

Band Aid staffers evaluate anti-starvation projects in Africa

By LARRY THORSON
Associated Press Writer

LONDON -- When rock started the money rolling to save the starving in Africa, Bob Geldof's foundations began receiving a flood of proposals for projects touted as long-term remedies for famine.

Build bridges and dams, vaccinate huge populations, drill wells, replenish stocks of cattle killed by drought, buy hospital equipment, provide seed and beekeeping expertise, support orphanages, train health workers, help develop politically controversial resettlement areas in Ethiopia -- these and many more ideas were among more than 700 projects eventually considered.

Most were rejected. "We all felt it would be much easier than it has been," said Penny Jenden, director of Band Aid Trust, the central foundation that also handles Live Aid money from the United States and from charities in Canada and Australia.

"Here was an Africa starving, a need for development. We thought there were projects just sitting there waiting for money, we had the money, we would find the good projects and fund them. It hasn't worked out that way."

Rock aid for Africa's starving millions began in 1984 when Geldof, leader of "The Boomtown Rats," got some of his colleagues together to record a song about Ethiopian famine victims, "Do They Know It's Christmas?"

The Irish pop singer called his project BandAid, and the record was a best-seller.

"Live Aid," a trans-Atlantic rock concert in July 1985 that originated from London and Philadelphia, the record and some other projects raised \$110 million. Geldof promised to be non-political, humanitarian and non-bureaucratic in distributing the money.

He and his advisers spent \$43 million on immediate relief and decided to spend the remaining 60 percent of the \$110 million on long-term development. But with only five volunteers, sifting through more than 700 project proposals clearly was an impossible job.

The five volunteers were supplemented with a committee of 10 British experts who have credentials in relief work, anthropology, public health, epidemiology, agriculture and development.

Mrs. Jenden, an anthropologist, said proposals were also screened by staff members at the Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Despite Geldof's desire to be non-bureaucratic, a four-person field staff was formed to check proposals recommended for acceptance in Niger, Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Sudan. She described the posts as "theoretical," because not all are always filled.

Ten people work in Band Aid's London office. "I don't personally agree we should be so lean administratively," Mrs. Jenden said, "but we are constrained by promises to the public."

Administrative expenses are paid not from money donated by rock fans, she emphasized in an interview with The Associated Press, but from corporate sponsorships and other donations.

Final decisions on projects are made by boards of trustees of Band Aid Trust, which handles money raised in Britain and most of the rest of the world, and the Live Aid Foundation, which dispenses money raised in the United States.

Geldof and rock promoter Harvey Goldsmith are on both boards, and Mrs. Jenden handles the flow of information about projects to and from the boards, the field staff and the agencies that spend the money.

Mrs. Jenden said the majority of the 700 proposals were rejected, some of them speedily. "If an agency was new to the

country ... and was using Band Aid as a label to get in, that's not justified," she said.

Many of the rejected proposals failed to reflect Band Aid priorities that stress grassroots participation and ideas. The trustees favored preventive health care and rural health training over buying expensive equipment for city hospitals, she said.

"Sometimes, it wasn't felt an agency had the capacity to effect what it wants, if a project was poorly designed, technical competence was not there or there was too high a level of expatriate project staff," she said.

Sometimes, the proposal simply asked for more than Band Aid could spend.

The Relief Society of Tigre, for instance, asked for \$30 million for its work in one province of Ethiopia. It got \$300,000.

A serious dilemma came with the Marxist Ethiopian government's resettlement programs, which some other agencies had sidestepped because people were being moved forcibly.

Nearly 600,000 people were moved, often at gunpoint on a few hours' notice, from the impoverished highlands to less crowded lands in the south. Most of those relocated were from Tigre province.

Most Western sources dismiss as grossly exaggerated the estimate of 100,000 deaths made in 1985 by the French group Doctors Without Borders.

The French agency was expelled, but Ethiopians did suspend the resettlement program.

Band Aid eventually agreed to finance two major resettlement projects, both run by the Irish

agency Concern, with a total of \$2.38 million.

"There was a lot of bad press in the States, as though Band Aid had blindly stumbled into this, which was certainly not the case," Mrs. Jenden said.

Band Aid "totally disapproves of forced resettlement," she said.

Relations with the Ethiopians can be delicate, because Band Aid is financing projects in both Eritrea and Tigre, where rebels are in control.

In May 1986, Ethiopian soldiers confiscated a shipment of donated medical supplies aboard the Band Aid Star intended for Eritrea, where secessionist rebels have been fighting the government for 23 years. The ship was bound for Port Sudan in neighboring Sudan, but put into

Assab first to offload some seed potatoes.

Geldof responded by withholding \$900,000 earmarked for Ethiopia.

Ethiopia eventually released the ship, minus the rebels' supplies, but agreed that the cost of replacing the goods should be deducted from the \$900,000.

"It wasn't exactly easy, but it was morally what had to be done," Mrs. Jenden said. "The government didn't like it very much."

In general, she said, Band Aid avoids explicit discussions with Ethiopian authorities about such aid projects.

"They know what we're doing, but they don't know the extent of the assistance we are providing," she said. "We have always maintained we are a humanitarian

organization, and we will fund where we feel people need help.

"If people are starving, that's what people gave us the money for, and we will try to help their starvation the best way we can."

In that instance, Band Aid parted company with some established relief organizations.

"They try to keep entirely out of politics. Our feeling is that you have to have a political understanding in order to avoid making political mistakes," said Tony Vaux, an emergencies officer with the Oxfam charity.

"But they have a lot of good sense in what they're doing. They're driven along by Bob Geldof's humanitarian approach: If there is a starving person, you feed him or her without asking too many questions," Vaux said. Please see page A16



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