

## Keynote Address

### *Meeting Human Needs in a Changing World*

by Robert W. Kates

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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, undertow, 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 draws 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 spectrum. 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 Kondratief 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 profound 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-superpower-dominated world.

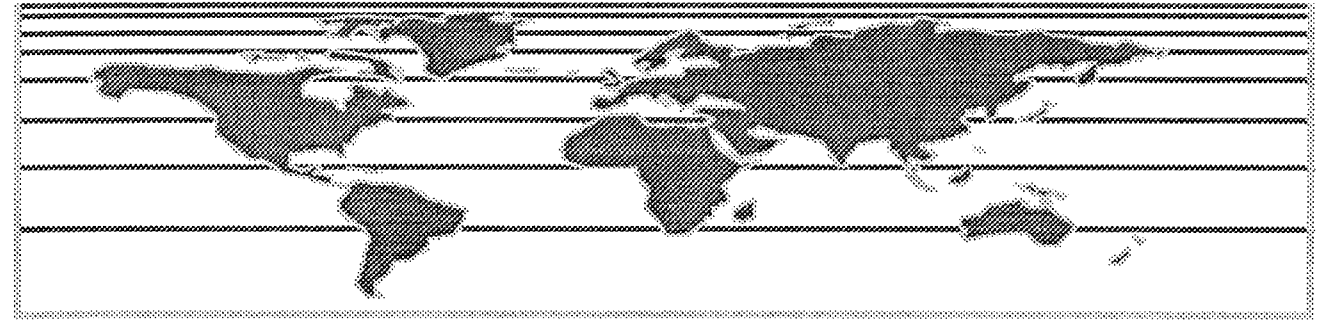
The demise of the USSR is seen by many as the twin triumphs of capitalism and democracy. This vision is reinforced by parallel events in developing countries. Privatization, the dismantling of government controls and regulation, and encouragement of investment and the free movement of capital is proceeding 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 extolled as deep currents 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 infatuation with the market will diminish as the high social costs of inequity begin to outweigh the benefits of overall growth. And I fear some of the chaos, gridlock, and corruption of emerging democracy will encourage the reemergence of

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



authoritarian institutions or worse. The world will surely appear less orderly. For example, each year in our program we count ongoing wars in which civilian food supplies become hostage to the conflict. These have diminished as the superpowers have withdrawn their encouragement, yet the number stays high, as new ethnic conflicts emerge, fundamentalism asserts itself, and the struggle for democracy is neither simple nor peaceful.

Amid the currents and tides, surprise brings undertows, riptides, and storm surges that batter our conventional expectations. Surprise can be anticipated, studied, and at times, simulated. In a connected world, coping with surprise should be of great interest. Indeed, the distinguished chair of *Overcoming Hunger in the 1990s*, Akin Mabogunje, authored a scenario in 1986 entitled, "The Even Greater October Revolution of 2017," that foresaw the collapse of the Soviet empire—albeit a bit late.

It may be easy to describe the characteristics of surprises, if not their detail. I think we would all be surprised if the great trends turned out to be recurrent tides—if, for example, the world became no warmer or crowded. Just think how surprised we all were at the reemergence of infectious diseases such as AIDS in the affluent well-medicated world. Similarly, I would be surprised if the infatuation with the market celebrated a golden anniversary. And I would be happily surprised if democracy really became universal.

What does this taxonomy of change mean for meeting human needs? Will a world that is warmer, more crowded, more connected, probably more diverse, be more caring? And how in such a world do we deal with the ebb and flow of the tides of change?

Human needs will surely increase. Rapid population growth places additional stress on already food-poor households; intensifies the stress on mothers and children; and puts greater burden on the limited capacity of developing nations to provide health care, social services, and education to its most vulnerable people. The larger dynamics of how rapid population growth affects the available food supply, the resource base for agriculture, opportunities for economic growth and employment, and the differential entitlements of household members—all factors that affect the prevalence of hunger—are still in doubt. Nonetheless, the task of ending hunger among twice as many people will be more difficult.

How the anticipated increase will differentially affect populations vulnerable to hunger is a related question. In one analysis, my colleague, Sara Millman of the University of Hawaii at Hilo, demonstrated that if regional rates of food poverty remain constant at their estimated 1983-1985 levels, the shifting geographic distribution of world population implied by regional variation in population growth rates would lead to an increasing global proportion in food poverty. A similar analysis for food deprivation indicates that the stalled decline in fertility in

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.

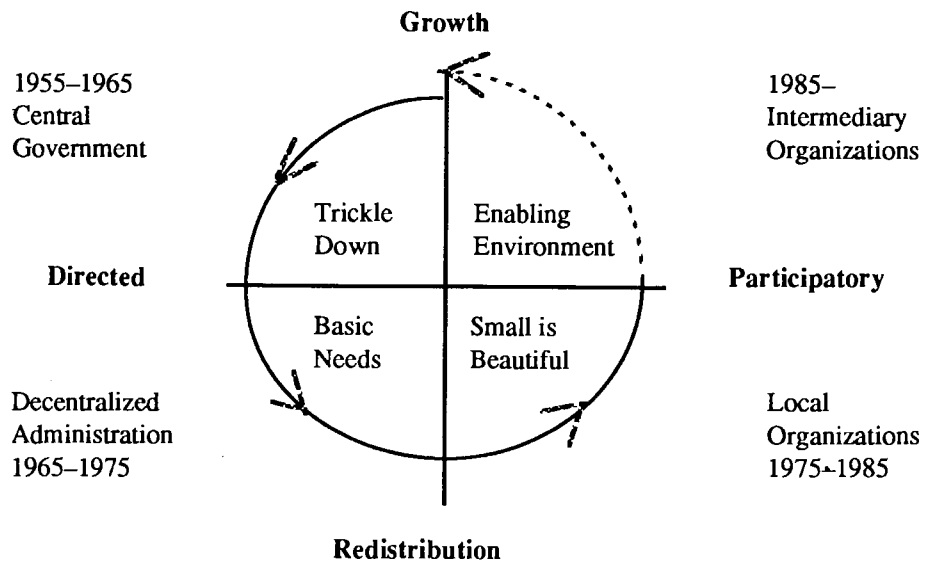
As the World Hunger Program's Ellen Messer has shown, rights to food are universal in the great religious traditions and in most, if not all, cultures. Anthropologist and faculty associate Lucile Newman's presentation of our collective research on the history of hunger brings some encouraging insight. 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 Crossgrove, 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 in 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 Marito 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

Figure 1. Shifts in prescriptions against poverty



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our common recent history in the struggle against hunger and poverty and assists us in turning from currents of caring to contemporary tides. He argues for four 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 tides of market reorientation and political restructuring hold promise but also cause concern. The market-oriented tide 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 tide of conflict and displacement with more refugees, displaced persons, and 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 Swede 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 PhD. 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. 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. 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 to make room for the great stirrings at the grass roots and, in turn, to link the grass roots to the summit; and to take the new clichés 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.

Most of all, we must make common cause between those who concentrate on coping with the currents, those who ride the tides, and those who respond to stormy surges and undertows. This will not be easy. Among us are those who are in constant motion, attending to the surging needs around us. Others decry such distraction as taking away from the more important efforts to concentrate on the underlying causes of hunger and poverty. And we are all caught between the conflicting pulls to assist the hungry in our country, or in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, or in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As we ponder the fate of the earth in a warmer, more crowded world, we ask how much attention should be given to the environment problem, or to the population problem.

Although we must recognize these differences in emphasis, concern, and judgment, we must transcend them to make common cause. Common cause for what? For meeting human needs in a changing world. □

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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. □

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