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The Road To Hell



Synopsis

A stunning personal narrative of best intentions gone awry, Michael Maren, at one time an aid worker and journalist in Somalia, writes of the failure of international charities. Michael Maren spent years in Africa, first as an aid worker, later as a journalist, where he witnessed at a harrowing series of wars, famines, and natural disasters. In this book, he claims that charities, such as CARE and Save the Children, are less concerned with relief than we think. Maren also attacks the United Nation's "humanitarian" missions are controlled by agribusinesses and infighting bureaucrats.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an angry book that has been written with considerable passion. The author worked in Somalia for some time and later became a journalist. In that capacity he has followed the history of the area and the collapse of Somalia as a state. The book is about Somalia and it is about how foreign aid made things worse. The book is to some extent journalist and fragmented. It looks at the stories of different characters. One Chis Cassidy for instance was an aid worker who headed a project to irrigate some land. He has to battle rampant corruption, the incredibly poor planning of the

project and continual attempts to undermine it. In the end despite his talent and passion for the job he fails and the money put into the project is simply lost. Millions and dollars whose only achievement is to enrich some aid workers and government officials. Cassidy is a tragic case and in the end he leaves Africa after one of his children is murdered to warn him off. The book also looks at how private charity works. How much of it goes to the charity organisation and how little to the target population. What aid that does go to the target population is so poorly distributed it achieves nothing. The main work of the book is to look at the overall situation in Somalia and the mechanics of aid. The story which was revealed to the public was that due to a war between Somalia and Ethiopia large numbers of ethnic Somalis had been forced to flee from their homes and were starving in refugee camps. As a result international agencies sent in huge amounts of food. The author reveals how the crisis was engineered by the then corrupt Somali government. That the numbers of refugees was at all times exaggerated.

Michael Maren began his journey to Africa as a Peace Corps worker. His first introduction to corruption occurred when school construction materials he obtained were diverted to add new rooms to local officials homes. But this was nothing compared to what is revealed in the rest of the book. Basically, when we provide food to African nations, much of it is stolen and used to build the wealth and power of whatever dictator is ruling at the time. Efforts to help local people grow their own food are often stopped, because the power base of the dictator would be reduced if people could grow their own food rather than depending on the dictator to provide it. The resulting suffering, wars, and corruption cannot be blamed entirely on evil African dictators. In fact, if I were to apportion blame based on the material in this book, most of it would fall on American grain merchants and the politicians who aid them. And some of the blame goes to the aid agencies who know this is the way the game is played, and say nothing so they can have a small piece of the corruption pie. American farmers see a pittance of the money made by the excess grain they grow. When extra grain is sent to foreign nations, or bought with Food Stamps in America, it's the American taxpayer and farmers who lose out. Who does get rich? The money goes into the pockets of corporations like A. C. Toepfer, Continental Grain, Interstate Grain, Cargill, Ferruzzi Trading, Matsui, Richo Grain Limited, Archer Daniels Midland, Louis Drefus, and Mitsubishi (page 191).

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