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International co-operative activities in the field of nutrition

An introductory statement

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I have been asked to give a general picture of the United Nations organizations, as a background to what other speakers will tell of work done for nutrition by their organizations.

The United Nations organizations are just what the name implies: organizations set up by governments as the machinery for their joint work. The secretariats form an international civil service; they have the same relation to the policy-making bodies, such as the General Assembly of the United Nations, as the staff of a government department has to Parliament.

In the family of United Nations organizations there are the United Nations itself and the specialized agencies.

The United Nations was set up, and its Charter adopted, in 1946. Its main purpose is to maintain international peace and security, and one of the ancillary purposes to that end is to achieve international co-operation in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems.

The highest authority of the United Nations is the General Assembly. Other organs deal with special parts of the work; one of them is the Economic and Social Council, with which the specialized agencies work directly. The members of the General Assembly and the other United Nations organs are delegates sent by the governments of the member countries. The secretariat, under the Secretary-General, staffs these bodies and carries out the programmes of work that they direct.

The specialized agencies deal with the more specialized and technical subjects. They are autonomous; each has its own constitution, its own conference or assembly of delegates from governments, and its own secretariat.

The United Nations and each specialized agency has its own budget, to which member governments contribute separately; the membership varies from one organization to another.

The agencies with which this symposium is concerned are the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The first two are specialized agencies, UNICEF is part of the United Nations.

Economic and social problems react on each other and cannot be dealt with in sealed compartments. One of the functions of the Economic and Social Council is to co-ordinate the economic and social programmes of the United Nations family as a whole. There is also a co-ordinating committee of the heads of all the organizations. In the end, though, it is the governments themselves that co-ordinate the work, through their representatives on the international policy-making bodies and, at home, by co-ordinating the work of their ministries that are receiving international assistance.

The word 'assistance' is important. The international organizations do not give direct services to the people of the world. Each government is responsible for the welfare of its people; international organizations, when the governments ask them, help governments to carry out that responsibility. The nutrition programmes described by Aykroyd (1956), Burgess (1956) and the Secretariat of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1956) are therefore mainly programmes of governments. They illustrate how international assistance works out in practice.

The international organizations also do work that has a more general application. They prepare international agreements, establish standards and collect and publish information.

The assistance given by international agencies to individual countries has been supplemented and on the whole greatly enlarged by the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance for the Economic Development of Under-developed Areas (ETAP). The Expanded Programme was started in 1949 by the Economic and Social Council to give effect to the growing conviction, expressed, for example, in 'Point IV' of President Truman's address to the United States Congress in that year, that a practical step to maintaining world peace would be to reduce the inequalities of economic development in different countries.

The Expanded Programme is directed by the Economic and Social Council, through its Technical Assistance Committee, composed of representatives of governments. There is also a co-ordinating committee of the secretariats—the Technical Assistance Board. The larger organizations that are participating in the ETAP are the UN itself, ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO.

The Expanded Programme is financed from a special fund to which the governments contribute—to the amount, in the past 4 years, of between £6.7 million and £9 million a year. This money is used by participating agencies for the same sort of assistance as they give under the programmes financed from their regular budgets.

The budgets of the international agencies are small and they receive many more requests from governments than they can deal with, even with help from ETAP.

But the money these agencies spend to assist countries brings large returns in terms of work accomplished, because the governments more than match their contributions. In health work under ETAP, for example, it has been estimated that governments spend about £4 for every £1 spent by WHO.

There is a shortage not only of money: for certain subjects it is becoming very hard to find people with the knowledge and character needed for international work. Governments have a similar difficulty. If international help is not to be wasted, the work for which it is given must be carried on and expanded by the governments. For this, governments need skilled staff of their own. An essential part of international aid is to help in training this staff; but it is not always possible to find people who can profit by the training. That calls for more expenditure on education. All these developments need capital expenditure on building and equipment—and there is least spare capital in the countries where the need is greatest.

Several agencies of the United Nations group help in this difficulty. The International Monetary Fund is concerned with the conversion of currencies, and the International Bank makes loans to governments for projects of economic development. Plans are now well advanced for the International Finance Corporation, which would lend, not to governments but to private enterprise, and would mobilize private capital for these loans. Recently a plan has been formulated for a Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development (SUNFED). This Fund would lend money to governments for important development projects which cannot be expected to pay dividends—such as sewerage systems for small towns, the control of infectious diseases or the building and equipment of schools.

I will end with a few details about the three agencies with which this symposium is specially concerned.

FAO was the first specialized agency to be set up after the war—in 1946. Its headquarters are now in Rome and in the past 2 years it has had a yearly budget of from £1·8 to £2 million. It has seventy-one member governments. Aykroyd (1956) describes its purposes and the arrangements made by FAO and WHO for joint working.

WHO was formally established in 1948. Its headquarters are in Geneva and it has strong regional components: regional committees and offices for Africa, the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. The objective of WHO is 'the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health', and health is defined in its Constitution as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. WHO has eighty-one members and four associate members. Its budget for the past 2 years has been about £2·7 million a year.

UNICEF was created by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946 to help the children of war-devastated countries. In 1952 it was reconstituted as the United Nations Children's Fund. The Fund is made up of voluntary contributions from governments and other donors, and is used to meet the emergency and long-range needs of children, particularly in underdeveloped countries. Its administration

is at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Sixty-one governments contributed in 1954 to the Fund and its budget for the past 2 years has been about £5½ million a year.

The Executive Boards of UNICEF and WHO established in 1948 a joint policy committee to direct their joint programmes—an arrangement which has proved very effective.

Other speakers report on the technical progress and practical results achieved in our nutrition work. These programmes give evidence also of something less tangible: new ways of working together. A programme that an international agency and a government develop together provides a searching test for the knowledge that the agency brings from other countries. Everyone learns from these tests. This exchange of knowledge is not only wider than ever before, it is also striking deeper. It is remarkable how, in the past few years, governments have come to accept and seek impartial advice on matters that go to the roots of the social life of the country, such as what people eat, or how much land a man may own, or whether a 12-year-old child should be at school or earning his living. This is what makes us believe that our work is really leading to more understanding among nations.

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FAO and nutrition

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The Nutrition Division

The broad aims of FAO are stated in the preamble to its Constitution, and the first of these is 'to raise levels of nutrition'. Nutritional concepts, as I have shown elsewhere (Aykroyd, 1953), played an important part in its creation. It is therefore appropriate that FAO should have a Nutrition Division as one of its five technical divisions, the others being Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry and Economics.

The Nutrition Division is the smallest of the divisions, employing some nineteen professional staff members, some thirteen of whom are stationed in headquarters in Rome and the remainder in regional offices in Washington, Santiago, Cairo and Bangkok. The staff of nineteen includes fourteen different nationalities. Two sections forming part of the Division may be mentioned, namely the Food Consumption and Management Section and the Home Economics Section. The Division has responsibility for home economics and certain aspects of food technology as well as for nutrition itself. Apart from the regular staff, specialists are employed in field assign-