

**UK Aid Policy and Practice 1974-90: An Analysis of
the Poverty-Focus, Gender-Consciousness and
Environmental Sensitivity of British Official Aid**

by
Christopher Charles Erswell

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**Thesis submitted in accordance with the
requirements of the University of Liverpool for
the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by
Christopher Charles Erswell MA**

February 1994

Abstract

UK Aid Policy and Practice 1974-90: An Analysis of the Poverty-Focus, Gender- Consciousness and Environmental Sensitivity of British Official Aid

Christopher Charles Erswell

This thesis provides a detailed analysis of UK Aid policy over the period 1974-90. Its focus is primarily upon the extent to which official aid was concerned with poverty alleviation. This theme permitted a comparison to be made between the records of the Labour administration of 1974-79 and the Conservative administration of 1979-90. A quantitative comparison is made of the two aid programmes.

The philosophical, moral and ideological aspects of the British aid programme are explored. Two themes in particular are studied in depth: aid and gender and aid and the environment.

The influence of lobby groups is considered, including those representing political, commercial, gender, environmental and "human development" interests. The implications of conditionality are also considered. Assessment is made of the proportion of ODA projects which can be said to be relevant to women using unpublished ODA documents. An analysis is also made of internal, unpublished ODA "flagship" projects documents, aimed at the poorest, women and the environment. The results of this investigation indicate that official aid during the period under scrutiny was characterised by a continuity dictated by the exigencies of the export lobby, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and the Foreign Office. The commercial and political influences were already evident under Labour. A quantitative increase in aid was negotiated in return for the introduction of the Aid for Trade Provision. This significantly

increased the commercial influence on aid, resulting in a shift away from the poorest countries and the sectors most critical to the poorest. It also prepared the ground for the greater emphasis on, and expansion of, commercial uses of aid under the Thatcher Government. Similarly, the political continuity between Labour and Conservative periods of office was typified by the support for the Somoza regime by the Labour Government and the axing of aid to the Sandinista regime by the Conservatives.

A sectoral analysis of British aid reveals a heavy bias towards cash crops and a lack of emphasis on sub-sectors critical to basic needs and human development. Very few projects can be said to be relevant to women in a conscious, pre-planned way. The very small number of poverty-focussed, gender-conscious or environmentally-sensitive projects are unlikely to ever account for more than a tiny fraction of the aid budget. It is argued that the conditionality attached to an increasing amount of aid is a mechanism for imposing a model of economic development in the interest of the donor, making it advisable for recipients to avoid using aid until such time as conditionality can be eliminated. Conditional aid should be abandoned by Northern agencies, but, given that this is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future, it is necessary to support attempts to reform aid in order to eliminate as many strings as possible in the medium term.

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Preface

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Professor Lord Bauer, formerly of the London School of Economics

Andrew Bennett, Chief Natural Resources Adviser, ODA

Rosalind Eyben, Senior Social Development Adviser, ODA

The late Judith Hart MP, former Minister of Overseas Development

Adrian Hewitt, ODI

Patricia Holden, Social Development Adviser, ODA

Mary Hubley (ODI), Consultant to ODA forestry projects in Nepal

Barrie Ireton, Principal Finance Officer and Head of Aid Policy, ODA

Jim Lestor MP

Joan Lestor MP, former Labour Spokesperson on Overseas Development

Maria Louise of the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO)

Professor Paul Mosley, IDPM, University of Manchester

Steve Percy, freelance writer on British aid projects in India

Timothy Raison MP, former Minister of Overseas Development

Mark Robinson, ODI Research Fellow and author of a work on British aid projects in Bangladesh;

Gillian Shepherd (ODI), consultant to ODA forestry projects in India.

I would also like to give my thanks to: Ann Clwyd MP, Labour Spokesperson on Overseas Development (and her researcher, Caroline Ashley) and Jim Lestor MP, for putting Parliamentary Written Questions to the House of Commons on my behalf; to the staff of the ODA Statistics Department at East Kilbride for courteously and patiently dealing with my numerous requests for information; to the staff of the House of Commons Public Information Office for supplying me with computer printouts of Commons debates and

publications; to staff of IDPM Library, University of Manchester, for their help in providing computer printouts of materials related to my subject; to Oxfam for allowing me to reproduce two charts from John Clark's book, *For Richer, For Poorer*; to Adam Raphael, editor of *The Observer*, and also the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, for supplying me with photocopies of articles on links between aid and arms; to Jessica Woodroffe (Christian Aid) for permission to use tables from her booklet, *British Overseas Aid 1975-90* (1992); to ODA Statistics Department for permission to use statistics from *British Aid Statistics*; to Sage Publications for permission to reproduce Tables 1 to 10 from the article, "The Aid and Trade Provision: Origin, Dimensions and Possible Reforms", in *Development Policy Review*, Vol 4, pp 291-313; to the Overseas Development Institute for permission to reproduce a table from *UK Aid to African Agriculture* (APGOOD Report). My thanks also to Oxford University Press for permission to reproduce table 3.14 from *Human Development Report 1992*.

I would like to acknowledge the extensive use in this thesis of statistical information taken either from the ODA's *British Aid Statistics* or from the ODA Statistics Department, which was subsequently presented in tabulated form in other writers' publications. Such tables are taken from:

Clark, G and Toye, J. "The Aid and Trade Provision: Origins and Dimensions and Possible Reforms". *Development Policy Review*, Vol 4, 1986, pp291-313.

Woodroffe, J. *British Overseas 1975-90*. Christian Aid, 1992.

All-Party Parliamentary Group on Overseas Development (APGOOD). *Report on UK Aid to African Agriculture*.

In the case of the latter two publications, figures have been converted into constant prices and new tables created from them in some cases. The authors of these publications, obviously, are not responsible for any possible errors during this conversion of prices.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr Walter Little of the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of Liverpool; Peter

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List of Abbreviations

APGOOD	All Party Group on Overseas Aid (House of Commons)
ATP	Aid for Trade Provision
BTAM	British Tropical Agricultural Mission
CAAT	Campaign Against the Arms Trade
CDC	Commonwealth Development Corporation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EDF	European Development Fund
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank)
IDA	International Development Association
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IGBA	Independent Group on British Aid
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Project
NAWO	National Alliance of Women's Organisations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
oda	official development assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ODM	Ministry of Overseas Development
OECD	Organisation for European Development and Cooperation
oof	other official flows
PAMSCAD	Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment

RNR	Renewable Natural Resources
SCS	Social and Community Services
sda	social development adviser (ODA)
TCTP	Technical Cooperation Training Programme
TRAP	Tropical Rainforests Action Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Organisation
WDM	World Development Movement
WID	Women In Development
WoW	War on Want
WRI	World Resources Institute

Chapter 1

Introduction: Objectives, Methodology and Literature

Objectives and Methodology

The initial intention behind this thesis was to enquire into and assess the extent to which British official aid policy and practice was poverty-focussed and whether it actually helped or harmed the poorest communities of the Third World during the period 1974-90. This was the primary objective of the project. Chapter 2 explores various frameworks to help in this inquiry. Chapter 3 examines aid policy under the 1974-79 Labour Government, and Chapter 4 aid policy under the 1979-90 Conservative Government. The existence of statistics covering the period also enable, as a very much more subordinate and secondary priority, a quantitative comparison of the records of the Labour and Conservative governments on the issue of poverty focus. This is undertaken in Chapter 5. However, this was not the primary objective of the thesis. Furthermore, in the course of researching material for the chapters on Labour and Conservative policy, it became evident that it was impossible to answer the question "How poverty focussed was British aid?" without examining in some considerable detail the question of gender and aid, and also the inter-relationship between aid, poverty and the environment. Women are a massively disadvantaged majority of the Third World populations. It was necessary to assess how the ODA approached aid and gender, since women were frequently poorer than men within their communities, and since a whole number of special measures were necessary to overcome obstacles in the way of assisting them. For example, in many Third World communities, it is forbidden for women to speak to men outside the family. The importance of having female field staff implementing ODA projects became apparent in the light of this. It was necessary to assess the ODA's consciousness of gender problems before any definitive answer could be given on the question of poverty focus.

Similarly, an assessment of the sensitivity of the ODA to environmental issues emerged as a key issue in determining the

question of poverty focus. The implications of aid projects in relation to the environment are crucial since, for example, poor rural communities live and work in the local agricultural environment. Changes as a result of “development” can have disastrous results on their often precarious economic situation.

The two chapters (6 and 7) on gender and the environment were really an extension of the chapter on the Thatcher Government’s aid policies.

Moreover, it became apparent that it is not really possible to compare the Labour and Conservative governments’ records on these two questions. As Judith Hart acknowledged during an interview for this thesis, gender was not on the agenda of the ODA at all during the 1970s. While the environment may have had slightly more of a profile, it was nowhere near as critical a question to the ODA as it is today. This is largely owing to the fact that both of these questions have only really become important in society as a whole during the course of the 1980s, when lobby groups became more effective and media attention was focussed on them to a significant extent. As is pointed out below, the perception of environmental issues changed from the 1970s to the 1980s. Under Labour the ODA prioritised urban environmental issues: housing, water supply etc. In the 1980s, as global warming and forest destruction became the focus of attention, the ODA, under the Conservatives, was obliged to shift its focus also to these new global environmental issues. While even the initial comparison on general poverty questions was very much a subordinate objective of the thesis, it was impossible to compare the records of the Labour and Conservative governments on gender and environment. It would not be fair because a change of consciousness in society as a whole took pace during the period 1974-90. The governments were not responsible for this change. Rather, their records mirrored the current level (or focus) of consciousness in society generally. In any case, statistics were not available on these two issues over the whole period, making a quantitative comparison impossible.

The primary objective of the research, therefore, was to illuminate the extent to which the policies of both governments addressed themselves adequately to the needs of the very poorest communities

of the Third World and the extent to which their practice lived up to their rhetoric. The comparison was necessarily limited to the poverty focus of the aid programme and was not a major consideration in this exercise, but a secondary, subordinate question. Since the issues of gender and environment only became a part of the rhetoric of the ODA in the 1980s, a comparison of Labour and Conservative records on these questions was neither fair (in the light of the absence of public awareness of these issues in society at large in the 1970s) or feasible (in the absence of statistics).

Methodology

The methodology employed in this project consisted of a variety of approaches to gathering information. These included:

1) Interviews with key actors

- a) Two former Ministers of Overseas Development, Timothy Raison and Judith Hart. The latter interview took place several months before she died and represents one of her last statements on her period of office.
- b) Party spokespeople/specialists on overseas development: Joan Lestor and Jim Lestor. These gave some insight into the dynamics of Parliamentary activity on overseas development from the point of view of MPs interested in this issue.
- c) ODA civil servants. These provided useful information on how the civil service bureaucracy saw things and how they implemented policy. The interviews with social development advisers and natural resources advisers were particularly valuable in shedding light on developments in relation to poverty focus, gender and the environment.
- d) Consultants to the ODA: a number of interviews with consultants to ODA projects based at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), which has a close working relationship with the ODA, gave some useful insights into problems with specific ODA projects in the forestry sub-sector.

- e) Lobbyists: these included a representative of the Women's Lobby, a freelance writer on environmental issues and British aid, as well as academics active in lobby groups.

2) **Analysis of ODA statistics over the period 1974-90.**

In addition to published statistics, access was gained to internal printouts of sub-sectors within project aid, programme aid and technical cooperation. This enabled an analysis of the priority given to those sub-sectors most critical to the poorest to be undertaken. A set of annual tables of British aid figures (taken from ODA statistics) published by Christian Aid also proved useful in this task. As far as possible, the policy adopted by Christian Aid of converting figures into constant prices was extended to other tables for the sake of consistency. An analysis of the two sectors which most impinge on the poorest – agriculture and social and community services – was undertaken, with the aid of the internal ODA printout, *Project Aid by Sector: Allocation and Expenditure*.

3) **Analysis of Project Documents and Reports.**

A number of “flagship” project documents were made available by the ODA in the key areas of poverty focus, gender and the environment. This enabled an estimation of the progress made by the ODA in these areas. An internal report on gender issues, however, revealed that gender did not figure in project aid generally. Correspondence between the ODA and an NGO also revealed that social development advisers are unable to monitor adequately the vast majority of aid projects. ODA Evaluation Reports were also a useful source of information.

4) **Analysis of Government Publications and Parliamentary Papers on Aid and Development.**

The ODA policy documents on Aid also provided an obviously crucial source of information. These included the policy documents on the environment and women, as well as White Papers on general development. *Hansard* was useful for following the relatively infrequent Parliamentary debates on aid and development. Reports of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the National Audit Office also shed considerable light on the efforts of Parliament to monitor government policy and practice

on aid questions. The House of Commons Information service was particularly helpful in providing computer printouts of Parliamentary and Government documents.

5) **Analysis of Reports of Lobby Groups.**

A wide variety of development, gender and environmental lobby publications proved to be very useful in terms of contemporary issues. Their criticisms of the ODA and official aid generally were also important in terms of developing an understanding of the shortcomings of official aid. NGOs are always a potentially damaging source of criticism of the failings of official government aid because they are in the same business and have a long experience of the problems and pitfalls of aid-giving. They also have money to produce literature which could be a thorn in the side of any government aid agency. However, as is pointed out later in this thesis, they are charities, and the government can threaten to take away their charitable status if they step over certain limits. The government also gives them money through the Joint Funding Scheme. As we point out also later on, a “carrot and stick” policy ensures the NGO publications do not go too far in “biting the hand that feeds them”. On the other hand, the NGOs were instrumental in setting up groupings like the World Development Movement (WDM) and the Independent Group of British Aid (IGBA) on a non-charitable basis. They are therefore not constrained by charitable status and are free to criticise the ODA. Some of the most useful material has come from these two organisations. However, these organisations operate on a shoestring budget (unlike the bigger NGOs), and their voice is not very loud.

Another lobby group, the National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (NAWO), which also has an input from NGO (women) personnel, has attempted to shift the ODA on gender issues through a dialogue with ODA staff. Some of its material is very interesting. However, the ways in which the ODA can neutralise or bring about the muting of criticism from such lobby groups is evident even with these latter mentioned non-charitable groups. NAWO, for example, has been funded by the ODA for a project to help NGOs to develop gender policies.

6) Academic Institutions

The IGBA is made up partly of academics whose departments are often partly dependent for research on ODA funding (NGO officers in the group have also accepted jobs at the World Bank). This must have some effect on what is said. Another academic institution, the ODI, which provides consultants for the implementation and evaluation of ODA projects, is also partially dependent on ODA funding for research. Teresa Hayter, who is well known as a critic of official aid, was sacked from the ODI for being too critical of the World Bank. The World Bank demanded that a report she had written should be scrapped because it was highly critical of its practice. Hayter opposed this, but the ODI acquiesced to the World Bank. Nevertheless, a good deal of valuable information has been published by academic institutions. As we point out later on, it is not a question of a mechanical censorship of criticism (although the Hayter affair was pretty blatant). It is rather a question of self-censorship and understatement of the problems, not stepping beyond the limits to criticism established by the ODA.

7) Press articles.

A fair amount of material on controversies over aid came from researching back issues of newspapers on microfilm. This was particularly necessary for the period of the Labour government 1974-79. The source was mainly *The Times*.

The popular environmental and development press/publications were also important sources of information – *The Ecologist*, *The Spur* (WDM paper), *New International*, *South*, etc.

8) Multilateral Institution Reports.

The various annual reports of multilateral institutions proved to be very useful, particularly the UNDP's *Human Development Report*, the *World Bank Annual Report*, UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children*, and the OECD's *Development Cooperation*, etc.

9) ODA Annual Report and other Publications.

An obvious source of material was the ODA's own *Annual Report* and its other policy/information publications. They were