

6 HALVING HUNGER IN THE 1990S

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As reported in Chapter 1 of this volume, perhaps 20% of the world's population, a billion people, experience hunger during a year. The imprecise numbers that take measure of the hungry tell us that a billion people live in households too poor to obtain the food they need for work; half a billion live in households too poor to obtain the food they need to move around; one child in six is born underweight; and one in three is underweight by age 5. Hundreds of millions of people suffer anemia, goiter, and impaired sight from diets with too little iron, iodine, or vitamin A.

Progress in Overcoming Hunger

Over the last three decades, there has been worldwide progress in reducing the proportion of the population that goes hungry. Nonetheless, the numbers of hungry, by various measures, have not decreased and probably have grown. Indeed, using one method of estimating hunger, expected rates of population growth, and recent progress in reducing hunger, it may take until the end of the century before the absolute numbers of hungry in the world begin to diminish, and not until the middle of the next century would the proportion of hungry people drop to a minimal 3% (Kates *et al.*, 1988:32).

The Progressive 60s and the Lost 80s

The estimated *proportion* of hungry people in the world was almost halved during the 1960s and the early 1970s, but further reduction has slowed since then (Grigg, 1985:50). In that period, per capita available food supplies in the developing countries increased by more than 10% and per capita national incomes grew by more than 40%. At the same time, the *number* of hungry people, estimated by a minimal standard of energy sufficiency (1.2 times the basal metabolic rate, or BMR), has remained almost constant, fluctuating around a half billion. And this rough estimate is relatively insensitive to the worsening in recent years of economic conditions in Africa and Latin America.

Conventional wisdom attributes the recent lack of progress against hunger to the worldwide slowdown of economic growth and development and to the failure of growth, where it has occurred, to benefit the poorest segments of society. The enormous increase in Third World debt has brought about a *reversal* of net resource transfers to developing countries.¹ Structural adjustment of economies in Africa and Latin America has almost invariably been accompanied by reductions in health, nutrition, and welfare programs. In Africa, issues of agricultural decline, population growth, armed conflict, and environmental degradation are cited as well for the lack of progress. Taken together, the decade of the 1980s has been characterized as the "lost 80s" in hunger reduction and poverty elimination.

Encouraging Developments

Yet some encouraging developments in the past decade also present new opportunities to overcome hunger in the 1990s. These include fresh understanding of the origins of hunger, lessons learned from efforts to subsidize or to distribute food, the evolution of a worldwide logistical system to provide emergency food aid, rapid progress against childhood and

nutritional diseases, the maturation of grassroots development groups, and reduced international tensions.

A growing consensus cites poverty as the origin of most hunger, with subsidiary roles for other causal factors such as natural disasters, war, disease, and feeding practices. There is widespread agreement that untargeted food subsidies are ineffective or cannot be sustained because of their high costs, but that careful targeting could reduce much of extreme food poverty. Experience with national and international relief systems has shown that they can help prevent deaths due to famine by distributing food, providing it at reduced cost, offering opportunities for needed income, and providing necessary medical care for those at risk of malnutrition and disease. The synergism between hunger and disease in small children has been diminished by successes in immunization and in treating diarrhea. Low-cost technologies for dealing with the nutritional diseases of vitamin A and iodine deficiencies have been developed, and these have been utilized in different parts of the world. Grassroots organizations have emerged in all parts of the world, providing a voice for poor and hungry people and a new source of leadership, service provision, and income-increasing activities. The end of the "Cold War" has brought promise of new resources released from the trillion-dollar global armaments budget.

Planning for the 1990s

As the decade of the 1980s has come to a close, frustration with the slow rate of progress has deepened in the communities concerned with hunger, while at the same time the new opportunities beckon. But coming to a consensus of what could and should be done is difficult. The different communities concerned with the issue appear to diverge greatly in their perspectives and prescriptions for policy—whereas some approach the many pressing problems incrementally, activity by activity, others attempt to tackle the greater context, promoting fundamental social change as a requirement for long-term solutions. And even within these alternative approaches, opinions differ as to which strategies and efforts have been most productive—or counter-productive—and where fundamental change is needed. These differences in approach do not simply reflect ideological or stylistic conflicts—although these are surely evident. Rather, they originate in deeply held convictions, which in one case is motivated by the desire to "light a candle, rather than curse the darkness" and in the other by great frustration over continuing human suffering and loss. Still, a search for "common ground" has begun to take place in a variety of fora: the "think tanks" and research institutes related to agriculture, hunger, nutrition, and poverty; the specialized national and international aid and development agencies; and the emerging networks of non-governmental and voluntary organizations.

From the think tanks have come both new ideas and syntheses of experience. The United Nations University-World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER) undertook a review of famine (Drèze, 1988) and hunger problems which has culminated in a forthcoming volume by Drèze and Sen (1990) on *Hunger and Public Action*. Continuing studies at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) have highlighted the roles that agricultural development can play in reducing hunger (Mellor, 1988) and have analyzed the impacts of food subsidies (Pinstrup-Andersen, 1988), commercial crop production (e.g., Kennedy and Cogill, 1987; von Braun *et al.*, 1989), and related issues on hunger prevalence. Susan George (1988) at the Transnational Institute has completed a searching examination of the debt crisis and its impacts on hunger and poverty. The Cornell University Food and Nutrition Policy Program has reviewed the efforts to improve child survival and to go beyond them. We at the World Hunger Program have reviewed some of the opportunities for overcoming hunger in the 1990s (Brown University Faculty Seminar, 1990) and have helped to bring together some of the major theorists and analysts in a concerted search for areas of agreement.

Ideas and analyses are not the sole province of research groups. Within the specialized agencies of the United Nations, many important analyses have been undertaken. The U.N. Administrative Committee on Coordination/Subcommittee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN) has assessed the prevalence of hunger (ACC/SCN, 1987a, 1989a), examined the state-of-the-art in reducing nutritional diseases (West and Sommer, 1987; Hetzel, 1988), evaluated the efficacy of nutrition education (Hornik, 1985), and reviewed the synergism between malnutrition and infection (Tomkins and Watson, 1989). Studies of nutrition-relevant policies in the 1980s and estimated flows of external resources related to nutrition are forthcoming (Horwitz, 1989; Mason, 1990). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) examined the impact of structural adjustment on the poor and particularly children's health and nutrition (Cornia *et al.*, 1987, 1988). The World Bank issued its landmark study on *Poverty and Hunger* (World Bank, 1986) and its review of its major exploratory efforts to reduce malnutrition (Berg, 1987). The World Bank and the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a joint study on the use of food aid in Africa (World Bank, 1988). Under the World Food Council's (WFC) Cyprus Initiative, the staff examined what had transpired in the 15 years since the 1974 World Food Conference, assessing, in particular, country experiences with targeted food, nutrition, and health programs (WFC, 1989). The U.S. National Research Council assessed food aid requirements for the 1990s for the U.S. Agency for International Development (BOSTID, 1989).

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and voluntary agencies tend to be more action-oriented but can be reflective as well. The Swedish Red Cross conducted a landmark study that probed the underlying societal causes of natural disasters and famines and what might be done to prevent them (Hagman *et al.*, 1984). A series of reflective studies has identified changing roles for NGOs, recognizing both expanded contributions beyond relief and small-scale development projects and the realities of the rapid emergence of NGOs in developing countries (Drabek, 1987; Durning, 1989).

An important set of studies and consultations has focused on initiatives for the 1990s. The World Food Council's Cyprus Initiative Against Hunger in the World (WFC, 1989) seeks to reinvigorate progress towards eliminating hunger with a program of cooperative action. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the ACC/SCN have proposed respectively ten-year programs to prevent vitamin A and iodine deficiencies (WHO, 1985; ACC/SCN, 1987b). UNICEF and WHO have collaborated on a joint health and nutrition strategy for the 1990s (WHO, 1988) and have participated in a Task Force for Child Survival that also included the Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the World Bank (see below). The World Bank has sought to address hunger and food security in Africa (World Bank, 1988a). Larger developmental goals for the 1990s have been addressed in the context of the U.N. Fourth Development Decade (North South Roundtable, 1988). From this mix of study and consultation, at least three major sets of achievable goals for the 1990s have emerged.

Achievable Goals

Task Force for Child Survival

In March 1988, a Task Force consisting of the Rockefeller Foundation, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank, WHO, health ministers, and leaders of bilateral aid agencies met in Talloires, France and adopted a comprehensive list of goals for "Protecting the World's Children: An Agenda for the 1990s." These served as the basis for a set of joint "WHO-UNICEF common goals for Health Development of Women and Children by the year 2000," which were recently revised and affirmed in Bangkok in March 1990 by a meeting of the original Task Force for Child Survival (1990).

The *Affirmation of Bangkok* calls for the halving of maternal mortality rates, reduction in infant and under-five mortality rates by a third or more, and efforts to address the needs of women for education, family planning, and prenatal and obstetric care. It sets major goals for the elimination of poliomyelitis and neonatal tetanus, a massive reduction in measles, a halving of deaths from diarrhea among children under five, and a one-third reduction in deaths from acute respiratory diseases. It calls for improved water and sanitation access for all. And specifically it calls for better nutrition through:

- Reduction of the rate of low birthweight (2.5 kilograms) to less than 10%.
- Empowerment of women to breastfeed their children exclusively for the first four to six months of life and to continue breastfeeding with complementary foods well into the second year.
- Reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-five children by one-half of 1990 levels.
- Virtual elimination of iodine deficiency disorders.
- Virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and its consequences including blindness.
- Reduction of iron deficiency anemia in women by one-third of 1990 levels.

In September 1990, the first *World Summit for Children* of national leaders will be held in an effort to mobilize support for these and similar goals. Also, after ten years of detailed negotiations, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been completed. This Convention sets minimum standards for children's survival, health, and education, and provides explicit protection against exploitation at work, against physical and sexual abuse, and against the involvement of children in war and armed conflict. Efforts to ratify the new Convention will continue throughout the decade.

World Food Council

In May 1989, the 36 member states of the WFC declared in Cairo that they would "make all efforts to achieve, during the next decade, the elimination of starvation and death caused by famine; a substantial reduction of malnutrition and mortality among young children; a tangible reduction in chronic hunger; and the elimination of major nutritional diseases." As to the means of achieving these goals, the Council referred to the Programme of Co-operative Action of the President (U.N. General Assembly, 1989:7-14).

The Programme provides a menu of "economic and social measures to increase access to food by the poorest and most vulnerable groups...providing the poor with access to food not only through more equitable distribution of food, but by implementing a set of targeted employment generating projects that enable the poor to earn sufficient income to meet their basic needs." It identified "measures to protect and improve the nutritional levels of the poor" by addressing "the most common constraints to good nutrition...insufficient access to food, infectious diseases, lack of knowledge and high rates of childbirth." It suggested key elements in policies for raising food production in the context of national food strategies. Finally, it discussed measures to redirect part of economic growth efforts in support of social programs and to lessen the impacts of debt and trade constraints on developing countries.

Bellagio Conference

In November 1989, 24 advocates, planners, and scientists from 14 countries met in Bellagio, Italy and concluded that it is possible to end half the world's hunger before the year 2000. At that meeting, we created a concise agenda of opportunity based upon the promising programs and policies that have already successfully reduced hunger in many places, stating:

We believe that it is possible and imperative in the 1990's (1) to eliminate deaths from famine, (2) to end hunger in half of the poorest households, (3) to cut malnutrition in half for mothers and small children, and (4) to eradicate iodine and vitamin A deficiencies. Together, they comprise a comprehensive yet still practical program that can end half of world hunger in the 1990's (Overcoming Hunger in the 1990s, 1989; see Appendix 6.1 for complete text).

Leading this agenda of opportunities was the virtual elimination of deaths due to famine among the 15-35 million people annually at risk, through implementing existing early-warning and famine-prevention systems and continuing efforts to provide safe passage of food in zones of armed conflict.

Seen as equally capable of eradication are two of the three major nutritional diseases. By iodizing salt or injecting iodized oil, most of the 190 million cases of goiter could be eliminated by the end of the century (Hetzel, 1988). A capsule given twice-a-year to the 280 million children at risk of vitamin A deficiency could virtually eliminate the disease in the crucial ages between 1 and 4 years (West and Sommer, 1987).

A third major goal adopted at Bellagio was to cut malnutrition among women and children in half. The impact of disease on the wasting and stunting of hungry children is already being reduced by the rapid progress in immunizing infants and providing simple, home-based treatment of diarrhea (Grant, 1989). Breastfeeding of infants is continuing or even increasing in many developing countries, perhaps as a result of efforts to encourage it and to discourage formula feeding (see Chapter 5). Innovative programs in Africa and Asia combine growth monitoring by weighing children with supplemental feeding if needed (Berg, 1987; JNSP, 1989). These activities could be combined with efforts to ease the burden on already overworked mothers and to reduce the nutritional anemia found in half of all women of reproductive age (DeMaeyer, 1989).

Finally, the group recognized that, although most hunger is rooted in poverty, the hunger of at least half of the very poorest households could still be ended. Extensive experience with food subsidies, coupons, ration shops, and feeding programs has demonstrated that careful targeting and effective application of such measures could reduce much urban food poverty (Pinstrup-Andersen, 1988; Reutlinger, 1988). In rural areas, providing wage and food income in return for labor to construct needed agricultural and environmental improvements reduces food poverty immediately while increasing long-term agricultural productivity and income (Ezekiel, 1988, n.d.; Mellor, 1988). Also valuable are programs that provide self-sustaining sources of credit, especially to women, to start small businesses or to produce local products and services (Katona-Apte, 1987; Hossain, 1988).

Food-poor households that raise their own food must cope with the deterioration of their natural resources, the loss of crucial access to common resources, and restriction to all but the most ecologically marginal land (BOSTID, 1983a). There are important opportunities for redistributing land that is little used to smallholders and for introducing a variety of low-cost techniques that can sustain productivity, provide fuelwood, limit soil erosion, and increase food and income (BOSTID, 1983b; Kang *et al.*, 1984; Tull *et al.*, 1987; Harrison, 1987).

This four-point systematic assault on the hunger problem in the 1990s would require additional flows of money and food aid from the rich to the hungry and poor—and a limitation of the flows that are now in the opposite direction. A realistic program to combat hunger in the 1990s might require U.S. \$5-\$10 billion per year in new resources, or about a 10-20% increase or reallocation of global foreign-aid disbursements. Even more important are the needs for renewed social energy and political will, the creative employment of local institutions and underutilized resources, and increases in the level of public attention and support.

Nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations are particularly important in reaching the hungry and poor, and at their best they embrace hungry people acting in their own behalf. Most of the goals identified at Bellagio could be accomplished in different ways. The most promising ones, the Declaration emphasizes, are those that empower people to assess their own condition and to act in their own behalf, that provide short-term hunger relief while addressing deeply rooted causes, and that can be sustained over the long-term.

Issues

Thus as we move into the decade, there is an emerging consensus on what might be achieved if we were to renew the effort to overcome hunger in the 1990s and on what major activities and resources are needed. To move beyond agreement on goals and needs—to halve hunger in the 1990s—I see at least three major issues: commitment, organization, and evaluation.

A Place for the Hungry

The most important issue is the commitment to halve hunger. At the Bellagio Conference, a participant told of the Swahili maxim “when elephants fight, the grass dies”—and then, wryly noting the end of the Cold War, she observed that “when elephants make love, the grass also dies.” Between the portentous events in Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, and Central America and the growing worldwide concern for the environment, making room at the table for the hungry of the world may become increasingly difficult.

Part of the solution is to link the new opportunities for grassroots action to overcome hunger with the ongoing wave of participation, pluralism, and democracy and to join those concerned with the fate of the hungry with those concerned with the fate of the earth. Part of it is to call for a global “peace dividend” to address the most desperate human needs for development. The achievable goals of the various declarations provide one concrete set of activities to place and to keep on the public agenda. But most of all, the communities concerned with hunger need to further pursue their common ground, to set aside their distinctive differences in missions and programs, and to come together with a single voice—but in many tongues—to keep hunger on the local, national, and global agendas of concern.

Tops, Sides, and Bottoms

A major cause for optimism in renewing the effort to overcome hunger is the emergence and prominence of nongovernmental and voluntary organizations, particularly grassroots groups in the developing world and populist pressure groups in the industrialized world. The grassroots groups not only offer new channels for services and education—as for example, in their role in Bangladesh in disseminating oral rehydration therapy—but most important, they represent authentic voices of the hungry and the poor speaking on their own behalf. The populist pressure groups have created for the first time a voice for the hungry and the poor in the parliaments and media of the industrialized world to compete with the usual array of developed-country special interests.

At the same time, as obvious from the initiatives to create an agenda for the 1990s, the process is still very much “top-down,” a coming together of specialized agencies in Talloires and Bangkok, of governments in Cyprus and Cairo, and a broader, independent, but still “expert” group at Bellagio. Leadership for efforts to implement programs and to mobilize resources still has to come from governments. No more important example of their potential can be found than in the remarkable achievement of the three “Cs” of Latin America—Chile, Costa Rica, and Cuba. Each of these countries had governments with profoundly different concepts of how to govern, yet each—because they consciously decided to do so—achieved equally remarkable progress in improving child health and nutrition throughout the hard times of the 1980s. Thus, while considerable rhetoric is devoted to the virtues of “bottom-

up" approaches employing grassroots institutions, the emphasis must still be on governments. "Participation" by local groups is often seen as important for implementation but not essential to leadership. Much more needs to be known about how the grassroots can be meaningfully coupled to global goals and governmental efforts while still maintaining their own initiative.

The tension over linking the summit and the grassroots is also matched by the "side-by-side" pulls to link hunger reduction to sectoral needs for education, water supply and sanitation, and family planning and to larger issues of economy, poverty, and environment. Is it possible to achieve the ambitious goals of eliminating the most extreme forms of deprivation and halving others without addressing issues of women's literacy, water supply, or birth spacing? (For example, a 1989 UNICEF report lists more than 20 sectoral goals). But in so doing, are we returning to a "basic needs" approach with its long list of sectoral basic needs that must compete with each other for funds and attention and make the problems seem insurmountable? And beyond these immediate linkages are the larger ones of peace, economy, poverty, and environment, and the degree to which a successful hunger-reduction strategy depends on what develops in each of these spheres of concern.

Doing Good—How Do We Know?

An underlying premise of the efforts to halve hunger in the 1990s is that it can be done by using interventions, technologies, and policies that exist and are known to work—"success stories" that emerged in the 1980s. The stories are heartening but their spread and multiplication requires continuing evaluation and adaptation to new circumstances. The achievements of rural income schemes in a state of India or a community growth monitoring program in a region in Tanzania may not transfer easily even between states or regions of the same countries, let alone between countries and continents. Thus, halving hunger requires a continuing effort to identify successes, to tell their story, to draw their lessons, to encourage their adaptation to new circumstances, and to build in ongoing participatory evaluation of new efforts. And for some problems, there may be few success stories upon which to draw. Perhaps the most pressing example is the safe passage of emergency food in zones of armed conflict.

Is it also not too soon to ask how we can measure progress in achieving the goals of halving hunger? There is considerable promise of much improved data for these purposes in the 1990s. More rapid and universal assessment measures are being developed, such as the three key indicators of birthweight, weight-for-age, and height-at-school-entry proposed for continuing measurement by a WHO-UNICEF working group (ACC/SCN, 1989b). And much more detailed data is forthcoming in the increase in representative national surveys of income, consumption, health, and nutrition (See, for example, Grootaert and Kanbur, 1989).

The Half-Life of Hunger

In nature, the rate of decay of radioactive elements is often described by a time period called a "half-life." Hunger too can be given a half-life in the time remaining in this century. Famine, goiter, and vitamin A blindness can be eliminated. The wasting of small children, the anemia of their mothers, the hunger of their families—all can be cut in half. It can be done using programs and policies that already work and all for less than 1% of the cost of the present global armaments budget. Halving hunger in the 1990s—what a way to start a new millennium!

Notes

1. Developing countries *received* net resource transfers of U.S. \$147 billion through long-term lending from 1978-82 but from 1983-87 *lost* a net total of \$85 billion, primarily in the middle-income developing countries (World Bank, 1988b:29-30; also see World Bank, 1989:18 and Wheeler, 1988:45-47).

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