

## Book Reviews

**Pursuing Food Security: Strategies And Obstacles in Africa, Latin America, And The Middle East**, W L Hollist and F L Tullis (eds) Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1987 (xv+356 pp, £31.95 pbk)

This well-researched publication contains thirteen chapters examining the complex determinants of food security in the world. After an initial presentation of two contrasting approaches to the issue, followed by critiques and one author's reply, subsequent sections of the book give case studies on specific geographical areas. These are: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia (South Asia, Sri Lanka and China), Latin America (notably Brazil, Bolivia and Peru), and finally the Middle East and North Africa. Thus the various chapters deal with a wide range of countries and experiences, whilst pursuing a common primary theme.

The editors, Hollist and Tullis, set the scene in a useful introductory chapter. They explain the distinction between food security and food self-sufficiency, while recognising that at the level of subsistence farmers, the two concepts have a high concurrence. They report that 750 million people in developing countries have only 90% of their daily nutritional needs, and up to 340 million of these people are "acutely undernourished". Yet more food is produced worldwide than can be consumed, stored or sold.

The two protagonists interpret this reality, and seek solutions, in differing ways. Griffin argues for a radical social reconstruction to eliminate poverty. He points to the well-known factors of over-emphasis on urban as opposed to rural developmental priorities, excessive reliance on imports (including food aid), and over-export of food; and the crushing foreign trade dependence of many nations striving to industrialise, and suffering run-away debt. He comments on the way rich Western nations tend to bolster Third World inequalities, and on the problem of high military expenditure at the expense of meeting social needs.

However, whilst giving a lucid and well argued analysis of the world situation, Griffin does not take us far in analysing how power relations or political and economic domination of rich over poor nations, and national elites over the working class and peasantry, might practically be resolved to reduce poverty. His concluding proposal is that "it would help if the Western governments would cease to provide massive amounts of military assistance....[to] give the poor in the Third World a little more room for manoeuvre to advance their own cause" (p32). We may readily agree, but it does not take us far in identifying concrete strategies to achieve this.

Mellor, on the other hand, argues for precisely the technological reforms that Griffith asserts as demonstrably ineffective. Mellor argues that structural and political change will

not occur on the necessary scale, so it is more pragmatic to take a reformist approach and improve agricultural production techniques. He identifies as the central problem that "the right people do not grow enough food in the right way" (p3). He argues that hunger may be reduced if appropriate technology can be improved together with reduced production costs and better use of and payments to rural labour. Part of his argument bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the 'trickle down' theory of development - that all will ultimately benefit from an increased cake. However, he is also restating the argument that "although a rural based, employment-oriented development strategy has its limitations, from both a growth and an equity standpoint it is superior to either the capital-intensive or the import-substitution strategy of growth" (p58). To some extent he is thus arguing explicitly against a 'trickle down' analysis, and seeking empowerment of grassroots producers through various reforms.

Part of the divergence between Mellor and Griffin lies in what is considered a necessary and what a sufficient precondition to reduce poverty and hunger. Beyond this, the possibility of structural reform both within poor countries and in relations between the developed and developing world is evaluated and discussed differently, with differing prominence given to and analysis of the underlying political economy.

Having elucidated the terms of the debate, subsequent sections of the book focus, as noted, on Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa's situation is described as "infinitely bleaker than that of the other third world regions" (p62), with, uniquely in the world, a net decrease in per capita food production over the last twenty years, and a widening gap between the rate of population increase and land availability. Christensen (Chapter Four) presents a well-researched overview, with stark graphs and statistics indicating the growing food crisis. She examines primarily the internal determinants of the crisis (poor prioritising, mistaken agricultural policies, inappropriate control structures, disincentives to production, and mismanagement); followed by Lofchie (Chapter Five) concentrating mainly on the external factors (the colonial heritage, including excessive export orientation, worsening terms of trade and protectionism, and inappropriate foreign aid). Both authors back up their analysis with concrete case studies and statistics.

Griffin then presents a case study of Ethiopia in Chapter Six, describing the devastating reality of a country with some of the worst development statistics in the world. He concludes, as do both previous authors, that investment in labour intensive grassroots rural development is essential. Lofchie calls this small scale developmental approach "the building blocks for economic recovery" (p118), if accompanied by "wholesale changes at the level of the international economic system". Within Ethiopia, fundamental internal political changes are clearly essential, as well as improved trade and aid relationships. Griffin, who has acted as economic adviser to the Ethiopian Government, is not optimistic about Ethiopia's future. We are left again with a valuable critique, but much less certainty about the viability of potential interventions on the ground.

In Chapter Seven, Jannuzzi examines the question of food security in South Asia in the context of rapid population growth. He outlines various developmental strategies, concluding that both growth and equity goals must be approached at the same time, as part of the same strategy. He illustrates the failure of a sequential approach to these goals, particularly focusing on the limitations of the Permanent Settlement Region, with its 250 million

population, in parts of India and most of Bangladesh. He considers how the aim of increasing agricultural production, in the absence of effective land reform and controls, serves to reinforce inequalities, poverty and hunger, and likewise, how equity goals alone also fail. This theme is echoed by Herring in Chapter Eight on Sri Lanka, in which the apparent developmental success story of the 1960s and early 1970s, attributed to a basic needs approach, has foundered from the mid 1970s, attributed largely to the liberalisation of trade and consequent external economic pressures militating against social welfare. Equity and growth goals have been in conflict. The dependence of Sri Lanka on external support has militated against the former while augmenting the latter.

Griffin in Chapter Nine examines the Chinese economy after Mao, concluding that essentially the economy remains socialist despite the current reforms and problems, and noting how comparatively successful China has been in ensuring food security. This short chapter concludes the section on Asia.

The discussion of Latin America starts with an examination by de Janvry of import substitution policies of the 1960s and early 1970s in several countries, giving way to neoliberal economic models and the well documented debt crisis. He argues for a reactivation of import substitution in wage foods, and analyses what this might mean in specific agricultural strategies by the state. Hollist, Chapter Eleven, then discusses the politics of hunger in Brazil, noting the worsening inequalities despite rapid economic growth. He concludes that while major land reform is objectively the most promising route to reducing poverty and hunger, the political realities make this solution unlikely. Therefore, for pragmatic reasons, "other strategies with admittedly less promise for the poor but greater political acceptability should be pursued" (p 243).

The section on Latin America concludes with a very interesting chapter by Tullis on the implications of the cocaine industry for food production in Bolivia and Peru. He notes the macro and micro benefits of coca production within these countries, and the difficulty of crop substitution programmes, amongst other initiatives. For example, on 1987 figures, peasants could obtain ten times the income from coca that they could obtain from any of roughly eighty alternative crops. However, the international market (primarily the USA, where the ongoing campaign against narcotics has gained momentum) may change, leading to a reduction in coca prices. Further, powerful cheap synthetic versions of cocaine, if widely available in the near future, could take the bottom out of coca production almost overnight.

The final, short section with one chapter (by Richards) addresses food problems and state policies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where "rapidly escalating effective demand and sluggish domestic supply response have made MENA the least food-self-sufficient region in the world" (p 287). Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and, to some extent, the Sudan are identified as having considerable oil wealth that has not been utilised for rural development nor to meet equity goals in general. Richards concludes that without 'equitable growth' strategies both the urban and rural poor face a continuing grim future, although only in the Sudan is mass famine seen as a significant threat.

This publication presents a wealth of useful material on the food crisis, although it is, understandably, stronger on critique than it is on proposing substantive solutions. Recognition of the need for growth with equity is not new, although reexamining and comparing current

policies and experiences helps to elucidate what this really means on the ground. Overall, the publication is a valuable addition to the literature on poverty and hunger, problems demanding urgent domestic and global solutions.

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**Trade, Exchange Rate And Agricultural Pricing Policies in Zambia**, Doris J Jansen, World Bank Comparative Studies, The Political Economy of Agricultural Pricing Policy, World Bank, Washington DC, 1988 (276pp, no price given).

This incisive analysis of the impact of exchange rate and agricultural price policy will leave Zimbabwean readers with a surreal picture of what could happen here if patterns established before independence are allowed to continue unchecked. It will do the same for many other African readers.

The study is an important contribution to price policy analysis in Africa. It will be most useful to agricultural and macro economists in government departments and at universities as well as to donor communities. It shows how various econometric techniques can be used, even where the data are not available for traditional approaches. In particular an innovative approach to establishing the exchange rate is clearly defined. The study carries out empirical analyses of:

- the effects of direct and indirect intervention on relative prices and the combined impact on relative values added
- the effect of price intervention on agricultural output, consumers, foreign exchange, Government budget, sectoral resource transfers and income distribution.

As with any quantitative analysis in a developing country adequate data is not available and traditional estimation procedures are not always possible. The advantage of this study is that it uses simplified techniques and logical analysis to derive guesstimate data where necessary. It is possible that Zambian readers may not always agree with the assumptions upon which these are based, but, since the approaches used have been clearly outlined, alternative assumptions can be substituted and the results reassessed. It would seem, however, that the assumptions actually understate the situation.

The study found that direct producer price policy had taxed both cotton and maize but subsidised tobacco. However, once the indirect impact of the exchange rate policy was included in the calculation the effective rate of taxation (negative NRP) was 26% for virginia tobacco, 46% for cotton and 48% for maize over 18 years from 1966-1984. The taxation was actually increasing over time and in 1984 (despite the price policy reforms) the NRPs were - 40% for tobacco, - 73% for cotton and - 58% for maize (using a shadow exchange rate of K5/\$). The results for all the commodities are similar, with confectionery groundnuts being the most heavily taxed; and paddy rice, wheat and tobacco the least in most years. Maize meal consumers were subsidised at an average rate of 52% over the past ten years.

Estimating some elasticities, and using others from similar situations, a rough approximation of the impact on maize output was estimated to be a 58% reduction per annum (over the long term) with the effects increasing over time so that they were - 71% per annum during the 1976-84 period. The negative output effect was proportionately greater for subsidised fertiliser. Excluding the impact from the consumer subsidy, the impact on