

The role of the individual administrator in famine relief: Three case studies

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A series of hypotheses on the role of the individual administrator in famine relief are proposed and three are examined with respect to case studies of famines in India (1896 and 1906—1907), Uganda (1908) and Lombok (1940). While the evidence is not conclusive, the focus upon the role of the individual administrator offers additional insights into the complexities of official response to famines.

Keywords: Famine; Famine relief; Administrator's motivations; India; Uganda; Lombok.

INTRODUCTION

While many studies of famine have been concerned with their causes and results, few have attempted to assess in any systematic way the role of the individual administrators in the management of the crisis. The aim of this paper therefore is to suggest a framework within which the role of the individual administrator might be assessed and to provide some evidence on three components of that framework. We first outline the proposed framework and then examine three case studies which we believe illustrate separate propositions.

It is possible to hypothesize that the individual administrator's actions may influence the outcome of famine relief measures and that those actions may be the result of several possible biases in the administrator's attitudes towards the famine itself. While there can be little doubt about the validity of the first proposition, it may be useful to rehearse some of the possible biases implicit in the second. These biases can be set out as a series of hypotheses ranging from the null hypothesis that there are no observable biases, through to a series of hypotheses which

suggest that there will be evidence in the actions of the administrator of definable biases which can be seen to have a measurable effect (either positive or negative) upon the management of famine relief. Our first approximation of these hypothetical biases is set out in Table 1 and our concern is to suggest possible ways in which the individual role of the administrator may influence the nature of the famine relief. From the null hypothesis (No. 1) there seems to be a range of possible biases, from an individual ideological stance, a national or cultural affiliation, personal career aspirations or experience as an administrator of famine relief, to personality bias or administrative training. As part of our more general research into the management of famine relief we have uncovered some evidence which seems to support three of these hypotheses.

Table 1. Hypotheses on the role of the individual administrator in famine relief

1. The individual administrator plays no separate role in the food crisis management other than to carry out his duties as delimited by his official position in an administrative hierarchy. This assumes an efficient execution of all duties uninfluenced by personal preference, interest or favour, and not influenced by any interests other than those of a conscientious public servant.
2. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects a particular ideological stance which is separate and different from that implicit in the institution of which he is a part.
3. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his national or cultural affiliation which is separate from that of the persons of the area administered.
4. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his personal career status/aspirations and which makes interpretation of his actions understandable most clearly in terms of the implications for his career prospects and opportunities.
5. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her personal experience as an administrator of famine relief. This bias may be the result of lack of experience or may be the result of prior experience and reflect a learning process.
6. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her personality which may or may not be compatible with working associates.
7. The individual administrator exhibits in the execution of his duties a bias which reflects his or her prior administrative training (separate from actual on-the-job experience, see 5).

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