

FOOD, FOOD SECURITY AND UN REFORM

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1 INTRODUCTION¹

In this article, we address the question of UN system reform from the perspective of food and food security. If all the talk of improved global governance is to mean anything, then it must be seen to have an impact in the area of food security.² Food is a fundamental human right, the subject of countless UN Conventions, Declarations, Compacts and Resolutions. However, the right to food is still routinely denied to at least 800 million people, 20 per cent of the population of developing countries.³ For many, the situation is getting worse not better: not least for 16 million refugees, 26 million people internally displaced, and many others facing hunger because of conflict (ICRC 1995). Furthermore, food security is exactly the kind of multi-sectoral and multi-layered topic that new forms of global government must be seen to tackle.

In recent international conferences, the UN has secured commitment to specific targets in the field of food security, to be reached by the year 2000: the elimination of starvation and death caused by famine, and of iodine and vitamin A deficiency; a substantial reduction of chronic hunger and of under-nutrition among children; and a substantial reduction also in diet-related non-communicable diseases.⁴ These targets will not be met, especially in Africa. Even to come close, however, will require more money, better spent, in a new political and policy context. Here is the challenge facing the UN. The agenda includes how to maintain the growth of world food supplies, manage a liberalizing food trade regime, improve the management of humanitarian aid, and deal globally with the social security implications of chronic hunger and malnutrition.⁵

In assessing the UN's capacity to meet the challenge, our starting point is a balance sheet of global governance in the food area. We identify strengths and weaknesses in the performance of the UN system on food security. The UN is good at advocacy and its other strengths include technical coordination, information collection and dissemination, as well as a substantial resource flow to the food and nutrition sectors in developing countries. On the other hand, the performance of the many different UN agencies with an interest in the food sector is extremely uneven and the politico-bureaucratic problems are immense. There are serious problems with the capacity of the system to agree, prioritize, coordinate and follow through a small number of key policy initiatives to reduce food insecurity. The UN system has also yet to come to terms with the challenge to its mandate posed by the coexistence of poverty, food insecurity, political instability and war.

The problems are well known and familiar from other sectors. We find connections in the debates about public administration, good government, and the sociology of international politics, as well as in the current debate on UN reform. We draw on these sources to propose options for improving the capacity of the UN system to deal with food and food security issues. Many small improvements are possible, including stronger coordinating bodies, joint planning at the country level, and administrative reform of UN agencies. However, more radical improvement requires more radical change: the UN mandate needs review, particularly in the area of conflict; there are too many agencies; and there are too many independent budgets. We would like to see a focal point in the UN system for policy determination and resource allocation for food

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² For recent contributions on global governance, see Urquhart and Childers 1990; UNDP 1994; Parsons 1995; Righter 1995.

³ The figures are from FAO/WHO 1992.

⁴ These are some of the targets of the International Conference on Nutrition, held in 1992. The report of that meeting (FAO/WHO 1992) also contains summaries of the targets agreed for the Fourth UN Development Decade and at the World Summit for Children. The latter, in particular, are more carefully quantified and more plausible. For example, they call not just for a 'substantial reduction' of chronic hunger, but rather for a 'reduction in severe as well as moderate malnutrition among under-five children by half of 1990 levels' (*ibid.*: 41).

⁵ See e.g. Serageldin and Landell-Mills (eds) 1994.

security. If the need for more unified political control over the UN system, and the need to give the Secretary General greater executive authority, lead to the creation of an Economic Security Council (see Mahbub ul Haq in this volume), then food should certainly be within its mandate.

To set the scene, we begin by noting that the UN apparatus concerned with food and food security issues is, if nothing else, certainly of a size and complexity to match the importance of the problem. If the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Bank and the IMF, are included, at least 29 UN bodies are directly or indirectly involved (Figure 1). They include the UN Secretariat, the specialized agencies (such as FAO, ILO and WHO), the funding programmes (IFAD, UNDP, WFP, UNFPA, UNICEF, World Bank, IMF), trade-related organizations (UNCTAD, WTO), special UN bodies (UN Centre for Human Rights, UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, UN Environment Programme, UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)), 5 UN regional economic commissions, emergency and relief agencies (DHA, UNHCR), and research and training institutes (UNU, UNITAR, UNRISD, INSTRAW).

The UN system has grown up 'like topsy'. Each agency has its own mandate, constitution, governing body, funding arrangement and location. Decision making is coordinated, to some extent, by the UN General Assembly and Security Council, and by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which consists of the heads of the UN agencies meeting under the presidency of the UN Secretary-General. However, each agency has a large degree of autonomy. Steps have been taken recently to reduce the large number of *ad hoc* and inter-agency coordinating bodies, and to streamline the coordinating role of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The funding programmes have set up a coordinating mechanism, the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), to devise collaborative policies and action plans. And an important UN General Assembly resolution (UN 1992) has been passed to improve the coordination of UN system assistance at the country level.

Despite these improvements, the complexity of the system in the food security arena remains a cause of wonder. For example, there are five bodies concerned with food aid: the governing body of the

World Food Programme, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA); the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS); the Consultative Sub-Committee on Surplus Disposal (CSD), a Sub-Committee of the FAO's Committee on Commodity Problems; the new World Trade Organization; and the Food Aid Committee, a non-UN body subsidiary to the International Grains Council, charged with overseeing the implementation of the Food Aid Convention, the only legally binding international agreement on food aid. In addition, the ACC has a Sub-Committee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN), which brings together nutrition specialists from the different agencies, and which also deals with some food aid issues. There is a real danger, and not just in the field of food aid, that because food security is 'everybody's business', it will become 'nobody's business'.

It was partly to cut through this complexity, and give greater political impetus to food security issues, that the World Food Council (WFC) was established by the UN General Assembly, following a recommendation of the World Food Conference in 1974. This proved not to be successful, and the Council has subsequently been disbanded. At the final session of WFC in 1992, ministers agreed that '...the Council has fallen short of achieving the political leadership and coordination role expected from its founders' (UN 1992).

There are many reasons for WFC's demise. The Council's membership consisted only of Ministers of Agriculture, who had no mandate to cover the range of food security issues outside the agricultural sector; the Council's role was a confused mixture of general advocacy and action plans; its meetings were insufficiently focused on monitoring action programmes; its Secretariat was too small; and there was lack of cooperation – even resentment – from key UN agencies.

Between them, the many agencies with an interest in food security are responsible for a large annual flow of aid to the food and food security sectors in developing countries. A recent paper estimates that the average annual flow from UN agencies to nutrition and related sectors, excluding agriculture, between 1987 and 1991, was around \$US 5 billion, of which \$US 3 bn from the World Bank and \$US 2 bn from other UN agencies (ACC/SCN 1995). To quote a specific example, 57 million people received food aid from the World Food Programme in 1994,

Figure 1: UN bodies with an interest in food and food security

Agency	Food interest	Agency	Food interest
FAO	Agricultural production, marketing, trade, food security, nutrition	UNDP	Technical cooperation for food production, marketing and consumption, management of round-table process
IAEA	Irradiation of food products	UN Environment Programme	Food production, food security and environmentally sustainable development
IFAD	Agricultural production, rural development	UNESCO	Formal and informal education on food issues
ILO	Employment and entitlement programmes, social protection	UNHCR	Refugee nutrition (with WFP)
IMF	Macro-economic policy, financing of food imports	UNICEF	Health and nutrition programmes for children and mothers
INSTRAW	Women and food security	UNITAR	Training programmes in food security and related issues
UN Centre for Human Rights	Food as a human right	UN Regional Commissions (5)	Food security in regional economic and social policy
UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs	Food policy in the context of social development	UNRISD	Research on food and other issues
UN	General oversight, political questions	UNU	Research on food and other issues
UN Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)	Food security and viable and sustainable settlements	WFP	Coordination of food aid policy through CFA, supply of developmental and emergency food aid for food security
UNCTAD	Food trade, agricultural subsidies	WHO	Health and nutrition policy and programmes
UNDHA	Humanitarian operations	World Bank	Macroeconomic and sectoral planning and policy, programme and project lending for food security, management of consultative groups
		WTO	Food trade

in a resource transfer involving three million tons of food (WFP 1995)

The UN has also produced many international initiatives related to food and food security including a number of international conferences: the World Summit for Children, the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the International

Conference on Nutrition, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit on Social Development, and the forthcoming World Food Summit, the Fourth UN Conference on Women and the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), among many others (Figure 2). Optimistically in our view, the Secretary-General

sees the series of international conferences as a '... continuum. They are cumulative in their content and the result of one influences the others' (Boutros-Ghali 1995: 49).

A feature of some recent summits or other international meetings has been to set global goals in the food and food security sectors. For example, the World Summit for Children set a series of targets, including that of reducing child under-nutrition by half of 1990 levels by the year 2000. Similarly, the International Conference on Nutrition committed itself to a number of targets, including eliminating famine and famine-related deaths, as well as iodine

and vitamin A deficiencies, by the same date.

Before turning to a balance sheet of UN performance in the fields of food and food security, it is worth asking what might reasonably be expected of the multilateral system. The UN system has traditionally been made up of agencies that formally have responded to the wishes of member governments. There is much scope for the secretariats of these agencies to take initiatives, but only in a few recent cases has the system been prepared to challenge the principle of national sovereignty. Within this constraint, we identify six kinds of task for the UN system to undertake:

Figure 2: Some major UN initiatives on food and food security, 1974-1994

DATE	ITEM
1974	World Food Conference (leading to establishment of World Food Council, International Fund for Agricultural Development, FAO Committee on World Food Security, reconstitution of WFP Governing Body)
1975	FAO Global Information and Early Warning System established International Emergency Food Reserve established
1977	IFAD established
1978	FAO Regional Food Plan for Africa
1981	IMF Compensatory Financing Facility extended to cereals
1983	Broadened concept of food security adopted by FAO
1985	World Food Security Compact (FAO)
1988	World Bank Task Force Report 'The Challenge of Hunger in Africa: a call to action' and initiation of World Bank food security studies in Africa
1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the UN General Assembly WFC Cairo Declaration and Programme of Cooperative Action
1990	World Summit for Children
1992	International Conference on Nutrition Department of Humanitarian Affairs set up UN Conference on Environment and Development
1993	World Bank Conference on Overcoming Global Hunger World Conference on Human Rights
1994	International Conference on Population and Development
1995	World Summit on Social Development Fourth UN Conference on Women
1996	World Food Summit

i Consensus-building, advocacy, moral persuasion and target setting, as at international conferences.

ii Acting as a forum for the preparation and negotiation of international treaties or conventions, for example in the field of human rights, like the Convention on Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or in specific areas of policy, like trade liberalization.

iii Technical coordination and standard-setting, either by an individual agency or a group of agencies. Examples might include standards for food quality, definitions and methods of measurement of under-nutrition, or dosages for micro-nutrient supplementation.

iv Information collection and dissemination, for example on world food supply, the extent of malnutrition or chronic dietary disease.

v Coordination of action among agencies, both national and international, and with bilateral governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for example on food and nutrition arrangements for refugees.

vi The implementation of aid programmes, whether capacity-building or direct resource transfer, usually, but not always, in collaboration with member governments and NGOs.

2 UN ACTION ON FOOD AND FOOD SECURITY: A BALANCE SHEET

At first sight, it is easy to be critical of UN system performance in the food and food security arenas: lack of political commitment by governments in developed and developing countries; too many organizations, often with competing agendas; the split between the Bretton Woods institutions and the rest of the UN system, resulting in confused and conflicting policy messages and action programmes; excessive and politicized bureaucracies; inadequately targeted resource flows; and moral weakness in the face of an imperative need to override national sovereignty in special circumstances. However, a more balanced assessment is necessary: the UN system has strengths as well as weaknesses.

First, the UN has been an important agent in advocacy for improved standards of nutrition and food security. Some agencies, like UNICEF, have a

particularly strong reputation in this field; but the UN system more generally, through its conventions, development decades, special international conferences and General Assembly debates, has helped to keep poverty and food insecurity as key themes on the political agenda in the 1980s and 1990s.

Second, the UN system has been efficient in technical coordination and standard-setting in the food and food security areas. Standards are never as neutral as they appear, and the debates have been both technical and political (for example, over the role of food industry interests). Nevertheless, the many technical committees of the UN agencies have done an important job.

Third, the UN has made a contribution to the standardization and dissemination of basic data on food and nutrition. Good examples are the FAO AGROSTAT system of agricultural statistics, the WFP's international data base on food aid (INTERFAIS), the regular reporting of FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on food shortages, and the monitoring by the ACC/SCN of the world nutrition situation.

Fourth, the contribution of the UN to resource flows to food and food security should not be under-valued.

On the other hand, there is the more negative side to the balance sheet.

First, the record of coordination among the UN agencies is at best chequered. The split between the Bretton Woods and non-Bretton Woods institutions is particularly unfortunate. It has led to conflicting policy advice and to lack of integration between aid instruments, for example food aid and financial aid. The task of linking relief and development (Maxwell and Buchanan-Smith (eds) 1994) has also so far proved beyond the capability of the UN system.

Second, the quality of aid and operational performance of the UN agencies has been very uneven. In our view, the most effective agencies are characterized by decentralized structures, an action-oriented organizational culture, appropriate investment in research and analysis, and a commitment to advocacy. Not many meet this standard.

Third, and more generally, the UN system has not always been very good at agreeing a consensus on how to tackle food and food security problems. There has been a tendency to fudge difficult choices that might disadvantage certain interests; or alternatively, to issue guidance at the level of generalities. A good example comes from the Seventeenth Ministerial Session of the World Food Council in 1991, which was asked to '...bring to the attention of multilateral financial and development institutions and bilateral donors the need for long term support to integrated technology systems, linking agricultural research, technology transfer/extension and on-farm application ...' (WFC 1991). To which organizations precisely was this message directed? What precisely were they supposed to do differently in the future? What activities were to be cut to make room for new initiatives? And how was the WFC to know whether or not different agencies had responded? Statements like this are vague and exhortatory, rather than precise and action-oriented. There has been increasing criticism that the cost involved in holding international conferences has not been justified by subsequent action

Fourth, the UN system has been better at issuing general statements of intent than it has at turning these into actionable statutes with some legal force. An example of the difficulty can be seen in the area of food as a human right, a fast-growing area of interest, but one which has so far not been able to turn statements of ideal in international conventions into precise changes of policy and action at the country level.

Fifth, the UN has generally not been successful at providing a forum for real international policy negotiation. A good example is the future of food aid, which, as noted, is being discussed outside the UN, in the Food Aid Committee at the International Grains Council. It is notable that there is as yet no appointed forum where the implications of the Final Act of the GATT Uruguay Round for a future food aid regime, the working of the IMF Cereal Financing Facility, and the future roles of WFP, CFS, CSD and the Food Aid Committee can be discussed together. It is hoped that the newly established WTO can expedite discussion on this matter.

Sixth, the politico-bureaucratic problems of UN administration are immense, both within and among agencies. Nobody who has witnessed the

unsatisfactory way in which heads of UN agencies are elected or selected, and the internal squabbling over posts, budgets or ownership of initiatives, can doubt that the UN system faces severe constraints in this domain.

Last, and by no means least, there are genuine problems with the mandates of the UN system, particularly in cases of food crisis caused by civil war or state failure.

The outcome of these various problems is at best a missed opportunity for the UN system. Yet they are not unexpected, and not irresolvable.

3 EXPLAINING SUCCESS AND FAILURE

In order to explain the strengths and weaknesses of the UN system in the field of food security, we draw on four separate streams of argument: (a) lessons from organization theory and public administration about the difficulty of managing multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary activities in multi-lateral fora; (b) the debate about 'good government', democracy and political and operational accountability; (c) the 'sociology' of international politics and the question of how international regimes emerge; and, more practically, (d) the debate about UN reform.

(a) Organization theory and public administration

The difficulties of managing food and food security issues in the UN food system display many features of the problems of handling multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary activities that have been problematical in other areas: integrated rural development, nutrition planning, national-level food security planning, even multi-disciplinary farming systems research (Crener *et al.* 1984, Maxwell 1986, Birgegard 1987, Field 1987). The goals are often over-ambitious, with long chains of causality; there is organizational overload, with unrealistic expectations of coordination between competing organizations; and institutional hierarchies make it difficult to be flexible, and to innovate.

The problems with food security management by the UN system in many ways mirror the difficulties experienced at the national level. One particular feature common to both is the prevalence of vertically organized 'role' cultures, which are particularly ill-suited to collaboration. By analogy with the

management literature, the heads of UN agencies can be seen as 'barons' who find it difficult to collaborate (Handy 1981, Ch 7). UN organizations also tend to display the features of 'mechanistic', rather than 'organic', corporate organizations, with minimal real participation, planning concentrated at the centre, vertical flows of information and command, strict hierarchies and rigid job descriptions (R. Murray 1992; P. Murray 1989, 1992).

Leadership is often a special problem. It is perceived as being '...self-perpetuating by whatever means, preoccupied with personal prestige and egocentric towards authority' (Abbott 1992). Executive heads are structurally positioned at the top of their organizational charts, often the only authorized channels of communication on policy and administrative matters between governing bodies and their secretariats. They are one of the major emblems of their agencies. The personality, nationality, politics and character of executive heads are explored for their meaning in agency life. Executive heads provide a juncture where feeling, in an officially sanctioned way, impacts on thinking.

Growth in the number of special task forces, of cross-cutting meetings and of coordinating bodies is a clear sign of an organizational culture in crisis: the 'patch and mend' approach is usually not sustainable. This is likely to be true even if each special meeting can be thought of as a task culture activity, which produces its own targets (as did the World Summit for Children and the International Conference on Nutrition). The responsibility for devising action plans to meet these targets is usually passed back to national governments, where the action plans overlap with each other, and where the organizational problems are simply replicated.

If the problems are familiar, so are the solutions. The management literature talks of 'open systems' that are user-centred with a high degree of participation, have flat hierarchies, enabling leadership and low inequality: in short, of 'task' cultures, rather than 'role' cultures (Handy *ibid.*; R. Murray *ibid.*). These lessons have been applied to food security planning in the context of a process planning approach:

'integrated planning but independent implementation (no 'super ministries' or 'lead agencies'); the importance of a bias to coordinated action over planning ('start small and grow');

the value of risk-taking and innovation ('pilot projects'); and the importance of addressing explicitly the need for new modes of organization in multi-disciplinary team work ('task cultures not role cultures')

(Maxwell 1990: 6).

We return below to the question of what these lessons mean for UN reform.

(b) Good government, democracy and accountability

The 'good government' agenda overlaps with the public administration debate on the efficiency, accountability and transparency of government, but also adds new elements in the realm of political reform, including human rights (Moore (ed.) 1993; Robinson (ed.) 1995). This is of particular relevance to the UN system. The major donors have made their aid conditional on these factors. In addition, a progressively greater share of resources directed to food and nutrition has been taken up by man-made emergencies in which human rights are at risk. For example, in 1994, two-thirds of WFP aid was distributed as relief assistance, mostly in man-made emergencies, with only one-third for development: five years ago the reverse was the case (WFP 1995).

The general debate on good government, democracy and accountability has witnessed an important shift from crude political conditionality, involving punitive measures, to a more measured emphasis on promoting improved governance through '...incremental, small-scale measures in the form of support for civil society associations, strengthening the electoral process and promoting constitutional reform' (Robinson 1995: 1). The measures taken include training journalists, promoting a free press, supporting human rights groups and NGOs, providing election monitoring and assisting new political parties. These measures are deliberately '... intended to be a threat to Third World Governments who abuse human rights, or are corrupt and undemocratic ... (they) can help those who suffer under them' (IDS 1995).

The issue of good government has become acute in conflict situations. Duffield (1994) has argued that the proliferation of 'permanent emergencies', usually linked to war and themselves reflecting a failure or crisis in development, has imposed new roles on the UN. He argues that, prior to the

mid-1980s, the UN seldom intervened to provide relief in complex political emergencies without there being an agreed cease-fire in advance. By the end of the 1980s, however, an accepted form of intervention was to negotiate access to affected populations through 'corridors of peace', with the UN agencies concerned often devolving to NGOs the responsibility for physical delivery of food and other relief in affected areas. This erosion of national sovereignty was further deepened during and after the Gulf War, with the innovation of using military personnel to protect a UN mandated relief operation, as in Bosnia, Kurdistan, Rwanda and Somalia. Thus, 'humanitarian assistance has become closely integrated with the dynamics of violence' (Duffield *ibid.*: 42).

This is difficult territory for the UN system, which has conventionally respected the concept of state sovereignty, in conformity with Article 2.7 of Chapter 1 of the UN Charter (UN 1945). But this Article also states that '...this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter on "Action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression"'. This provision has assumed particular significance as man-made emergencies have increased in incidence, scale and duration, leading to the UN Secretary-General's priority to the implementation of the concept of a 'development-relief continuum' in which peace-making, peacekeeping, relief, rehabilitation and development assistance are inter-related.⁶

The new mood has practical consequences. Thus, the General Regulations of WFP were amended in 1992 to allow it to provide humanitarian relief assistance at the request of the UN Secretary-General instead of waiting for a request for such assistance from a national government, which might never come (WFP 1993); the World Bank has taken a higher profile in political liberalization (Robinson *ibid.*: 3); and there has been a lively debate about the scope for UN intervention in long-running political crises causing famine (Richter 1995; Parsons 1995; Gordon 1995).

These developments would seem to provide both a theoretical and practical foundation for an enlargement of UN system mandates and activities beyond the borders of sovereign states, in food

security and in other fields. There are important links to be made with definitions of food security which stress 'human dignity' (Oshaug 1985) or 'autonomy and self-determination' (Barracough and Utting 1987) as defining characteristics, and, more generally, with the growing literature on nutrition and human rights (Eide *et al.* 1991).

(c) International regimes for food security

The evolution traced by Duffield has still not percolated fully into official regimes for food security. Most UN agencies were not set up to handle this growing problem, and have not adjusted to the changing face of food insecurity described above (Crawshaw and Shaw 1995).

To assess the scope for progress, it is important to understand how regimes come into being. A recent contribution (Uvin 1994) examines the complex interdependence of institutions generating the dominant principles that govern approaches to world food and food security problems. Uvin finds that 'the processes in each of the issue areas ... were strongly biased towards the preferences of only a handful of powerful states, foremost among them the United States'. (*ibid.*: 283).

On the other hand, Uvin finds some room for manoeuvre by international organizations: they 'were much more important than being merely the reflection of powerful states' interests. They were not only crucial in the creation, reinforcement and change of international regimes, but they also often were central actors in the concrete process' (*ibid.*: 284). However, Uvin finds the Bretton Woods institutions to be the powerful actors rather than the other UN agencies.

One important lesson to be learned is that the role of the UN system, in food and food security issues as elsewhere, is itself a policy 'regime', which needs to be negotiated around the interests and preferences of the most powerful states. It is not a new insight, of course, to argue that the weaknesses of the UN system largely derive from the shackles placed on it by the big powers. A good example is the hobbling of the nascent WFP in 1961, which prevented the new organization from handling programme food aid for development purposes, restricting it to direct distribution of project food aid for development projects and emergency

⁶ On this topic, see also Shaw and Hutchinson (eds) 1993, Maxwell and Buchanan-Smith (eds) 1994.

operations (FAO 1985: 315). But can improved UN system performance now be sold as being in the best interests of the big powers as well as other member states? The use of the UN agencies in recent crises, from Iraq to Bosnia and Haiti, and in Africa and the former Soviet Union, suggests that the climate of opinion may be changing, but is this a temporary expediency or is a permanent, new regime possible?

(d) The debate on UN reform

Debate on UN reform is as old as the UN itself. Many of the themes raised in the previous paragraphs are reflected in the current literature. Several themes have figured prominently in the debate.

A highly controversial theme concerns the limits of the political and economic powers of the UN. Recommendations have ranged from strengthening ECOSOC to become a 'one-world parliament' (UN 1969), to the building up of an 'economic United Nations' side-by-side with the 'political United Nations', totally recasting all UN structures concerned with development in order to constitute regional and sub-regional development agencies or enterprises, and setting up a world forum to deal essentially with economic problems (Bertrand 1985). More recently, the establishment of an 'economic security council' has been proposed, with a focus on sustainable human development, and a new concept of 'human security', which combines freedom from fear with freedom from want (UNDP 1994; Mahbub ul Haq in this volume).

The need for stronger cohesive and coordinated action throughout the UN system has been a constant theme, for which a number of prescriptions have been made, including: establishing a central 'brain' as a policy centre for development; identifying one UN organization as the 'hub' of the UN system's development work; creating a system-wide computerized information system covering the work and activities of all the UN agencies; and establishing a common UN development service (UN 1969).

A major UN General Assembly resolution was passed in 1992 relating to the coordination of UN system assistance at the country level (UN 1992), which serves notice that the UN system must 'get its act together'. The centre-piece of the resolution is the call for the formulation of 'country strategy notes' (CSN) by interested recipient governments

with the assistance of the UN system, under the leadership of the UN resident coordinator. The CSN would: be based on the priorities and plans of recipient countries; ensure effective integration of UN system assistance; and facilitate assessment and evaluation of impact. A programme approach is to be adopted, decentralization of decision making to UN country offices encouraged, and training provided to build up national capacity and execution.

Leadership of the UN system is another vital and touch-stone concern. A study by Urquhart and Childers (1990) found the process of appointing the UN Secretary-General '... a curiously haphazard affair'. It recommended that an improved election process should include: serious consideration by governments of the necessary qualifications for the post; a single seven-year term; cessation of the practice of individual campaigning; agreed rules concerning nominations and a timetable for elections; well organized search for the best candidates worldwide; inclusion of women as candidates; high-level consideration of candidates by governments; and avoidance of an election or selection process that would result in the appointment of the 'lowest common denominator'. Concerning leadership of UN specialized agencies and programmes, the study recommended that the process of appointment should be 'demystified', with '... far more imaginative and wider search procedures', single-term appointments for a maximum of seven years, and major improvements in the selection process '... to ensure the highest standards and the most effective choices'.

Proposals have been made to 'de-politicize' the UN specialized agencies, making them leading technical bodies in their respective fields, with non-voting decision making procedures, or voting arrangements that avoided either domination by major donor countries or by consensus that would lead to stalemate between developed and developing countries, and a central financing of their activities with coordinated programmes of action (Williams 1987). For the funding programmes, proposals have included amalgamating them into one consolidated fund, with a common location and common intergovernmental governing body to maintain cohesion and common oversight (UN 1969; Childers and Urquhart 1994).

The continuing rift between the Bretton Woods and other agencies of the UN system has caused concern that the former will be given the lion's share of aid funding for macro-economic measures, with the latter receiving decreasing funds for human resource development activities (SID 1991).

Despite its charter (UN 1945), and its leadership in standard-setting on gender issues for the world as a whole, the UN system is failing 'abjectly' as an equal-opportunity employer (Urquhart and Childers 1994). The preamble to the UN charter affirms '...the equal rights of men and women...'. Article 8 states 'The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs'. Fifty years after the UN charter was adopted, only about 30 per cent of the professional staff of the UN secretariat in New York are women, and the pledge to fill 25 per cent of executive jobs with women by this year is well below target. At the senior decision making levels, the percentages are absurdly low, despite recent progress; only five (UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP) of the 25 principal UN agencies are headed by women. This is particularly concerning given the pivotal roles that women play in food and food security issues.

4 PRINCIPLES FOR UN REFORM

Four main principles for reform of the UN system in the food and food security sectors may be distilled from the above discussion.

First, pretty well any improvements, such as better search and appointment procedures for UN agency heads and changes in the voting system will represent a change to the international regime governing the activities of the UN agencies. As such, they will need to be negotiated internationally and will have to be seen to conform to the preferences of the major players. The UN itself can be one such player, although it may not be very influential.

Second, the regime changes will need to take account of the changing political and geographical context of food and food security problems, particularly the co-existence of war and famine, and the growing consensus in favour of questioning, and even removing, the sanctity of national sovereignty when circumstances so warrant.

Third, organizational changes will be central to any reform process, not only to tackle what we have called the 'politico-bureaucratic' problems of the UN system, but also to address explicitly the problems posed by the multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral nature of the food and food security problems. The recent focus on precise targets in food and nutrition goes some way to meeting the need for an objective-oriented task culture; however, the UN system as a whole does not yet have the organizational means to deliver the programmes needed to reach the targets.

Finally, UN system reform in the food and food security sectors should, of course, be seen in the context of the agenda of wider UN system reform. Any changes made will need to be consistent with this wider process, including steps taken to remove the barriers between the Bretton Woods and non-Bretton Woods agencies, and to strengthen the co-ordination of financial, technical and food aid. There is also considerable support in the literature for measures to increase the integration and coherence of the UN system.

We see two main paths in applying these principles: a minimum, gradualist or evolutionary option, which might be called '*status quo plus*'; and a more ambitious option, involving major restructuring of the UN system, revised mandates and new forms of organization.

The minimum option would leave untouched the basic structure of the UN system and its mandates. It would focus on better coordination and integration of initiatives, on more precise policy and operational guidance, and on better implementation and coordination of action programmes. The agenda could include such items as: establishing food security as one of the major standing items on the agenda of the ACC; broadening and strengthening the work of the ACC/SCN; providing a small permanent secretariat for the JCGP; including food security as a common item in Country Strategy Notes and in the coordinated work programmes of UN agencies at the field level; making food security a major goal in the policies and programmes of the IMF, World Bank, WTO and UN specialized agencies; strengthening coordination with bilateral programmes, the private sector and NGOs; discussing and deciding on initiatives to be taken in the UN General Assembly and the governing bodies of the concerned UN agencies on the basis of

annual progress reports; and undertaking administrative reform, based on 're-engineering', to define and replicate best-practice.

The more ambitious option would include the steps proposed for the minimum option but would also involve: systematic review of the mandates of the various UN bodies, in order to give greater prominence to food security and the human right to food (including, where necessary, the right to intervene in sovereign states); expanding but also centralizing funding; and, perhaps most important, strengthening the political control of the UN General Assembly and ECOSOC, and the executive leadership of the UN Secretary General. These arrangements would enable there to be a single food security policy for the UN system, with resources allocated to follow the policy across the system according to the comparative advantage of agencies.

Whichever option is followed, we believe it is necessary to have a focal point on food security in the UN system, certainly on technical matters, but preferably also at the highest political level. The experience of the World Food Council suggests that there is little mileage in setting up a separate institution without executive authority and with a mandate which cuts across that of other bodies. Nor, however, can a coordinating or supervisory body reasonably be located in a single agency, like the FAO, with restricted sectoral membership and a limited sectoral mandate. One possibility, therefore, is an institution based within the UN proper, perhaps within the ACC structure and reporting to ECOSOC; another is to strengthen the coordinating capacity of UNDP, as the UN's main development agency; a third would be to establish a 'World Food Security Council', as proposed, but not agreed, at the World Food Conference in 1974 (UN 1975: 37);

and a fourth, if the proposal to create an Economic Security Council comes to fruition, would be to give that body responsibility for food security as one of its primary tasks. In all these cases, the focal point will be more effective if it has a say in resource allocation; and if it clearly has a mandate which includes the Bretton Woods Institutions.

5 CONCLUSION

The UN Secretary-General has rightly argued that 'The world now produces enough food to feed its population. The problem is not simply technical. It is a political and social problem. It is a problem of access to food supplies, of distribution and of entitlement. Above all, it is a problem of political will' (Boutros-Ghali 1993).

We agree. However, we also believe that a solution to world food security problems requires improved global governance. This too requires political will. Improvements to the *status quo* can only be stop-gap solutions. The evidence of the UN's strengths and failures, and an exploration of the reasons underlying observed performance, both suggest that more radical change is the necessary route.

Action is urgent. Today's problems are already pressing. Over the next 25 years, the world's population will increase by 40 per cent and effective demand for food by 55 per cent, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI 1995). Furthermore, it must be a priority to raise the nutritional status of millions of people who do not have the purchasing power to buy all the food they need. With the right policies and the right framework of global governance, these needs can be met. If not, the prospects for resource degradation, economic and political crisis and human misery are grim indeed.

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