

PREFACE

The world food crisis of 1972-74, which led to the convening of the World Food Conference in November 1974 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Hunger and Malnutrition, focussed the debate on international food policy on two main issues. First, how in the short term could the basic and immediate food needs of the Least Developed and the Most Seriously Affected (MSA) Developing Countries be met by the international community? Secondly, what measures should the international community take in the longer-term to increase food production and improve its consumption and distribution in developing countries?

The recovery in world food production and supplies since 1975 appears to have blunted the resolve of the international community for speedy action to implement practical solutions to the issues raised and debated in 1974 and subsequently. Yet the food problems confronting the majority of developing countries and indeed the conscience of the whole world have scarcely changed in the last four years. Although in purely statistical terms present world food reserves are probably adequate to meet any immediate crisis caused by crop failure, effective international commitment to the maintenance of reserves and to the transfer of food from surplus to needy countries has still to be agreed.

There is a danger that the continuing failure to establish an effective world grain reserve system may lead to a cut-back in world grain production, with the eventual prospect of a reduction once more in world reserves below minimum safety levels. Furthermore, and most important in the long-term, the implementation of policies and the provision of resources to increase food production in food deficit countries is making very slow progress indeed, while measures to improve food consumption and distribution in these countries remain few and inadequate.

There are twelve Commonwealth countries among the 46 MSA countries. It is estimated that about a quarter of the population of developing countries suffers from malnutrition, but the proportion in Commonwealth developing countries is probably even higher, in some countries as much as a third. The evolution and application of international food policy is of particular importance to Commonwealth developing countries, particularly the Most Seriously Affected. It is also important to developed members, such as Australia and Canada, which are major world producers and exporters of grains.

This paper attempts to provide an assessment of developments in the food situation since the World Food Conference in 1974, paying particular attention to progress in the adoption and implementation of policies at the international level. A further paper is planned on World Food Security with special emphasis on the situation in Commonwealth countries.

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