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## Food and development policies

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# Food and Development Policies

Every day the world's population increases by 160,000 people. While it took a hundred years, from 1850 until 1950, for the total to double, experts calculate today that it will double again in only 40 years. Even now, however, two thirds of the world's people cannot be properly nourished. Food production must be quadrupled by the year 2000: otherwise mankind will face a catastrophic famine.

In developing countries the inadequate food production is due not so much to dwindling land reserves as to the poverty of the people, the huge excess of births, and the almost complete lack of training facilities for the people. Because the people are hungry, the whole food production will be consumed. The lack of capital and the lethargy of society prevent far-reaching improvements in agricultural methods. "Poverty breeds poverty." The aim of the self-help and development programmes has been, for a long time, simply to break out of this vicious circle. But in the vast majority of cases increased production will be cancelled out by the "population explosion", if not outweighed even.

It is probably essential to meet the demand being made by the developing countries for an increase in economic aid. Its success, however, depends on effective use being made of this aid. Up to now the majority of the new countries has persistently refused to concede to the donor nations the right to discuss, or to keep under review, the ways in which aid is applied, since the industrial nations prefer to give nationally "tied" aid rather than help the international economic aid organisations.

Even if these difficulties are not taken into consideration, over-ambitious development plans will frequently fail in practice, because they are designed for a stage in development which the country concerned has not yet reached. It is certainly true that capital-intensive production methods should be promoted as, in the long run, they will speed economic growth, and that investment processes should be hastened by artificially creating regional imbalances. But one must take this step by step.

Every national economy goes through several distinct stages in its development from an agricultural to an industrial economy. A development policy can shorten this period of transition. A country, however, cannot make the transition in one single bound without overtaxing itself. The majority of the countries with undernourished people have not yet been able to develop the agricultural sector sufficiently in order to be able to embark on the next stage of development. An all out effort for industrialisation is premature at this moment. Priority must be given to increasing agricultural productivity, in order to solve the most pressing need—the provision of an adequate food supply. Improved methods of cultivation, and the intensive education and training of the people should take precedence over the purchase of sophisticated machinery. For rich countries to supply consumer goods on long credit terms will be just as useful as the establishment of a world fertiliser confederation, or the sending of agricultural experts.

It is very possible that increased productivity in the agricultural area—possibly hastened by the downfall of the feudal structure—will release production factors for successful industrialisation at a future date. This will contribute, in no insubstantial way, towards easing the food problem, even though the possibilities of winning food from the sea, or of making it chemically have not yet been utilised fully.

*Heinz-Dietrich Ortlieb*