



WORKING PAPER APRIL 2022

**RECURRING DISASTERS: SWEDISH  
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA**

Emma Öståker



# Recurring Disasters: Swedish Humanitarian Assistance to Ethiopia

Emma Öståker

Working Paper, April 2022

to

The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA)

The EBA Working Paper Series constitutes shorter overviews, surveys, mappings and analyses that have been undertaken to bring about discussion and advance knowledge of a particular topic. Working Papers are not subject to any formal approval process by the Expert Group. Just as in the EBA reports, authors are solely responsible for the content, conclusions and recommendations.

Please refer to the present report as: Emma Öståker (2022), *Recurring Disasters: Swedish Humanitarian Assistance to Ethiopia*, Working Paper, April 2022  
The Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

This report can be downloaded free of charge at [www.eba.se](http://www.eba.se)

Cover design by Julia Demchenko

## **Abbreviations**

AAH/ACF	Action Against Hunger/Action Contre la Faim
COS	Church of Sweden
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross)
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontieres International
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PMU	Swedish Pentecostal Churches (development organisation)
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission, Ethiopia
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority (1965–1995)
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency (1995–)
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children´s Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office of the Coordination of the Humanitarian Assistance
WFP	World Food Program

# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword by EBA .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sammanfattning .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Humanitarian assistance – principles and approaches.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. Ethiopia – development, humanitarian crises and disaster response .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Humanitarian crises due to natural and man-made disasters .....	11
Ethiopian approaches to disaster management.....	15
<b>4. Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia – what, when and how? .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Aggregate financial flows.....	22
Overall trends in Swedish humanitarian assistance .....	24
Swedish humanitarian assistance 1970–2020.....	27
Some overall lessons.....	33
<b>5. Concluding reflections.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>36</b>

## Foreword by EBA

Swedish development cooperation and aid to Ethiopia has a more than 60 years history covering a wide range of sectors including rural development, education and research collaboration, gender equality, human rights, and democratization but also humanitarian support. Ethiopia has unfortunately, especially from the 1980s and onwards, become a symbol for low-income countries' problems with famines, malnutrition, droughts, and related crises, which are also sometimes exacerbated by conflicts.

This mapping study has been commissioned as a complement to EBA's ongoing evaluation of long-term development cooperation between Sweden and Ethiopia to provide a historical background to today's Swedish humanitarian and long-term work in the country. The study shows that Ethiopia has for a long time and at regular intervals suffered from disasters and emergencies where Sweden then contributed relatively large sums of humanitarian aid. The mapping looks at the period from the mid-1970s until 2020 and thus does not include the most recent years.

The study raises vital questions about how Sweden, the donor community, and the Ethiopian government have worked overtime to strengthen Ethiopia's own capacity to respond to recurring famines and crisis situations. There have been several Ethiopian institutions and mechanisms with responsibilities for disaster management, early warning, food security and social protection. These have played important roles but have also been limited by varying challenges, including capacity deficiencies.

It is our hope that this working paper will be of use to the MFA and Sida, but also to civil society organizations and to anyone interested in the effectiveness of humanitarian aid and aid to Ethiopia.

EBA working papers are shorter studies of questions of limited scope or that complements a regular EBA report. Working papers are not subject to a formal decision from the expert group but instead reviewed by the secretariat before publication. The authors are, as with other EBA publications, responsible for the content of the report and its conclusions.

Stockholm, April 2022

Jan Pettersson, Managing Director

# Sammanfattning

Sverige är en av de största bilaterala humanitära givarna i världen och en engagerad givare av humanitärt bistånd till en rad krispåverkade länder. Syftet med denna kartläggning är att ge en översikt över svenskt humanitärt bistånd till Etiopien sedan mitten av 1970-talet och fram till och med 2020. Rapporten är historiskt tillbakablickande. Huvudfokus ligger på omfattning och karaktär hos den svenska humanitära insatsen i landet över tid. Som en bakgrund till presentationen innehåller rapporten också en kort introduktion till humanitärt bistånd i allmänhet och en kort beskrivning av den etiopiska kontexten med tonvikt på de nödsituationer och katastrofer som har motiverat humanitärt stöd. Styrelsen för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete (Sida) ansvarar för humanitärt bistånd på land och regional nivå. Därför ligger fokus i denna kartläggning också på bistånd som kanaliseras av Sida.

Etiopien är ett av de största länderna i Afrika utifrån befolkningens mängd (112 miljoner människor 2019) och ett av de mest diversifierade med runt 78 olika etniska grupper och mer än 80 språk. Under de senaste åren har Etiopien uppmärksammats som en av de snabbast växande ekonomierna i regionen, och som ett land med positiva trender när det gäller flera indikatorer för mänsklig utveckling (livslängd, hälsa osv.). Samtidigt kännetecknas Etiopien av återkommande katastrofer, konflikter och hungersnöd vilket har motiverat humanitärt bistånd i närmare 50 år. Etiopiens nödsituationer är komplexa och kopplar till en rad olika faktorer, såväl natur- och väder-relaterade som mänskligt skapade. I korthet har de humanitära kriserna sedan 1970-talet orsakats av en kombination av naturkatastrofer (allvarlig torka, översvämningar och insektsangrepp) och politiska faktorer (politisk instabilitet och förtryck samt konflikter mellan etniska grupper och krig med grannländer). Med en befolkning som till stor del är beroende av jordbruk och boskapsskötsel har försämrade naturförhållanden och extrema väderfenomen, tillsammans med politiska faktorer, resulterat i kronisk matosäkerhet, återkommande hungersnöd och ett ökande antal flyktingar. Sedan början på 1970-talet har Etiopien haft ett flertal allvarliga kriser med hungersnöd och svält (1972–1974, 1984–1985, 1999–2000, 2002–2003, 2008 och 2015–2016). Läget har varit fortsatt allvarligt under senare år med cirka 7 miljoner människor i behov av humanitärt bistånd 2015–2020, en situation som har förvärrats ytterligare till följd av ihållande torka, gräshoppsinvasion och covid 19-pandemin samt av intern konflikt sedan slutet av 2020. År 2021 rapporterade Sida att 1 av 5 etiopier var i behov av humanitärt bistånd, vilket motsvarar 23,5 miljoner människor.



Sedan 1970-talet har det etiopiska förhållningssättet till humanitära kriser utvecklats från direkt nödhjälp i samband med kris till ett mer omfattande katastrofhanteringssystem med multisektoriellt och decentraliserat ansvar. Det har över tid funnits flera etiopiska institutioner och mekanismer med ansvar för katastrofhantering, tidiga varningssystem, livsmedelssäkerhet och socialt skydd. Dessa enheter har spelat viktiga roller men har också begränsats av en rad utmaningar, bland annat kapacitetsbrist.

När det gäller internationellt humanitärt bistånd till Etiopien, inklusive den svenska insatsen, har det funnits en generell trend från distribution av enskilda stödinsatser, delvis i natura, till ett system med stöd via strategiska partners, och samordning under FN:s ledning utifrån gemensamma analyser och insatsplaner. Parallellt med det har det internationella biståndet alltmer kommit att styras av humanitära principer samt god humanitär givarpraxis. Sverige har aktivt engagerat sig i humanitära reformer på global nivå och strävar efter att tillämpa gemensamt överenskomna principer vid allokering av humanitärt stöd.

När det gäller det svenska humanitära biståndet till Etiopien (1970–2020), framgår det tydligt att stödet har speglat utvecklingen i landet och ökat i anslutning till svåra humanitära kriser. Huvudfokus över tid har legat på materiell hjälp i form av skydd, vatten, transporter, stöd till flyktingar etc. men också akut livsmedelsbistånd, särskilt i samband med stora svältkatastrofer. Under hela perioden har en stor andel av svenskt bistånd kanaliserats via icke-statliga organisationer (NGOs). Ett stort antal olika NGOs har använts för den svenska humanitära insatsen med en viss förskjutning mot internationella NGOs under senaste år. En annan trend är att det bilaterala humanitära stödet till etiopiska offentliga partners har minskat. Samtidigt har användningen av multilaterala organ som humanitär biståndskanal ökat. Detta är förmodligen en återspeglning av den allmänna utvecklingen vad gäller den internationella humanitära ansatsen med ökad användning av landbaserade fonder som administreras av FN:s kontor för humanitärt stöd (UNOCHA) i samordning med den etiopiska regeringen.

Sverige har i utvärderingar bedömts som en snabb och flexibel humanitär givare. Mot bakgrund av nästan 50 års humanitärt bistånd, parallellt med långsiktigt utvecklingssamarbete, och den senaste tidens allvarliga utveckling kan det vara läge att ta ett bredare grepp i bedömningen av vad som kan göras med stöd från olika aktörer, inklusive Sverige som utvecklingspartner och humanitär givare. Detta behövs för att förebygga och mildra framtida nödsituationer och för att minska antalet människor i behov av humanitärt bistånd.

## Summary

Sweden is one of the largest bilateral humanitarian donors in the world, and a committed provider of humanitarian assistance to a range of crisis-affected countries. The objective of this paper is to present an overview of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia since the mid-1970s until 2020. The report has a retrospective perspective. Prime focus is on the scale and character of the Swedish emergency response. As a backdrop to the presentation of Swedish assistance, the paper also includes a short introduction to humanitarian assistance in general as well as a brief description of the Ethiopian context with an emphasis on the emergencies and disasters which have motivated humanitarian support. The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) is responsible for providing humanitarian assistance at country and regional level, as a consequence, focus in this paper is on assistance channelled by Sida.

Ethiopia is one of the most populous countries in Africa (112 million people in 2019) and one of the more diversified with some 78 different ethnic groups and more than 80 languages. In recent years, Ethiopia has received attention as one of the fastest growing economies in the region, and it is a country with positive trends in terms of several human development indicators (life expectancy, health, etc). At the same time, Ethiopia is characterised by recurring disasters, conflicts and famines which have motivated humanitarian assistance for almost 50 years. Ethiopian emergencies are complex in nature and linked to a range of interdependent factors, both natural and man-made. In brief, the humanitarian crises since the 1970s have been caused by a combination of natural disasters (severe droughts, floods and insect infestations) and political factors (political instability and repression as well as conflicts between ethnic groups and wars with neighbouring countries). With a population largely dependent on agriculture and pastoralism, deteriorating natural conditions and extreme weather phenomena have, together with political factors, resulted in chronic food insecurity and frequent famines, and increasing numbers of internally displaced people and refugees. Major crises include the famines in 1972–1974, 1984–1985, 1999–2000, 2002–2003, 2008 and 2015–2016. The situation has continued to be challenging with some 7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2015–2020, a situation that has become even worse with continued drought, grasshopper infestation, and the covid-pandemic, as well as the internal conflict since the end of 2020. In 2021, Sida reported that 1 in 5 Ethiopians needed humanitarian assistance which equals 23.5 million people.

Since the 1970s, the Ethiopian approach to humanitarian crises has developed from emergency relief response to drought affected populations to a comprehensive disaster risk management system with multisectoral and decentralised responsibilities. Over the period, there have been several Ethiopian institutions and mechanisms with responsibilities for disaster management, early warning, food security and social protection. These entities have played important roles but have also been limited by varying challenges including capacity deficiencies.

In terms of international humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, including the Swedish response, there has been a general trend from single distributions, partly in kind, to a system of support via identified strategic partners and coordinated efforts under UN leadership with joint analyses and response plans. In parallel, the international response has increasingly been guided by humanitarian principles and good humanitarian donorship practice. Sweden has been actively engaged in humanitarian reforms at global level and strived to be a principled donor in the allocation of humanitarian funds.

As to the Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia in 1970–2020, there is an overall trend of fluctuations in terms of financial disbursements, which reflect the humanitarian situation to a large degree. Prime focus has been on material relief assistance such as shelter, water, transports, support to refugees etc. but also on emergency food assistance, especially in conjunction to major famines. Throughout the period large shares of Swedish assistance has been channelled through NGOs. A substantial number of different NGOs have been used for the Swedish response, with a shift toward international NGOs in recent years. Another trend over the period is decreasing bilateral assistance, with disbursements to Ethiopian public institutions, and increasing use of multilateral agencies as channels of assistance. This is probably a reflection of general developments in the international humanitarian approach with increasing use of country-pooled-funds formally administered by UNOCHA in coordination with the Ethiopian government.

Sweden has been assessed as a rapid and flexible humanitarian donor. In the light of almost 50 years of humanitarian assistance and the current critical situation, it may be timely to take a broader look at the situation, and to explore what could be done on behalf of different actors, including Sweden as a development partner and humanitarian donor, to prevent and mitigate future emergencies and to decrease the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

# 1 Introduction

Sweden and Ethiopia have a long history of cooperation and partnership. When Sweden started with international development cooperation in the 1950s Ethiopia was one of the first countries to receive government-to-government support, and a first agreement was signed in 1954 (Sida, 2004). Since then, Sweden has provided support to a range of development cooperation initiatives in different thematic fields. In parallel, there has also been a long-standing engagement on behalf of Sweden to respond to recurring crises and emergencies in Ethiopia. The contributions for humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia have increased in recent years, and amounted to more than 20 million USD annually in the period 2016–2020.

The aim of this paper is to present an overview of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia since the mid-1970s, including a description of the scale and character of aid flows. As a backdrop, the paper also includes an introduction to the broader context, including conditions and reasons for humanitarian assistance as well as institutional approaches to emergency response and disaster management in Ethiopia. Focus is on highlighting overall trends.

The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) are both engaged in humanitarian aid. Whereas the MFA is responsible for overall coordination, policy and core funding to humanitarian multilateral organisations, Sida is responsible for providing financial support to humanitarian assistance at country and regional level, including support for the UN’s consolidated appeals process and appeals from the Red Cross movement. Focus of this paper is on humanitarian assistance channelled via SIDA/Sida.

The descriptions of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia are mainly based on existing aid data reported to the OECD DAC/CRS (1975–2018), including reports and documents with focus on humanitarian assistance. As a means of general orientation, a select group of people with experience of Swedish assistance to Ethiopia have also been interviewed. Prime focus in the paper is on aid flows categorised as “emergency response” which include material relief assistance, emergency food assistance, relief coordination and support services.

The paper is divided into four parts. First, an introduction to the broader context with focus on some overall characteristics of Swedish humanitarian assistance and second some general characteristics of Ethiopia since the beginning of 1970s with prime focus on emergencies and crises motivating humanitarian action. This part also includes a brief overview of the Ethiopian approach to disaster management. Third, a presentation of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia (1970–2018/20) with focus on aggregate flows, categories and channels of assistance, as well as specific characteristics in different time periods and some general lessons. Four, a brief section with concluding reflections in relation to the Swedish response in Ethiopia.

## 2 Humanitarian assistance – principles and approaches

The overall aim of humanitarian assistance is to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after man-made crises and disasters caused by natural hazards. Domestic governments have the prime responsibility to prepare for and respond to crises in their own territories and many governments invest significant amounts in national disaster risk reduction and response (GHA, 2016). However, when a country cannot or does not live up to this responsibility, external organisations and states may provide support in the spirit of international humanitarian law and established international practice. This duty is often called *the humanitarian imperative*.

Swedish humanitarian assistance is founded on the humanitarian principles (humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, the Geneva Conventions (1949), additional protocols and other sources of international law. Other important guidelines include the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship and the Grand Bargain commitments.

International guidance and best practice for humanitarian action have evolved over time. The *humanitarian principles* were adopted by the UN General Assembly in two separate resolutions, in 1991 (humanity, neutrality and impartiality) and in 2004 (independence).<sup>1</sup> The principles and good practice of *Good Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD) were first endorsed in 2003 by an informal donor forum. The overall purpose was to enhance coherence and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance as well as donor accountability. Since 2003, the membership of the GHD-forum has expanded, and in addition to providing guidance, the principles have also proved useful in assessing donor performance, including in the OECD/DAC Peer Reviews. Additional guidance to make humanitarian assistance more transparent, effective and inclusive is found in the so called “*Grand Bargain*” *agreement*, which is based on negotiations between the largest humanitarian actors (donors and organisations) and was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The agreement highlights the importance of partnerships between donors and organisations, international and local actors, and humanitarian actors and local populations affected by crises (MFA, 2017).

---

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 46/182 (1991) and General Assembly resolution 58/114 (2004).

In parallel to these developments, the international response to humanitarian emergencies has also evolved in terms of approaches and mechanisms for coordination. The United Nations and the Red Cross have been, and still are, key players in the international response. In 1972, the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) was established to coordinate humanitarian support and to strengthen emergency preparedness. In the 1990s, there were several reforms in the UN humanitarian system resulting in coordinated appeals with joint plans for assistance, bringing together the support from both UN agencies and NGOs. Since then, joint analyses and coordinated response plans have become the norm for programming of international humanitarian assistance at country level (except for assistance via the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières International (MSF) which have their own mechanisms (Swithern, 2018). Since 1991, the UNOCHA (UN Office of the Coordination of the Humanitarian Assistance) has a key role in mobilising and coordinating humanitarian assistance. Swedish assistance is primarily channelled through organisations which are part of the UN-coordinated response and to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement.

Sweden has been a committed humanitarian donor in terms of funding but also in terms of engagement in humanitarian reforms. In 2015, Sweden was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest bilateral donor in terms of financial amounts for humanitarian assistance, and in 2019, Sweden was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest bilateral contributor (GHA 2016, 2020). Regarding reform processes, Sweden has been actively involved in different reforms of the UN-system, the Good Humanitarian Donorship-initiative and a driving force behind the Grand Bargain agreement.

Sida has a central role in preparing and implementing humanitarian assistance at country level since the early 1970s. Analyses and decisions about country allocations are made at Sida Headquarters in Stockholm. The initial idea with annual emergency allocation was not that they should be programmed but used to finance shorter interventions based on needs. With the attempt of streamlining decisions, Sida started to develop annual frame-agreements for disaster relief with major umbrella NGOs and UN-organisations in the 1990s (Sida, 1995), which provides more flexibility and predictability for its partner organizations, in line with the GHD principles. This approach has later evolved and since 2012/13 Sida primarily provides support via a select number of strategic partners (multilateral and NGO). Sida's allocations are based on humanitarian needs analyses, response plans and appeals, but are also guided by the government strategies for Sida's humanitarian assistance (2008–2010, 2011–2014/16, 2017–2020).

### 3 Ethiopia – development, humanitarian crises and disaster response

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world, and one of few countries in Africa without a long history of colonization. With a population of more than 112 million people, Ethiopia is the second most populous nation in Africa after Nigeria, and one of the more diversified with more than 78 different ethnic groups and more than 80 different languages spoken around the country (World Bank, 2020).

There are at least three broader stories of Ethiopia, one of economic growth and development, one of conflict, both internal and with neighbouring countries, and one of poverty and recurring humanitarian crises. In recent years, Ethiopia has been one of the fastest growing economies in the region with an average economic growth of 9.8 % in the period 2008/09–2018/19, and a real gross domestic production (GDP) growth of 9 % in 2019. Most of the growth has been linked to industry (construction) and services (World Bank, 2020). Ethiopia has been considered a potential growth engine in Africa. In parallel to economic growth, there has also been strong population growth in Ethiopia from some 32 million people in 1975 to 112 million in 2019 (ibid, Gapminder).

Looking at Ethiopia over a longer period, there are also clear examples of progress in terms of human development. From 1975 to 2015, average life expectancy increased from 44 to 65 years, and child mortality (per 1,000 births) decreased from 143 to 43 (HDI). Poverty measured as income (1,2 \$/day) has decreased from 45.5 to 23 % in the 20-year period 1995/96–2015/16. These and other similar examples reflect positive trends in terms of human development, however, from a relatively low level, and poverty is still a real challenge in Ethiopia. When measuring poverty from a multidimensional lens, including aspects such as health, education, living standards etc, the level of poverty has been estimated to 87 % (Sida, 2018). In addition to general patterns of poverty and vulnerability, Ethiopia has been characterised by disasters and famines which have motivated international humanitarian assistance for some 50 years.



## Humanitarian crises due to natural and man-made disasters

Ethiopia has been affected by recurring humanitarian crises. Since the 1970s, millions of people in Ethiopia have been in chronic need of humanitarian assistance and emergency food assistance to survive. Ethiopian emergencies are complex in nature and are linked to both natural and man-made disasters. In brief, the emergencies have been characterised by combinations of natural disasters and extreme weather phenomena, political instability, internal conflicts and wars with neighbouring countries, misdirected policies and development efforts, recurring insect infestations and outbreaks of epidemics. As a consequence, Ethiopia has experienced severe destruction of assets and livelihood, poverty, chronic food insecurity and famine, and increasing numbers of internally displaced people and refugees. In 2019, Ethiopia was ranked among the eleven most risk prone countries in the world, due to its high hazard exposure, weak infrastructure, low coping capacity and high level of vulnerability amongst the population (Sida, 2020).

### Long history of natural disasters with droughts and floods

Ethiopia is one of the most drought prone countries in the world and vulnerable to climate change. Throughout history, Ethiopia has been frequently affected by bad harvests due to extreme weather phenomena. On an average this has been a recurring pattern every ten years in the past five hundred years. Hence, natural disasters are not a totally new phenomenon. In the past decades, extreme weather variability has resulted in some areas of the country experiencing droughts whereas other areas have suffered by floods. The frequency of extreme weather phenomena seems to have increased over time, possibly as a result of climate change. Since the early 1980s, Ethiopia has been affected by several *droughts* (1984, 1988, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2005, 2011–2012, 2015–2020) but also major *floods* (1995–1997, 2003, 2005–2020). In addition to extreme weather, Ethiopia has also been hit by recurring *insect infestations* (2004, 2017, 2019–2020) and *epidemics* (1989, 2013, 2016–2019) OCHA).

Between 1980–2010, a yearly average of 1.8 million people were directly affected by disasters (Sida, 2015). One of the explanations that natural disasters have such severe consequences in Ethiopia is that more than

80 % of the population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture and pastoralism (EC, 2016). Agriculture in Ethiopia is to a large degree rainfed and variability in terms of rains significantly affect the livelihoods and food security for farmers and pastoralists. Intensive deforestation has further increased the risks for soil erosion, land degradation and desertification with significant impact on limited resources. The competition for natural resources and arable land has increased due to climate change with extreme weather in combination with population growth. This development is not only a general challenge but also a source of conflict.

## **Political instability, internal conflicts and wars with neighbouring countries**

Ethiopia has been characterised by longstanding internal conflicts driven by ethnic differences, unequal distribution of land, competition for limited resources, and weak governance. There is also a long history of popular protest and separatist sentiments among different ethnic groups, recently illustrated by the internal conflict which started between the Tigray region in the north and the central government, in late 2020 (UCDP; Sida, 2020).

In the past 50 years, Ethiopia has been ruled by five different regimes with divergent approaches to government rule. At the same time, all of them have, at least partly, been characterised by political instability and conflict. Until 1974, Ethiopia was ruled by successive emperors. The last emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military coup and replaced by a pro-Soviet Marxist-Leninist military junta, “the Derg”, led by Mengistu Haile Mariam. The period preceding this change of government was characterised by popular protest over land distribution and lack of development, underscored by recurring crop failure and famines. With “the Derg” in power, Ethiopia turned into a one-party communist state, and “red terror” was launched to eliminate adversaries. In 1976–1991, popular resistance grew, resulting in frequent internal conflicts and eventually in a change of government, when one of the main rebel groups EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) seized power. After a transitional government era (1991–1995), Ethiopia was turned into a federal republic implying a change from a centrally governed country to a multicultural federation with nine ethnically defined states based on ethnic-national representation. The first EPRDF-government was dominated by the TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front) from the Tigray region, representing only some 10 % of the total population, and resulting in ethnicity becoming highly politicised and new internal

conflicts. The 2005 election marked a turning point in terms of democratisation, and the 2010 election has been characterised as re-establishing a one-party state with a government regularly criticised for repressing human rights (Desportes et al 2019).

In 2018, TPLF lost dominance of the Ethiopian government when Prime Minister Hailam Desalegn resigned following mass protests that started in 2016. Since then, Abiy Ahmed, an Omoro politician, has been in office as Prime Minister (UCDP, UI). In 2019, Abiy Ahmed was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in ending the 20-year post-war territorial stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, in parallel to this, political and ethnic unrest has increased in Ethiopia, and in late 2020 this developed into intensified violence and armed conflict between the government forces and TPLF forces. A conflict which has also spread to other parts of the country and overall caused humanitarian suffering.

In addition to internal conflicts and intercommunal violence, Ethiopia has been involved in frequent conflicts with neighbouring countries. Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Ethiopia was engaged in conflict with Somalia over the Ethiopian Ogaden region, escalating into a war in 1977–1978. There have also been recurring conflicts with Eritrea in the period 1961–1991, resulting in a war in 1998–2000. Following the end of the war with Eritrea in 2000, the demarcation of the border was problematic for many years, until a peace treaty was signed in 2018. In terms of external conflicts, Ethiopia has also engaged in conflicts of other countries such as providing support to the Somali government in its fights against the Supreme Islamic Council of Somalia.

## **Recurring famines and chronic food insecurity**

In the past 50 years, Ethiopia has experienced chronic food insecurity and been affected by frequent major famines. Severe crises in terms of food insecurity and famine include the following (EU, 2016; Graham et al., 2013):

- 1972–1974: 4 % of the population affected, some 200,000 deaths, 50 % of livestock lost in the regions of Tigray and Wollo.
- 1984–1985: 7.9 million people affected, 400,000–1 million deaths.
- 1990–1992: 4 million people suffered food shortage in northern, eastern and southern Ethiopia.

- 1993–1994: 4 million people in need of food assistance in Tigray, Wollo and Addis Abeba.
- 1999–2000: 62 million people affected, 16 % of the population in need of food assistance.
- 2002–2003: 13 million people affected, 60,000 deaths.
- 2008–2009: 6.4 million people affected in southern Ethiopia.
- 2015–2016: 10.2 million people in need of urgent food assistance, 7.9 million people chronically food insecure, 18 % of population affected.

All of Ethiopia has not been affected to the same extent of the emergencies above. For example, the famines in 1972–1974 and 1984–1985 primarily affected the northern provinces of Ethiopia, including the regions of Tigray and Wollo. Ethiopian famines have been localised to different part of the country, primarily to politically and economically marginalised communities, and to vulnerable groups in these communities. Drought and rain failures, resulting in food shortages, have been key factors behind recurring famines but they are not the only reasons. The level of food insecurity has also been linked to conflicts, poor government policies, inadequate infrastructure, environmental degradation, structural problems in Ethiopian agriculture, and rudimentary farming techniques (Weismann, 2003; Graham et al. 2013).

International humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia has to a large degree developed in response to the severe famines in the 1970s–1980s. The famine in 1984–1985 was a starting point for a more broad-based international attention and humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia. At first, there was little knowledge and response to the crisis in the 1980s, but this changed after exposure in international media (BBC), the creation of Band Aid in 1984, the Live Aid-concert in 1985 and the surge of a broad range of other actors and organisations engaged in fundraising. Together these actions contributed to increased global awareness of the Ethiopian situation and records in fundraising for anti-famine efforts.<sup>2</sup> Since then, famines in Ethiopia have continued to get international attention and coverage, but in increasing competition with other crisis-affected countries.

---

<sup>2</sup> Band Aid was a charity supergroup with mainly British and Irish musicians and recording artists which released a song for the Christmas market in 1984. Live Aid was a multi-venue rock-concert in 1985 and one of the largest-scale satellite and television broadcasts at the time with some 2 billion viewers across 150 countries.

Food security is a longstanding challenge. In the period 2015–2020, some 7 million people have continually been in need of humanitarian aid, including emergency food assistance, due to prevailing dry conditions and deteriorating farmlands and pastures (OCHA, Reliefweb). Due to continued drought, grasshopper infestation, the Covid-pandemic and internal conflict, this figure has increased. In 2021, Sida reported that 1 in 5 Ethiopians needed humanitarian assistance, which equals some 23.5 million people (Sida, 2021).

## **Increasing number of internally displaced persons and refugees**

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees are often in vulnerable situations, and in need of humanitarian assistance. As a result of natural disasters and conflict, IDPs are a common feature of Ethiopia. Following the floods in 2020, for example, some 300,000 people were displaced. Displacements in terms of forced relocations of people for political purposes has also been part of Ethiopian history, such as the resettlement program started by “the Derg” regime in the 1980s. Intercommunal violence has been another factor in mass internal displacements and something that has increased significantly in recent years. The number of IDPs due to conflict reached 3.2 million in 2019 (OCHA, 2019).

Due to the volatile situation in the Horn of Africa region with conflicts and crises in neighbouring countries, Ethiopia has been, and still is, a major host of refugees. The refugees are mainly from Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea. In 2014, Ethiopia surpassed Kenya in terms of being the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa with a total of some 644,000 refugees, primarily women and children in need of protection and assistance. Since then, the number of refugees has continued to increase resulting in more than 800,000 refugees in 2021. (Sida, 2015, UNHCR, 2019, 2021).

## **Ethiopian approaches to disaster management**

The Ethiopian response to natural disasters and humanitarian crises has evolved extensively since the early 1970s. A range of initiatives and mechanisms have been launched to address and mitigate disasters in different ways. Overall, there has been a range of investments in Ethiopia for disaster management as well as initiatives focused on recovery, disaster

reduction and resilience, which have been closely linked to poverty reduction and sustainable natural resource management. In this section, focus is primarily on the Ethiopian government's approach to disaster management and how the approach has developed in the last 50 years, including some of the challenges.

## **From emergency relief response to disaster risk management**

The first formal governmental disaster management institution the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) was established in 1974, in the wake of the 1973–1974 famine. The initial mandate was to provide assistance to drought victims in the provinces of Wollo and Tigray. Since then, there have been several changes in the Ethiopian government approach to disaster management. Somewhat simplified, the approach could be described as first focusing primarily on emergency relief response in conjunction to disasters (1970s–1980s), later to also include more explicit linkages between relief and development (mid 1990s), followed by a paradigm-shift toward a more pro-active and comprehensive disaster risk management system (since 2008). Below is a brief chronological overview of Ethiopian institutions and policies focusing on emergency response and disaster management (EC, 2018; Graham et al. 2013, Ministry of Agriculture, 2014):

- *1974: the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC)* was established by the Derg regime to respond to crises through relief food distribution and other emergency supplies and services, later with additional responsibility for rehabilitation including settlement programs, but also for generating information and analyses to help prevent famine. The RRC turned into a relatively large and powerful part of the Ethiopian government in the 1970s–1980s but was turned down in size in the early 1990s.
- *1993: the National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management* was launched by the EPRDF-government with a key objective to save lives, integrate relief assistance with development efforts and enhance the coping capacities of affected populations. The policy was considered a “state-of-the-art” policy and had been drafted but never adopted during the Derg regime. The policy defined increased involvement by key sectors in disaster management, something which was later formalised (2003) through the establishment of emergency sectoral task forces as a first step to engage line ministries.

- *1995: the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC)* was established following the new policy and a process of restructuring and renaming of the RRC, including a significant change in approach with focus on the linkages between relief and development through community-centred “employment generation schemes. There was increasing focus on early warning and emergency food response. In 2004, the DPPC was renamed as the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA).
- *2008: the Disaster Risk Management and Food Security Sector (DRMFSS)* was established through a process of transferring the DPPA and the responsibilities of early warning and food security to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) with similar structures replicated in all regions. This was not only a change in structure but also a clear shift from a system primarily focused on disaster response to a more pro-active approach.
- *2013: the National Disaster Risk Management Policy and Strategy* was adopted as a means to effectively implement the change in approach and to provide direction for the institutionalisation of the disaster risk management system, including horizontal and vertical coordination among decision-making bodies.
- *2015: the National Disaster Risk Management Commission (NDRMC)* was established under the Prime Minister Office with a mandate to ensure a more streamlined disaster risk management approach, including an Early Warning and Response System across all government sectors, at federal, regional and local levels, as well as in city administrations. The NDRMC has a broadened scope and is responsible for coordinating disaster risk response, risk management, preventive measures, and recovery programs in the country.

## **Preparedness and mitigation with challenges**

As noted, there has been an overall shift in the government approach to disaster management in the past decades with increasing focus on prevention and risk management. At the same time, Ethiopia has a relatively long experience of established mechanisms to strengthen preparedness and mitigation to disasters, such as early warning systems and emergency food reserves.

In terms of *Early Warning Systems (EWS)*, the first system was established in early 1974 under the imperial regime and was further developed after the famine in 1984–1983. With the National Policy for disaster management (1993) there was increasing focus on EWS (Graham et al. 2013). The EWS set-up has varied over time and been comprised by several decentralised systems including seasonal weather forecasts with meteorological information, estimates of people affected by failed rains, nutritional assessments of children, household economy analyses and household food security analysis etc. (ibid). One of the more recent examples has been to develop a disaster risk profiling system at local (woreda) level as part of the government’s initiative of Woreda Disaster Risk Reduction Planning (EC, 2018). The EWS have provided useful information in a variety of ways but there has also been a range of challenges, including problems in rolling out and implementing such systems and in sustaining them. Another challenge, at least historically, has been in terms of how “warnings” have been ignored or thwarted. One example is the lack of recognition and response by the Derg regime to warnings preceding the famine in 1984–1985. Another example is the crisis in 1999–2000, when estimates of emergency beneficiaries reported from woreda levels were perceived as exaggerated and downplayed by zonal and federal officials resulting in limited allocations of assistance (Graham et al 2013). Timely dissemination of information has also been a challenge. For example, the impacts of El Niño were covered by international media in September 2015, but it was not until March 2016 that farmers in Ethiopia received information through local radio and TV about delays in the rainy season affecting what crops to plant and when (Ibrahim and Kruczkiewicz, 2016).

Ethiopia has engaged in meeting food shortage in different ways. In response to recommendations by the FAO, Ethiopia established an *Emergency Food Security Reserve* in 1979, first run by an additional unit to the RRC and later by autonomous agencies (the Emergency Food Security Reserve Administration 1992–2012 and the Strategic Food Reserve Agency since 2013). The underlying idea with a reserve was to ensure an emergency food stock that could feed vulnerable populations for some months. The system with a food reserve was not successful in alleviating the 1984 famine but has been credited for effectively addressing food insecurity and several emergencies. However, at times there has also been depletion of stocks due to mismanagement (1999–2000 and 2008–2009) as well as depletion due to disagreement between donors and the



Ethiopian government about emergency request figures, for instance in 1999–2000 when there was international disapproval of the Ethiopian war with Eritrea (Graham et al. 2013).

In parallel to EWS and food security reserves, there have also been initiatives of public food distribution and social protection programs. Immediately after the famine in 1983–1984, a food-for-work program was launched and in the early 1990s employment generation schemes were established which later transformed into *the Productive Safety Net Program* (PSNP) first launched in 2005. The PSNP has been a large-scale and long-term effort to address food insecurity throughout the country via delivery of cash or food transfers in exchange of public work or as direct transfers. The PSNP has been one of the largest of its kind in Africa and targeted some 8 million people every year (Filipski et al., 2017). In March 2021, the Ethiopian government launched its 5<sup>th</sup> PSNP, with financial support from development partners, targeting poor and vulnerable households.

## **Institutional limitations and political dimensions affecting disaster response**

The public institutions for disaster management have had key roles in responding to emerging crises. The mandates of these institutions have varied over time, and so has their capacity to respond. For a period, the RRC was considered a relatively strong institution staffed with some 1,000 people, however in parallel to increasing decentralisation of disaster management the staffing of the central institution was reduced to some 700 people (DPPC) and later some 300 (DRMFSS) (Graham et al 2013). In 2014, the Ministry of Agriculture noted that the disaster management system had been characterised by capacity limitations, in number and quality of staff, and high turn-over at all levels of the system. The limitations in terms of human resources were particularly severe at woreda level. Other limitations affecting the system have been linked to office space, equipment, communication systems etc. (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014).

The interplay between different actors in response to humanitarian crises depends on the capacity of the actors but also on the interplay between them. For long periods, there have been tensions between the Ethiopian regimes and international humanitarian actors, especially international NGOs. These tensions are linked to the varying perspectives of Ethiopian

governments vis-à-vis humanitarian actors and humanitarian aid. For example, during the Derg regime (1974–1991) there was criticism of the country's high dependency on donor funds from Western countries, including fear of Western influences, but also those who were in favour of foreign aid to address famine (Lautze et al. 2009). Moreover, humanitarian aid has been viewed as something that could be used for subversive purposes by political opponents but also by regimes (Rashid et al. 2019).

Institutions responsible for disaster management have been at the centre of the tension between different actors and perspectives, having to balance and deal with competing demands from the government, humanitarian actors and disaster affected communities. The mere existence of institutions for disaster management has partly been perceived as state failure or as institutionalised dependency on foreign aid (Lautze et al., 2009). There have been repeated efforts to weaken these institutions, however, as new crises have emerged their services have been required and useful. As more international organisations and NGOs have established themselves in Ethiopia, and as a means of exercising some control, the government has repeatedly used the tool of legislation to introduce requirements regarding registration, coordination and reporting of international actors (ibid).

As indicated above, disaster response is not a wholly technical and apolitical process. Failure to quickly respond to the droughts and famines in 1973 and 1984 contributed to the end of both the imperial and the Derg regimes. Historically, power relations and questions of legitimacy have often influenced the response, including who and what will be protected from disaster impact (Graham et al., 2013, Desportes et al., 2019, Hilhorst et al, 2019).

## 4 Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia – what, when and how?

Since the 1970s Sweden has provided substantial support to emergencies and humanitarian crises in Ethiopia. Overviews of aggregate aid flows are presented below, as well as overall trends in terms of what Swedish assistance has been used for and how it has been channelled. In addition, there are somewhat more detailed, still brief, presentations of Swedish assistance to Ethiopia per decade in the period 1970–2020.

The tracking and descriptions of Swedish humanitarian assistance is based on CRS data (OECD DAC) and other relevant sources and reports. Focus is on Swedish assistance categorised as “emergency response”. Financial flows are reported in million USD, constant prices (2017).

Aggregate CRS-data provide useful information in mapping humanitarian assistance, however there are certain limitations with this kind of data which affect the level of detail in the presentation. One such limitation is that the tracking of data is reported for the first level recipient only. Given that financial allocations in many cases are subcontracted or channelled onwards to third parties or local cooperation partners for implementation, the first level does not reflect the full picture. Another limitation for this kind of mapping, is that there have been shifts in terms of focus and tracking of CRS data over time. Consequently, information about Swedish contributions is not fully consistent when for longer periods of time. For example, there is little information about first level recipients in CRS data for the 1970s and 1980s, something that has been central in later reporting.

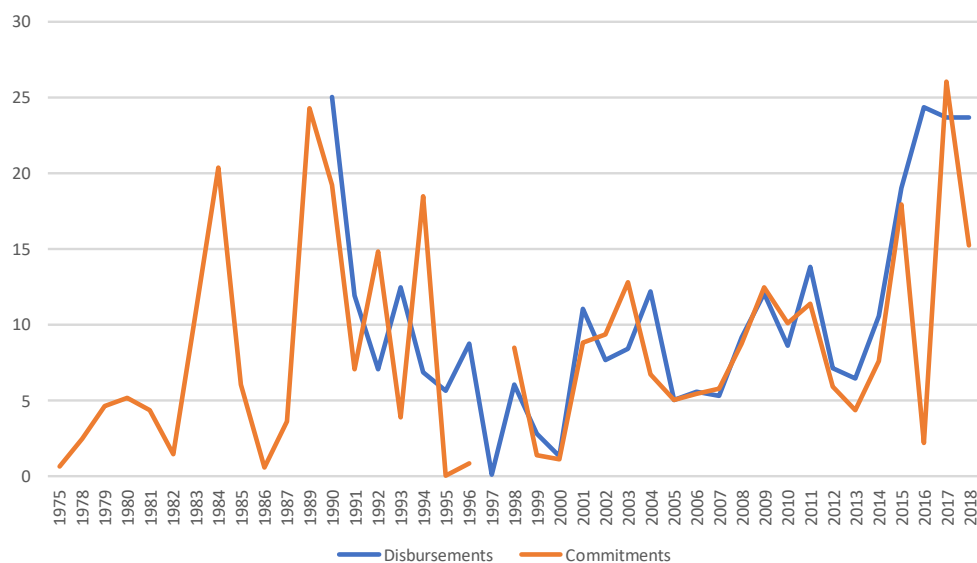
CRS data include Swedish commitments and disbursements. Focus of this paper is primarily on disbursements, apart for the period 1975–1990 which only report on commitments.

# Aggregate financial flows

## Financial fluctuations and increasing assistance in recent years

The overall trend of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia is characterised by recurring fluctuations in terms of commitments and contributions. Another trend is that Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia has increased in the past 20 years to a level in 2015–2016 that was similar to the level of contributions in the early 1990s. The graph below shows the trend of aggregate financial flows, including the “financial peaks” which are closely linked to the occurrence of disasters and emergencies in Ethiopia.

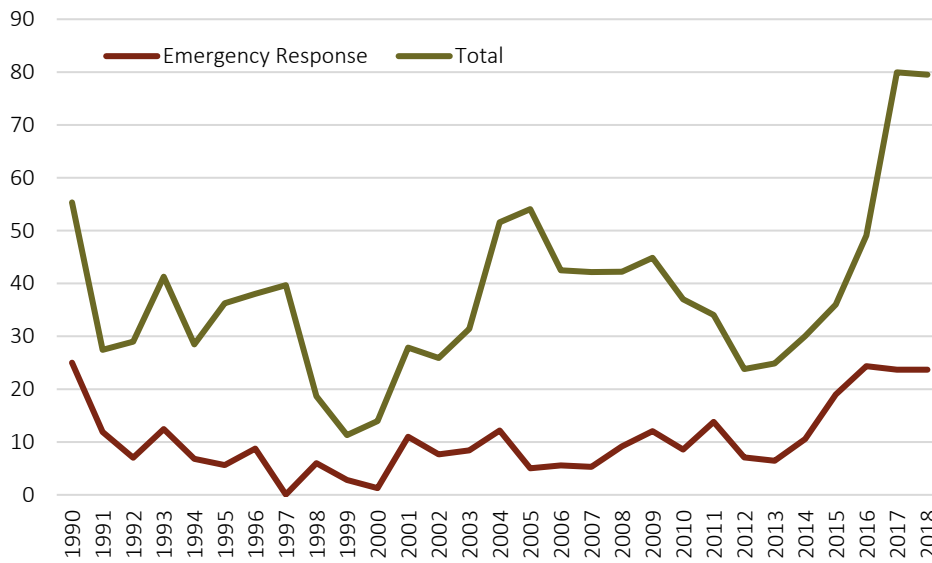
**Figure 1: Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia 1975–2018 (million USD)**



Source: OECD DAC/CRS

When looking at the trends of total Swedish bilateral aid to Ethiopia, including both development cooperation and humanitarian assistance similar trends emerge in terms of fluctuations and an overall increase of assistance since 2015.

**Figure 2: Swedish bilateral aid to Ethiopia 1990–2018 (million USD)**



Source: OECD DAC/CRS

## Sweden is one of the largest bilateral donors to Ethiopia

In terms of humanitarian funding for Humanitarian Response Plans and Consolidated Appeals, Sweden has been one of top five government donors for several years since the early 2000 (OCHA, Financial Tracking Services).

In 2018 the humanitarian funding to Ethiopia totalled USD 881.8 million and in 2019 the figure amounted to USD 826.4. Approximately 80 % of the humanitarian funding in 2019 was within the Humanitarian Response Plan, and the largest donors were the USA (USD 495 million), the UK (USD 74.5 million), EU (USD 58.5 million), Germany (USD 37.5 million) and Sweden (USD 26.8 million). The US share was approximately 60 % whereas the Swedish share was 3.2 % (Sida, 2020).

In terms of the total Swedish allocation for humanitarian assistance, the share of the Ethiopian allocation has ranged between 1.3–7.7 % in the period 1998–2018. Since 2016, the allocation for Ethiopia has amounted to around 5.5 % of the total allocation (Openaid).

## **Overall trends in Swedish humanitarian assistance**

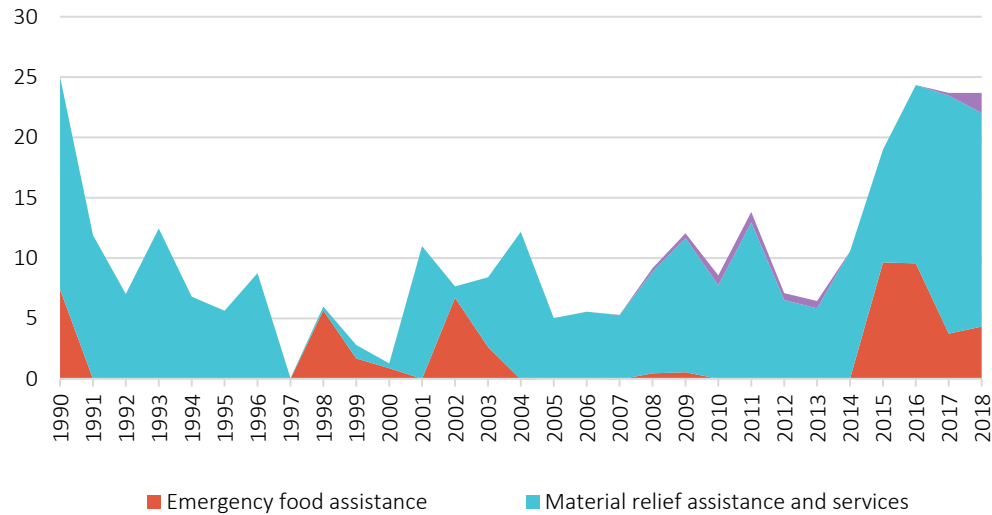
Swedish humanitarian assistance could be described in different ways and below focus is on “what” the assistance has been used for and “how” it has been channelled.

### **Prime focus on material relief assistance and periodically on emergency food assistance**

The major share of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia has been focused on “material relief assistance and services” which include support for certain transports, shelter, water, acute health care etc. targeting people directly affected by disasters but also internally displaced people and refugees living in severe circumstances.

Emergency food assistance has also been an important part of Swedish assistance, primarily in close conjunction to increased food insecurity, such as the major famines in the late 1990s, and in 2002–2003, 2008, and 2015–2016. In a longer perspective, emergency food assistance has changed in character from financial support for specified deliveries of wheat and oil in late 1970s and 1980, to support for local procurement including support to the Ethiopian government for such procurement, and later to emergency food via international agencies such as the World Food Program. Sweden is a promoter of international donor coordination and has financially contributed to “relief coordination” which include support to UNOCHA as a coordinator of the international humanitarian response.

**Figure 3: What has Swedish assistance been used for? (disbursements in million USD)**



Source: OECD DAC/CRS

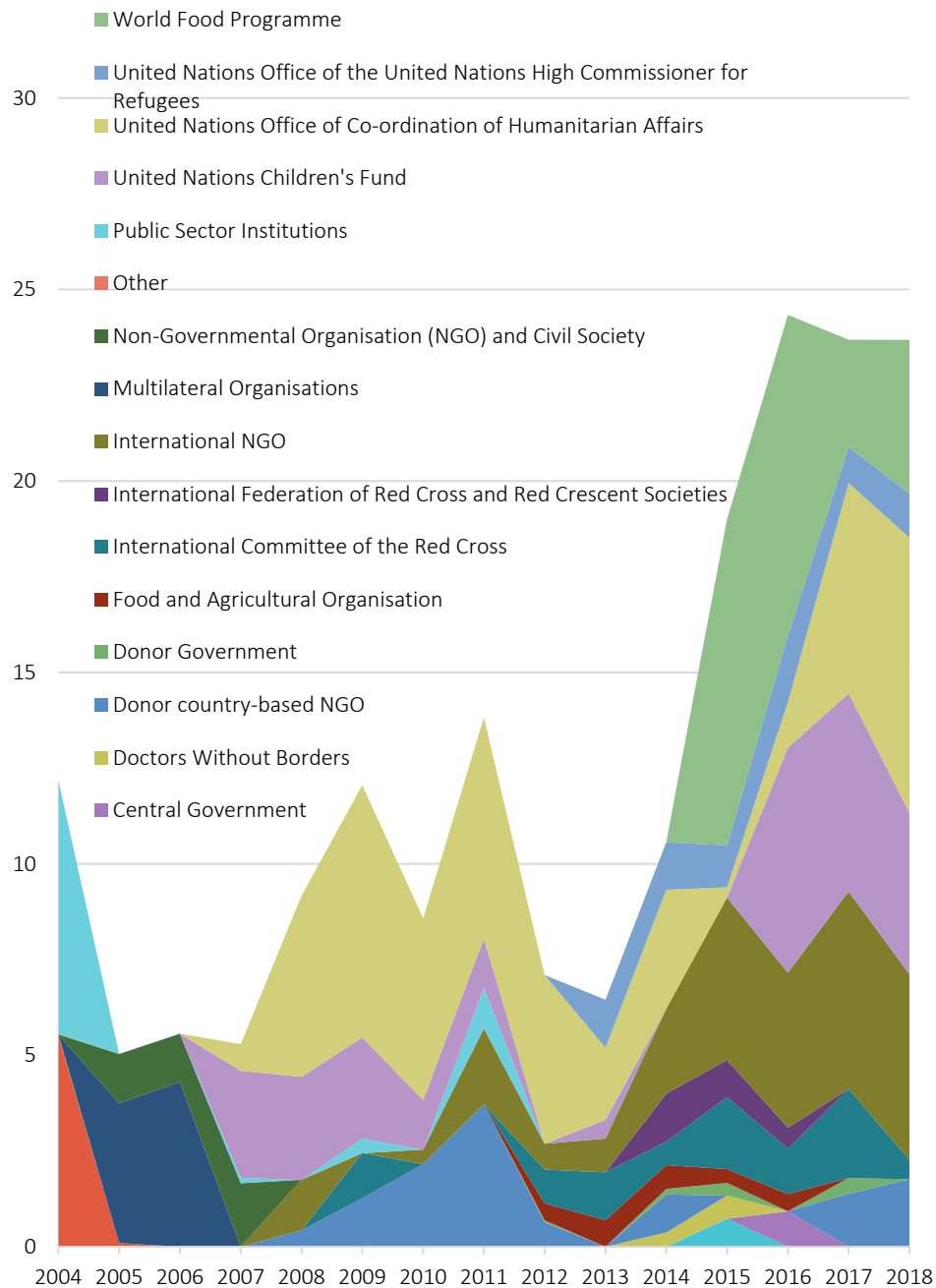
## **Strong focus on NGOs and increasing use of multilateral agencies as channels of assistance**

The overall trend since the beginning of 2000 is that an increasing share of Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia has been channelled via multilateral agencies and funds (at least when looking at the first level of recipients). This could probably be explained by an increasing role of multilateral agencies in general within the frameworks of joint humanitarian analyses, strategies and response plans. Another explanation could be that with increasing funds for humanitarian assistance it has been easier increasing allocations to multilateral agencies with relatively high absorption capacity. As presented below, multilateral agencies have been essential in channelling Swedish assistance since 2004 but also the Red Cross movement and NGOs, especially international NGOs.

In a longer perspective, there has been a shift in Swedish assistance from a primary focus on NGOs and Ethiopian public sector institutions, as first level recipients in the 1980s and 1990s, to an increasing role of multilateral agencies. There are probably different explanations to this shift, including the changes in the humanitarian landscape at large toward more joint efforts under UN-leadership and more country based pooled funds

formally administered by the UN. The latter in close cooperation with the government in the recipient country. Since 2012/13, Sida has primarily channelled humanitarian assistance through so called strategic partners – both multilateral agencies and NGOs – which have been identified as relevant for the diversity and complexity of the Ethiopian situation.

**Figure 4: How has Swedish assistance been channelled?**



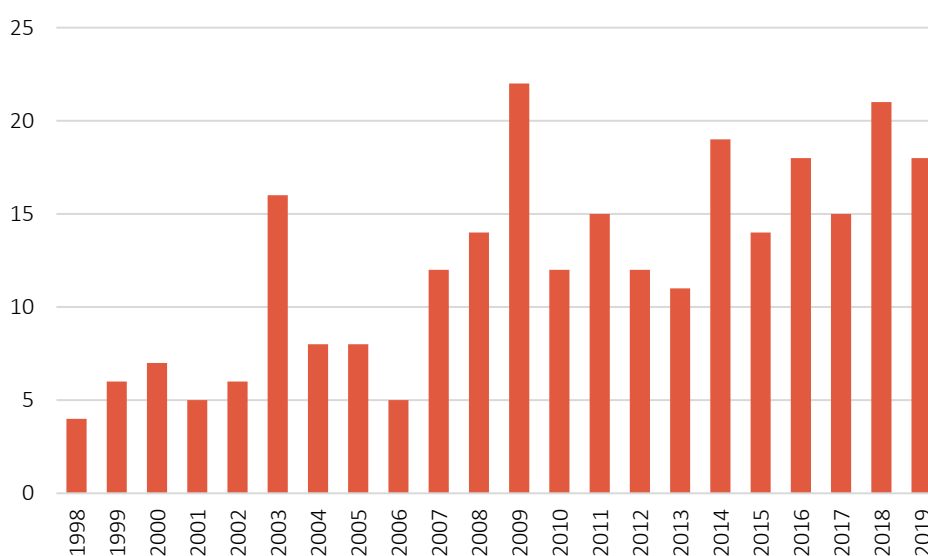
Source: OECD DAC/CRS



## Increasing level of activities

In terms of number of activities, there has been an increase since the late 1990s but the period 1998–2019 is also characterised by fluctuations. The level of activities is probably a reflection of the level of Swedish funding but also of the complexity and character of the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia with calls for a broad range of different kinds of assistance, to be allocated to different groups of people in different parts and regions of the country.

**Figure 5: Number of activities/contributions to Ethiopia (per/year)**



Source: Openaid.se

## Swedish humanitarian assistance 1970–2020

The following sections include some key characteristics of the Ethiopian context and the Swedish humanitarian response in different decades. The purpose is to provide some further details in relation to the overall trends and descriptions presented in the previous sections.

### The 1970s – famine, political turbulence, and initial Swedish assistance

In Ethiopia the 1970s were a period characterised by a change of government in 1974, drought and severe famine in 1972–1973, and internal as well as external conflicts. In 1974, the Ethiopian government

established the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) to address emergencies, and to set up an early warning system. As to the role of the international community, the World Food Programme (WFP), USAID and the Red Cross started to become increasingly engaged in food assistance as a response to the serious famine. At the time, some 20 international organisations, mostly local missions and NGOs, were engaged with humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia (Lautze et al, 2009).

In Sweden, humanitarian assistance started to become more formalised in the 1970s with a separately assigned budget allocation for humanitarian purposes in the budget for 1973/74. The general approach was to transfer assistance as financial contributions, but also in terms of food (wheat) contributions. At the time, Sweden had a national stock of food, mainly to be used by the WFP for international catastrophes (Prop. 1977/78:135). As to Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, there is relatively little information in the CRS-data about official contributions from Sweden. Nevertheless, data indicates that there was a Swedish response to the humanitarian situation. Apart from “pre-emergency aid assistance”, Sweden contributed with wheat deliveries and material relief assistance in 1978. There is no information however, about which channels were used.

## **The 1980s – famine, increasing international attention and Swedish engagement**

The 1980s were characterised by civil war, serious droughts in 1980–1982 and severe famine in 1983–1984 covered by international media and attracting global attention and records in fundraising for anti-famine initiatives. This was a period when Ethiopia was affected by locust infestation and meningitis epidemic, and a time when the government engaged in so called resettlement policies with forced relocation of people causing further emergencies and distress.

Following the famine, the Derg government allowed for more international agencies into Ethiopia to help address the critical humanitarian situation. A strong expansion of relief institutions followed in the 1980s, with more UN-programs and an increasing number of NGOs. The period was characterised by extensive logistical problems with insufficient infrastructure, inadequate storage, limited transport capacities and poor roads. As a result, organisations such as the WFP established their own logistics capacities (Lautze et al, 2009).

The Ethiopian response with the RRC was stronger than earlier, but it was also in lack of sufficient funds and internal capacity. The RRC remained an important channel for humanitarian assistance in the 1980s, but there was also a tendency among donors to increasingly channel support through NGOs. In order to have some control, the Ethiopian government issued regulations regarding specific reporting to different Ministries, reflecting their dual standpoint vis-a-vis international actors (ibid).

The Swedish emergency response in the 1980s could be described in terms of “two major peaks” in terms of humanitarian assistance. The first peak in financial commitments was in 1983–1985, in response to the critical situation with famine and conflict. Swedish assistance was primarily used for material relief assistance with focus on aid for victims of conflict, refugee relief, and assistance targeted to the Kambatta province and health care in the Wollo province. More than 20 % of the total funds were used for emergency food relief, primarily for wheat delivery but also for food and oil. One third of the emergency food relief was reported as wheat delivery specifically targeting the Wollo province which was heavily affected by the famine (CRS).

The second financial peak of humanitarian assistance was in 1989 with Swedish support channelled on the one hand *bilaterally* through the Ethiopian government/RRC for drought preparedness and on the other hand through an increasing number of *Swedish NGOs* for different purposes (CRS). Assistance channelled through Swedish NGOs included allocations to Diakonia for material relief and emergency food assistance; Save the Children for emergency support, reunification programme in Wollo and support to Sudanese refugee children; Lutherhjälpen for grain, and soil and water conservation, and the Swedish Evangelical Mission Society/Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen for food distribution.

## **The 1990s – new hope, new crises and an increasing number of humanitarian actors**

This period was characterised by a change of government (1991) and change of constitution (1995), optimism, new crises and war with Eritrea. The decade started with increasing hopes that previous patterns of emergencies and crises would not continue. In 1996 there were bumper crops and for the first time since the early 1980s the US did not provide any emergency food. However, this soon changed with the emergence of droughts and floods in 1996, and new needs for emergency assistance.

The 1990s was also characterised by increased distrust between NGOs and the new TGE-government which argued that international NGOs perpetuated an unhealthy dependency on relief. The government sought to control and guide NGOs through elaborate mechanisms of reporting etc. causing frustration among NGOs. Towards the end of the period there was again a major humanitarian crisis with some 10 million people in need of food assistance at the height of the crisis in 1999–2000. This situation coincided with diminished response capacity in government partly due to the war, but also diminished response from NGOs which had focused more on development than relief (Lautze et al, 2009).

As described earlier, the 1990s was also a decade of several reforms within the international humanitarian system, introducing humanitarian principles, UN-coordinated appeals with joint plans for humanitarian assistance and the establishment of UNOCHA to mobilise and coordinate the international humanitarian response. Sweden was in support of these reforms and started to channel more assistance via multilateral organisations in Ethiopia. However, major shares were still channelled bilaterally and via NGOs. In an estimate for the period 1990/91–1993/94, Swedish contributions were distributed as follows; 39.5 % bilaterally, 42.2 % via NGOs, and 18.3 multilaterally (Sida, 1995).

In the 1990s, Swedish humanitarian assistance was primarily used for material relief assistance, and emergency food assistance, including support for local food procurement. Large shares were also used for transport and logistics, food distribution and returnee support. Assistance channelled *bilaterally to the Ethiopian government* was mostly used to support the RRC with emergency transports, but also for purchase and import of seeds and fertilizers. Sweden also supported the purchase of trucks as part of a World Bank project focused on emergency, recovery and reconstruction. In terms of *multilateral agencies*, Swedish assistance was primarily channelled through the WFP for emergency food assistance and emergency transports, the FAO for material relief assistance and the UNHCR for refugees, repatriation and reintegration (CRS).

In addition, a broad range of Swedish, international and indigenous NGOs were used to channel Swedish humanitarian assistance. Among major first level recipients were the Swedish Red Cross (SRC) in cooperation with the Ethiopian Red Cross, the Swedish Pentecostal Churches (PMU/Interlife), Star of Hope International/Hoppets Stjärna, Diakonia, Lutherhjälpen, the Swedish Evangelical Mission Society/Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen, Lutheran World Federation, Save the Children, ICRC and MSF (CRS).

## 2000–2009 – food shortage, humanitarian reforms

The first decade of the new Millenia was characterised by humanitarian crises following droughts and floods, political instability with violence and riots but also increased optimism as a result of economic growth. In terms of crises there was serious food shortage in Ethiopia in 2002–2003, with an estimate of 14.5 million people at risk in 2003. Following this crisis, the government launched several reforms to redress disaster vulnerability in order to end the reliance on foreign aid. However, in 2008 Ethiopia was again hit by a new crisis resulting in some 6.4 million people in need of emergency aid (Lautze et al., 2009; SR 2008).

At a global level, there were several initiatives to improve transparency, predictability accountability, partnership and coordination in this period, including the Good Humanitarian Donorship-initiative (starting 2003) and the UN humanitarian reform process (starting 2005). Sweden took an active role in both processes.

In the period 2000–2009, there were three financial peaks in terms of disbursement of Swedish humanitarian aid in Ethiopia, i.e. in 2001, 2003–2004 and 2008–2009 in response to the emergencies in these years. In the beginning of 2000, Swedish assistance was still channelled *bilaterally* through the Ethiopian public administration for material relief assistance and emergency food assistance, including support for local grain and local food procurement. However, over the period there was a shift toward more focus on multilateral support and continued focus on NGOs.

Overall, a broad range of *multilateral actors and NGOs* received Swedish humanitarian assistance in 2000–2009. The three most central actors (in terms of disbursements) were the UNICEF, UNOCHA and ICRC. Given the limitations of CRS-data it is not clear if all Swedish responses to international appeals are reported as such. According to available data, Sweden provided assistance to appeals from UNICEF (2007, 2008), UNOCHA (2008, 2009) and ICRC (2007, 2008, 2009). Other important multilateral actors during the period included WFP and FAO (CRS).

As to Swedish humanitarian assistance via Swedish and international NGOS, the major actors in terms of disbursements included Swedish Red Cross/IFRC, PMU, Caritas, MSF, Swedish Church, Save the Children and African Humanitarian Action (CRS).

## **2010–2020 – economic growth, political instability and worst drought in 30 years**

In Ethiopia, the period has been characterised by economic growth and decline, political instability with demonstrations and violence, increasing numbers of IDPs and refugees, and severe drought causing a major humanitarian crisis in 2016–2017. The drought in 2015–2016 was the worst in 30 years, which in combination with internal conflict caused the worst humanitarian crisis in 50 years. Almost 18 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance in 2016–2017 (OCHA, Sida 2019).

At an international level, the World humanitarian Summit took place at the same time as Ethiopia suffered from a severe crisis. Pooled funding at country level increased as a preferred mechanism to respond to emergencies. In Ethiopia, local humanitarian funds administered by OCHA was already a mechanism in use as an opportunity for different actors to apply for funds for humanitarian projects. The Ethiopian Emergency Response Fund and the Country Based Pooled Funds have been used to increase the effectiveness of the humanitarian response as they prioritise quick release of funds, NGOs and local actors that can access hard to reach areas (OCHA).

As to Swedish humanitarian assistance, there has been an increase of financial disbursements since 2013. During the period, humanitarian assistance has primarily been provided for material relief assistance but also for emergency food assistance, especially since 2015. Swedish assistance has increasingly been disbursed through multilateral channels, which include support to pooled funds such as the Humanitarian Response Fund and the Emergency Response Fund, coordinated by UNOCHA. The largest *multilateral* disbursements have been channelled via the WFP, primarily with focus on emergency food assistance but also to initiatives under the heading “from humanitarian assistance to resilience”. Other important multilateral actors for Swedish assistance include UNICEF, UNOCHA, UNHCR and FAO (CRS).

Apart from UN-coordinated appeals, Swedish humanitarian assistance has also been used for annual responses to ICRC appeals in Ethiopia and support via 14 NGOs. As to NGOs there is an increasing use of international NGOs in the Swedish response to humanitarian crises in Ethiopia. The largest organisations in terms of Swedish funding include the Norwegian Refugee Council, Action Against Hunger/ACT, Swedish Red Cross/ICRC, MSF, and Islamic Relief.

Other NGOs used as partners and channels in Ethiopia include the Swedish Church (COS/ACT), Swedish Mission Council/SMC, Oxfam GB, Save the Children, Plan Sweden and Danish Refugee Council. The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency has a framework agreement with Sida for support to international operations, including Ethiopia (CRS).

## **Some overall lessons**

A key feature of humanitarian assistance is that it is not based on a long-term program approach but on annual allocations based on identified needs and coordinated strategies and plans at country level. Effectiveness depends to a large degree on the ability to respond rapidly and adequately.

Overall, there are few evaluations of humanitarian assistance to specific countries. In 1995, Sida commissioned an evaluation of humanitarian assistance to the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia. The overall assessment was that Swedish support was considered timely, flexible, user-friendly and effective. The Swedish focus on logistics and food support was considered appropriate. According to the evaluators, the results of action were primarily a result of the ability and quality of Sida partners. Hence, the choice of partners was identified as critical for good results (Sida, 1995).

In 2016, Sida commissioned an evaluation of Sida's fulfilment of the goals of the strategy for Sida's humanitarian assistance (2011–2014). The evaluators noted that Sida had made considerable effort in allocating resources based on humanitarian needs, and in developing the model for allocation of geographical funding. They assessed Sida as a principled donor and strong proponent of IHL, as well as a strong supporter of humanitarian coordination. The introduction of multi-annual framework agreements with selected partners and systematic assessments of partner performance was assessed to be positive. The evaluators noted an increasing emphasis on national and local actors through Country Based Pooled Funds. The overall assessment of Sida as a predictable, rapid and flexible donor, was positive. Despite the lack of structures to promote closer collaboration, the evaluators identified several linkages between Sida's humanitarian and development assistance, including growing recognition of the importance of common context analyses to ensure complementarity and more flexible use of funds (Sida, 2016).

## 5 Concluding reflections

The focus of this paper has been on presenting overall trends in Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia, but also on providing an overview of the broader context and the reasons for humanitarian assistance. As noted, Ethiopia is prone to extreme weather phenomena and has been affected by recurring disasters, conflicts and emergencies, including several severe famines in the last 50 years.

Sweden has been a committed humanitarian donor for decades and ranked as one of the largest bilateral donors in terms of humanitarian funding to Ethiopia. Swedish humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia has fluctuated over time in response to recurring crises. Over the period 1970–2020, there has been a shift from single decisions about food deliveries and transports, to contributions via strategic partners channelling assistance in line with UN-coordinated frameworks of analysis and response. As to changes in the Swedish approach to Ethiopia, they seem to reflect how Swedish humanitarian assistance has changed in general, and how the overall humanitarian system has changed over time. It has not been within the scope of this assignment to make any assessments of Swedish assistance to Ethiopia, or to make any depth analysis of reported results. The only identified evaluation of humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia (1995) concluded that Swedish assistance had been timely, flexible, user-friendly and effective. In a more recent evaluation (2016) of Sida's humanitarian assistance the overall assessment was positive.

There is no doubt that there have been reasons for humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia on a recurring basis, and that Sweden has played a role in alleviating some of the suffering. In 2019–2020 Ethiopia was ranked as one of the 10 largest recipients of international humanitarian assistance. Since then, the humanitarian situation has become even more troubling with serious drought, grasshopper infestation, and the COVID-19 pandemic as well as internal conflicts since the end of 2020. In 2021, Sida reported that some 23.5 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, Relief web, Ethiopia 2020, GHA 2021, Sida 2021).

This paper has focused on describing the overall reasons for humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia and not on analysing all the interlinked and underlying factors behind the crises. As noted earlier, frequent humanitarian crises and chronic food insecurity are not only a consequence of natural disasters and environmental degradation, but also of structural problems and man-made disasters. In the case of Ethiopia,



political instability and conflicts have affected the humanitarian situation negatively since the 1970s. In the light of almost 50 years of humanitarian assistance and the current critical situation, it is easy to start wondering about what could have been done earlier to prevent this negative trend, but also on what could be done now, on behalf of Ethiopian actors and the international community, including Sweden, to decrease the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance?

For decades, the Ethiopian government and international donors have made recurring investments in development more broadly, but also in disaster prevention, disaster recovery and resilience. The relatively recent focus on a more proactive, multisectoral and decentralised approach to disaster management is being rolled out and still to be fully functional. It has not been part of this paper to investigate the linkages between humanitarian assistance and development assistance focusing on disaster prevention and resilience. However, in preparing for future Swedish assistance more broadly it might be useful to explore key lessons from interventions in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and to consider whether a closer collaboration between Swedish humanitarian and development assistance may prove useful in addressing some of the recurring challenges in Ethiopia.

## References

- CRS, OECD DAC/CRS-data for Swedish assistance to Ethiopia, 1976–2018.
- Damtie Y. & Asmare, A. (2020) Evaluation of Ethiopian early warning system: the case of Dera and Jabithenana Zuria Districts, *Safety in Extreme Environments*, 2, pp. 197–204.
- Desportes, I., Mandefro, H., 6 Hilhorst, D. (2019) “The humanitarian theatre: Drought response during Ethiopia’s low-intensity conflict of 2016, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 57:1, pp. 31–59.
- EC (2018) *Ethiopia Assessment on the Operationalization of DRR System at Local Level*, European Commission, Mission Report September 2018.
- EU (2016) European Union Delegation to Ethiopia, *Assessing the Root Causes of Recurring Food Insecurity in Ethiopia, May 18, 2016*.
- Filipski, M., Taylow, J.E., Abegaz, G.A., Ferede, T., Talfesse, A.S. and Diao, X. (2017) *General equilibrium impact assessment of the Productive Safety Net Program in Ethiopia*, 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 66, New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).
- Gapminder, [www.gapminder.org/tools/](http://www.gapminder.org/tools/)
- GHA (2011) Global Humanitarian Assistance, *Humanitarian financing to Ethiopia 2000–2010*.
- GHA (2016), Global Humanitarian Assistance, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2016*.
- GHA (2020), Global Humanitarian Assistance, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2020*.
- GHA (2021), Global Humanitarian Assistance, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2021*.
- Graham, J., Rashid, S., and Malek, M. (2013) Disaster Response and Emergency Risk Management in Ethiopia, Ch. 9, in book: *Food and Agriculture in Ethiopia: Progress and Policy Challenges* (pp. 256–29), Eds. Dorosh, P. and Rashid S., University of Pennsylvania Press for IFPRI.
- Government Communication 2016/17:60, *Policy framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance*.
- Habte, B., Kweon, Y.J., 2018. *Addressing Internal Displacement in Ethiopia*. Forced Migration Review, pp. 40–42.

- Hammond, L. and Maxwell, D. (2002) “The Ethiopian Crisis of 1999–2000: lessons learned, questions unanswered”, *Disasters*, 26:3, pp. 262–279.
- Hilhorst, D., Despoetes, I., Milliano, C., (2019) “Humanitarian governance and resilience building: Ethiopia in comparative perspective”, *Special Issue: Humanitarian Governance* 43:2.
- HDI, Human Development Index, Ethiopia, [www.hdr.undp.org](http://www.hdr.undp.org)
- Ibrahim M. and Kruczkiewicz, A. (2016) *Learning from experience: a review of early warning systems Moving towards Early Action 2016*, International Research Institute for Climate and Society.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia (2014) Disaster Risk Management Food Security Sector, *Disaster Risk Management, Strategic Programme and Investment Framework*.
- Montemurro, M. & Wendt, K. (2019) *The Path of Least Resistance. HERE ‘Mandates’ Study Ethiopia Report*, HERE-Geneva.
- Lautze, S., Raven-Roberts, A., Erkinch, T., 2009. *Humanitarian Governance in the New Millennium: An Ethiopian Case Study*. ODI.
- MFA (2010), Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Saving lives and alleviating suffering Policy for Sweden’s Humanitarian Assistance 2010–2016*.
- MFA (2011) Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Strategy for humanitarian assistance provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2011–2014* (UF2011/19399/UD/SP).
- MFA (2017) Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Strategy for Sweden’s humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2017–2020*, (UD2017/01299/KH).
- MFA (2020) Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *Strategy for Sweden’s humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2021–2025*.
- OCHA (2019) *Ethiopia Situation Report*, No 23, 30 June 2019.
- OCHA, ReliefWeb, [www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)
- OCHA Services, Financial Tracking Services, [www.fts.unocha.org](http://www.fts.unocha.org)
- Openaid, Etiopien, [www.openaid.se](http://www.openaid.se)
- Prop. 1977/78:135, Regeringens proposition 1977/78:135 om riktlinjer för internationellt utvecklingssamarbete (Government Bill on guidelines for international development cooperation).

- Rashid, S., Alemu, D. and Dorosh P. (2019) *Public Policies for Enhancing Food Security: The Case of Ethiopia*, Study funded by the European Commission.
- Sida (1995), Sida Evaluation report 3/95, *What Relief for the Horn – SIDA-Supported Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Southern Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti*, R. Apthorpe , H. Ketel , M. Salih , A. Wood.
- Sida (2004) *Ethiopia – Sweden, 50 years of Partnership Against Poverty*, Sida and Global Reporting.
- Sida (2015) Humanitarian Crisis Analysis, Ethiopia.
- Sida (2016), Sida Decentralised Evaluation 2016:3, *Evaluation of Sida's Humanitarian Assistance*, T. Mowjee, L. Poole, L. Greenhalgh and S. Gharbi .
- Sida (2018) *Strategiplan för Etiopien*, 2018-11-14.
- Sida (2019), *Fördjupad strategirapport för Sveriges utvecklingsamarbete med Etiopien 2016–2020*, 19/000497.
- Sida (2020) Humanitarian Crisis Analysis, Ethiopia.
- Sida (2021) [www.sida.se \(https://www.sida.se/om-sida/presskontakter/pressmeddelande-och-pressinbjudningar/mer-humanitart-stod-till-konflikt-drabbade-etiopien\)](https://www.sida.se/om-sida/presskontakter/pressmeddelande-och-pressinbjudningar/mer-humanitart-stod-till-konflikt-drabbade-etiopien) published 26 May, 2021.
- SR (2008) Sveriges Radio, *Stort hjälpbehov i Etiopien*, 26 October 2008, Margareta Svensson, [www.sverigesradio.se](http://www.sverigesradio.se)
- SR (2016) Sveriges Radio, *Svår torka i Etiopien – tio miljoner i behov av nödhjälp*, 16 April 2016, Anna Roxwall, [www.sverigesradio.se](http://www.sverigesradio.se)
- Swithern, S. (2018) *Underfunded Appeals: Understanding the Consequences, Improving the System*, EBA Report 2018:19, Expert Group for Aid Studies, Sweden.
- UCDP, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Ethiopia, [www.ucdp.uu.se](http://www.ucdp.uu.se)
- UNHCR (2019) [www.reporting.unhcr.org/ethiopia](http://www.reporting.unhcr.org/ethiopia)
- UNHCR (2021), Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan, Updated for 2021.
- UI, Utrikespolitiska Institutet, Landguiden Etiopien [www.ui.se](http://www.ui.se)
- Weissman, F. (2003), *The Food Emergency in Ethiopia. What the Drought Conceals*, 1 March 2003, [www.msf-crash.org](http://www.msf-crash.org)
- World Bank (2020) [www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia](http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia)

## Interviews

Johan Holmberg, former expert to Ministry of Agriculture in Ethiopia (1972–1976) and Swedish Ambassador in Ethiopia (1999–2002), December 16, 2020.

Birgitta Karlström Dorph, former Swedish Ambassador, Ethiopia (1988–1993), December 15, 2020.

Gustav Lindskog, Programme Manager/Specialist, Unit of Humanitarian Assistance, Sida, December 11, 2020.

Ingrid Löfström-Berg, former Head of Development Cooperation in Ethiopia (2004–2008), December 18, 2020.

Johan Schaar, Member of EBA and Chair of ALNAP Steering Committee, November 27, 2020.