

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chairman: J. C. WATERLOW, *London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT*

*A. Tomkins:* I would like to raise the particular question that Dr Clay addressed about the development of food aid. It seems an incredibly complicated system. Could you tell us something about the conflicts that you see between the development of food aid, as seen by the host receiving country, and the policies of food aid as seen by the donors. It seems to be a major conflict that I think is possibly one of the most important things that needs resolving. You noted that in the emergency situation, food aid could actually decrease the artificially increased price of cereals. It could also act as money, to release money for foreign exchange. Who decides on that, is it the host government or is it the donor? Who should it be?

*E. Clay:* You raised a complicated question. Let me give you one or two fragments of an answer. First imagine what is typically the negotiated situation over food. Imagine a country where the government is confronted by a very serious balance of payments situation, a serious internal budgetary situation and an immediate need to assure and also guarantee the prices of food to frankly those people without whom the country would disintegrate. To ask about long-term development questions is not easy because managing the food system appears very much to be a question of this month and the next 12 months ahead. It is important to recognize too that there are many donors and each donor is dealing with a whole string of countries, so that immediately complicates the situation. Those within the donor agency concerned with development want to try and provide aid within some long-term developmental framework. Trying to reconcile those two positions isn't easy. Suppose that the donor side perceives that there is a need to shift resources to the agriculture sector by price incentives to the producers. From the point of view of the government you are shifting resources which are already over-constrained and putting up prices to the producer which intensifies the budgetary situation. The government has to pay more for any food that it purchases locally, and it also puts up the prices which are confronted by the consumer. In those circumstances it isn't easy to arrive at any long-term framework for that food aid, except in the case where the country has a clear and large structural food deficit. For example, Cape Verde is dependent on imports for virtually all its food. The government knows this, the donors know it and it's a question of whether 94% or 96% of food will have to be imported this year.

At the other extreme, in Sahelian countries between 1981 and 1984, food production fell by one-third in six countries taken together. But between 1984–85 and 1985–86 food production went up by 70%; now you imagine what that means

in terms of trying to plan your food problem. That is something very difficult, not susceptible to simple solutions, and it requires first the building up of a relationship of confidence over several years between both parties; second it requires all the information that Dr Cutler talked about; and third it requires immense flexibility on both sides because the situation can change with such alarming rapidity. We can pillory the donors now for pushing too much food aid into Africa in 1975, but if the rains hadn't come then the famine would have been an even more severe problem. The rains did come so there was too much food aid. I would suggest perhaps one or two things that ought to be considered. For instance, the EEC modified its procedures so that it would be possible, if necessary, to replace food aid with something else, but very little use is ever made of the provision. A long-term relationship does need confidence between two sides and that is why Ethiopia is such a difficult case. There is no confidence between the donors and the host government. On the whole donors are not very good at sticking with things, they like something fashionable. Every minister who takes over an aid agency wants some new initiative that he can pursue. The thing that we are most guilty of is pointing to the 'easy' problems in the recipient country and overlooking the very real problems that exist within the aid agency.

*R. F. Grimble:* I would like to hear the panel's views on monetary aid for developing agriculture in Africa. As we know there is a special problem in Africa, in that food production per head has fallen in that part of the world rather than in other parts of the Third World where production has more or less stabilized. There seems to be a number of problems associated with Africa that I would like the panel's comments on. The first of these is that governments do not seem to give agricultural aid towards growing food crops. The all-party committee of the House of Commons that looked at British aid to Africa was particularly critical of the fact that not a lot of British agricultural aid went to actual food production. Of 500 or so US aid programmes only about twenty-two went to local food production. That sort of thing is a common trend with donor countries. I would like to hear the panel's views on this trend. The other thing that I would like your views on is the fact that a lot of food in Africa is grown by women. One of the speakers referred to the difficulty of getting aid to underprivileged groups in the population. Women would be in that group. The FAO said in a report, that in all regions of the Third World, the introduction of modern agricultural technology is primarily aimed at male tasks, and is used almost exclusively by men. Third World agricultural productivity cannot be substantially increased, nor can rural poverty be alleviated, unless women's access to productive resources and services are substantially improved.

*J. Seaman:* I began by saying that as a medical practitioner in agricultural economics, I would be happy to give the answer. I don't think it is easy to give summary answers to a lot of these points, each one is a book in itself. Why don't donors give to food production as it is actually practised in the developed countries? The answer is in part technical, that is to say that these projects are worked out by people who are primarily agronomists. They are not economists, if

they were they would tend towards the sort of project where you have notable inputs and measurable outputs. Look, for example, at British aid expenditure on research in overseas agriculture. A sizeable proportion of it goes to overseas research institutes, the Potato Research Institute, the Rice Research Institute and so on. The sort of potatoes which are being researched are for large-scale commercial production. The sort of potatoes that the average Peruvian produces are not researched at all. They have no commercial value. I think countries are possibly more interested in the first kind of crop because of the value of foreign exchange. We tend to sometimes talk about the problems of developing countries as if their governments were wicked and were somehow excluding their farmers from a good deal, in which the farmers could eat well. Clearly if farmers are going to eat well, the economics of the country have got to be right. For most developing countries that demands a steady substantial flow of foreign exchange, which is not available from donor sources. It has to be generated from other sources on an agricultural rather than on an industrial base. Inevitably it determines the governments to make a priority of cash crops and possibly, quite correctly, one can make a good argument that to invest in peasant agriculture is a mistake.

The next point that you made, I think, was about the role of women in agriculture. I would agree with you that women obviously do an enormous amount of agriculture in the developing countries; they are in that sense a neglected group for investment, but I think it is the wrong way of expressing the problem. It comes down, I think, to what I said at the end of my talk; it is well meaning, but it is naive to try and pick out women as a subgroup that can be helped. We started off with the position that many African farmers have enormous difficulty farming at all given the economic climate. The economic climate is so bad that no aid donor can correct it, or make substantial changes to it. Then to go and say 'well we can't help the men, let's make a large and strong public position of not helping women as well'. They are different things aren't they? I don't think people often realize quite how this money has disappeared during the last 10 years. For example, in Burkina Faso, which used to be called Upper Volta, I was involved in a drought survey 13 years ago which took us to a series of villages across the North of the country. I repeated the same journey 2 years ago to exactly the same villages and as I went along, I jotted down the value of all external capital input I could find. With the exception of a completed laterite road, I could have easily financed all the identifiable capital inputs from my own pocket in the same period of time. Obviously the money has been invested in a climate, in a way that is pointless. The donors push more money out, and the agencies concerned have to spend it. They are paid to get rid of it. They get rid of it with very little effect on the ground, which is why I say that women are important, but I would not actually express women as a subgroup as an important target for aid. The real question for most of the really depressed agricultural sectors is what climate are they working in? Donors can't fix it. It really is a political problem and it is a problem in those terms, as Professor Waterlow said, as much for people in this room, as it is for specialists in aid or agriculture.

*Chairman:* The House of Commons Committee was told by Ms Alison of the Institute of Development Studies of the general problem that women are invisible at the levels of policy, planning implementation and evaluation. It is not just a question of women being a vulnerable target group; it is that their special knowledge and special problems are not taken into sufficient account. How is it that we have no women on this panel?

I do not want this discussion to be concerned only with aid. As the Parliamentary report said at several points, the most important thing is to encourage self-reliance. We can contribute to this by training, institutional support and the development of human resources.

*E. R. Ørskov:* First of all I think there is no solution that is applicable everywhere. The main point is to identify (1) what is the constraint in a particular situation and (2) what a government is wanting to produce. For instance, in Zimbabwe in the last couple of years I think they have simply put a guaranteed price on maize. It didn't take the farmers long to respond to that. When you ask them what they produced last year, they produced so many bags of maize, they know it all.

I think that as far as women are concerned, we should maybe not consider them as a group themselves, we should, however, talk with them. I have tried to do this when I go to rural communities of the target group, to make sure that everybody is there, that the women are not left inside the house, because they normally know what the cows have had to eat. Sometimes you find that when you ask the man, he has to go in and ask his wife how much she has fed the cow, because he doesn't know himself. So I think that women on the whole have been neglected and we should try to ensure that they are consulted. Briefly, having identified the target group then they should be the first to be consulted. You are then likely to identify the first constraint in your operation much easier than if you only speak to the government.

*D. F. Hollingsworth:* I am not commenting on the women point, I do very much agree with what Dr Ørskov has just said. I want to ask a question of the panel. Is there any development in the storage of food in Africa? It is fine to produce it, but it would be an enormous help if it was stored somewhere and there was easy transport. Could we have some comments on those questions.

*E. R. Ørskov:* As far as animals are concerned, I have already mentioned in my paper that to me the best way of storing food is to put it in the hump or tail as fat. As far as humans are concerned it would probably be the best way as well, but of course that may not be socially acceptable! It is a big problem in all areas and tropical regions to store food in an adequate way, and I think this is probably something in which we could assist in finding easy and simple storage methods. Insects and pests can very easily ruin the feed in storage.

*E. Clay:* There is growing evidence that the storage question was misconceived in two ways over the past two decades. The first misconception was that, at least for grains, there is a technical problem. The evidence is that people are able to keep grain losses to very minimal levels, and I mean that from the lowest level of the

peasant farmer in a village, to a government like Zimbabwe which is managing to store over 1 million tonnes of maize with improvised storage. The losses are actually lower than you would find in developed countries. Second, there was the tendency to try to resolve the problem by gigantism: if you could build up large central stocks, this would be a way to resolve the problem. There is a place for large stocks in a system particularly where you have large urban demand for food, but all the evidence is that really the problem starts at the lowest level. If farmers had the economic capacity to do so, most would store quite large stocks for themselves. Traditionally they did this, but what has happened now is that through the erosion of their economic capacity, for a variety of reasons, they no longer do this to the same extent. This suggests a need to find ways of helping the people in rural areas to store food for themselves. There are little projects, for instance the famous grain bank scheme in Burkina Faso. Another problem is if you have stocks and you can't move them around. In the last 2 or 3 years in some countries in Africa there have been localized scarcity and an incapacity to move grain from other parts of the same country.

*E. Rickards:* I have worked in East Africa for many years and also in Malawi and Zimbabwe in a consultant capacity. I was glad to hear what Professor Waterlow said about women being on the consulted side of policy making. I could name several women that I know in some of those countries who could be very helpful in that sphere.

*F. Y. Zumrawi:* A question for Dr Clay: You mentioned that in the last 2 years, in most African countries, the main cause of the food crisis is economic. I think the situation in the Sudan is more one of drought than one of simple economics. In the Sudan 70% of food production begins with the rains and so drought has a great effect on food production and also transportation. Not only does drought cause a problem in supporting livestock it also leads to the migration of people from rural areas to urban areas which also causes an economic problem in the towns by affecting the food prices. So my main question to Dr Clay is to ask his views on the role which drought has played in this particular famine.

*E. Clay:* Of course the drought has been a real problem. There have been enormous drops in agricultural production and very severe stress on pastoral communities, but the problems have been exacerbated by the economic weakness of the countries. Some countries have been able to cope much better with these problems than others. In part this is because they had the economic resources to cope with these problems or, one might say, the better economic management, therefore their economies meant they were in a stronger position to cope with those problems. For example, the run-down of your transport system enormously exacerbated the problems that you have had to confront in trying to cope with the drought.

*G. Giddins:* My husband and I returned from Kenya 2 years ago after living there for 20 years. He is a botanist and has done a lot of collecting and travelling. I have done a certain amount with him. I want to take up this question of the position of women in Africa. I want to give two examples from East Africa. I was

told by an engineer who had set up pumps in villages all round our region, that when he came back the small pumps were all out of order. I asked him who was looking after them, as these pumps were very important for food production by the women, and he said men. What happened was that somebody gave his cousin a job, and that chap just left them and probably went to a bar. It seems to me it would be better to give the woman the job of maintaining the small pumps; by teaching her, she would teach other women, and she wouldn't neglect them. A similar problem occurred with terracing the soil. In some parts it is dreadfully hard and very difficult to dig and people don't terrace. The women are left to do it, it is much too hard for them and they abandon it. We ought to be teaching the young man in agricultural college to go out and help their mothers with agricultural work. It would make a tremendous difference in those areas where there is soil erosion.

*J. Seaman:* I am not actually consciously trying to be sexist, I think there is just a misunderstanding of what I am saying. There is no question that women do a great deal of the work, and women suffer by any measured standards a greater burden of the hardship in most developing countries; I don't think that is in issue. There is equally no doubt that in specific areas it may well be more appropriate to choose a woman rather than a man for a particular job; I don't think that would be contentious in any way at all.

I would like to take up the point which Professor Waterlow made that women should be involved very much more in the national political process. It is reassuring that in a good many African countries women are becoming more involved. Countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe are good examples. What I am saying is this, that I think that a profound mistake we make, and which has been neglected in some of the questions, is that somehow we can pick out women for special treatment. With aid we are dealing with a very blunt instrument, which is pushed around by world economic forces. I think that what we have got to do is, frankly, to be a little more forgiving about what actually happens with aid in developing countries. We need to be a little more realistic about what it is possible to do from the outside. If we did we would get a lot further with the money that we spend. The constant switching from fashion to fashion which besets everybody in every aid agency, has done the subject a profound disservice.

*Chairman:* Another subject that is fashionable nowadays is community participation, which is unwelcome to some governments because it means community activation. I am anxious to get contributions from people who have been in Africa.

*B. Harris:* As a nutrition society, surely you are in the business of discussing policy, and what people can do as individuals. On the basis of this I think the nutritionist should begin to understand how important women are in agricultural production and, maybe, for the good nutritional status of the population, because women have in the past been food producers. 70% of African food has been produced by women, but they have also been responsible for the care of children. When you have environmental degradation on the scale that exists in Africa, it takes women much longer to fetch the fuel, to find the firewood, to cook the food.

In other words, their reproductive role, maintaining the household, maintaining one generation to another, is taking a great deal more time. Where you have male migration to the job opportunities that Dr Seaman mentioned, women are left responsible for the whole of food production. Perhaps the only thing that they may not be responsible for is animal rearing and rationing grain from the family granary. In those circumstances there is a great deal to be said for people from the outside giving advice. One thing that I wish had been raised, was that in Africa, a lot of privatization of land has taken place by men alone, women are not able to buy or sell land or have title to land. This means that they are not credit worthy; banks will not give them credit for production. A simple change in legislation would enable women to have title to land, which might bring about much more in terms of an increase in food production than a lot of agonizing from the outside world about appropriate research in millet.

*Chairman:* Would any member of the panel like to respond to those very important comments, especially the last one about credit and allowing people to own things, which was a very constructive suggestion? I didn't realize that in Africa they had, what we used to have in Victorian times, a system where women couldn't own anything. Dr Elaine Carter has recently been in Ethiopia, and so I wonder whether or not she has any comments to make?

*E. Carter:* I do have a few comments I would like to make. First going on from what the lady from Sudan said about the problem in her country being largely one of drought. The area I was working in in Ethiopia was very fertile. Apparently Ethiopia is one of the most fertile countries in the world, but it just doesn't have water in adequate quantities at the right time. I would have thought that one of the best ways to give aid to Ethiopia would be by producing irrigation systems, and methods for storing water. I think from the brief time that I was there, that is by far the single most important thing.

Another thing that people might find interesting is that in Ethiopia we were dealing with an acute nutritional problem, where we were feeding children who were malnourished. We fed all the children under 5 years who were malnourished, plus all their siblings and their mothers. This meant that their fathers weren't fed on the nutrition scheme on the grounds that they were men and should be able to fend for themselves. Anyone who didn't have enough food, the government promptly resettled, so the men were actually split up from their families and taken miles away to lowland areas where they were not used to living, they were not used to the climate and were not used to the people there. The families never got together again. Of course we have been talking about the role of men and women in this debate but it is important that we should view what is best for everyone in the family.

*F. Liddell:* Professor Waterlow, you have made some comments about the need for self-reliance and have made a comment about community participation. I think these are aspects that perhaps haven't been taken up as well as they should be, so I would like to make a few comments.

First I should like to come back to Dr Seaman's comment that investing in peasant agriculture was a mistake. If you are talking about countries in Africa where up to

90% of the people in the country are self-sufficient farmers, then it seems vital to put resources and direct our energies towards supporting rural farming in food production. Going on to the comments about Burkina Faso, I too have been to Burkina Faso and certainly it is not a country where you see a great deal of evidence of large development projects. I would raise the question as to what do we mean by development and that perhaps the most important examples of development are not the visible signs at all. They are not dams and wells, things that have been cynically described as cathedrals in the desert, but rather they are more to do with building human self-reliance, of questions of human organization at a grass-roots level. One of the things that perhaps would not be visible, but is a great strength in a country like Burkina Faso, is the strong tradition of community organization and community participation. Perhaps arising out of that strength has come the development of the grain bank. It may be small in scale but I think it is a very significant example of development because it is local, it involves village participation and it represents the move towards creating food security. I think this concept of food security is a very important one. It is not just food supply, but a reliable access to food which is important, so by this scheme local people organize themselves, construct a building, and can buy in food when it is at a cheaper price from other areas where there are surpluses. If households within the village have a surplus within their own fields, they can sell into this grain bank, rather in the way that a co-operative shop runs, and which they know they can trust. There is always grain there to be bought at prices agreed by the village when there are times of shortage.

*Chairman:* Some of these points take us back to Dr Nabarro's valuable paper, in which he emphasized the importance of training people to understand what is going on and what the relationships are.

*N. Ruck:* I have been working recently on a British-funded programme for nutrition training in the health services. I want to ask John Seaman to expand a bit on what he said about quantitative evaluation. I found that I was often under pressure both from top people in the big aid organizations, multilateral and government ones, and from the doctors I was working with. They wanted what they were doing to be measured and felt that this would help them. On returning to Britain one is asked, 'Has it been any use?' 'What have you been doing?' 'How do you measure it?'

*J. Seaman:* If I could first go back to the previous speaker, Dr Liddell from Christian Aid, and just say two things. One is that as far as Burkina Faso is concerned, your last point about development being 'something else', I wholly agree with and I think it is the gist of what I am trying to say. The grain bank programme in the Sahel, is remarkable, it covers 90% of the population there. It was a national policy which goes back even into pre-revolutionary days. It pushed for certain kinds of programme, which were followed very closely and to considerable success, in some areas I think. In the same 10-year period \$100 million, according to donors, have been sunk in that area. The question is, what has it achieved? My answer is, not much. It has a great deal to do with national



policies that are already determined. If donors care to follow national policies they can get a long way with their money, but when they go across them, then there are problems, so I wholly agree with Dr Liddell's comments.

Second, the question of investment in cash crops *v.* peasant crops. I am not saying that to invest in the smaller producer is in some way wrong, what I am saying is that sometimes if you look at the problems that a country has, as opposed to the problems of an individual, very often you are led to the conclusion that the country has got to invest in commercial crops if it is to survive as a country. Now that may be a reflection of the way the world is, it may be quite wrong, but it is a fact of life, and simply to bang a drum which says small farmer good, big farmer bad, actually serves neither at all. I think in fact much more could be spent on peasant crops.

There is also a question of quantitative evaluation; again I have nothing against quantitative evaluation, quite the reverse. I think the problem is that you have two sorts of problems. There is the need for research in certain areas. The work that you have been doing in Egypt, of which I have recently read and think is excellent, shows very good use of money in order to measure what went in and what comes out of a small programme. What I am against is the extrapolation of that principle into the expenditure of larger sums of money. It seems to me that one uses bodies of research rather than individual bits of research in order to clarify and discern matters of general principle, and that once one has reached the stage of general principle, one should be able to proceed on the basis of much less information and very often of a lower quality.

Certain sectors have reached the stage where it is impossible to invest money except under the most artificial conditions, because one has to measure what comes out at the other end. So very often a programme is fixed in time, 2 years, when all common sense says you might run it for 2 years and if it works, in perpetuity. If you were to design and run your programme properly, you would do things which meant that the output could not be measured because the methodology did not exist. Programmes are now being constrained to say you can't have that sort of output, it is too vague, it is too general, we have got to design the programme to get different outputs, so that we can bring consultants in to measure them.

So if you ask, 'can anything be done about the situation?' then I think it really comes back to the fact that aid is really not a serious subject in the industrialized countries. It is a serious subject, but it does not rank with problems like unemployment, and other bigger political issues, in this country. These latter things are what governments regard as very serious indeed. In reality overseas aid is a bit of a Cinderella, it does not attract by and large the best academic minds, for obvious reasons. There is no career continuity, a lot of the problems are highly open, they are not actually the terrain of an academic at all. It reduces to the statement that aid isn't actually terribly serious, it comes up from time to time, when there is a famine. In the meantime the money is spent and a large sector of the general public take little or no interest in how it is spent. Politicians pay lip

service to efficiency in the use of aid but in actual fact they are prepared to put up with levels of inefficiency that they would not be prepared to put up with elsewhere.

*Chairman:* I think, following up your last point, that evaluation is sometimes used as a delaying tactic. Evaluation may be necessary to see how to get the best results for money, but I tend to agree with John Seaman that very often it is over-elaborated.

*E. Dowler:* I would like to come back to what Dr Seaman was just saying and direct my question particularly to him. How would he respond to the statement often put to me as a nutritionist: 'that if this or that government did not spend so much money on arms, it would have more to spend on food and agriculture'? And conversely, 'if food aid is a means of releasing foreign exchange does it not enable armament spending to increase?'

Going on from that though, I wonder if you would be prepared to be a little more optimistic about the British public's response to famine and development given that, I think, over 100 000 people are supposed to have signed up to 'Run the World'. One of the spin-offs of such events, I have found, is the growing number of people who are now aware of the issues in Africa; the enormous response to Band Aid and Live Aid, and NGO advertising, is not limited to the giving of money: people now want information as to what is going on, and why things happen the way they do.

*Chairman:* I think this is a good note to close on. The extent of the public response to the African famine is cause for optimism. We have to hope that the emotional response will be followed and backed up by sustained interest. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be much discussion of the basic problems of aid in the newspapers or Parliament, and as far as I know overseas aid hardly gets a mention in the party political programmes.

However, we have to get away from this rather patronizing word 'aid'. Within a country we take it for granted through our system of taxes and social security that the better-off have a responsibility to help the worse-off. The proposals for a new economic order extend this responsibility from the domestic to the international scene. Perhaps I am idealistic, but I believe that this responsibility of the 'haves' to the 'have-nots' will gradually be accepted.

In the meantime, I suggest again that priority should be given to helping countries to develop their own people, their own institutions and their capacity for self-reliance. These activities are not expensive and they have a multiplier effect: every well-trained competent person will produce other competent people, as was well brought out in Dr Nabarro's paper. I would like to see all our members putting as much pressure as they can on our government and other organizations to increase their support for training, for technical development and for that part of the Overseas Development Administration's activities that is called technical co-operation. Administratively it may be a little expensive and time-consuming, but in the long run I believe that it would give better value for money than these very large food-aid programmes. For example, the Overseas Development

Administration spends about £20 million per year on research which, by its terms of reference, is likely to give practical results within a reasonable length of time. This is not a negligible amount, but it is still only 2% of the aid budget. This is the kind of component which could usefully be increased and I would like to see much more support of research that is not just being done *in* Third World countries but *by* the people of those countries.

I wish to thank not only the speakers but all the audience for producing such a lively discussion. This discussion meeting, with the discussion being recorded and published, is a new departure for the Nutrition Society and I hope that it will be a successful precedent.