was spoiled as a result of untimely heavy rain.⁵⁴ Poor infrastructure with in stricken areas and shortage of trucks were also hampered the relief operation.⁵⁵ Moreover, the government was accused imposing tax on imported relief foods. In 1985, the Derg was believed to have raised \$ 30 million by imposing an import tax on relief foods.⁵⁶

5. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE FAMINE

The 1984-1985 famine in Ethiopia had remarkable effects. It has been suggested that the famine had affected almost ten million people, one quarter of the country's entire population, five times the number of the 1972-1974 famine. The total number of people died of famine has been not known. But, it has been suggested that the death toll to be not more than one million and most those who died were children under the age of five.⁵⁷ The famine had also resulted refugee crisis.

⁴⁸Kelmus Kloos and Bernt Lindtjorn, p. 134; Henze, p. 31; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia...*, p. 226; African Watch, p. 228.

⁴⁹Fantahun, p. 38.

⁵⁰Zmolek, p. 41; Dawit, p. 187; Fantahun, p. 130.

⁵¹Dawit, p. 243; Fantahun, p. 138; Zmolek, p. 41.

⁵²Jamieson, p. 153.

⁵³Vestal, "Ethiopia's Famine ...", p. 126; Dawit, p. 112; Fantahun, p. 78; *Addis Zemen*, (Tikimt 25, 1977

E.C.), p. 11.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Zmolek, p. 47.

⁵⁶Keller, "Drought, War ...", p. 621; Vestal, "Ethiopia's Famine ...", p. 127.

⁵⁷Lanz, p. 169; Markos, p. 261; African Watch, pp. 172-173; Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia...*, p. 224.

More than 400,000 Ethiopians fled to Sudan; Sudan played to host the influx of refugees from its eastern neighbor mainly from Eritrea, Tigray and other parts of Ethiopia. The famine together with war and resettlement program had resulted refugee crisis.⁵⁸ The country has been identified by the international community with famine. Even in the latest Oxford English dictionary Ethiopia is used to illustrate the meaning of the term famine. Some Ethiopians living abroad were so embarrassed by such images that they sought to conceal their identities.⁵⁹ Moreover, even though NGO's relief operation during the famine saved hundreds of thousands of lives, it have killed the working sprit of some peasants. A sense of dependency on relief aid has been developed.⁶⁰

6. CONCLUSIONS

Ethiopia had a long history of famine and famine is endemic to Ethiopia. The 1984-1985 famine was one of the major famines that ravaged Ethiopia. The famine was caused by the combination of drought, civil war, and lack of appropriate and timely measures to cope with the disaster. Media had played a fabulous role in galvanizing the international community and generated enormous emergency aid to the Ethiopian famine victims. In the relief operation the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission and a number of NGO's were participated, their share in this regard was 45.7 percent and 54.7 percent, respectively. As a result of the relief operation the lives of hundreds of thousands of people were saved. The relief operation was hampered by factors like war, poor port facilities, poor infrastructures and shortage of trucks. The famine had resulted remarkable effects. It took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, brought refugee crisis, and the country has been identified by the world community with famine; even in the latest Oxford English dictionary Ethiopia is used to illustrate the meaning of the term famine.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adhana Haile. "Peasants Response to Famine in Ethiopia, 1975-1985." *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5, (1991). pp. 186-188.
- [2] Africa Watch. *Evil Days: Thirty Years War and Famine in Ethiopia*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991.
- [3] Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. 2nd ed. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002.
- [4] Clay, Jason W and Holcomb, Bonnie K. *Politics and the Ethiopian Famine 1984-1985*. Cambridge: Cultural Survival Inc, 1986.
- [5] Clay, Jason W. "Western Assistance and the Ethiopian Famine: Implications for Humanitarian Assistance." In R.E. Downs, Donna O. Kerner and Stephen P. Reyna (eds). *The Political Economy of African Famine*. Pennsylvania: Gordon and Breach Publisher, 1991.
- [6] Dawit W. Giorgis. *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*. New Jersey: The Red Sea Press, 1989.
- [7] Demel Teketay. "Deforestation, Wood Famine and Environmental Degradation in Ethiopia's Highland Ecosystems: Urgent Need for Action." *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (2001), pp. 53-76.
- [8] Ek, Ragnhild and Karadawi, Ahmed. "Implications of Refugee Flows on Political Stability in the Sudan." *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (1991). pp. 196-203.
- [9] Fantahun Ayele. "NGO's Relief Operation in Wollo, 1973-1986." M.A Thesis in History, Addis Ababa University, 1994.
- [10] Fassil G. Kiros. "Economic Consequences of Drought, Crop Failure and Famine in Ethiopia, 1973-1986." *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (1991). pp. 183-185.

⁵⁸Vestal, "Ethiopia's Famine ...", p.126; Ragnhild Ek and Ahmed Karadawi, "Implications of Refugee Flows on Political Stability in the Sudan." *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (Stockholm: Springer, 1991), p. 32.

⁵⁹Sorenson, p. 79; Fantahun, p. 1.

⁶⁰Dawit, p. 228.

- [11] Girma Kebede and Jacob, Mary J. "Drought, Famine and the Political Economy of Environmental Degradation in Ethiopia." *Geography*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (1989). pp.65-70.
- [12] Henze, Paul B. *Ethiopia in Mengistu's Final Years: The Derg in Decline Volume I*. Addis Ababa: Shama Books, 2007.
- [13] Jamieson, Dale. "Duties to the Distant: Aid, Assistance and Intervention in the Developing World." *Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 9, No.1 (2005). pp. 151-170.
- [14] Kinfu Abraham. *Ethiopia from Empire to Federation*. London: ELLPD Press, 2001.
- [15] Keller, Edmond J. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- [16] "Drought, War and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (1992). pp. 609-624.
- [17] Kloos, Kelmus and Lindtjorn, Bernt. "Malnutrition and Mortality during Recent Famines in Ethiopia: Implication of Food Aid and Rehabilitation." *Disasters*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1994). pp. 130-139.
- [18] Lanz, Tobias J. "Environmental Degradation and Social Conflict in the Northern Highlands of Ethiopia: The Case of Tigray and Wollo Provinces." *Africa Today*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1996). pp. 157-182. Marcus, Harold G. *A History of Ethiopia*. London: University of California Press, 1994.
- [19] Markos Ezra. "Demographic Responses to Environmental Stress in the Drought and Famine Prone Areas of Northern Ethiopia." *International Journal of Population Geography*, Vol. 7 (2001). pp. 259-279.
- [20] Mellor, John W. and Gavian, Sarah. "Famine: Causes, Prevention and Relief." *Science New Series*, Vol. 235, No. 4788 (1987). pp. 539-545.
- [21] Rubenson, Seven. "Conflict and Environmental Stress in Ethiopian History: Looking for Correlation." *Ambio*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (1991). pp. 179-182.
- [22] Savaiano, Scott and Schrodt, Philip A. "Environmental Change and Conflict: Analyzing the Ethiopian Famine of 1984-1985." In Carl W. Robert (ed). *Text Analysis for the Social Sciences: Methods for Drawing Statistical Inferences from Texts and Transcripts*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc, 1997.
- [23] Sivini, Giordano. "Famine and the Resettlement Program in Ethiopia." *Africa*, Vol. 41, No. 2, (1986). pp. 211-242.
- [24] Sorenson, John. *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993.
- [25] Urbach, Kistin A. "Famine as Human Rights Violation: The Case of Ethiopia and the Great Famine of the 1980's." *Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Rights Law*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2006). pp. 27-42.
- [26] Vestal, Theodore. M. "Ethiopia's Famine: A Many-Dimensioned Crisis." *The World Today*, Vol. 41, No. 7 (1985). pp. 125-128.
- [27] "Risk Factors and Predictability of Famine in Ethiopia." *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1991). pp. 196-203.
- [28] Waal, Alex de. "Famine and Human Right." *Development in Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1991). pp. 77-83.
- [29] Webb, Patrick, et al. *Famine in Ethiopia: Policy Implications of Coping Failure at National and Household Levels*, Research Report 92. Washington, D.C: International Food policy Research Institute, 1992.
- [30] Zmolek, Mike. "Aid Agencies, NGO's and Institutionalization of Famine." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1990). pp. 37-48. Periodicals Addis Zemen. Tikimt 25, 1977 E.C.
- [31] Hidar 1, 1977 E.C.
- [32] Hidar 2, 1977 E.C.
- [33] Hidar 11, 1977 E.C.
- [34] *The Ethiopian Herald*. January 27, 1985