

BELLAGIO

DECLARATION

THE NEXT STEPS

ROBERT W. KATES



"To cut malnutrition in half for mothers and small children" is the third goal of the Bellagio Declaration. This mother and her children live in a slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Going beyond the Cold War has reversed the world's priorities, but hunger may still be the excluded middle. In 1969, I returned from two years of work in Africa to a country swept up in the turmoil of foreign war and social change, to try to use my science to address some of the great problems of human existence. "The ultimate problems of human existence," I then wrote, "are problems of mystery; the penultimate problems are of survival." I then described three, closely-linked, great penultimate problems, listing them in the order that I thought I could do something about, but what was also the reverse of their importance in the great scheme of things.

- "...the adequacy of resources and environment in the context of current and future rates of population growth, and the greater growth rates of technology and consumption.

- The growing separate, global concentration of wealth and poverty at a time of continued rising expectations, with the prospects of worldwide social unrest and conflict increasingly along racial, national, and continental lines.

- The exceptional disparity between the greatly advanced technological capability for change, including that of destruction, and the primitive character of the human behaviors and institutions providing for control of this new capability."

Thus I thought I could do most about resources and environment (I am a geographer by training) and least, professionally, about nuclear war. Yet I saw nuclear war as the greatest threat to human survival.

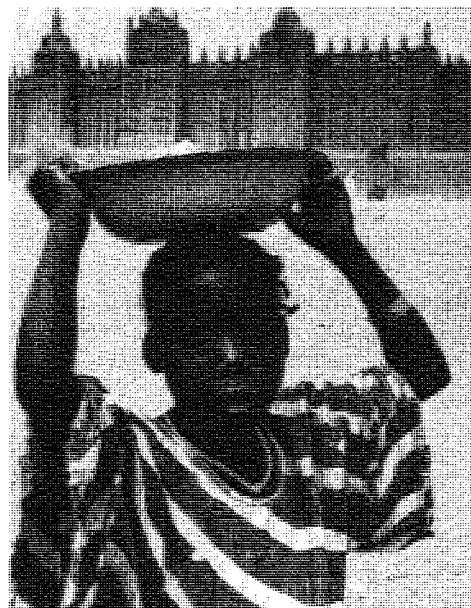
Twenty years later, my agenda has not changed, but my perception of their difficulty has. For that remarkable year of 1989 has reversed their order, both in actuality and in popular perception. The end of the Cold War is marked by the year of the environment and the emergence of fears of planetary survival because of the profound global changes to the environment now underway. And 20 years later, my central concern, as when I worked in Africa, is with the excluded middle of the penultimate problems: the persistence of hunger in a world of plenty.

In optimistic moments, I hope that, in retrospect, 1989 marked the beginning of the great renewal in overcoming hunger. If words could do it, it surely was an auspicious year. For two years previous, groups and agencies concerned with hunger struggled to propose new initiatives for public action. In 1989, the intergovernmental

World Food Council adopted in its Cairo Declaration a statement supporting goals of "... 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." In March 1990, meeting in Bangkok, the interagency Task Force on Child Survival (Rockefeller Foundation, the United Nations Development Program, UNICEF, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, and other agencies) revised and reaffirmed their earlier goals to call for the: "Reduction of severe and moderate malnutrition among under-five children by one-half 1990 levels. Virtual elimination of iodine deficiency disorders. Virtual elimination of vitamin A deficiency and its consequences, including blindness."

And in November 1989, a non-governmental group of 23 planners, practitioners, opinion leaders and scientists meeting at the Rockefeller Foundation Study and Conference Center in Bellagio, Italy, produced the Bellagio Declaration: Overcoming Hunger in the 1990s (see *WHY Magazine*, Spring 1990, pp. 27-31). The participants came from 14 countries, both north and south. They are affiliated with nine national or international agencies, eight advocacy and grassroots organizations, and five universities and research institutes, but they participated as individuals sharing their expertise and concern.

Specifically, the Bellagio Declaration proposes four achievable goals for the



One of the four achievable goals of the Bellagio Declaration is "to end hunger in half of the poorest households" in the world. A girl finds something to eat as she poses before a mosque in Djenne, halfway between Timbuktu and Bamako in the Sahel.

1990s: (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 1990s by building on the better and best of programs and policies for overcoming hunger. The most promising programs, the Declaration found, 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.

In the eight months since the production of the Declaration, considerable progress has been made in its dissemination, adoption, and implementation. The Declaration has been printed in English, French, and Spanish and reprinted in such diverse media as the *Dar-es-Salaam Daily News*, the U.S. *Congressional Record*, and the Mexico City *El Dias*. The Declaration itself has been endorsed, to date, by more than 70 researchers and practitioners including, among others, leaders of Bread for the World, World Hunger Year, the International Rice Research Institute, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Hunger Project, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations University, the World Resources Institute, and World Vision.

Beyond goals is implementation, how to concretely link the "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches called for in the Declaration, how to find or reallocate the financial and institutional resources needed, how to build on the promising programs and policies that already work well. For each of the four achievable goals, specific activities are needed or are underway. The major evaluation of the Sudan relief effort currently underway should spark generic proposals for providing safe passage for emergency food supplies in zones of armed conflict. The World Summit for Children this fall will serve to highlight initiatives for halving the undernutrition of mothers and children. Detailed plans on iodine and vitamin A are forthcoming. More effort is needed to pursue the reduction of chronic food poverty.

Going beyond the Cold War provides the renewed opportunity to address global and national hunger, but I also want to report concern. 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, Central America, and the worldwide concern for the environment, making room at the table for the hungry of the world could become increasingly difficult.

The great penultimate problems are always linked, but addressing them together in the age of the sound bite and buzz word is difficult. Yet somehow we must effectively link those concerned with the fate of the hungry with those concerned with the fate of the earth. We need to find ways to merge the new opportunities for grassroots action to overcome hunger with the wave of participation, pluralism, and democracy. We need to realize the global Peace Dividend, not merely from the superpowers, but from the trillion dollar global arms budget, and it should address the most desperate of human needs for development. We can use the achievable goals of the various declarations to provide a concrete set of activities to advocate and to work for. But most of all, the community concerned with hunger needs to pursue its own common ground, to set aside distinctive differences in missions and programs and come together with a single voice, but in many tongues, to keep hunger on the local, national, and global agenda of concerns. Beyond the Cold War there is much work to do. ■



Robert W. Kates is Director of the Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Program at Brown University. He can be reached at Box 1831, Providence, Rhode Island 02912; (401) 863-2700.