J. X. Kasperson and R. W. Kates, (eds.), 1990. Overcoming Hunger in the 1990s, a special issue of Food Policy, Vol.15, No. 4, pp.273-368.

Conference reports

Reducing hunger in the 1990s

Third Annual Hunger Research Briefing and Exchange, *Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 4–6 April 1990*

We enter the last decade of the 20th century, after the 'lost eighties', with a renewed awareness that the high hopes of the 1974 United Nations World Food Conference have fallen short of realization. Food production lags in some parts of the world, minimal goals for improved nutrition and health are still far from being achieved in many areas, and women and children continue to suffer disproportionately. Meanwhile, resources continue to be diverted from alleviating hunger to conflict and military build-ups. The UN and other international organizations have lacked either the will or the skill to promote the growth of local institutions that could enable people to free themselves from hunger. Yet in some environments, often with the support of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), progress has been made, especially when these efforts have enabled people to participate more fully in shaping their own destinies.

Raising public awareness

According to some indices, even the absolute level of suffering may have declined somewhat, but the development community continues to face the dilemma that top-down programmes seldom offer more than temporary relief unless they are accompanied by the strengthening of local groups. Even NGOs find it difficult to let go and turn programmes over to local people.

These were some of the insights offered in the opening session of the Third Annual Hunger Research Briefing and Exchange held at Brown University during 4–6 April 1990. The conference, which drew more than 150 participants from NGOs, universities and government, focused this year on consensus-building for a new attack on the most egregious problems of hunger and malnutrition. Among the promising weapons were the Bellagio Declaration, formulated in November 1989 by 24 researchers, activists and planners and aimed at reducing global hunger by half before the beginning of the 21st century; the World Summit for Children planned for September 1990 in New York by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and from NGOs; the Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) project being implemented by the World Bank with co-sponsorship from the United Nations Development Programme and the African Development Bank; and regional conferences leading up to the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition planned by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the WHO. The final session addressed issues of raising public awareness and generating support for these and similar initiatives. Chaired by Glenn Olds of the Better World Society, the panel included presentations by Representative Claudine Schneider (R–RI), Brian Dickinson, syndicated columnist with the *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, and Sam Harris of Results. The subsequent discussion was punctuated by spirited debate and controversy, especially over the allocation of the so-called 'peace dividend' between US domestic and international priorities in the rapidly changing world political climate.

This year's briefing featured both a plenary session, chaired by J. Larry Brown of Tufts University, and a technical panel on the continuing but often hidden problem of hunger and inadequate nutrition in the USA. These two sessions highlighted failures and successes of past efforts and the urgent need to revitalize government support of nutrition programmes. The technical panel, led by Linda Neuhauser of the University of California at Berkeley, discussed efforts to shift attention from a poorly defined concept of hunger to providing food security for everyone, with attention to the nutritional inadequacies and underestimated costs of the US Department of Agriculture 'thrift' diet and to the difficulties of providing reliable assessments of the actual extent of hunger in the US. William Whitaker of the University of Maine subsequently organized an impromptu session to discuss the need for a major effort analogous to the Bellagio Declaration to deal with US domestic hunger.

A panel on emergency relief in regions of conflict picked up a prominent theme from previous briefings on a somewhat hopeful note after the (relative) success of Operation Lifeline Sudan. Organizations such as the UN World Food Programme and NGOs continue to face serious problems in zones of conflict, but the easing of East–West tensions lays the groundwork for the potential use of UN peacekeeping forces in the future. The session on using food aid to increase food security reported on the efforts of three voluntary organizations (CARE, Oxfam America and the Mennonite Central Committee) to combine short-term relief with long-term self-sufficiency in projects in Africa and Asia. The common theme of local community involvement repeated the emphasis on empowerment so prominent in the opening session. Food aid cannot be seen as successful unless it is part of a strategy for promoting future food security without dependency.

Child survival continues to be a major international concern, but a panel at this year's briefing forcibly emphasized the need to go beyond survival to issues of the subsequent well-being of children. All indicators, especially growth, demonstrate the abysmal state of existence for hundreds of millions of the world's children and prove the need for more differentiated and sophisticated intervention plans to provide for better nutrition at all stages of child development. Population trends and policies

were the topics of another discussion that linked improvements in child survival and increased life expectancy together with a declining but still substantial birthrate as part of continuing global population growth. Environmental degradation and decreasing agricultural production constitute one common local or regional outcome, but are not the only possible result. More discussion and dissemination of successful case studies are urgently needed.

The difficulties mentioned earlier of assessing the prevalence of hunger in the US pale before the global problem. A session on assessing hunger prevalence noted ongoing and planned efforts to collect more reliable new data and to improve analysis of existing data. The UN Administrative Committee on Coordination, Subcommittee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN), chaired by the session's moderator, Dr Abraham Horwitz, monitors nutrition trends and flows of resources related to nutrition. The FAO is now undertaking the Sixth World Food Survey, which should be available as an input into the 1992 International Conference on Nutrition. The World Hunger Program draws on these types of activities and its own efforts in preparing its evolving, multidimensional 'profile' of hunger at the global scale. Special efforts are needed to track hunger among an estimated 15 million refugees worldwide. Famine monitoring could also be improved with better information on vulnerable groups of people, as noted in another panel. Progress continues to be made on combining existing early warning information with new technologies and new kinds of local monitoring, as in the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) project of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), but a more sophisticated understanding is also needed of how events feed into the determinants of hunger and how traditional coping mechanisms are invoked when the threat of famine appears.

The needs for and possibilities of more sustainable systems of agricultural production were evident in a session comparing the experiences and insights of 13 Thoman Fellows from 11 countries at Michigan State University, problems of environmental degradation and agricultural production in southern Africa, and a USAID-sponsored project of the Rodale Institute in the Peanut Basin of Senegal. No less important for assuring food security are improved methods of storage, the topic of another panel. Most food is locally grown, but inadequate storage facilities often leave producers at the mercy of traders and moneylenders. Large central facilities are subject to sabotage by competing interests, but new types of storage containers especially adapted to decentralized and flexible use help empower small producers, especially women.

As in previous years, the exhibition of hunger-related books, displays by organizations attending the briefing and screenings of recent videos attracted considerable interest. The conference notebook contained nearly 150 abstracts of recent publications and ongoing research projects. 'Oppressed', a provocative arrangement of bronze figures by Connecticut sculptor Nicholas Swearer, and a book exhibit on 'A harvest gathered: food in the New World' in Brown University's John Carter Brown Library were opportune additions to the conference.

The awards ceremony for the 1989–90 Alan Shawn Feinstein Awards for the Prevention and Reduction of World Hunger was moderated by Vartan Gregorian, the President of Brown University, and featured remarks on 'The shame of hunger' by honorary chair Elie Wiesel, winner of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Peace. The research award was presented to Amartya Sen of Harvard University and the public service award to Rose Escalante de Amicama on behalf of the Women's Organization of Independencia, Peru. Morley Safer of CBS News presented the award for the prevention and reduction of world hunger to Fazle H. Abed, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), on behalf of his organization.

William Crossgrove
World Hunger Program
Brown University
Providence, RI, USA

The Hunger Research Briefing and Exchange is co-sponsored by the Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Program at Brown University and InterAction, the American Council for Voluntary International Action. A more detailed summary of the sessions and discussions is available as an occasional paper from the World Hunger Program, Box 1831, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912, USA. The fourth annual Hunger Research Briefing and Exchange will be held in Providence, RI, in the spring of 1991.

Declaring a possibility

Ending Hunger: A Strategy for the 1990s, organized by International Development Forum, *London, UK, 3 April 1990*

The power of 'declaring a possibility' and the role of that in creating the conditions for change, was the basic theme of the presentation by Mick Crews, Hunger Project Board Trustee. Jeffrey Efeyini, international financial consultant, followed up with some specific suggestions for economic change.

The Hunger Project, launched in 1977 to declare the possibility of ending hunger by the year 2000, had devoted its first 10 years to creating a critical mass of opinion which accepted that there was no absolute shortage of food in the world and believed that chronic persistent hunger (distinguished from famine) could be ended for the first time in known history.

Now the Hunger Project was concentrating on securing cooperation – ending hunger could provide a powerful context for development work of all kinds. Issues of population, environment, peace, economics, human rights, were all inextricably linked.

It still stressed the need for a spoken

commitment. Historical precedents included Kennedy's undertaking to put a man on the moon, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and the Wright brothers. In this tradition, the Hunger Project called for an era of opportunity to create the climate for change. The Project had no blueprint. The strategy would be developed in action, in partnership with all those involved in development.

Jeffrey Efeyini focused on the problem of the sheer size of Third World debt relative to the economic capacity of most of the affected countries. Ending hunger through development meant addressing all the human problems (health, water, employment) that debt worsened. Huge efforts were squandered on rescheduling exercises, rather than development. He thought a free market economy was necessary to end hunger, but it was not sufficient to do so – it needed to be accompanied by an equitable distribution of wealth created.

Structural weaknesses and policy mistakes were acknowledged. But a massive market-based case-by-case debt forgiveness exercise, releasing capital resources to the sectors needing it most, was vital. New money was needed on a more cooperative basis than before, for infrastructure, education, agriculture, etc, with conditionality related to securing real economic growth, rather than the narrow market focus the IMF now used. A new multilateral institution might be needed if the existing babies of Bretton Woods could not be reformed. Real local participation in international economic management was vital to real development.

Lively, sometimes heated, debate revolved round a widespread scepticism as to whether 'declaring a possibility' was enough. What would actually make the rhetoric real? Wasn't it theoretical and utopic? Were the conflicts of interest deeper than 'raising awareness' could reach? Are 10 years enough? Did development criteria need to be fundamentally redefined? Many basic issues need to be addressed – capital flight, land reform, technology transfer, the terms of trade, barriers to trade (especially in the US and Japan) and food self-sufficiency. Such changes would 'make Perestroika seem like a tea party'. How would concerned people actually get their Government and fellow citizens to move? What was the motivation for us to change?

Mick Crews thought that the developed and developing world did have common concerns. As a businessman, he found that many large international companies now realized that 'sustainable development' was the only future. More and more were speaking that language. There was a myriad of problems, and no one 'solution'. However, problems often had to be tackled sequentially – one had to step out, to create possibilities. He could not make firm predictions, but it felt like the verge of a sea of change.

The Hunger Project was trying to 'begin the conversation' at many levels: UN, governments, including the USSR, and at the 'grassroots'. An Africa Prize for Leadership was timed to maximize debate among politicians and diplomats. In a major initiative in Gujarat, personal commitments and participation by government, academics, scientists and the grassroots had led to great progress in literacy, training, water, sanitation, as well as ending hunger.

Max Dixon
Environmental and Development Studies Group
London Research Centre
London, UK

Book reviews

Comprehensive exposition

HUNGER AND PUBLIC ACTION

by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen

Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK, 1990

Professors Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen have truly performed a labour of love in producing, in one volume, both an excellent primer for anyone interested in the subject of world hunger and an up-to-date state-of-the-art review for the professional development economist. They have succeeded remarkably in this most extraordinary undertaking and produced an exciting and most valuable addition to the rapidly growing literature on the dismal subject of persistent hunger in the modern world. The arguments and the evidence are presented in a convincing manner. A casual reader may hardly realize the full extent to which the authors of the book have taken him or her along on a journey that challenges much of conventional thinking about the causes and remedies of hunger in the modern age.

People hold strong beliefs in matters of life and death. Hunger in its many manifestations has preoccupied the minds of common people, scholars and political leaders through millennia. Some of the old accumulated wisdom and 'hunger codes', particularly those taught by the world's great religions, continue to play a major positive role. Unfortunately, however, in our rapidly changing world much of the conventional wisdom about the nature and causes of hunger and the prescriptions for private and public action is as outdated, ineffective and even counterproductive as witchcraft.

Hunger and Public Action is a comprehensive revision of those still widely believed perceptions about the nature of the hunger problem and of pursuant, outdated existing 'hunger codes'. Why is hunger in modern times so different than in other ages? And why are remedies which are not attuned to present-day realities doomed to failure? The most fundamental but often not appreciated concepts about the nature and magnitude of hunger in the modern age and the appropriate remedies can be found

in this new book and should inspire action in the modern age. In a nutshell, they are as follows:

- Hunger is intolerable now as it never was in the past because, contrary to widely held perceptions, it is unnecessary in the modern world. The enormous expansion of productive power has made it possible to guarantee food for all.
- The health problems connected with food consumption, for a substantial part of humanity, stem from having too much, not too little food. Inadequate capacity for producing enough food at an aggregate international or national level is hardly the problem.
- If politics is the 'art of the possible', then conquering world hunger has now become a political issue.
- The persistence of hunger in even relatively poor countries is related not merely to a general lack of affluence, but also to substantial – often extreme – inequalities within the society. Comparative economic power of one group *vis-à-vis* another group can be especially important in any market economy.
- Extensive international interdependence of economic life means that famines can occur not only as a result of events in the immediate vicinity but also of events far removed; not only as a result of shortfalls in supply but also of losses of purchasing power and of some people's gaining purchasing power, leading them to demand a larger share of available food supplies, leading to so-called 'boom famines'.
- The same interdependence of modern economic life that sometimes leads to hunger from unexpected sources has also drastically reduced the threat of hunger from events that disrupt or destroy food supplies. Famines and even more subtle forms of deprivation are often prevented because, in the modern world, sharply reduced costs of trading have made it possible to redistribute food and the means of acquiring it. Similarly, complementary public measures to curtail hunger can be most effective when they take full advantage of all available opportunities for redistributing food and the means of acquiring it through existing and evolving food and labour markets.

There is no way a brief review could even begin to convey the wealth of ideas and facts presented in *Hunger and Public Action*. Think of the book as a comprehensive text for a course. The busy professor need not even worry about preparing his or her own reading list. The book includes some 3000 citations to the literature.

Concepts and definitions

The greatest contribution of the book is in the wealth of concepts and definitions that the authors develop for any subsequent exploration of the subject. These fundamental concepts are, of course, useful in formulating hypotheses that can and should be tested against hard data. But, perhaps more important, better theory is likely to lead to more effective public action, even if the empirical work must follow behind. Concepts that are essential to an understanding of the issues are developed throughout the book, though most are introduced with sufficient clarity in Part I. Briefly here are some of the highlights of the approach on the essential issues:

On 'What is hunger?', Dreze and Sen refuse to accept the narrow dictionary definition 'discomfort or painful sensation casued by want of food'. Instead, they recommend, for the purpose of developing public action, that a more appropriate definition should be 'anything that causes any or all of the following conditions – undernourishment, debilitation, fatigue, morbidity and possibly mortality, with obvious effects on human wellbeing and productivity'

The authors draw a distinction between two kinds of hunger: famines and endemic deprivation. Famine is defined as an acute form of starvation leading to large-scale mortality. Endemic deprivation is sometimes referred to as chronic undernourishment. The objectives of public action are to prevent famines and to minimize endemic undernutrition.

A person suffers from hunger because of insufficient 'entitlement' or 'ability to acquire'. The entitlement concept stands in contrast to the availability concept. More food in the market does not necessarily entitle a person to more food. Similarly, the availability of health and education services does not necessarily entitle a person to these services. What matters most to the understanding of hunger, then, is understanding people's entitlements.

Entitlements depend on initial endowments (of physical and human resources) and the value obtained from exchanging them for commodities and services that prevent 'hunger'. The exchange can be with nature (eg the exchange of land and labour for crops) and can proceed directly, for satisfying one's own needs, or indirectly, from the exchange of commodities and services with others through markets for commodities and services.

The difficulties of measuring the extent of hunger lead the authors to define a new concept called capability and to draw a distinction between a capability and a standard of living.

They correctly observe that food consumption and caloric intake are not the only factors influencing hunger and its consequences. Food consumption is neither the ultimate 'outcome' of interest nor the only 'means' towards the desired outcome. One can measure directly the 'outcome' of interest, probably an index of hunger-related deprivations; or one can measure the 'means', in addition to income and food consumption by individuals (but if the data are not available, by households), also the other known 'means', such as access to all kinds of public services.

There are clear advantages to the second alternative. Hunger, as the authors have correctly defined it, is a complex phenomenon, particularly if it is not of the famine dimension, which cannot usually be measured except perhaps by an index of 'outcomes' that are themselves difficult to measure. The other advantage of

staying with measuring the means is that it is a less paternalistic way of proceeding, recognizing that one of the 'ends' of any public action should be 'the freedom to achieve'. In this context, capability would then refer to an index of all the means rather than particular outcomes.

Unfortunately, the discussion of the capability approach is not the most lucid part of the conceptual presentation. It is not at all clear what the authors have in mind when they recommend measuring capability rather than achievement. They have confused this reviewer, at least, when they say 'the "capability approach" can focus either on functionings (achievements) or on the capability to function, or both . . .'

Turning to the question, 'social security: promotion as well as protection?', the authors note that many existing social security arrangements, particularly in middle- and high-income countries, have been of the insuring or protecting kind. In a world in which many people are normally deprived, and particularly in poor countries, it may be appropriate to set up a social security system that would promote the eradication of severe deprivation as well as protect the normally adequately nourished against temporarily unfavourable conditions.

For the purpose of analysing the effectiveness of different country strategies the authors classify countries as support-led security (SLS) and growth-mediated security (GMS) strategy countries. An SLS strategy assigns high priority to direct measures against the persistence of chronic deprivation, such as the provision of access to certain public services and through measures that lead to a more equal income distribution. The GMS strategy consists of giving high priority both to direct measures and to general economic growth.

As the authors themselves say: 'there is nothing particularly complex nor alarmingly novel about these concepts'. Yet they are rarely adhered to by experts and amateurs alike. It is therefore very important that a comprehensive and sensible approach to a better understanding of the hunger problem should be as attractively stated as it is in *Hunger and Public Action*. The seasoned reader in the literature on hunger, however, will take particular interest in the empirical part of the book. The authors have worked long and hard to provide a strong empirical underpinning to the unfolding story.

Noteworthy in particular is the authors' observation that many more people die each year because of marginal deprivation of essential nutrition and insufficient access to public health than of much-publicized famines. Also noteworthy are the accounts of successes of African countries (illustrating that even under adverse general economic conditions and negative growth in aggregate food production it is possible to assure a minimum of subsistence to all), the comparative study of China and India (showing that under equivalent rates of growth, countries can realize very different achievements in the alleviation of hunger) and the accounts of experiences of countries that have implemented programmes in direct support of target groups in their population (showing that such programmes can achieve positive results under different political regimes).

Empirical support

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the empirical portion of the book has nothing of the elegance that characterizes the theoretical part. The evidence presented is soft and often hardly convincing. This is not for lack of trying. Obviously, the authors have tried to squeeze the data as hard as they could and sometimes beyond. The reality is that the specific objective of eradicating hunger has been rarely given high priority and therefore there has also been not enough effort to collect data. Again and again the authors have to resort to (their own) sound reasoning to infer what should be expected to happen rather than being able to present us with the empirical evidence.

Personally I find the lack of rigorous analysis undisturbing. I did not expect the time to be ripe for solid empirical evidence. Nevertheless, some critical observations did come to mind again and again on reading the empirical accounts. The most fundamental is that, almost throughout the empirical analysis, success is measured by narrow objectives, such as infant mortality or other measures of infant welfare, in contrast to what the authors had promised early in the book, the much broader definition of hunger. Second, there is not always sufficient attention to the cost of achieving what are often limited 'successes'. And finally, the ideological predisposition of the authors appears sometimes where it would be better to get on with a more dispassionate empirical analysis.

If success is to be measured by achievements rather than capabilities, it is clear that the only available data are mortality and child anthropometrics. But selection of these criteria biases the outcome of the empirical analysis clearly in favour of countries that pursue support-led security with the narrow objective of improving the health environment of the population. It is relatively easy to make good progress on reducing mortality, particularly when the initial rate is very high. But this success may be deceptive. More people may be kept alive just to be too poor to have access to enough food for a healthy and active life.

Would it not have been more appropriate to measure performance on an array of variables that jointly comprise the capability of the population to be adequately nourished? These variables could include income, relative prices of staple foods and access to a variety of public services, such as health and education. Although it may of course be more difficult to gather data on even these indirect indicators of adequate nourishment than on child mortality, this approach should not be ruled out as a blueprint for future empirical studies.

It is somewhat surprising that the authors seem to show no more concern about the reliability of conclusions that are often based only on infant mortality data. The only rational explanation that comes to mind is that much of the authors' previous work has been on the incidence and

prevention of famines, in which case mortality data are indeed very meaningful. This is clearly not appropriate, however, when the concern is with chronic deprivation, which, by definition, implies a concern with how people live, not only whether they are alive.

Relatedly, it is questionable whether the success of a strategy for the alleviation of endemic deprivation can be adequately judged on the basis of infant mortality data. What seems to be required in this case is sustained progress on improving a broad range of entitlements. One can only wonder if the conclusion that countries which pursue support-led security can do as well as countries which pursue growth-mediated security can hold up for very long.

The absence of any substantial accounting for costs in the comparative studies may of course be inevitable insofar as both direct and indirect costs would have to be brought into account. However, if that is the case it is surprising to find so little discussion of costs, again because countries that devote large resources to health measures may do well on the criteria used in the book, but may have difficulty providing a sustained basis for the other ingredients of good nutrition.

The mixing of the ideological disposition of the authors with interpretation of events may be little more than a slight nuisance to some readers. But it involves a question of substance as well. For instance, the failure of China to control famines is attributed only to that country not having a free press. Could it not also be that the occurrence of famines in China and in earlier times in history had something to do with not having had a free and well-functioning market? And similarly, it is not only the existence of a free press which explains the international responsiveness to a famine anywhere, but also the existence of an enormous capacity to produce and transport food which attests to the positive contributions made by relatively free enterprise economies.

Overall, however, the comparative performance of China and India is one of the most interesting chapters in the book, even though it leaves one with many unanswered fundamental questions about the sustainability of achievement in China. What would have happened, for instance, if the policies of the 1950s and 1960s had continued and growth without the development of internal and external trade had remained very sluggish, or if the political will to provide real benefits to people, which usually is strong in the aftermath of a revolution, had slackened with the next generation of leaders? Similarly, was India positioning itself perhaps better for sustainable eradication of hunger by building an economy with room for a mix of private and public enterprise? This of course is in no way to justify the observed insufficient attention to the eradication of poverty also in the early stages of development.

Another particularly noteworthy point discussed quite extensively in the book and supported by empirical observations from places as far apart as Bangladesh and Cape Verde is that in the modern era it is often more advantageous to provide people in distress with cash (if possible as wages for productive employment) than with food. This is so because food supplies move around fairly efficiently, often outperforming public distribution schemes in terms of both costs and timeliness of delivery.

In their concluding chapter Drèze and Sen rhetorically ask: 'Is this not a hopeless time to write in defence of public action . . . when the world has moved towards unhesitating admiration of private enterprise?' The book provides a comprehensive account of why a mix of both private and public action is needed to combat hunger. In their own words: 'It is, as we have tried to argue and illustrate, essential to see the public not merely as "the patient" whose well-being commands attention, but also as the "agent" whose actions can transform society. Taking note of that dual role is central to understanding the challenge of public action against hunger . . .'

My final recommendation to the reader of this review is to read all 279 pages of *Hunger and Public Action* and look to a most rewarding experience.

Shlomo Reutlinger
The World Bank
Washington, DC, USA

Provocative sketch

HUNGER IN HISTORY

Food Shortage, Poverty and Deprivation

edited by Lucile F. Newman

Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1990, 409+xi pp

'The history of hunger is for the most part unwritten. The hungry rarely write history, and historians are rarely hungry . . . Our contribution to the history of hunger lies not only in the information we have assembled, but also in the development and application of an integrative model of the causes, conditions and consequences of hunger' (pp 22–23). So Sara Millman and Robert W. Kates describe this collaborative volume to which 30 authors, 21 of whom are members of the Brown University Faculty, contributed. As one would expect, the result is very uneven and the history of hunger remains unwritten. All the same, a provocative sketch of what may have been the major fluctuations in the human experience of hunger emerges from the pages of this book, together with a very optimistic prognosis for the future.

First, the general sketch. On the basis of recent anthropological accounts of the diet of a few surviving hunters and gatherers one may believe, with Mark Cohen (Chapter 3), that the earliest human communities did not suffer much from hunger, but eventually, when hunting skills improved to a point that led to overkill of big game, humans were driven by hunger first to broad-spectrum hunting and gathering, and thence to agriculture. With agriculture hunger took

prevention of famines, in which case mortality data are indeed very meaningful. This is clearly not appropriate, however, when the concern is with chronic deprivation, which, by definition, implies a concern with how people live, not only whether they are alive.

Relatedly, it is questionable whether the success of a strategy for the alleviation of endemic deprivation can be adequately judged on the basis of infant mortality data. What seems to be required in this case is sustained progress on improving a broad range of entitlements. One can only wonder if the conclusion that countries which pursue support-led security can do as well as countries which pursue growth-mediated security can hold up for very long.

The absence of any substantial accounting for costs in the comparative studies may of course be inevitable insofar as both direct and indirect costs would have to be brought into account. However, if that is the case it is surprising to find so little discussion of costs, again because countries that devote large resources to health measures may do well on the criteria used in the book, but may have difficulty providing a sustained basis for the other ingredients of good nutrition.

The mixing of the ideological disposition of the authors with interpretation of events may be little more than a slight nuisance to some readers. But it involves a question of substance as well. For instance, the failure of China to control famines is attributed only to that country not having a free press. Could it not also be that the occurrence of famines in China and in earlier times in history had something to do with not having had a free and well-functioning market? And similarly, it is not only the existence of a free press which explains the international responsiveness to a famine anywhere, but also the existence of an enormous capacity to produce and transport food which attests to the positive contributions made by relatively free enterprise economies.

Overall, however, the comparative performance of China and India is one of the most interesting chapters in the book, even though it leaves one with many unanswered fundamental questions about the sustainability of achievement in China. What would have happened, for instance, if the policies of the 1950s and 1960s had continued and growth without the development of internal and external trade had remained very sluggish, or if the political will to provide real benefits to people, which usually is strong in the aftermath of a revolution, had slackened with the next generation of leaders? Similarly, was India positioning itself perhaps better for sustainable eradication of hunger by building an economy with room for a mix of private and public enterprise? This of course is in no way to justify the observed insufficient attention to the eradication of poverty also in the early stages of development.

Another particularly noteworthy point discussed quite extensively in the book and supported by empirical observations from places as far apart as Bangladesh and Cape Verde is that in the modern era it is often more advantageous to provide people in distress with cash (if possible as wages for productive employment) than with food. This is so because food supplies move around fairly efficiently, often outperforming public distribution schemes in terms of both costs and timeliness of delivery.

In their concluding chapter Drèze and Sen rhetorically ask: 'Is this not a hopeless time to write in defence of public action . . . when the world has moved towards unhesitating admiration of private enterprise?' The book provides a comprehensive account of why a mix of both private and public action is needed to combat hunger. In their own words: 'It is, as we have tried to argue and illustrate, essential to see the public not merely as "the patient" whose well-being commands attention, but also as the "agent" whose actions can transform society. Taking note of that dual role is central to understanding the challenge of public action against hunger . . .'

My final recommendation to the reader of this review is to read all 279 pages of *Hunger and Public Action* and look to a most rewarding experience.

Shlomo Reutlinger
The World Bank
Washington, DC, USA

Provocative sketch

HUNGER IN HISTORY

Food Shortage, Poverty and Deprivation

edited by Lucile F. Newman

Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, MA, USA, 1990, 409+xi pp

'The history of hunger is for the most part unwritten. The hungry rarely write history, and historians are rarely hungry . . . Our contribution to the history of hunger lies not only in the information we have assembled, but also in the development and application of an integrative model of the causes, conditions and consequences of hunger' (pp 22–23). So Sara Millman and Robert W. Kates describe this collaborative volume to which 30 authors, 21 of whom are members of the Brown University Faculty, contributed. As one would expect, the result is very uneven and the history of hunger remains unwritten. All the same, a provocative sketch of what may have been the major fluctuations in the human experience of hunger emerges from the pages of this book, together with a very optimistic prognosis for the future.

First, the general sketch. On the basis of recent anthropological accounts of the diet of a few surviving hunters and gatherers one may believe, with Mark Cohen (Chapter 3), that the earliest human communities did not suffer much from hunger, but eventually, when hunting skills improved to a point that led to overkill of big game, humans were driven by hunger first to broad-spectrum hunting and gathering, and thence to agriculture. With agriculture hunger took

ability to control the world around us and make it serve our purposes surely involves new risks of breakdown. A world in which everyone had all he or she wanted to eat might well be a world in which everyone was also exposed to starvation with any and every hiccup in the global circulation of goods and services upon which harvests as well as deliveries of food would presumably depend thanks to high-tech agricultural methods of production. Modern industrial societies are already in that exposed position. The enhanced potential for disaster that our food system already embodies might be worth study too, along with administrative safeguards that might be invented to make breakdown less likely.

The World Hunger Program at Brown University that produced this volume therefore has more to think about than shows up in the pages under review. But this is a provocative start with all the awkwardness and some authentic brilliance that one expects of pioneering work.

William H. McNeill
Professor of History, Emeritus
The University of Chicago, USA

Risky but restrained

MODERNISING HUNGER

Famine, Food Surplus and Farm Policy in the EEC and Africa

by Philip Raikes

Catholic Institute for International Relations in collaboration with James Currey and Heinemann, London, UK and Portsmouth, NH, USA, 1988

Anyone who writes a book on the problems of hunger and food policy in Africa is taking a big risk. First, it seems like an overworked subject, all too easily amenable to rash statements. Second, most would now agree that the regional and country data on which to base judgements are really not good enough. In beginning to read Philip Raikes's book, these worries about the value of the book are exacerbated. With a rambling preface the author gives little encouragement to the reader to take the book further.

Country studies

But once over that hurdle, the book is well worth reading. By the end two factors stand out: first, the author's directness in saying as appropriate that the available statistics, information and his knowledge do not allow him to safely take a subject any further, and therefore smartly getting on with the next subject, and second a good coverage across disciplines and literature, without being dogmatic in any one area.

The author's approach to the subject is also a bit risky. Like many he tries to relate a whole range of international factors to problems of food availability, entitlements and malnutrition at the family level. Again, the available data do not always allow these linkages to be made with clarity. However, in general, the author is suitably restrained in his conclusions and uses the novel approach of concluding most chapters with country case studies, so building country pictures for all his main themes. However, more should have been said in two areas. The first is that, for the sake of balance, the author does not say enough about micro-level aspects, trying to show how hunger and poverty on the farm or in the family are affected by international issues. He relies almost entirely on reviewing Sen's entitlement thesis in relation to famine, without expanding it with additional evidence on how low incomes cause low food intake rather than a deficit of food production *per se*. The second is linked to this: the issue of Africa's debt, conditions for structural adjustment and their impact on vulnerable groups is an area of work where many writers have tried to make these macro–micro linkages, with some success.

The book is organized into two parts. Three chapters look at Africa and its food crisis, taking a critical look at what the data show and how they are to be interpreted. Chapter 2, which relates food production with urban food consumption, is particularly interesting. Chapter 4, on famine and Sen's thesis, also looks at other factors related to malnutrition – seasonality, social systems and coping strategies and characteristics of different vulnerable groups.

The second part of the book is largely based on the consultancy report (on how EEC policies affected agriculture in tropical Africa) which provided the impetus for this book. Much has been added to the book so that the EEC's work as a development agency is put within an overall context. After a general introduction on world food production and trade, there are four chapters on EEC policies towards Africa, including the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy, food aid and project aid.

Conclusions

In his conclusion, as throughout the book, Raikes wisely stays away from Western-originated political dogma to explain processes of development, carefully noting the differences between countries and in the policies they have followed. Many African countries have now been independent for over 30 years and it is fair to examine how effective their internal policies have been. In his preface he warns the reader that he does not intend to reach clear, broad 'policy conclusions'. The evenhandedness with which he has treated his material shows how easy it is to be superficial when forcing conclusions.

Richard Longhurst
Ford Foundation
Khartoum, Sudan

Calendar

This calendar is based on information provided by the respective organizers and from secondary sources. FOOD POLICY welcomes information on meetings suitable for listing in this section. Copy deadlines are three months ahead of cover dates.

August 1990, Jakarta, Indonesia
First conference of the Asian Society of Agricultural Economists. Further information from Dr Yang Boo Choe, Chairman, ASAE Organizing Committee, Institute of Developing Economies (Ajia Keizai Kenkyusho), 42 Ichigaya-Hommura-Cho, Shinjukuku, Tokyo 162, Japan.

2–7 September 1990, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
First Asian Conference on Food Safety. Contact Conference Secretariat, First Asian Conference on Food Safety, Malaysian Institute of Food Technology, c/o Food Technology Division, MARDI, PO Box 12301, 50774 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

3–7 September 1990, The Hague, The Netherlands
VIth Congress of the European Association of Agricultural Economists on the theme European Agriculture in Search of New Strategies. Further information from NOC VI EAAE Congress, Mr Kocs de Vlieger, PO Box 29703, 2502 LS The Hague, The Netherlands (Tel: 31 70 3614161; Fax: 31 70 3615624).

5–7 September 1990, Glasgow, UK
Development Studies Association Annual Conference on Conflict and Change in the 90s. More details from The Enrolment Secretary, Department of Adult and Continuing Education, 59 Oakfield Avenue, Glasgow G12 8LW, UK (Tel: 041 339 8855 ext 4394; Fax: 041 330 4808).

11–14 September 1990, Warsaw, Poland
A Ford Foundation-sponsored conference on Food Economy in Socialist Countries: Production – Reforms – International Trade, during which a special session on 'Multiple utilization of agricultural resources' will be held. More details from Tadeusz Hunek, Rural and Agricultural Development Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, Nowy Swiat 72, PL 00330, Warsaw, Poland.

17–19 September 1990, Reading, UK
Systems Theory Applied to Agriculture and the Food Chain (International symposium to mark the retirement of Professor C.R.W. Spedding). Contact Dr S.P. Carruthers, Department of Agriculture, University of Reading, Earley Gate, Reading, Berks, RG6 2AT, UK (Tel: 0734 318496).

22–25 September 1990, Ashford, Kent, UK
Agricultural Economics Society and Economic and Social Research Council Seminar/Workshop on New Developments in Empirical Research in Agricultural Economics. More details from Alison Burrell, Department of Agricultural Economics, Wye College, Ashford, Kent TN25 5AH, UK.

22–24 October 1990, Brussels, Belgium
Food Policy Trends in Europe: Nutritional, Technological, Analytical and Safety Assessment Aspects. Contact ILSI Europe, Ave E Mounier '83, Box 6, B-1200 Brussels, Belgium.

14–18 November 1990, Mexico City, Mexico
International Conference on the Latin American Crisis: a Challenge to International Professionals. Details from Mekki Mtewa, Association for the Advancement of Policy, Research and Development in the Third World, PO Box 70257, Washington, DC 20024–0257, USA (Tel: 202 723 7010).

April 1991, Rehovot, Israel
IAAE Interconference Symposium on The Cooperative Experience in Agriculture: International Comparisons. Further information from Professor Raanan Weitz, Settlement Research Centre, PO Box 2355, IL–76120 Rehovot, Israel.

22–29 August 1991, Tokyo, Japan
XXI International Conference of Agricultural Economists on the theme Sustainable Agricultural Development: The Role of International Cooperation. Further information from R.J. Hildreth, Secretary–Treasurer, IAAE, Farm Foundation, 1211 W 22nd Street, Suite 216, Oak Brook, IL 60521–2197, USA.

10–12 September 1991, Cambridge, UK
International Conference on Food Control: Food Safety, Good Manufacturing Practice and Harmonization. Further details from Dr Mary Fox, Food Control, Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, PO Box 63, Westbury House, Bury Street, Guildford, Surrey GU2 5BH, UK (Tel: 0483 300966; Fax: 0483 301563).

Publications

ACP–EEC Lome Convention: 12th Annual Report of the ACP–EEC Council of Ministers (1988) (Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 1989, 185 pp, £8.20)

Agricultural Growth, Domestic Policies, The External Environment and Assistance to Africa – Lessons of a Quarter Century (Microinfo Ltd, Alton, Hants, UK, 1990, 46 pp, £6.00)

Agricultural Policy Analysis Tools for Economic Development edited by Luther Tweeten (Intermediate Technology Publications, London, UK, 1989, 402 pp, £19.95)

Agricultural Policy Reform: Politics and Process in the EC and USA by H. Wayne Moyer and Timothy E. Josling (Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, UK, 1990, 235 pp, £30.00)
This book examines the role of the political process in explaining agricultural policy decisions. The authors apply different decision-making theories to agricultural policy making in the EC and USA.

Agridatabank (Edizioni L'Informatore Agrario, Largo Caldera, 3A – 37122 Verona, Italia, 1990, 558 pp, L48.000)

Agrisoftware 90, Volume Primo, Guida al Software Agricolo in Commercio (Edizioni L'Informatore Agrario, Largo Caldera, 3A – 37122 Verona, Italy, 1990, 509 pp, L42.000)

Agrisoftware 90, Volume Secondo, Guida al Software Agricolo Non Commerciale (Edizioni L'Informatore Agrario, Largo Caldera, 3A – 37122 Verona, Italy, 1990, 279 pp, L34.000)

Alternative Agriculture (National Academy Press, Washington, DC, USA, 1989, 448 pp, £23.35)

Basic Sensory Methods for Food Evaluation by B.M. Watts, G.L. Ylimaki, L.E. Jeffery and L.G. Elias (The International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1989, 160 pp)

Communist Agriculture: Farming in the Far East and Cuba edited by Karl-Eugen Wädekin (Routledge, London, UK, 1990, 131 pp, £25.00)
This book looks at Agrarian systems in Asian countries with communist regimes and Cuba. The contributors discuss how Soviet experience has influenced and sometimes hindered development, and look in detail at China, Mongolia, Vietnam and Cuba.