

## A GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM TO END WORLD HUNGER

**D. John Shaw**

**The three UN agencies dedicated to food security could be doing a lot more and a lot better. Closer coordination is needed to prevent inefficiencies and competition.**

“The current system is outdated and inefficient. . . . Countries, food agencies, and donors aren’t working together in a focused and coordinated way to provide the help small farmers need, when they need it. . . . the [UN] food agencies have taken on projects that weren’t strategic because they needed any funding they could get simply to stay in business.”<sup>1</sup>

–*Bill Gates*

Given the complementarities of their missions and mandates, calls have been made over a number of years for the three UN agencies based in Rome to work more closely together. These three agencies are the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP). The Annex provides a thumbnail sketch on each agency. They all work on food-related issues and seek to end hunger and alleviate poverty. They subscribe to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. To a large extent, they share common member states and are members of the Committee on World Food Security (see Box 1). And they are endeavoring to cooperate more, as a report by WFP has shown.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the call for closer cooperation continues for two prominent reasons. A new type of program for WFP assistance, called Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations (PRROs), was developed in January 1999. The PRROs have three clearly identified components: protracted relief, refugee feeding, and recovery. It was intended not only to maintain WFP’s dual mandate of providing development and relief assistance but also to attract donor contributions to its flagging development resources. It was also a genuine attempt to prevent the re-appearance of emergencies and to provide an effective exit strategy for WFP from such

crises. PRROs are now the largest component of WFP aid and have resulted in an increasing concentration of WFP assistance in sub-Saharan Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Asia. As resources for the recovery component of PRROs have not concomitantly increased, an increasing amount of WFP overall aid has been locked up in the other two components, and in their increasing duration. FAO and IFAD projects and programs could contribute to the recovery component of PRROs, which could benefit from the other WFP-executed components.

The other major driver of closer collaboration has been WFP’s attempt to shift its focus from “food aid” to a “food assistance,” meaning that most donors are now providing cash contributions to WFP instead of the in-kind commodity contributions that they

### Box 1: The Committee on World Food Security (CFS)<sup>3</sup>

The CFS was set up in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum for review and follow up food security policies. In 2009 it went through a reform process to ensure that the voices of other stakeholders were heard in the global debate on food security and nutrition. The vision of the reformed CFS is to be the most inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for all stakeholders to work together in a coordinated way to ensure food security and nutrition for all. It was reformed to address short-term crises but also long-term structural issues; it reports annually to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Membership is open to all member states of FAO, IFAD, and WFP.

granted in the past. A major exception is the United States, WFP's largest donor, which continues to provide aid in the form of US-produced commodities. The cash contributions can be used to purchase food in developing countries and to support cash and voucher transfer schemes, which give WFP greater flexibility to cooperate with other aid agencies, including FAO and IFAD. A prominent example is WFP's Purchase for Progress program by which WFP's local and regional food procurement is focused on promoting marketing opportunities for smallholder farmers, and in increasing their production and incomes. The program also provides fertile ground for the implementation of projects and programs supported by FAO, IFAD, and other aid agencies; WFP is also already receiving considerable assistance from philanthropic foundations like the Gates Foundation. WFP has also taken steps to spread knowledge about best practices: it produced a book which describes innovative pilot projects, cash and voucher transfer schemes, and other food assistance tools.<sup>4</sup>

Experience has shown the benefits of integrating humanitarian and development assistance, particularly in protracted or complex emergencies that in the past have resulted mainly from wars but are likely to increase in both scale and incidence as climate change takes effect. Development activities in support of humanitarian efforts can help prevent further deterioration in economic and social structures, establish foundations for recovery and reconciliation, and help avert future emergencies. Conversely, effective humanitarian assistance can facilitate the implementation of development activities. Hence, the rationale routinely recommended for closer FAO, IFAD, and WFP cooperation. Fragmented and under-resourced projects may also be avoided. A major asset could be the close coordination of the networks of FAO and WFP field offices and the partnership arrangements that the three agencies have established. Particularly significant, the rapid development and deployment of social information and communication media enables the three agencies to observe conditions on the ground throughout the developing world in real time and monitor progress, or the lack of it, together. This could help in the transformation of aid by responding to the needs and aspirations of governments and people in developing countries as they define them, in line with priorities that they themselves set, and guided by their own agendas.

However, establishing effective cooperation among the three agencies will not be easy. The three agencies have separate constitutions, governing bodies, management structures, financial arrangements, and programs of assistance. Further, in the 1980s the FAO director-general attempted a bureaucratic-coup to dominate the WFP, an event that soured relations between the agencies—WFP's executive director from 1982 to 1992, James Ingram, vividly describes this in his book *Bread and Stones*.<sup>5</sup> This unfortunate legacy must be overcome to establish closer working relations. That experience showed the importance of leadership qualities in managing UN agencies. It also showed the important roles that governments should play in the governing bodies of the UN agencies, and that effective reform is possible under the appropriate conditions. The preference, however, seems to increase

bureaucratic transaction cost by establishing increasingly cumbersome mechanisms for coordination and consultation rather than choose a UN lead organization. UN activities related to food have been largely uncoordinated since the demise of the World Food Council in 1993, which was specifically established as a high-level UN body to coordinate the work of all the agencies of the UN system concerning food production, nutrition, food security, food trade, and food aid.<sup>6</sup>

Various attempts have been made to improve coordination around food security. These include a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis established by the UN secretary-general together with a Comprehensive Framework of Action to enhance the efforts of the UN system and the international financial institutions to respond to the crisis; the creation of the Global Food Crisis Response Program by the World Bank group; and the High Level Conference on World Food Security convened by FAO, IFAD, WFP along with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research in Rome in January 2008. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon identified the "right to food" as a third track of the Comprehensive Framework of Action at the High Level Conference on Food Security in Madrid in January 2009. At the same time, the UN High Level Task Force emphasized the need to address all aspects of the food system from a human rights perspective. At the G8+ summit in Italy in July 2009, more than \$20 billion was pledged for what became known as the Agricultural and Food Security Initiative. And the World Bank published its *Implementing Agriculture for Development: Agriculture Action Plan FY 2010-2012* in 2009.

And there also have been developments that could help establish closer cooperation between the three agencies. The executive heads of the three agencies have changed. Both FAO and IFAD have had extensive independent external evaluations and are going through a period of reform based on their findings. WFP has completed a major transformation to become the world's largest humanitarian agency and is carrying out a transformation to food assistance programs that allows greater flexibility and facilitates cooperation among the three and other UN agencies; indeed, it is now the logistics expert of the UN system.<sup>7</sup>

The agencies could demonstrate solidarity and establish coordination by declaring a global initiative to end world hunger. They could share their respective advantages in a global partnership program, similar to partnerships that address HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, the protection of children, the environment, and international agricultural research. As in the other global partnership programs, the three agencies could pool their resources, skills, and reputations towards achieving objectives over time, with a common governance and management structure. The initiative could also include other UN agencies as the concept of food security has been redefined over the past fifty years moving it out of a purely agricultural sector concern into the broader arena of poverty and developmental problems and the large and dramatic ways in which the world food system has evolved.<sup>8</sup>

## ANNEX: PROFILES OF THE MAIN UN PLAYERS IN FOOD SECURITY

### FAO

President Franklin D. Roosevelt convened a United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture at Hot Springs, Virginia, in May 1943, which led to the creation of FAO as a UN specialized agency and the primary multilateral food and agricultural institution. Contributions from member governments were to be assessed according to criteria established by the United Nations. Five priority areas of work were: eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition; making agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable; reducing rural poverty; enabling inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems; and increasing the resilience of livelihoods from disasters. FAO's special contribution to the UN system was to develop and disseminate knowledge concerning a spectrum of issues relating to food and agriculture. Over the past 70 years since its establishment, there have been few aspects of food and agricultural development that FAO has not covered. The new director-general of FAO, Jose Graziano da Silva of Brazil, has committed FAO to a reform program in response to the recommendations of the independent external evaluation completed in 2007.

### WFP

The birth of WFP was due to the inspiration of George McGovern, the future senator from South Dakota and unsuccessful US presidential candidate in 1972 who was the first director of President John F. Kennedy's Office of Food for Peace and Kennedy's special assistant. At a meeting of the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee in FAO in Rome in April 1961, McGovern proposed the establishment of a three-year experimental multilateral food aid program. WFP was approved as a joint UN/FAO undertaking in parallel resolutions passed by the FAO Conference and the UN General Assembly on 24 November and 19 December 1961, respectively. The continuation of WFP beyond the experimental period (1963-65) was approved in parallel resolutions by the General Assembly and FAO Conference in December 1965 "for as long as multilateral food aid is found necessary." All contributions to WFP are made on a voluntary basis.

The original purpose of WFP was to provide emergency assistance and to explore the possibilities of using food aid to promote economic and social development through school lunch programs and labor-intensive projects. All contributions from member governments were to be made on a voluntary basis. However, during the initial three-year experimental period WFP could not respond quickly to emergency situations. Therefore, for the first thirty years of its operations, two-thirds of its assistance was provided for a wide range of development projects and one third for emergencies.

WFP executive director James Ingram noted that while donors were ambivalent in their support of food aid for development projects this did not apply to WFP's humanitarian assistance.

He set in motion a series of measures that were to tip the balance for WFP to become a humanitarian agency. That transformation, the most far-reaching and extensive of any UN agency, was completed by his successor, Catherine Bertini, a US citizen and the first woman to head WFP, over the ten years of her leadership (1992-2002). In 2001, WFP was first described as the world's largest humanitarian agency. It is currently headed by Ms. Erharin Cousin of the United States.

### IFAD

The world food crisis of the early 1970s and the UN World Food Conference held in Rome, Italy in 1974 pointed to the need to increase food and agricultural production in the developing countries, for which a substantial increase in investment was necessary. Contributions to IFAD are made by members of three groups: OECD countries; OPEC countries; and developing countries. Voting is calculated on both membership and contributions to IFAD's resources. The World Food Conference recommended that IFAD should be established as a specialized agency with the specific mandate not only to increase agricultural production but to focus on the poorest, food-deficit countries and provide assistance in ways that would raise the income, productivity, and nutrition of the rural poor. Its overarching mission was therefore to "enable poor rural people to overcome poverty" through country-specific solutions. This involved a number of instruments including: increasing access to land and other natural resources; providing or improving financial services, markets and technology; and incorporating ideas about the causes of poverty and how development assistance should be delivered to eradicate it in sustainable ways through innovative approaches and partnership arrangements.

The result has been a much broader agenda for IFAD for poverty reduction. It involves not only transferring improved technologies and production methods but also assisting the rural poor in establishing their own, frequently informal, institutions. Innovation and partnership are seen as central to the achievement of IFAD's broader mandate. The ability to scale-up successful and replicable innovations can increase the value of IFAD's assistance and its impact on poverty reduction. An impressive network of relationships has been formed with bilateral and multilateral donor organizations and nongovernmental organizations. The importance that IFAD attaches to forming strong partnerships is epitomized by the fact that the directors and secretariats of four international collaborative arrangements are hosted at IFAD's headquarters: the Belgium Survival Fund for assistance in response to drought and famine in East Africa; the International Land Coalition, which works to increase poor people's access to land and productive resources; the Global Mechanism to Combat Desertification; and the Global Environment Facility to help developing countries fund programs and project to protect the global environment. The current president of IFAD is Kanayo F. Nwanze of Nigeria, who is publicly committed to strengthening cooperation with FAO and WFP.

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## NOTES

1. "Gates attacks 'Outdated' UN Food Agencies," *Financial Times*, 24 February 2012.
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3. Source: <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/en>
4. S. W. Omama, U. Gentilini and S. Sandrom, *Revolution: From Food Aid to Food Assistance. Innovations in Overcoming Hunger* (Rome: WFP, 2010).
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6. D. John Shaw, "The World Food Council: The Rise and Fall of a United Nations Body," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, no.30 (2010): 663-94.
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