

EDITORIAL

Experts agree that there are "three great unknowns" in trying to estimate the extent of hunger – i.e., the availability of food, the amount of food people need for nourishment, and how access to food varies among different income groups within a city. Because of these uncertainties, predictions of future global famines are considered inaccurate.

After several weeks of uncertainty, the US Congress has apparently agreed to give US \$ 7.5 million toward next year's UNEP budget (see *Environmental Policy and Law* 8(1) (1982) page 29).

The news has given rise to mixed feelings – disappointment that this is a reduction of over 25% on last year's contribution, and relief that strong factions in the Executive have not succeeded in axing the US contribution.

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At a recent meeting of the Brandt Commission, it was stated that since the publication of their report two years ago, the economic and environmental situation had steadily worsened – and the same message came from all the relevant bodies at the beginning of '82.

The contributing factors are reduced aid programmes by nations affected by recession due mainly to the problems of expensive energy imports and unemployment. Added to this, the world's poorest people are concentrated in regions highly dependent on imported fuel, with unsuccessful agricultural production and accountable for most of the expected increase of 1500 million in world population until the year 2000.

According to FAO statistics, at least 420 million people in 1981 did not have enough to eat. But, increasingly, the assertion of such statistics is being challenged. Indeed some critics, while convinced that world hunger is a real problem of tragic scope, agree that behind the statements about the hungry, there is a great deal of confusion and uncertainty. For although 420 million people stayed hungry last year, FAO has stated that supplies of food were about one tenth higher than actually needed by the world population.

In the face of such difficulties, the question is being asked increasingly, whether FAO has the right kinds of input to deal with these contradictions, and if existing programmes are being accordingly managed.

Unfortunately, the outcome of the three-week FAO conference was described as "almost wholly negative". The controversial rise in the biennial budget of the organization was finally approved, but the countries who will pay for most of it have not voted in favour of the increase. (To compare, 92 out of 152 countries together only give 0.01% of the budget.) The increment, from US \$ 278 million in 1980-81, to 360 million in 1982-83, won support from 110 countries with five votes against and nine abstentions. This led the main donors to stress in a joint statement "that the fight against hunger will not to be won simply by increasing administrative expenditures".

For the coming biennium, the Director-General stated that it was very possible that 66% would be dispensed in Italy. (See also *Environmental Policy and Law* 7(1) (1981) page 1.) An insignificant portion remains to be disbursed elsewhere.

The controversy as to how FAO has been approaching its task and what it should do to fulfil its mandate, still continues and several questions remain unanswered. We should be happy to be given the opportunity of reporting on progress in the future.

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Discussions concerning the "Special Window" in the Environmental Fund, proposed by Sweden (see *Environmental Policy and Law* 7(3) (1981) page 132), still continue. As it was recognized that the "window" concept would continue to have difficulties with would-be donor countries in the developed world. The Nordic group outlined another approach during informal consultations. This is known as the "clearing-house concept" for environmental activities in developing countries financed by additional resources, and is now under consideration. We plan to report on further developments. □

19th January, 1982