

## **Migration as Hunger-coping Strategy: paying attention to gender and historical change**

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### **Introduction**

When their natural basis for existence and survival is seriously threatened, African communities, community sections or individuals may decide to move away in search of work and food or even in search of new land on which to resettle. Such migratory moves, whether temporary or permanent, are mostly regulated through non-state institutions that entitle the destitute to some kind of help. This article focuses on the arrangements that underwrite the ability (the institutionalized entitlement) to participate in the resources management of other, more fortunate communities during times of severe hardship. Such arrangements relate to both interhousehold customary agreements -- involving kin and/or affines, or patrons and their clients --and intrahousehold relations, involving husbands and wives or women household heads and other adults with whom they share responsibilities. In this article I highlight the dynamic, fast changing nature of the institutionalized coping arrangements that underpin migratory moves in times of stress, and I raise questions about their sustainability in the near future. The dynamic, possibly irreversible transformation of these so-called 'traditional', non-state institutions has profound implications for the debate on institutional aspects of natural resources management.

Only recently have scholars become aware that drought-coping strategies in Africa are deployed sequentially. In **agrarian societies** (and here there is a contrast with pastoralists), the full sequence usually begins with the sale of stock and alterations to the structure of meals, and ends, as the crisis deepens, with the liquidation of productive assets. This liquidation impairs the area's (or the community's or some people's) capacity to recover. To the discovery of

"sequence" must be added the discovery of "patterned variation". At every stage of an unfolding crisis, this variation exists mainly along lines of socio-economic differentiation and gender.

Social scientists working on famine in agrarian societies regularly cite Cutler's (1984) sequence as their guideline for predicting the degree of distress. This sequence is in five stages (here adapted from Fleuret 1986: 228), with each stage indicating a higher stress level.

1. sale of stock
2. wage labour (which may lead to a collapse of the labour market if supply overwhelms demand and depresses wages)
3. borrowing of cash and food
4. sale of valuables, jewellery, firearms
5. (total crop failure, sale of capital assets, or loss of capital followed by) distress migration.

Two of the five stages in this sequence refer to migration. Stage Two, the recourse to local wage labour, may involve the absence of a section of the community (eg male household heads, artisans) for a short period of time. Local wage labour is usually available on farms in nearby regions where the impact of drought has been less severe and is a crucial strategy in attempting to stave off or delay the famine process. At this second stage, which can be thought of as the 'first (predominantly male) phase of migration' (Mesfin 1990: 233, 237), members of the community may also move to more distant labour centres (Colson 1979: 26). This usually involves men, though it has to be admitted that migration studies generally (rural to urban) have neglected to describe and explain women's migration (Ferguson 1991). Once stage Five is reached, the second phase of migration, the entire community - or at least those fit enough to do so - moves away to make the march either to a food distribution centre or to new lands suitable for resettlement. Migration in the second phase means quitting the area (usually after crop failure) and abandoning the productive system; it occurs on a larger scale than during phase one and signals severe distress. Distress migrations are mostly permanent, although they may involve, according to Fleuret, the leaving behind of 'capital assets in the guardianship of less severely affected kinsfolk, [thus] permitting a return to food production if conditions improve in the future' (Fleuret 1986: 228).

In synthesis, there are three migration options: (fairly) **local casual labour**, paid for in cash or kind/food, **employment at distant urban/industrial labour centres** (labour migration in the so-called classical form) and **distress migration**. It is important to distinguish these various types, since fragile economies are known to be able to build up resilience through diversifying resources and strategies. But migration patterns are never simple, and complex linkages may exist between the migrant options, on the one hand, and between the migration package, trade, employment and agricultural production, on the other.

Although the discovery of sequential strategies in coping with severe drought and hunger is of recent origin and of practical predictive value, it would be misleading to conceptualise 'coping' in a strictly schematized manner. Now that social scientists have discovered a model, there is danger that inquiries become model-led and that analysts fail to pay attention to strategies that deviate from the sequence they have come to expect. Essentially, the danger is that social science thinking about migration options during severe drought becomes fossilized, a-historical in character, and that analysts fail to further their understanding on the basis of fresh, innovative inquiries. This is as true of the migration options as it is of the other mechanisms. In this paper I argue that social science researchers, if their work is to have ongoing practical value, must collect detailed evidence of processes of change, including nuances in social response and context. Research on migration as a hunger-coping strategy must not get bogged down in a reductionist, modelled perspective that obscures context and/or history.

### **Cause for Analytic Concern**

The concerns I shall develop regarding the analysis of migration options during drought and famine have recently also been directed at the activities of external relief agencies. Concretely, the argument goes that the formulation of relief policies is ill-adjusted to how people affected by severe food shortages think and behave. How local people view their predicament and what solutions they see is routinely ignored. At the present time, outsiders who intervene

during food shortages only have 'partial understanding'. (My claim in this paper is that much the same can be said about the current state of social science understandings.) De Waal deplors this state of affairs:

'We still understand relatively little about indigenous conceptions of and responses to famine. There is need to go deeper, to listen to more articulations of the problems (such as the conflicting articulations of different groups in society), before returning to the question of how to formulate policies. There is a danger that policies developed from the present partial understanding will be too shackled by current orthodoxies to represent the change that is needed. [Moreover,] all famines are different, and so the methods of relieving them ought to be appropriately different' (De Waal 1989: 1-2).

On the basis of that experience, De Waal calls for dialogue between relief organizations and Africa's rural poor.

'Currently there is no dialogue, no exchange of views, between relief organizations and the people they avowedly serve, the rural poor. Instead, the relief agenda is set entirely by the self-named 'donors' and their colleagues in the rich world. ... If, however, we listen ... to an articulated understanding of the principles that underly [the] actions [of the poor] - a lively debate will follow, and a new agenda will be set' (1989: 1).

The collection of even the most basic information, including data on post-drought (post-famine) migration patterns has an equally poor track record. El Sammani, also referring to Sudan, complains about the lack of ongoing research:

'Even in the late 1980s, no data was available on the total Sudanese death toll in 1984-5. There are no projections of the number of physical deformities or mental retardation appearing later in infants and children as a result of food shortages and malnutrition, nor are there any studies of subsequent migrations and the changes experienced by migrants during and after the drought. The scant information that is available consists mainly of uncoordinated case studies by relief agencies, regional departments, and researchers' (El Sammani 1990: 182; emphasis added).

The present paper highlights the need for a continual updating of our knowledge of migration in the context of drought and hunger.

De Waal's argument that relief operations in northern Darfur are based on 'partial understanding' is true also of other parts of Africa and the world. This is well illustrated in the controversy which has arisen, within the social sciences and amongst administrators, regarding the general nature of drought-induced responses. For some, such responses are positive, normal ways of coping, and drought-stricken communities should have the right to cope with their own means (Turton and Turton 1984; Morris in Torry 1986). This is in line with De Waal's thinking. For others, the responses are clear indicators of stress, and the only humane attitude the outside world can take is to intervene at the earliest possible opportunity, that is, from the moment asset depletion begins (Jodha, in Torry 1986).

Torry's review of emergency relief in India, in which he exposes in particular the views held by two economists, M.D. Morris and N.S. Jodha (Torry 1986), is an apt illustration of the controversy. Morris claims that farmers in India plan for weather fluctuations by 'accumulating assets in good harvests, and drawing down stocks in lean years' (Torry 1986: 2). In his view, the depletion of assets, together with out-migration and sharing between households, is no more and no less than a 'normal', effective strategy for minimising risks when the harvests fail. Morris therefore claims that alarm-raising officials habitually misread these adjustments. Their mistake is to read distress signals into what is really an effective way of coping, so they tend to send in government aid when it is not really needed. In contrast, Jodha contends that when small farmers mortgage land or liquidate productive capital to meet current needs (reaching "stage 5"), they are demonstrating the onset of acute distress and must receive relief well before they reach that stage. In Jodha's view, help is needed from the moment people start migrating in search of work, even local work, which is "stage 2" on Cutler's sequence: the first (male) phase of migration.

Such controversy is easy to understand. For a start, the sequence is an abstraction and real-life situations may not be all that sequential or easy to comprehend by outsiders. Secondly, the distinction between short-term wage labour migration (phase 1) and full-scale distress migration (phase 2) is not necessarily clear-cut. And some people may be left behind even during distress migration. (The idea of 'guardianship', as Fleuret put it, seems rather romantic.) Also, both types/phases may be temporary. Thirdly, there is the serious

question of judgement, that is, the pronouncement of an "official" view based on outsider/bureaucrat opinion on how well, or how badly, people are coping. Field-based officials may be knowledgeable, but is equally (if not more) likely that they fail to read the local scene. The latter happens particularly when they are not themselves locals (see Tobert 1985 for a dramatic illustration). Finally, and undoubtedly the most difficult issue, analysts (and planners and relief workers) must consider whether 'coping' should be understood in terms of preserving individual lives or preserving a way of life. On this fundamental ethical question, opinion is bound to vary.

Some anthropologists, though, have taken a firm stand. In their work with the Mursi in Ethiopia, Pat and David Turton (1984) report how one group of Mursi responded to the 1970s drought via a strategy of 'spontaneous resettlement' ("stage 5"). This particular group had not been reached by organized relief efforts, which was a kind of failure; it was, however, a failure which was blessed.

'Systematically distributed relief would certainly have saved many lives, especially, one must assume, those of young people. And yet, [this relief] might also, if distributed in "emergency feeding stations", at which people were obliged to congregate for daily handouts, have turned large numbers of Mursi into permanent refugees in their own country. It might, in other words, have saved lives at the cost of destroying a way of life - a complex mode of adaptation for which there exists no viable short-term alternative' (Turton And Turton 1984: 179).

Importantly, the Mursi

'came through this experience with their social and economic institutions shaken but intact and with an undiminished sense of their own cultural identity' (1984: 179).

It may need emphasizing that the Turtons are referring to feeding stations as opposed to full-scale programmes of relief and rehabilitation; they are not opposed to intervention as such. For instance, they certainly would have welcomed programmes in formal education and literacy training (1984: 189). The central issue they expose is that outsider interventions may prohibit the deployment of a particular coping response - in this case, a migratory move 'outside [Mursi] traditional territory'. The move turned out to be beneficial to the community in the sense that it was economically feasible and

did not turn the people afflicted into 'dependants' set to lose the will to survive by their own means.

What type of intervention then might be thought of as politically, economically and culturally appropriate? The common short answer is: 'early' intervention. Those in favour of early intervention mostly take the view that famine-prone areas can reduce their vulnerability by preventing poor people from migrating on a permanent or even a short-term basis. They see a need for early intervention, based on the idea that it is advantageous to 'keep people in their homes, with their productive assets (however meagre), with their families, with their independence and under as little nutritional stress as possible' (McAlpin 1987: 399). This view is backed by the lessons learned from Indian experiences with managing the social impact of drought. Effective policies, in states like Maharashtra, have centred on the idea that rapid recovery of agricultural production is possible provided essential works are carried out during the drought, via schemes that offer 'employment for all who want[ed] it', and provided that the cash earned through such work can be spent on 'fair price' foods. These two qualifications - 'work for all who want it' and 'fair price' foods throughout the drought - are crucial incentives in preventing migration, but they are not so easily 'transported' to Africa. (I shall return to this later on.)

My primary concern in this article is to examine the quality of the information which exists on migration-based coping strategies in Africa and to look at the conclusions drawn. This will involve taking a look at how the authors of recent 'state of the art' papers (Campbell 1990a, 1990b; Fleuret 1986; Shipton 1990) have digested the information on migratory responses and labour markets. Such 'state of the art' papers are important because they are sources of information likely to attract the attention of planners and relief workers. In reviewing these reviews I shall highlight some special problems with the quality of the information available. One major problem, never fully taken up by the ethnographers or the reviewers, is that migration strategies are not 'givens' but rather take shape as circumstances evolve. Put differently, migration options may 'come and go', they have a history, and what is an option during one famine (or serious drought) is not necessarily an option during the next famine (or when drought intensifies).

Our understanding of the efficacy of the migration options during drought or famine will remain at a superficial level if we do not develop a feel for process thinking. Individual researchers may have developed a sense of history in writings on their own field research, but, as I will show, the focus on change is blurred or lacking in the review papers. A further issue which needs highlighting is the gender dimension embedded in drought-induced migrations, especially during the first phase of migration, and the consequences this may have for food security. These consequences must be taken into account before anyone can judge the efficacy of a particular coping strategy.

### **Being Serious About Migration? Some African Examples**

References to migration as a coping mechanism often end up as general statements about 'what can be done' when a crisis deepens. By "general", I mean that they refer neither to gender nor to the changing nature of the migration options.

For example, in her review article 'Indigenous Responses to Drought in sub-Saharan Africa' (1986), Anne Fleuret points out that various types of migration can be resorted to during drought: re-settlement, off-farm employment (which generates remittances) and local wage labour. All are mentioned as strategies which Kikuyu and Kamba farmers have used successfully in recent decades. According to Fleuret, in the mid-1970s in Kenya:

'Kikuyu and Kamba farmers recently settled in traditionally pastoral areas of south-central Kenya ... responded to drought-induced shortages ... by using cash generated by off-farm employment, remittances and local wage labor to produce food' (1986: 227).

Likewise, in 1984

'Taita households responded to ... crop failure with a number of market-oriented strategies, including migratory wage labor (53% of households), local cash-compensated casual labor (42% of households), and sales of livestock, poultry and their products, firewood and charcoal, illegal beer, honey and handicrafts. During the drought 70% of household income was obtained from off- and non-farm sour-



ces, as opposed to less than half of these sources in the non-drought year of 1981 (A. Fleuret 1985)' (1986: 227).

In all these cases, migration of one type or another has been used successfully. While I am not in a position to be critical of Fleuret's overall verdict (and rather have reason to think it correct), it needs pointing out that migrations are here presented as 'matters of fact,' that is, as issues about which no further questions need to be asked. My concern here is that 'migration' is treated as a building block, a given, in the same way that households were once (and often still are) treated as analytic units.

A similar criticism can be raised about the way Fleuret treats the role of cash transactions. While it is difficult to argue against her overall conclusion that 'market-based responses are now the most important strategies' for coping with short-term drought in sub-Saharan Africa' (1986: 224), further questions must be asked. For example, who exactly is taking part in the market-based responses and who exactly benefits? Do women and men participate equally in the quest for cash income and, if not, can it be said that both are coping equally well? Further, how guaranteed are the labour- and cash-based strategies: are they sustainable? And how is cash stored for use at future times? Unfortunately, such questions are left out of Fleuret's review article; neither the migrants' gender nor the historical specificity of a particular option receives much attention. Although 'coping' cannot really be 'measured', something could be gained from looking at the strategies in terms of gender participation and by reflecting on the longer-term 'reliability' of market-based modern responses.

A similarly generalizing comment on the positive contribution of migration can be found in a recent article on food problems in Rwanda. Consumption studies, write Graf, Voss and Nyabyenda,

'suggest that poor farmers consume all their bean seed before the next planting and have to buy seeds from richer neighbors at high prices (CIAT, Annual Report, 1988; MINAGRI 1986). The result of these transactions is a capital flow from poorer farmers to the richer ones which the poorer try to balance by selling their labour to wealthier neighbors or migrating temporarily to areas with high demand for agricultural labor' (Graff, Voss and Nyabyenda, 1991).

In this statement, reference is made to social differentiation and wealth, yet again, migration itself appears as a 'matter of fact', a timeless phenomenon (it is what people do and will go on doing) and gender is not considered either. Ignorance about the gender component in migration studies (and in social science thinking about migration) remains widespread, since women's migration, both rural to rural and rural to urban, is still a poorly understood social issue (cf Ferguson's critique of my book Migrants No More).

The above references to migration are not wrong, but they imply that 'first phase' migrations can be resorted to at all times and that everyone benefits. Migration options, I shall now document, must not be taken for granted nor should they be presented as gender-neutral. Rural wage labour migration during stressed times is an option influenced by gender and its benefits are not necessarily evenly spread. We must acknowledge, too, that the option of a 'spontaneous resettlement' is an option increasingly closed to prospective migrants. I shall highlight both these issues, starting with the gendered nature of migration during famine.

### **Migration in Famine: the gendered nature of coping strategies**

The role of migration during drought and famine is a topic fraught with uncertainty. The following statement by Shipton, another example of a positive but crude reference to migration, highlights the problem:

'Labor migrations of able-bodied men out of farming areas have sometimes been cited as contributing causes of food shortages, particularly in swidden farming systems where male labor is needed for clearing [303, 257; cf 270, 272]. But migrations are also the main solutions to food shortages. Having long understudied the topic of migrations, anthropologists have lately "gone to town on it", showing its importance for the hungry and needy [34, 84, 136, 206, 263; 356, 361, 373, 375, 379]' (Shipton 1990: 370).

Such a broad statement may reflect research findings, but it does not fully enlighten. It does not reveal how the 'hungry and needy' benefit, nor does it indicate whether and how widely the benefits are

shared. Importantly, the gender-specific reference to male labour (ie long-term labour migration) is followed by a reference to 'the hungry and needy' - but neither their gender nor their age are declared. Although it is generally accepted that the choice of famine coping strategies varies 'according to socio-economic status and gender' (Campbell 1990a: 234), the references to migration which we find in 'state of the art' review papers generally omit to bring out that the gendered nature (or male control) of the migration options may have negative consequences for the nutritional status of those who stay behind. Source "379" in Shipton's review, which is The Story of an African Famine (Vaughan 1987), does support the claim that migration can be a solution, yet Vaughan is a little more precise when discussing 'the importance for the hungry and needy' and shows the solution to be a solution for men and only sometimes for their households. She recalls the situation in Malawi in 1949.

'At home the women waited for their [migrant] husbands to return, which they usually did at night so their neighbours could not see how much food they had with them. But, both written sources and oral testimonies indicate that often the men did not return at all, but stayed away in their home areas until the famine was over, or took extra wives in the places to which they had gone to find food. 1949 is thus remembered as the year of 'many divorces', and this aspect of the famine features prominently in women's songs' (Vaughan 1987: 34).

The pervasiveness of the gendered nature of famine coping strategies is also conveyed in recent work on post-famine developments in Highland Bwisha, Zaire (Pottier and Fairhead 1991), where a striking gender-based shift in taking up opportunities for casual labour occurs when "normal" times turn into "crisis" times. In "normal" hunger times, besides pegging down to a hunger menu, poor people who suffer hunger can work for others (kuc'incuru). This is women's work: poorer women work for richer local farmers. Under conditions of normal/seasonal food shortages, women take full responsibility to provide food for their households. Such work is easy to get because of the ecological diversity across Bwisha, yet women's labour is rewarded with poor-quality foodstuffs. (If work is hard to come by, however, or when it seems more profitable, women may trade food across ecological zones aiming to make a profit by taking advantage of the price differentials between markets.) Significantly, however, when normal hunger turns into prolonged hunger and wealthier farmers stop employing labourers in

order to economise on their own food reserves, it is men who migrate in search of food to areas further afield.

In 1984, at the first sign of abnormal weather conditions in Highland Bwisha, men from very needy households (at VERY HIGH altitude) started to leave the area. They found work in the LOW and MEDIUM zones, some four hours' walking away, where they were paid in what are normally considered the inedible parts of colocasia. This hardly edible food mostly reached their homes, because children or women who traded (a minority) would take the colocasia up to the highlands. As the crisis worsened and local casual work became unavailable or too poorly paid, poor men took up short-term migration in order (as they explained) to earn food and take the pressure off the food supplies at home. Were they doing their own families a service or were they running away from problems, as Malawi women alleged their men did during the 1947 famine? Male respondents were vague on the subject, but, since we were only four years removed from the famine at the time of the fieldwork, women said they could recall the names of a few men who had not returned.

In the Bwisha Highlands in 1984-5, only men had recourse to short-term migration. Moreover, casual local labour and short-term migration were not the only male prerogatives. Men controlled all the famine coping measures, such as the use of beer-bananas and sorghum as famine foods, the sale of animals and objects of value, and the ability to leave home to work for food, seeds and other basics. During the famine Bwisha men had a monopoly over all the means of food entitlement (Pottier and Fairhead 1991: 458).

That Bwisha women needed to rely on men, usually their husbands, to secure food entitlement during prolonged hunger put women (and hence their young children) at a severe economic disadvantage. In 1984 this disadvantage was most pronounced in the case of widows and wives of poor polygynous households. Although the variation of individual experiences must not be ignored, the outlook of women was generally poor. (Only a minority of better-off women were able to retain some financial and therefore nutritional independence early on in the famine, through trading food in the locality. Such women often belonged to relatively prosperous households.) Women's enforced reliance on men, however, can be made worse by

the conditions under which the latter must work. With reference to Ethiopia, Mesfin argues that

'although they are strongly motivated to help their relatives [back home], most of the men lucky enough to get work in other areas are paid only subsistence wages and are unable to do so' (Mesfin 1990: 237).

The gendered nature of short-term, 'first phase' migration opportunities during famine must be considered before analysts can say with confidence that migration is a coping mechanism from which the hungry community stands to benefit.

### **Migration Patterns Are Changing**

Of interest too, in debating "Migration and Development", is the fact that migration options change over time.

For the 1984-5 Bwisha famine, Fairhead and I noted that long-distance migration was not an option many had considered, since, quite simply, in 1984 'there was nowhere to go'. This contrasted with the 1972 drought, during which many people from Highland Bwisha (Jomba) had migrated to new lands where they then settled permanently.

'In 1972/73 there had been permanent migration to lower altitudes after severe shortages had developed following destructive hailstorms at higher altitudes. Many of those who migrated became quite wealthy because they had access to free land on which they pioneered small-scale coffee production. In 1984, however, this option was virtually closed, as there was no longer any land available to settle on for free. Land had to be paid for in hard cash ... which was beyond the reach of those desperate enough to contemplate migration. The few Bajomba who did migrate permanently in 1984 secured the welcome and help of relatives. But this option was open to few. In modern-day Bwisha relatives cannot be relied upon for long-term hospitality and support' (Pottier and Fairhead 1991: 455; emphasis added).

This particular reference to the changing character of spontaneous resettlement (or the longer-term migration option) is of interest

since it suggests that 'market forces' (in this case: cash) are not always a blessing, but can in fact constitute a barrier to coping. (This point will be developed later.)

For the Interlacustrine region as a whole, it is time to acknowledge that migration as 'spontaneous resettlement' (cf Turton and Turton 1984) is a coping strategy which increasingly belongs to the past. It was still tried in 1989 in southern Rwanda, when the severe drought that year drove many people into Tanzania, where they had friends and relatives prepared to welcome them, or so the story goes. The Tanzanian authorities, however, took a different view, made life unpleasant for these ecological refugees and forced their return. Not surprisingly perhaps, the re-entry into the Rwandan communities of origin has not been smooth, since the returning households were far from welcomed back (Nkundabashaka 1990).

Interestingly, too, distress migrations that took place decades ago and resulted in resettlement with "official" approval by the host community, may come to be reconsidered in the light of new events. The story of the Rwandan Tutsi refugees in 1959, although prompted by political events (not hunger), is a case in point. Those who fled to Uganda made use of the close, marriage-based ties that existed between their royal family and those of the Ankole and Toro; ties through which the Batutsi had become 'cousins'. 'In the traditional African context,' writes Byarugaba, 'the Batutsi and the Banyankole (Bahima) royal families were so close that each was ready to help the other in case of need' (Byarugaba 1989: 150). He points out, however, that this 'spontaneous resettlement' must be seen in the light of inter-ethnic relations within Ankole:

'In Ankole there are two ethnic groups: The Bahima and the Bairu. The Bahima were the traditional rulers while the Bairu were the serfs, like the Bahutu in Rwanda. Traditionally, though now disappearing, there have been conflicts between the ruling Bahima and the ruled Bairu. So, whereas the Bahima were willing to allow the Batutsi to come in, the Bairu saw them as invaders who had to be fought and thrown out. The Batutsi were coming in to join hands with the Bahima to take away the little land belonging to Bairu' (Byarugaba 1989: 150).

Some twenty-five years later, in 1983, after "The Alien Registration and Control Bill" was passed under Obote II, the position of the Rwandans became precarious, for the Bill declared all naturalized

persons aliens and non-citizens. At this point, the Rwandans, who had become quite prosperous (partly because of UNHCR protection), became the target of intense harassment. Being cattle herders, they also stood accused of causing extensive environmental damage. The problem went away briefly when many Rwandans joined Museveni's 'bush campaign', yet they are today once again labelled as 'a drain on Ugandan resources' and 'privileged foreigners on Ugandan soil' (Byarugaba 1989: 150-154). These accusations and pressures are mounting and may have been a contributing factor behind the Rwandan Patriotic Front's attempt to invade Rwanda in 1990.

If full-scale permanent migration leading to resettlement must today be ruled out from the package of coping mechanisms, a claim for which there is increasing evidence (cf the current population movements in Kenya), and for which population growth and land scarcity are the main causes, then it becomes necessary also to ask questions about the scope and reliability of that other migration option which the package includes. So, what about the future of short-term, short-distance migration? Or casual work on local farms? And what about the future prospect of using migrant remittances as a coping strategy?

The latter topic has only just surfaced as an issue, due to the economic and political changes in South Africa and the ensuing return home of thousands of international migrants, but it could soon be of enormous critical importance to the entire region of Southern Africa. If these return migrations 'en masse' are confirmed, as is likely to happen, the implications for countries like Lesotho and Zimbabwe - where smallholder agriculture is subsidized and indeed kept alive through remittances - could be devastating. Even within Zimbabwe, where migrant workers are crucial in keeping farming alive in the drought-prone Communal Areas, it would seem that many urban workers are also currently also being laid off. Detailed accounts of these changes are not yet available (at the time of writing), yet it is not too early to stress that the topic of remittances will be intensely discussed during the coming months and years.

Short-term, short-distance migration to farms where work is available, which usually follows cycles of seasonal deprivation, is also changing, since the scope for such opportunities is declining. On

this topic there is virtually no longitudinal information available. There are references in the literature to casual work as a coping strategy (eg Holy 1980) but no serious research has been carried out on how wealthier farmers and the poor regard the future prospect of opportunities for casual labour. Such information is needed and must address the gender question. My concern here is based on the mentioned research in Highland Bwisha, which brought to light that wealthier farmers now appear reluctant to take on the 'usual' number of casual labourers during seasonal hunger. 1984, it seems, taught them a lesson in vulnerability, so they are today no longer prepared to take on any risks they regard as unnecessary.

This 'no risk' attitude is a new phenomenon in Bwisha and may have far-reaching consequences, because post-drought periods are reputed to be good times for those seeking local casual labour. One well known example comes from Holy's work among the Sudanese Berti in western Darfur, where after the 1970s drought the wealthier households were found to be very willing to recruit. In 1980, Holy wrote:

'Quite a number of wealthy household heads have completely stopped weeding their fields themselves emulating the behaviour of rich merchants. The use of hired labour has increased not only in agriculture but also in animal husbandry. ... the wealthy household heads nowadays systematically employ their poor neighbours as herdsmen' (Holy 1980: 71)

Holy's observation, referring to 1977/78, has led Fleuret to reflect:

'wealthy [Berti] households subsidize the poor through such employment, in the same way that Kamba and Taita labor migrants provide support in the form of wages to casual workers in their home communities' (Fleuret 1986: 227).

The view from Jomba (North Kivu) in 1988 was different: the wealthier farmers declared not being too keen to subsidize any longer. Consequently, Bwisha highlanders now regard both local casual labour (or short-term migration) and spontaneous resettlement (more permanent migration) to be coping mechanisms which should not be too much relied upon in a future crisis. Local/regional work may still be available, but permanent migration belongs definitely to the past. The implied irreversibility is a concept Bwisha highlanders are familiar with, since other institutio-



nal mechanisms for managing declining resources (eg ubutira) have also turned out to be mere temporary measures (Pottier and Fairhead 1991: 445). Despite Shipton's claim (1990) that migration can be both a cause of and a solution to a food crisis, and despite the excellent documentation of spontaneous resettlement in the case of the Mursi people in Ethiopia (Turton and Turton 1984), more recent evidence suggests that the migration options (both as first and second phases) are increasingly difficult to realize, at least in Africa's Interlacustrine region. (I am urging researchers in other parts of Africa to consider whether a similar contraction of the migrant options is occurring there too.)

If it is indeed the case that wealthier farmers will withhold opportunities for local casual labour in a future crisis, then we may expect that distress migration will set in very rapidly. This is a serious development. Short-term migration and local wage opportunities may favour men more than women, a reality to which policy makers must become sensitive, yet, these options do act as buffers that delay the intensification of a drought-induced crisis; they act as brakes on the ultimate (and potentially very damaging) strategy, which is that of a full-scale exodus. In future famines, such exodus will be towards food distribution camps rather than new areas where resettlement is feasible.

On what scale this reduction in migrant opportunities is taking place is difficult to say, but it could be significant, especially in the case of Southern Africa, where the dependence on remittances from long-distance migration is high. (This is an issue for urgent research.) The reluctance of 'wealthier' Bwisha landholders to take risks by offering too much employment may be a region-specific phenomenon, restricted to Bwisha; it may also be more widespread, in which case, full-scale distress migrations will be occurring in the future with greater speed than they have done in the past, which means less time to prepare for relief.

El Sammani (1990), writing about Sudan, provides dramatic evidence which backs the view that wealthier sections in rural areas are permanently reducing their assistance (for want of a better word) to the more vulnerable sections. In Sudan, long-standing coping structures and practices are coming to an end. El Sammani's important evidence deserves to be quoted in full:

'Among nomadic pastoralists it was an established part of the socio-political structure for wealthy herd owners to lend animals to relatives and poor families, who lived on their milk while husbanding the livestock and offspring, which remained the property of the lender. This system enabled a livestock owner to amass followers, so building prestige and enhancing social and political status while guarding against extreme social stratification and destitution. Although the system had begun to decline over the last 30 years because of the rising economic value of livestock, forms of it continued, especially among nomadic camel herders: the poorer member of society contributed their labour by tending animals while the rich herd owners reciprocated by providing a large portion of their food. During the 1980-85 droughts this structure broke down as priorities changed. For many wealthy herd owners, survival and saving livestock to make full use of available resources became a priority, and maintaining former social and political status a lesser concern (although this was obviously a major factor in their ability to adjust to the crisis). Many herd owners broke away from these networks of supporters and affiliates, severing long-term relationships and altering social duties and expectations' (1990: 189-90; emphasis added).

El Sammani provides further evidence of dramatic - possibly irreversible - change by pointing out that seasonal migration everywhere is being curtailed, often in the name of peace or environmental protection, and sometimes involving the police as arbitrator.

'The 1984-5 drought set many tribal groups in competition for scarce resources: the long-standing relations that had developed between tribes using the same pasturage were frequently severed as groups began for the first time to think in terms of ownership of their territories and of exclusive rights of access to the grazing and water resources within them. The decision to exclude all outsiders from these areas had far-reaching consequences for these formerly mobile populations: in marginal environments constraints on seasonal migration usually increase population pressure on confined areas, which leads to rapid and irreversible wind erosion or desertification and permanent degradation of resources. Group self-determination, economic viability and patterns of personal and inter-group contact are also severely damaged, and tribal authority is often replaced by secular power. Events in Darfur, where police assumed control over migratory movements, provide an example of this. Measures that include high taxes on grazing, water and security provision were applied in order to regulate the mobility of Kababish nomads from northern Kordofan in Umm Kedadada District (eastern Darfur), an area to which they had migrated seasonally since the turn of the

century. The eastern Darfur groups who had instigated these restrictions on the Kababish received similar treatment from Baggara groups in southern Darfur when seeking seasonal pasturage there' (1990: 197-8; emphasis added).

Such evidence strongly suggests that drought-coping strategies are indeed being radically changed, destroyed even, and that they must not therefore be written about as if they were a-historical institutions, strategies to-be-taken-for-granted in the 1990s.

### **Implications For Intervention and Policy**

Having started off by looking at the controversy surrounding the nature of drought responses (are they indicators of distress or ways of coping?), having then moved on to suggest that migrant options in Africa may be weakening as effective strategies, I shall now turn to the implications for policy and intervention, beginning with the position of those practitioners who believe that intervention must come early and aim to prevent migration.

Development workers interested in ending famine are increasingly clear that "famine prevention" equals "preventing migration", ie preventing distress migration (Stage Five on Cutler's sequence). D'Souza articulates this view with reference to Mozambique:

'Repeated crop failures have clearly made people vulnerable but centuries of drought-occurrences have moulded local coping-responses. When these responses become too overburdened, people migrate in search of jobs and food. It is this response which tends to make people (migrants as well as those who remain behind) highly vulnerable in the short, as well as in the long, term. Therefore famine prevention, and rehabilitation programmes, must, as a priority, pre-vent migration and this requires sufficiently early and, perhaps only limited, action to support existing coping-responses. Food aid may be needed to tide some families over to the next harvest but the greater majority would benefit more from material inputs to sustain irrigation of crops or other coping-responses (D'Souza 1988: 37; emphases in text).

Effective intervention, however, requires a prior and detailed understanding of what causes vulnerability. The task researchers face is

'first of all, to understand how communities become vulnerable, then to deduce ... what kind of action at what stage (before, during and after famine) donor agencies can take to minimize suffering and death' (D'Souza 1988: 4).

What kind of action is needed?

McAlpin (1987), who has reviewed state-led interventions in India, shares the view that preventing famine requires the prevention of distress migration, which in turn requires early intervention. It is advantageous, she writes, to 'keep people in their homes, with their productive assets (however meagre), with their families, with their independence and under as little nutritional stress as possible' (1987: 399).

It is instructive to look at McAlpin's views in some detail, since they are relevant not only to the migration debate in Africa (ie migration as movement) but also to the role of cash as a coping strategy. According to McAlpin, there are six lessons Africa could learn from the Indian experience: six principles to be worked on, adapted and implemented. McAlpin focuses on the state of Maharashtra, which includes Bombay, where famine occurred in 1970-73, but her account also includes the experiences of many other dry and drought-prone Indian states. Generally, over the past one hundred years the governments of these states have worked out a by and large successful series of policies for managing the social impact of droughts. These policies have evolved in such a way that they now 'prevent significant elevations of mortality, even during severe and prolonged droughts' (1987: 396). In addition, ways have been found

'to prevent major disruptions in the ongoing agricultural processes ... and insure the rapid rebuilding of working capital in agriculture. For instance, in 1973-74, the first post-drought year in Maharashtra, the production of foodgrains rebounded to 106 % of the average production of the 2 years immediate preceding the drought' (1987: 396).

The crux of McAlpin's argument is that rapid recovery of agricultural production was possible thanks to 'work done during the drought,' for which local people had been paid and which had

'improved irrigation facilities and access to markets' (1987: 396). The work done included 'bundling fields, constructing percolation tanks, well construction, clearing existing tanks of silt, terracing land and building roads'; all realized 'with the labor of people who were being given employment as part of the relief effort' (1987: 396). Obviously this happened on a vast scale since, since 'employment for all who wanted it was the major relief tool used by the Government of Maharashtra' (1987: 396). Moreover, and equally crucial, the money thus earned by the poor was spent on food bought from 'fair price' shops.

The emphasis here is on 'employment for work' as opposed to 'food for work'. The government of Maharashtra rejected the latter strategy on the grounds that 'payment of money (rather than food wages) permits the private sector to absorb some of the newly effective demand' (1987: 402). To make cash available rather than food helps 'strengthening normal channels for marketing grain in rural areas. [The availability of cash] can assist in mitigating future shortfalls of production by encouraging the normal market process to move grain from where it is cheap to where it is costly' (1987: 402). Of course, vigilance is needed to assure fair prices, which is why, by the end of the 1970-73 drought, 'a fair price shop existed near every site where relief employment was ongoing' (1987: 402).

McAlpin's principle that employment (not food) should be used to provide relief is pertinent to the African scene. Employment, writes McAlpin,

'can be created in several ways. If village communities are strong and well-governed, they can be given loans with which to carry out labor-intensive projects that they clearly see to be of value to the village. If individual landowners usually employ significant amounts of labor, the landowners might be given loans to make capital improvements to their farms - like levelling and bunding fields, digging, deepening, or repairing wells. ... A third alternative is the direct provision of employment by government on public works projects - building of major roads, irrigation works and the like' (1987: 402)

'Aid for landowners' may at first appear to be a tricky strategy, since relief workers and agencies may disapprove of helping 'the rich'. However, if they were better informed (eg about the speed with which fortunes in rural Africa may change) they might consider this an ideological price worth paying, as long as it is indeed the case

that the strategy keeps the poorest people close to their homes and families. If the 'shrinking' of local/regional opportunities for casual work becomes common in Africa, then 'aid for landowners' to enable them to recruit casual labour may be a positive contribution to migration-prevention. On the other hand, developers may also be aware of Pierre Spitz's argument that the poorest members of society are denied the right to feed themselves because of structural violence (Spitz 1978: 868); a view hardly reconcilable with the suggested type of aid.

It is not my intention here to resolve the issue. Instead I wish to take a closer look at the notion that migration must be prevented. This means asking questions: on what scale does migration occur? and how close to their 'homes and families' should mobile hungry people remain?

At this point, it is useful to return to De Waal's study of northern Darfur. De Waal rejects 'the policy of discouraging migration' (ie "stage 2" movement), because people do need 'cash, fodder and water', which in the case of Darfur is available from nearby areas at certain times of year. His view on preventing migration is subtle but firm.

'Preventing migration during the harvest and dry season would ... have undesirable side effects, because richer farmers in south Darfur depend for a labour supply on seasonal migrants from the north' (De Waal 1989: 215).

Rather than discourage migration through relief assistance, De Waal suggests that

'food distributions would be more effective [if they could help] farmers return to their villages before the start of the rains. At this point, food relief would be supporting people's strategies, not restraining them. This would [also] serve to reduce the health crises that occur in squatter camps after the first rains, when low-lying areas are flooded, wells become polluted, and malaria becomes epidemic' (1989: 214).

Simply to 'prevent migration' would be counter-productive. Instead, intervention must aim to prevent health crises in the large villages and towns where migrants are likely to want to go during the harvest and the dry season. Crucially, however, through well-timed

food distributions migrants must be encouraged 'to return to their villages before the start of the rains' (above). This particular view indicates that De Waal's position is not that far removed from McAlpin's, as the difference seems to lie in the latitude that can be allowed (how much migration? over what distance? for how long?). To allow and assist with some degree of mobility could be beneficial.

But an additional comment on markets and cash is needed in light of the discussion earlier on. Since the package of migrant options and their long-term future is likely to differ from region to region, and given the likelihood that these options may be less available in the future, I suggest that equal attention be paid to finding ways in which farmers, rich and poor, can be assisted to ensure that the cash they make is stored in a retrievable way, so it becomes an effective instrument in times of prolonged hardship. Specifically, relief organizations should address not only the need to support cash flows but also the need to ensure that the money earned, eg during the dry season, can be used effectively rather than being spent on a little food at exorbitant prices. Appropriate policy initiatives are required here, particularly in terms of coordination among organizations and with governments, which is an enormous and politically sensitive task. That assistance with cash - to stimulate banking in familiar 'traditional' modes (Seddon 1993) and banking away from herds - is as important as preventing health crises has been dramatically illustrated in the case of the Zaghawa people in 1984 (details below). Presently, the Zaghawa market/cash strategy is causing severe difficulties and there is no reason for being optimistic.

Optimism, however, is evident in Fleuret's very positive evaluation of the 'cash' option as a coping device. After referring to:

- 'the [Isiolo] Boran studied by Hogg', who pursue 'a strategy of economic diversification, including sales and barter of stock, increasing participation in wage labor and agriculture, trade, ...';

- 'the Zaghawa of Darfur, [who] pursue a strategy of six months of cultivation on rainfed plots and six months of dispersal to practise craft activities ... at distant market centres';

- and contemporary Botswana where 'casual labour for cash or kind wages, and migratory wage labor, have replaced many of the traditional institutions',

Fleuret concludes that

'the integration of small-holder farming and pastoral households in the contemporary world market economy [has become] an essential component of their ability to withstand food shortages precipitated by drought' (1986: 228).

While Fleuret is right in stressing the importance of the world market economy, her approach to 'the cash option' is rather broad and overoptimistic, because it does not address how reliable such a 'market' strategy is. Nor does it inform about intra-household interests in cash and budgetary control.

In the case of Zaghawa people, it seems true that the activities of the migrant potters (female) and blacksmiths (male) were indeed mostly sufficient to raise the supplementary grain and other foods which the entire community needed during the rest of the year (Tobert 1985: 214). On the other hand, it is most remarkable that after 15 years of such diversified existence (1969-84) - years during which 'excess cash was spent on enlarging the herds' (1985: 214), one finds that the accumulated wealth had not been sufficient to see this community through the 1984/85 drought. Notwithstanding the reputed mobility of Zaghawa to visit distant markets and their success in earning excess cash, by October 1984 'several [Zaghawa] potters were begging for money against the sale of future pots' (1985: 218); already this 'modern' coping strategy was breaking down. The implication is that fifteen years of successful integration in the 'contemporary world market economy' had not been enough to see Zaghawa through the famine without begging. Their involvement in the cash economy had seen them through some difficult years, yet their inability to face 1984/85 in spite of regular surplus cash and investments must surely indicate that more is needed than mere involvement in a free market economy. Surely, assistance of the kind offered in Maharashtra (eg through fair price shops) or made available to promote appropriate, traditional-modified banking facilities (cf Landell-Mills 1992: 13), will be needed to give



the market-based coping strategies of Africa's rural poor any long-term chance of success.

El Sammani (1990) confirms that the once-successful 'first phase' migration option pursued by Zaghawa groups proved ineffective in 1984-85. His evidence even suggests that the migration option itself was becoming a thing of the past in 1984-85, since the Zaghawa (and other groups) were being tied to permanent camps. Moreover, the demise of the migration strategy had already set in in 1968-73.

'In both episodes, a high proportion of migrants from northern Darfur, Kordofan and Eastern regions resettled permanently in irrigation schemes in central Sudan, riverain areas of the White Nile and the Nile (bordering north Kordofan) and at major towns. At New Halfa irrigation scheme, for example, sizeable groups of Zaghawa, Fur, Birgid, Tama, Masalit and other tribes driven from Darfur by the 1968-73 drought, were still living there in migrant labour camps in the late 1980s. In 1980 they formed about 23% of the scheme's population, estimated at about 217,000. The drought of 1984-5 consolidated the same trend of settlement at other schemes. In many Rahad scheme villages, for example, migrants living in labour camps outnumbered the scheme's original population. Displaced groups of pastoralists appeared to have resettled permanently in other rural settlements in the late 1980s' (1990: 186-87; emphasis added).

'Settlement of a similar magnitude also occurred in the permanent 'camps' of environmental refugees that grew up around many towns ... [For example,] In El Fasher town (capital of Darfur region), a sizeable part of the 1987 population consisted of Zaghawa migrants and others from local tribes. "According to the 1983 census El Fasher town had 84,533 inhabitants that year. The town administrators believe, however, that it was an underestimation of the real number. They estimate the population today (1987) between 150,000 and 200,000" (Ibrahim 1987: 10). Much of this increase can be attributed directly to the 1968-73 and 1984-5 droughts; as a result of the long-term presence of these migrants the town's residential area grew considerably and new neighbourhoods appeared' (El Sammani 1990: 187).

In addition to the demise of 'first phase' local migration, there is no guarantee that migratory wage labour to industrial/urban centres will be of much help to farmers in southern Africa in the 1990s. Even should it continue, wage labour migration is not necessarily going to solve all problems. (We are back here at the question whether migration causes or resolves hardship.) It is likely that

some problems are solved and others are created, thus perpetuating the overall problem of food insecurity. This reflection has been made for Lesotho, where the migratory wage labour option is practised on a significant scale. Here, as D'Souza has argued

The prevalence of cash in the economy over a long period has allowed people to survive but has also increased vulnerability because of the inherent problems of relying on a resource outside one's own political boundaries. The tradition of migrant labour may also have encouraged only a limited investment by the government in development schemes such as irrigation projects, cash-cropping and other income generating-activities (D'Souza 1988: 18).

There is no cause for optimism regarding the current efficacy of cash-based solutions to food insecurity in Africa. Without safety mechanisms to ensure a) that household members do not become cash-dependent, b) that fair and stable food prices prevail, and c) that cash can be effectively stored, there is little point in applauding the cash economy. I agree with Fleuret that 'access to cash through employment or through exchange ... permits rural households to survive times of crisis and achieve food security even in the face of production shortfalls' (Fleuret 1986: 228), but such a broad statement needs qualifying. Without elaborate safety mechanisms that guarantee some form of effective long-term accumulation, there is little hope of a permanent solution to food insecurity.

Moreover, the 'cash for work' argument has a strong gender dimension which must not be overlooked. It is not helpful to take an undifferentiated view of 'the household'. And even where 'cash for work' schemes have specifically addressed the gender issue, it is clear that no easy solutions exist. The uphill struggle is clearly conveyed in the Oxfam America experience reported by Michael Scott (1987). Adding to the argument that solving food insecurity requires the prevention of full-scale outmigration, Scott argues that 'relief must be accompanied by recovery assistance, such as seeds, tools and draft animals, as part of an overall development plan' (1987: 364). Such a plan, however, can only work when informed by knowledge about prevailing local conditions. When Oxfam America took the unusual step (then unusual in donor circles) of making available loans for the purchase of draft animals in northern Shoa province, a particularly hard-hit area, the scheme was targeted at both male-headed and female-headed households. Oxfam were re-

sponding to the common complaint that aid often has a 'gender bias'. When it came to sorting out the applications, however, Oxfam were dismayed to discover that 'no female-headed households [had come] forward to request draft animals, despite the fact that they formally qualified for the loan programme' (1987: 365). Oxfam had devised the scheme not knowing that social forces would prevent women from applying for the loans. (Scott does not say why women did not come forward. Perhaps their reticence was linked to notions of ownership, ie the convention that it is men who own draft animals.) This particular Oxfam America experience shows that the cash option must be seen in context. It also highlights how difficult it is to overcome constraints related to gender - which must be overcome if long-term solutions to food insecurity in Africa are to be found.

### **Conclusions**

The scope for short-term migration during drought may be less of an option in the future than it has been in the past. If this is confirmed, and if it is also true that opportunities for formal labour migration become restricted (especially in Southern Africa), then the danger of distress migrations occurring on a vast scale in the future must be heeded. In attempting to cope with these changing circumstances, governments and relief organizations will need to join forces and work out strategies for running effective 'cash for work' (CFW) programmes. Planning, however, will require detailed research and 'good information' before decisions can be made about which CFW interventions are most appropriate (D'Souza 1988; also Maxwell 1990 on targeting in the Sudan).

But 'good information' is difficult to obtain because opportunities and constraints in rural Africa are continually shifting. Moreover, some critical variables are interlinked: as the Highland Bwisha study has revealed, while it is possible to obtain some general idea of 'wealth' and 'vulnerability' before a crisis develops, the exact timing of the drought (whether or not it comes at the beginning of the planting season), the altitude at which households farm and whether or not hail has visited their fields... are all factors that help determine a household's 'wealth' or 'vulnerability' (Pottier and Fairhead 1991). 'Good information' about wealth can be collected and made available before a drought develops, but 'precise information' about vulnerability (ie information useful for targeting) can

only be collected after the drought has taken a firm grip. To make matters worse, the separation between 'normal' and 'abnormal' conditions is increasingly unclear (*Disasters*, Editorial, 1987) and field administrators are not always well informed (cf Tobert 1985; but see McAlpin 1987: 400 for a different view). Still, these difficulties should not be an excuse for claiming that local-level conditions should not be monitored, rather the opposite is true.

I conclude that future research on migration under conditions of food insecurity, which must be stepped up, should focus on how people relate to their coping mechanisms, eg on perceptions of how reliable people believe their coping responses to be. Migration options, the role of cash, and the implications of both for gender and food security within households, should all be concerns at the top of research agendas for Africa. In collecting this basic information, in starting the dialogue between 'the poor' and those in charge of relief and development (governments, agencies), researchers must also develop a feel for historical change. With reference to migration, researchers must assess the various options in terms of their future efficacy and approach that efficacy with due reference to gender. Taking an a-historical approach to migration would be dangerous, because this would imply that all coping strategies are there for the taking, that they can be used today and tomorrow. The bundle of responses must not be overvalued, nor can 'the sequence' of famine processes be taken for granted or their speed predicted.

Because research efforts have been scant and patchy, an a-historical, functionalist (systems) view of coping strategies has emerged. A recent account of the systems view suggests for Africa that village-level

'coping strategies are based in the social, economic, political and environmental systems of rural communities. Within the social system, they include sharing through gifts and loans with relatives, clan associates or between villages. The social relations which facilitate such exchanges are formalized through institutions, such as marriage and clan and age-set associations, which have a variety of functions among which are reciprocal arrangements for assistance in times of difficulty. [Likewise,] coping strategies within the economic system can be found at the level of the household, the extended family and the market place. Many systems of crop production and animal husbandry incorporate risk-reducing mechanisms. Farmers may plant crops in different ecological zones, grow a variety of crops and

engage in off-farm activities which increase the diversity of the system' (Campbell 1990a: 233; emphasis added).

Systems thinking is of value in that it graphically conveys the idea that people's responses to drought 'make sense', that they are not the product of panicky, irrational behaviour. Social scientists should not tire of making that point to aid workers and policy makers. However, systems thinking also misinforms by failing to pay due attention to permanent change. El Sammani's update of the plight of Zaghawa migrants and the Highland Bwisha case material, here looked at only briefly, reveal the ephemeral nature and historical development of coping arrangements in real life; changes which a systems approach cannot capture. (Systems approaches, moreover, assume that there are 'normal' and 'abnormal' conditions.) Several of the key strategies Campbell mentions are based on institutions (marriage, extended family and gift giving) that have all been drastically transformed in recent decades (see eg the discussion on ubutira exchanges in Pottier and Fairhead 1991). Campbell does suggest that traditional 'social institutions are being replaced' (1990b: 149), but this sounds too much as if we were dealing with building blocks. As an alternative, I suggest that key social institutions are in the process of radical transformation rather than being replaced. Transformations are difficult to pin down in neat schemata. Historical change is not a question of add-ons or substitutions: cash does not replace so-called 'traditional' arrangements, the two blend together.

Campbell's summary shows that a strongly functionalist approach to understanding coping strategies prevails.

'the structure of response to food deficits at the village level in Africa is complex. While differences in the details of specific strategies exist from society to society, studies do suggest that in areas where food shortage is recurrent, a range of coping strategies exist which is preserved in the rural production system. These are chosen in a sequence from more to less desirable and adoption varies by gender, economic class and social status' (1990a: 234).

Relief workers and policy makers may feel that this neat overview 'sums it up', that awareness of variation, detail and complexity is all that matters. In my view, however, this awareness is just the beginning. Researchers must get beyond the idea that the 'range of coping strategies ... is preserved' and that the sequence of coping can start

all over again whenever food shortages develop. As the discussion has shown with regard to the migration options, the assumption of certain continuity is not tenable. Researchers must develop particular sensitivity to the monitoring of historical changes. This includes acknowledging that options may need to be renegotiated, that some strategies may be feasible one year and not the next, that others may be phased out permanently. Although my argument has focused on migration options, it is appropriate to broaden the scope to include all local-level coping strategies.

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# APPENDIX

