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The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was the first of several permanent international organizations established in the postwar period. The organization's constitution asserted that members were "determined to promote the common welfare" and pledged to improve nutrition, raise standards of living, enhance food production and distribution, and "[ensure] humanity's freedom from hunger."¹ Since food insecurity was a catalyst for conflict, eliminating hunger and rural poverty was believed to be a necessity for peace. The enormity of the task that lay ahead was not lost on contemporaries who envisioned the program as a key component in the postwar international order.

Regardless of the real or perceived significance of the organization, histories of the FAO remain sparse. Existing scholarship offers an overview of the FAO's founding, but few historians explore the organization's many missions, contributions, or controversies.² It is this "paradox" that contributors to this special issue, "Confronting a Hungry World: The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization in a Historical Perspective," seek to address (345). The result is a thought-provoking issue that offers both a top-down and bottom-up perspective on the organization's early years. Editors Corinne A. Pernet and Amalia Ribí Forclaz offer a collection that breaks with the one-dimensional institutional histories of the past and instead examines the "FAO's role in the articulation of policies and practices of 'development'" (346). By focusing on the 1950s, the articles underscore how postwar promises and desires for international cooperation were quickly eclipsed by Cold War politics. The lofty goals of eradicating hunger and poverty remained out of reach, but the FAO's early projects, which collected information on production and consumption, laid the foundation for later global governance and food safety standardization.

¹ "Constitution," in *Basic Texts of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*, vol. I (2017), 3, <http://www.fao.org/3/K8024E/K8024E.pdf>.

² Aside from organizational histories, such as Gove Hambidge, *The Story of FAO* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1955), the scholarship on the FAO is thin. See for example John Cave Abbott, *Politics and Poverty: A Critique of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Ruth Jachertz, "'To Keep Food Out of Politics': The UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 1945–1965," in *International Organizations and Development, 1945–1990*, eds. Marc Frey, Sönke Kunkel and Corinna R. Unger (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 75–100; Amy L.S. Staples, *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945–1965* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2006).

Pernet and Forclaz's introduction, "Revisiting the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)", sets the tone for an ambitious issue.³ They believe the general "reluctance" of historians to engage with the FAO is largely a result of archival difficulties, since access to the organization's papers has been limited in recent years (347). Yet the contributors impressively marshal a diverse array of sources, combing local archives and personal papers scattered across the globe alongside the FAO archives in Rome. One of the great strengths of this collection is the variety of perspectives incorporated in the analyses. Actors from within and beyond the purview of FAO's administration enrich the narratives, offering valuable insights into the organization's role in facilitating cooperation among different nations and interest groups.

The first three essays in the issue examine how knowledge was produced and circulated by civil servants and experts in the FAO's early programs. Amalia Ribi Forclaz's article, "From Reconstruction to Development," focuses on the work of the Rural Welfare Division under the leadership of economist Horace Belshaw.⁴ Relying on correspondence, Forclaz traces the origins of rural development planning in the late 1940s, highlighting Belshaw's sensitivity to local cultures and skepticism towards expert intervention. Belshaw "focused on how to develop people rather than resources," believing economic development was a social process (364). His holistic approach was abandoned, however, in favor of technical assistance programs and short-term interventions. This shift is important, Forclaz argues, because it deepens our understanding of the intellectual history of development. The FAO offered a platform for experimentation in the early postwar period, demonstrating that "development was never a homogenous set of ideas" (365).

Sarah W. Tracy's article, "A Global Journey—Ancel Keys, the FAO, and the Rise of Transnational Heart Disease Epidemiology," similarly examines the contributions made by a single individual working for the FAO.⁵ Keys, who was a physiologist, served as chair of the FAO Committee on Caloric Requirements and the Expert Committee on Nutrition. These experiences piqued Keys's interest in regional dietary habits, and "led him to think globally about the relationship between diet and cardiovascular health" (372). Tracy argues that Keys's FAO service profoundly shaped his research agenda. In addition to thinking in broad comparative terms, he developed new techniques for conducting research on a global scale and built a social network of like-minded scientists. Tracy's article explores the theoretical, interpersonal, and technical changes in Keys's work as he transitioned from a nutritional physiologist to a chronic disease epidemiologist. She concludes that the relationship between the experts and the FAO's global mandate was "dynamic and synergistic...with each party influencing the other, sometimes in mutually beneficial ways" (374).

Adopting the perspective of a fieldworker, Corinne A. Pernet focuses on Emma Reh, a staff member of the Nutrition Division assigned to Central America in her article, "FAO from the Field and from Below".⁶ Pernet relies on Reh's correspondence and field reports to explore issues of marginalization surrounding the FAO's work in Central America during the 1950s. These challenges included difficulties establishing a strong presence in the region, structural inequalities within the organization, a growing tendency to privilege medical science over field work, and a gender imbalance that affected Reh's ability to conduct field work and navigate bureaucratic circles. Reh's food surveys drew direct correlations between poverty and malnutrition, yet, her emphasis on socio-economic factors was swept aside in favor of nutritionism. For Pernet, this shift toward medicalization is indicative of "gendered power asymmetries" (392).

³ Corinne A. Pernet and Amalia Ribi Forclaz, "Revisiting the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO): International Histories of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Development," *International History Review* 41:2 (2019): 345-350, (hereafter *IHR*).

⁴ Amalia Ribi Forclaz, "From Reconstruction to Development: The Early Years of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Conceptualization of Rural Welfare, 1945–1955," *IHR*: 351-371.

⁵ Sarah W. Tracy, "A Global Journey - Ancel Keys, the FAO, and the Rise of Transnational Heart Disease Epidemiology, 1949-1958," *IHR*: 372-390.

⁶ Corinne A. Pernet, "FAO from the Field and from Below: Emma Reh and the Challenges of Doing Nutrition Work in Central America," *IHR*: 391-406.

The remaining articles explore issues of sovereignty, examining how local dynamics shaped the implementation of rural development programs. Oliver Dinius's "Transnational Development on the Frontier" looks at the Brazilian government's effort to promote social and economic development in the Amazon with the creation of a regional development agency, the Superintendency for the Plan of Economic Valorization of the Amazon (Superintendência do Plano para a Valorização Econômica da Amazônia, SPVEA).⁷ The Brazilian government requested FAO assistance to develop programs in fishery, agriculture, and forestry. Dinius offers a close analysis of competing visions of development that emerged in the Amazon Mission, demonstrating how these differences influenced the FAO's planning and shaped Brazilian agendas. The FAO's Amazon Mission failed, Dinius concludes, because the host nation lacked the administrative capacity to support the project (423). Surprisingly, the failure of the Amazon Mission cannot be attributed to resistance to foreign meddling or differences in strategy but rather was the result of a lack of resources that were then further undermined by existing economic circumstances and Brazilian politics.

Finally, Benjamin Siegel's essay, "The Claims of Asia and the Far East", focuses on newly independent India where the FAO's agenda held great promise but failed to deliver.⁸ Siegel examines the converging interests of Indian experts, administrators, and politicians, concluding that the FAO "proved a greater boon to Indian careerism and the authority of Indian experts themselves than to the amelioration of hunger" (428). Siegel identifies a disconnect between FAO administrators and Indian representatives, highlighting the tension between national and international aspirations. The FAO offered a platform for international recognition and legitimacy but failed to provide adequate material assistance. The FAO's marginal role in Indian agricultural development reflected a "winnowing scale of ambition" that importantly coincided with decolonization and an escalating Cold War (428).

For this reader, the greatest takeaway is the collective emphasis on interpersonal relations. The FAO encouraged collaboration across disciplines and state borders. It enabled Keys to forge important connections with scientists across the globe. Keys's research paid close attention to similarities and differences in eating across cultures, reflecting field worker Reh's interest in local custom and Belshaw's holistic approach to rural welfare. Belshaw and Reh remained skeptical of top-down development programs and believed that greater attention needed to be paid to individual needs and establishing goodwill with local communities. In Brazil and India, government agents and experts manipulated FAO strategies to serve their own needs and interests, often at the expense of recipient populations.

Together these articles illustrate how different actors, agencies, and governments interpreted the FAO's mission to eradicate hunger and combat rural poverty and adapted it to suit a range of long- and short-term objectives. The issue concludes with a thoughtful epilogue by Corinna R. Unger that reflects on the articles' interventions and offers suggestions for future historical inquiry.⁹ Unger commends the issue's focus on rural development, which she believes offers new insight into both the FAO's history and the organization's contributions to the field of international development (452). She also notes how the articles situate the FAO in the larger political context. The organization was not isolated or static, but adjusted strategies in response to a variety of external political and economic factors.

"Confronting a Hungry World" stresses the importance of the FAO to postwar histories of transnational cooperation, international organizations, development, and food and nutrition. The essays do an extraordinary job of breathing life into the early years of the organization, as it struggled to reconcile its idealism to meet practical demands and evolving geopolitical circumstances. Buoyed by postwar idealism, the FAO endeavored to make freedom from want a reality for

⁷ Oliver Dinius, "Transnational Development on the Frontier: The FAO's Fishery and Forestry Missions in the Brazilian Amazon," *IHR*: 407-426.

⁸ Benjamin Siegel, "The Claims of Asia and the Far East': India and the FAO in the Age of Ambivalent Internationalism," *IHR*: 427-450.

⁹ Corinna R. Unger, "International Organizations and Rural Development: The FAO Perspective," *IHR*: 451-458.

populations across the globe. Yet almost 75 years later, food security remains elusive.¹⁰ Conflict, climate change, and poverty continue to stymie the U.N.'s efforts. Even so, this exploration into the early years of the FAO offers fresh insights on the renewed program to eradicate global hunger and malnutrition.

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¹⁰ In 2015, the U.N. General Assembly established the goal of eradicating hunger by 2030 as part of the organization's sustainable development goals. For more see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>.