

VII. Postscript - The Fourth Session of the World Food Council, June, 1978

137. The Report of the Fourth Session of the World Food Council, held in Mexico City in June 1978, became available just as this paper was going to print. The Mexico Declaration of the Council reviewed developments in the world food situation, in particular the implementation of the Manila Communiqué issued after its Third Session in 1977. As was to be expected, the Mexico Declaration covered rather familiar ground, and the achievements of the World Food Council in the preceding year to which it was able to point were rather limited, the most significant perhaps being the operational establishment of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in 1978, and the Council's stimulation of considerable additional contributions to the International Emergency Reserve. However, the Council acknowledged that the rate of progress in solving fundamental food problems was far too slow.

138. The proceedings of the Fourth Session of the Council seem to have been rather low-key, and its discussions and recommendations appear to have attracted little interest on the part of the world press. It is difficult to take an optimistic view as to the degree of implementation in the future of the recommendations the Council made, which in some of the main areas of its responsibility were from new standpoints; discussion of some familiar problems also broke new ground.

139. During the proceedings it was felt that the basic development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product needed to be re-stated; under the heading of increasing food production the first recommendation noted that developed countries should take urgent steps to reach this target. Other recommendations were that developing countries should, in the appropriate regional fora, review the constraints to increasing food production, while donors, in existing fora, should examine ways in which they could support developing countries more effectively. The international financial institutions should also address these same issues. The Food Priority Countries were invited to formulate food and nutrition plans, while the Secretariat of the Council was to see if bodies could be found to carry out analysis of internal resource flows to food and agriculture; thus the external support to be given to food production could be re-assessed. Lastly, all countries should participate in the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. In summary the recommendations were an invitation to all concerned with food production to become much more actively involved.

140. In the sphere of nutrition the emphasis was put on more equitable income distribution so as to result in correspondingly more equitable food consumption levels. The goal of eradicating Vitamin A deficiency and endemic goitre within a decade should be adopted, and in future all major development projects should contain an assessment of their impact on nutrition.

141. To improve food security developing countries needed to be able to satisfy their import requirements without impairing their economic development, while food deficit countries should have access to reserves in times of shortages. International financial institutions and governments ought to

consider special financing measures to allow developing countries to undertake stockholding obligations; the establishment of food reserves on a regional or sub-regional basis was also necessary.

142. As regards food aid the Council recommended that a new Food Aid Convention covering 10 million tonnes of cereals a year should be negotiated. Signatories to the present Food Aid Convention should try to raise their contributions in a new Convention and other countries should also be asked to participate. Discussion in the Council indicated that developing countries would like to see food aid increase to about 15 million tonnes a year; this view was, however, contested by donor countries. The recommendation on the International Emergency Reserve emphasised that it should be a continuing reserve with yearly replenishments. With respect to the contribution of trade to the solution of the food problem the Council noted with concern the increase in protectionist trade practices, and called upon developed countries in the MTN to act in accordance with their commitment to developing countries in the Tokyo Declaration. The Negotiating Conference on the Common Fund should be resumed as soon as possible, and developed countries were asked to extend the Generalised Scheme of Preferences to processed agricultural commodities.

143. Some of the more important points highlighted in the discussion which preceded the adoption of the Mexico Declaration of the Council were:

- (a) In 1977 food production in developing countries went up by only one per cent, and the rise in world food output of 2 per cent was small after the large increases of 1975 and 1976.
- (b) There was a need for an improvement in future in assessment studies, notably with regard to the rice situation and fisheries, the reduction of food losses and internal investment in developing countries. Changes in the proportions of the developing world's population which were malnourished were important; it was desirable, therefore, for future reviews to give more detailed information, including estimates of the numbers regarded as slightly, moderately or severely under-nourished, so that severe undernutrition could be dealt with first.
- (c) There could be a marked easing of food problems as the result of a reduction in world expenditure on arms.
- (d) The importance of agricultural research was emphasised; in particular improved national research capacity was desirable. However, existing mechanisms to strengthen international co-operation were probably adequate, and there did not really seem a need for new mechanisms.
- (e) The three sponsoring agencies - the World Bank, FAO and UNDP - which had decided to wind up the CGFPI were asked to report periodically upon the assistance which they had undertaken to provide to the WFC following

the disbanding of the CGFPI. Meanwhile it was agreed that some of the functions of the CGFPI would be undertaken by the WFC, in particular the co-ordination of the mobilisation of additional resources, and the analysis of resource flows to increase food production in developing countries.

- (f) There was still an inadequate allocation of external assistance to the Food Priority Countries (FPCs).
- (g) The World Bank's lending to agriculture and rural development in the fiscal year 1978 was estimated at \$3.3 billion as against only \$0.96 billion in 1974.
- (h) The most recent estimates of official external assistance to agriculture indicated a larger increase in 1977 than had been indicated in the earlier report to the Council. It was now estimated at \$6.7 billion in 1977 as against \$4.8 billion in 1976 and \$5.4 billion in 1975. The 1977 level was therefore 24 per cent above the 1975 level and 13 per cent higher in real terms.
- (i) Accelerated action was required at the country level, and the Council should act as a catalyst to bring together developing and donor countries as well as the appropriate international institutions.
- (j) Several donor countries gave details of their external assistance plans. France, for example, was going to increase its aid to multilateral agencies by 25 per cent. The United States intended to raise its financial aid to food and agriculture by 23 per cent in 1978 and by a further 40 per cent in 1979. West Germany was increasing its financial aid to agriculture by 17 per cent in 1978.