

Bland Aid? Does 'Band Aid' help the people of Darfur in Sudan?

The new version of the Band Aid single 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' is a hot favourite to be Christmas number one in the UK this year. Sold on CD for £3.99 and also available as a download, the new version of the 1984 charity song features a host of top pop and rock stars such as Coldplay, Robbie Williams, Will Young and Jamelia. All profits will go towards helping the starving people of the Darfur region in Sudan.

Retailers expect the CD to sell about 500,000 copies in its first week. Woolworths and Virgin Megastores will give their proceeds to the Band Aid Trust charity, while the Government Chancellor, Gordon Brown, has decided not to charge tax on the new release. The first Band Aid single raised £8m of aid for Ethiopia in 1984. Songwriters and organisers Bob Geldof and Midge Ure are hopeful that its success will now be repeated, with proceeds going to Sudan this time. Beyond Sudan, it is hoped that the single will also draw British people's attention to the plight of other African nations and to the work of the recently-formed Commission For Africa. *The Sun* (15 November 2004), which canvassed heavily to get pop stars involved with the new CD, is hopeful that 'it will put pressure on governments around the world to wake up to the crisis in Africa'.

Band Aid 2004 - who sings what

Chris Martin (Coldplay) - *It's Christmas time, there's no need to be afraid. At Christmas time, we let in light and we banish shade.*

Dido - *And in our world of plenty we can spread a smile of joy. Throw your arms around the world at Christmas time.*

Robbie Williams - *But say a prayer, Pray for the other ones. At Christmas time it's hard, but when you're having fun.*

Sugababes - *There's a world outside your window, and it's a world of dread and fear.*

Fran Healy (Travis) - *Where the only water flowing,*

Fran Healy and the Sugababes - *Is the bitter sting of tears,*

Fran Healy and Justin Hawkins (The Darkness) - *And the Christmas bells that ring there are the clanging chimes of doom,*

Bono (U2) - *Well tonight thank God it's them instead of you.*

Will Young and Jamelia - *And there won't be snow in Africa this Christmas time.*

Ms Dynamite and Beverly Knight - *Where nothing ever grows, no rain nor rivers flow.*

Group - *Do they know it's Christmas time at all?*

What's happening in Sudan?

Sudan desperately needs help. Around 1.2 million people in the Darfur region of western Sudan have been driven from their homes as a result of armed conflict. Hundreds of thousands have been left seeking refuge in makeshift camps and are now beset by famine and disease. This *forced migration* is the result of a 17-month-old conflict that comes from long-standing tensions between nomadic ethnic Arab tribes and their ethnic African neighbours over water and farmland.

Conditions among those displaced in Darfur (on the fringe of the Sahara desert) are very poor. Between 36,000 and 100,000 are already dead as a direct result of the violence or of epidemic disease (*The Independent*, 09 August 2004). The United Nations estimates that 49 percent of displaced Sudanese lack food, 88 percent lack shelter, 67 percent lack water and 93 percent lack adequate sanitation. With only a handful of toilets (one for every 285 people), people are forced to defecate elsewhere, usually at the edges of the camp. The torrential rain that has been falling since the rainy season began in September has been washing excrement back into the camp, leading to dangerously unsanitary conditions. Disease and diarrhoea are serious problems and cholera can break out in

Darfur at any time. Good hygiene is vital to the survival and well-being of children but is entirely lacking under such conditions.

This tragedy is the product of a deep-rooted conflict in the region that encompasses both religious and ethnic differences. It also relates to the sharing of political power and oil money. Ethnic Arab Sudanese have recently begun to dominate Sudan's national government, based in Khartoum. They are sympathetic to the Arab cattle-herding people of the Darfur region. The other group living in Darfur – the settled Black African farmers of the river valleys – felt left out of recent political and financial reforms. As a result, they formed the 'Sudan Liberation Army' and the 'Justice and Equality Movement' and began attacks on government targets, claiming that the regime was oppressing Black Africans and supporting Arabs. In response, Darfur's Arab militia groups known as Janjaweed began their attacks on Black villages, supported by the government (*The Guardian*, 10 June 2004). Huge displacements have resulted, with hardly a village left intact.

Efforts to reduce the hazard impact are now underway, with Band Aid hoping to provide much-needed additional assistance. Oxfam is one of 11 major charities running an emergency appeal for aid to Sudan, co-ordinated by the umbrella organisation Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). So far, £12m has been raised from the public and appeal organisers predict that it will bring in at least £17m. The DEC is continuing to appeal for more cash as aid agencies say they need up to £27m to meet the immediate needs of people in the area (*The Guardian*, 04 August 2004). UNICEF is currently attempting to provide clean water for around half a million people through the construction of new water facilities. In addition, UNICEF has recently delivered one million bars of soap and 25 million chlorine tablets. Despite these achievements, more resources are desperately needed to step up life-saving initiatives across the region. 350,000 could die before the end of the year, according to UN estimates made in September.

However, the roots of the conflict need to be resolved before people can return to their villages without risk of reprisal. The United Nations Security Council has already passed two resolutions asking the Sudanese government to act to stem ethnic violence in the western Darfur region or face sanctions. The three African countries on the council - Algeria, Angola and Benin – all backed these US-sponsored resolutions. Failure to resolve the situation has led to the Security Council holding a special session in Nairobi, Kenya this November, which may result with a UN promise to provide aid to Sudan's government and southern rebels if they fulfil their promise to finalise a peace deal by the end of the year. It also called for an immediate end to violence in the western Sudanese region of Darfur but aid agencies have said the resolution was weak and urged further action.

[See *The Guardian* (15 November 2004) for a good summary of the roots of the conflict. This report also gives details of the problems that southern Sudan (the Shilluk region) has been facing since 1983 and which have been widely over-looked since the Darfur crisis began.]

What was the original Band Aid all about?

Twenty years ago, on October 23rd 1984, BBC news presenter Michael Buerk made a broadcast from the famine in Ethiopia that showed images the likes of which many British people had never seen before. Desperately thin and poorly children were shown to be literally starving to death. Two pop stars – Bob Geldof (from the Boomtown Rats) and Midge Ure (Ultravox) were so moved by the report that they wrote the song 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' and recruited the biggest stars of the day to record it. It was the best-selling UK single of the decade, raising £8m. A concert at Wembley Arena the following year helped raise the total amount of money raised to more than £60m, with American stars also recording their own anthem and staging a parallel concert.

However, problems in Ethiopia have not gone away. A combination of political unrest, rising population numbers and unreliable rainfall continues to threaten the well-being of its people. Total population is now 67 million, having doubled since 1984. Spring rains have failed for the past five years, meaning that food resources are low, although the country continues to be a major coffee exporter. 14 million are currently dependent on food aid, compared with only 8 million in 1984. 98% live on less than \$2 per day (about £1).

What is the long-term plan for Africa – more aid or better trade?

The donation and receipt of aid is not a simple matter. Despite the continuing challenges that population growth and low rainfall brings them, many Ethiopians feel they have moved on since 1984, when the impact of drought was made far worse by civil war and by the action and inaction of the Mengistu dictatorship. When drought struck again in 2003 - more severely than it did in 1984 - far fewer actually died because the country's road infrastructure had been improved. Food aid is now much easier to distribute than in the past. Also, since 1991, the country had had a democratically elected government, and food aid is no longer being used as a political weapon (*BBC News*).

Given that this progress has been made, some Ethiopians are disappointed that – thanks to the anniversary of Band Aid - they are being remembered by the western media as a dependent country, unable to help itself. There are concerns that this could undermine efforts to foster non-dependent sustainable development using tourism. The business community have been promoting Ethiopia as a modern tourist destination: it has superb ancient archaeology and is possibly the original home of human race! As a result, they feel that it is not helpful to remind the world about the famine of 1984 by reviving Band Aid. Quoted by *BBC News*, Tony Hickey, who runs tour company Village Ethiopia, says that 'I haven't met anybody in the business sector in Ethiopia - whether in tourism or any other type of business - that welcomes the 20th anniversary. What Ethiopia needs now is foreign investment and a flourishing private sector'.

[see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3958047.stm> for more from this perspective]

Ethiopia also has a major coffee export industry but receives very little real income from it. This is because world coffee prices are now at a thirty-year low, with a price that is just 25% of the 1960 level. Ethiopia has lost an estimated \$900m revenue over the last five years as a result of plummeting prices. Critics of the way that world trade is regulated claim that it would be far better to reform trade laws than to keep giving aid to countries like Ethiopia. Band Aid founder Bob Geldof understands this, and the main part of his work within the **Commission for Africa**, actually involves trying to address these deeper issues. His goal is to achieve non-dependent sustainable development for all African nations.

The Commission for Africa was launched in February 2004. There are 17 members of the Commission. All are working in an independent capacity and most of the Commissioners are from Africa. The timing of the Commission's work is intended to seize 2005 as an opportunity to make a difference for Africa. 2005 will see the United Kingdom chairing the European Union, with Africa high on the agenda for debate. In its consultation document *Action for a Strong and Prosperous Africa* (Nov 2004), the Commission recognises the need for trade reforms that address the 'problems of subsidies, tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The Commission will make proposals for a rapid and timetabled reduction of subsidies that contribute to over production in rich countries of commodities where Africa has a comparative advantage. And it will propose mechanisms identifying and rapidly eliminating vexatious non-tariff barriers, including those constituting aggressive and bureaucratic application of rules of origin.' If all of this can actually be achieved, then there may not be any need for another Band Aid single in 2024.