Keynote Address

Meeting Human Needs in a Changing World

by Robert W. Kates

In the midst of change, it is extraordinarily difficult to take its measure, to detect what is lasting and different from what is ephemeral. I focus here on the shifting world to suggest some ways to sort out the changes and their implications for our common task of meeting human needs. I address three kinds of changes, and, as we meet here in Rhode Island, the self-designated Ocean State, I use an oceanographic metaphor, describing change as currents, which are the long-term trends; tides, which represent the cyclical swings; and surges, undertows, and ripples, which are the surprises.

I believe a warmer, more crowded, more connected, but more diverse world awaits us. These are powerful trends, as deep-running as the great ocean currents of the Gulf Stream, seemingly set in place with little possibility of reversal, although subject to slower or more rapid movement.

Unless our scientific reasoning is flawed, we are already deeply committed to a warmer world. Prevailing scientific opinion holds that the surface air temperature of the earth has increased between 0.3 and 0.6 degrees Celsius over the last 100 years and that it will increase two to five degrees sometime in the next century, if present trends of increase in human-induced greenhouse gases persist. Expectation for the distribution of the average warming within regions, effects on rainfall, and subsequent impacts on human life and livelihood, however, are uncertain. Except for the fact that we expect greater warming toward the poles, we do not know for any particular place how much warming will occur, and whether it will be wetter or drier overall. Nonetheless, the current is running, the trend is already underway, and even the most far-reaching proposals will only slow but will not prevent the warming trend.

The future will also be much more crowded. When we began our research at the World Hunger Program six years ago, we took as a marker the conventional expectation of a population doubled to 10 billion people as the next equilibrium state that theory and experience seemed to indicate. This by itself seemed troubling because it led to the projection that satisfying the human needs of a doubled world population would require a four-fold increase in agriculture, a six-fold increase in energy and an eight-fold increase in the economy. Many doubt the capacity of the earth to sustain such growth under any circumstances, even if it were possible to attain it. To add to that uncertainty, the slowing of the decline in fertility advances the mid-century population projection to 11 billion and climbing.

The world of our future will also be much more connected by ties of communication, economic production and consumption, and migration. Within this decade, for example, worldwide phone portability will be a reality, altering communications as profoundly as has the fax machine. Similarly, within the next five years, at least two and probably three major common markets, with associated blocs in the south, will exist.

Paradoxically, such connectedness will not necessarily homogenize the world’s people—it may well increase the diversity. The flow of things, informa-
tion, and most certainly people draw the world together, but leads to greater
diversity in the specific destinations toward which the flows are directed. This is
surely the case for the rich part of the world. Consider the food section of any
supermarket, or the more important prospect that in 2050, a majority of the U.S.
population will be people of color and immigrants and their children. Strong
countercurrents to the forces of connectedness, emphasizing ethnic, national,
and religious distinctiveness, maintain the diversity.
More familiar cycles or swings are as different from the trends of time as
tides are from the great currents. Many are short term, such as the recession of
the business cycle or the El Niño of Pacific Ocean warming. In decades-long
swings, the great democracies move to the left or the right of the political spec-
trum. A noted American historian claims this movement can be observed in
American politics at thirty-year intervals. Over longer time scales of fifty years,
so-called Kondratiev cycles respond to the introduction of clusters of new
technologies. Finally, over very long-term horizons, even the great currents may
appear as tides on the shores of time.
"Pundits and commentators often treat recurrent tides as long-term currents. For
example, the great economic events that led to the collapse of the Soviet Empire
were surely a storm surge of surprise and have formed the most prominent
feature of our changing world, marking the end of the Cold War-driven, two-
supercpower-dominated world.

The demise of the USSR is seen by many as the twin triumphs of capitalism and
democracy. This vision is reinforced by parallel events in developing coun-
tries. Privatization, the dismantling of government controls and regulation, and
encouragement of investment and the free movement of capital is proceeding in
many parts of the world. The shifts from military to civilian governments in Latin
America, the hesitant but important steps to multiparty elections and civil and
political rights in Africa, and the explosion of nongovernmental organizations
(NGOs), especially in Asia, are seen as a parallel trend toward democracy, civil
society, and public participation. The reverberations around the world of the changes in Eastern
Europe cannot be minimized.

Yet I suspect that what is extending as deepcurrents of change may well emerge as
recurrent tides. We will probably not return to a bipolar world in the
near future, but American dominance will prove elusive.
New configurations of economy and politics are already evolving.
The inflation with the market will diminish as the high social
costs of inequity begin to out-
weigh the benefits of overall
growth. And I fear some of the
chaos, grudgery, and corruption of emerging democracy will encourage the reemergence of

Ronald Roshenr, Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, in
conversation with Robert W. Kates, Director of the Alan Shawm Fennesse World
Hunger Program, and Akin Mabogunje, Chair of the Overcoming Hunger in the
1990s Project.

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South Asia will increase the global proportions of underweight children because of the vastly higher proportions of underweight children in that region than elsewhere. Although it is not likely that hunger rates will stay constant—indeed, they may increase because of rapid population growth in poorly fed populations—hunger rates would have to decrease more rapidly in groups that are both the hungriest and the fastest-growing to invalidate this conclusion.

As the World Hunger Program's Ellen Messer has shown, rights to food are universal in the great religious traditions and in most, if not all, cultures. Anthropologist and faculty associate Lucile Newman's presentation of our collective research on the history of hunger brings some encouraging insight. What changes over time is how these rights to food are extended to larger and larger groups.

Caring for and sharing with humankind and other species is the direction toward which we move.

Linked to this consistency of values are the changes in entitlement and the ability to produce or exchange food. The history of hunger is marked by occasional plenty, diminishing food shortage, and continuing food poverty. Evidence suggests recent decreasing proportions but constant or increasing numbers of hungry people. Over time, the scale and complexity of entitlement to food changes. The availability of food extends to the entire globe from the earlier limits of a day's walk, a hunting trip, or a seasonal migration. The nature of entitlement changes from access to natural resources and the dependencies of kinship to a complex set of resources, gifts, and exchanges. Responsibility for kin extends to strangers a world away.

This current of caring is marked by a number of positive observations. William Crosw prize, faculty associate of the World Hunger Program, has reviewed the secular trends upward in human height as a long-term measure of nutrition improvement. The trends, however, are not universal. In Europe, heights in the early Middle Ages were as great as at the turn of this century, although much smaller as between. The forty-year decline in numbers exposed to risk of famine continues unabated, tempting us to believe that famine can be eliminated within this decade. And Marvin Garcia of the International Food Policy Research Institute has shown that the decline in children's stunting and wasting persists despite difficult economic conditions. Finally, we await the findings of the Sixth World Food Survey to assess the progress made in reducing chronic food poverty.

A development spiral (Figure 1) devised by Goran Hyden, Associate Director for Africa of the World Hunger Program, suggests the trajectory of redistributing growth. Growth through 1985 is enabled by enabling environments, 1985's intermediary organizations, and directed Basic Needs participation. Small is beautiful in decentralized administration, 1965–1975. Local organizations 1975–1985.

Hunger is an anachronism in a world of plenty. The hungry are those who are left out, marginal, specially vulnerable, discriminated against, or ignored. Affirming our solidarity with the hungry of the world can serve as a constant as we seek our bearings in a changing and confusing world.

our common recent history in the struggle against hunger and poverty and assists us in turning from currents of caring to contemporary sides. He argues for major swings in the prescriptions against poverty around two major axes reflecting questions of how far poverty eradication is dependent on growth or redistribution and how much the poor can help themselves or how dependent they are on government programs.

Contemporary sides of market reorientation and political restructuring hold promise but also cause concern. The market-oriented side may stimulate growth but will surely stimulate growth in the gap between rich and poor, within and between countries. The market, despite its efficiency in allocation, does not possess self-correcting mechanisms to assure food security to contain and reduce the numbers of hungry people. Political restructuring may bring a persistent side of conflict and displacement with more refined zones of armed conflict in which the provision of humanitarian assistance will be perilous indeed.

Finally, in Hyden's drawing, the move around the two axes is sketched as spiral to stress that we learn by experience and never return to quite the same spot, even though the same broad territory may be revisited. Thus, we have encouragement from still another Sved of what Gunnar Myrdal described as the benign spiral as opposed to the vicious circle in which we are simply condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. Knowing something about our past, what should we do in the face of change? I offer five suggestions to help us meet human needs in a much changing world.

Although I probably spend more time attempting to make sense of the world around me than most people—that, after all, is and should be the central task of think tanks like the World Hunger Program—the kind of sorting that I am suggesting to you does not require a Ph.D. We can all ask ourselves which are the true currents of our times, the tides that come and go, and the surprising surges and undertows that seem so discontinuous and truly different. We can all learn how to sail the waters of our lives.

We are all people of our times and contexts. Most of us do not live among those with whose fates we identify. Our own lives, careers, families, countries are swept along by the tides and currents of which we speak and at times our own and others' interests are confused or in actual conflict. We can navigate better if we affirm our values. Hunger is an anachronism in a world of plenty. The hungry are those who are left out, marginal, specially vulnerable, discriminated against, or ignored. Affirming our solidarity with the hungry of the world can serve as a constant as we seek our bearings in a changing and confusing world.

We know how to do some things well, we are learning how to do others. Having hunger in the world is achievable. Implementing the brave words of the Bellagio or Medford Declarations is harder, but we have made the beginning. And we will learn more as we exchange experience and confront common difficulties.

If we affirm the constancy of our values, we should try to use the shifting tides to further our goal, to make the market work for the poor and target for direct assistance those left invisible; to seize the democratic moment and make space for the great stirrings at the grass roots and, in turn, to link the grass roots to the summit; and to take the new cliches of this decade—participation, empowerment, enabling environments—and make them real. At the same time, we must have that sense of change to know that we will both underdo and overdo, and in another decade we will need to compensate for outcomes we had not intended.
Halving hunger in the world is achievable. Implementing the brave words of the Bellagio or Medford Declarations is harder, but we have made the beginning.

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Ending Deaths Due to Famine

From Principles to Practice

by Robert S. Chen

Rapid worldwide social and political change presents both opportunity and risk for efforts to end hunger. This is most evident in the arena of preventing famine, where superpower conflict and competition have subsided—only to be replaced by growing regional and ethnic rivalry.

The Bellagio Declaration’s first goal—to eliminate deaths due to famine—notes that the major obstacle to its achievement is the destruction or interdiction of civilian food supplies and humanitarian aid in zones of armed conflict. Thus, institutions that provide humanitarian assistance when human and natural disasters strike must be strengthened. And, when peace does occur, quickly restoring basic food security is important—not the least as a way to nurture peace and democracy.

In the short run, aid institutions clearly need better guidelines for dealing with the challenges posed by violent conflict. Developing such guidelines has been the objective of the Humanitarianism and War Project undertaken by the Thomas J. Watson, Jr. Institute for International Studies of Brown University and by the Refugee Policy Group. Based in part on the discussions held at the 1992 Briefing, a draft set of “Principles and Policy Guidelines for Aid Practitioners in Situations of Armed Conflict” is in revision. One key issue raised in these discussions, as emphasized in the following articles by Peter Uvin, Jarat Chopra and Thomas Weiss, and James Ingram, is the apparent collision between human rights and national sovereignty. Finding effective ways to protect the basic human right to food in all circumstances remains a critical need.

In the long run, a critical task will be to restore food security equitably and sustainably in areas disrupted by conflict. Reports at the Briefing on El Salvador, Ethiopia, Iraq, Mozambique, and Uganda highlighted the pitfalls and the promise of reconstruction efforts and the important contributions of nongovernmental organizations to the process. The complexity and difficulty of the task of reconstruction demand a high degree of balance and sensitivity on the part of aid agencies as well as a long-term commitment to assistance that does not fade once the visible crisis of armed conflict appears to have ended.

The UN Conference on Environment and Development and the International Conference on Nutrition in 1992 provide important opportunities for making progress towards both of these objectives. Of special interest will be the interplay between national rights, human rights, and emergent “environmental” rights. A permanent end to the deadly threat of famine is likely to require “co-evolution” and compromise among all three categories of rights—and a worldwide strengthening of institutions and commitment to balance and enforce them.

Developing the necessary principles and putting them into practice may be one of the greatest challenges—and potential achievements—for the remainder of this decade.