



WHO SPEAKS
FOR THE
HUNGRY?
HOW FAO
ELECTS ITS
LEADER

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Charles H. Weitz

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► Contents

PREFACE 5

I. LEADERSHIP OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION 9

- Selecting a leader 9**
- The social context of FAO 10**
- Leadership patterns in FAO 12**
 - Terms of office — Election procedures*

II. THE ELECTIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS 16

- The 1956 and 1959 elections 16**
- The 1961 constitutional amendment 16**
 - The 4 + 2 + 2 formula — Pros and cons — The impact on the incumbent — Crucial omissions from the debate*
- The 1963 election 19**
- The 1967 election 20**
 - Adeke Boerma — Hernán Santa Cruz — Sen again? — Gabriel d'Arboussier — Sen and Santa Cruz — Boerma's campaign — Sen denied — A complex election — Secret or open voting?*
- The 1971 election 24**
 - Drawbacks of a four-year term — The six-year proposal — Debating a six-year term in the General Conference — The election*
- The 1975 election 27**
- The 1977 constitutional amendment 29**
- The 1981 election 32**
- The 1987 election 32**
 - Northern demands — Using the South — Enter Canada — Who will oppose the incumbent? — A Northern sponsor for a Southern candidate*
- The 1993 election 35**
 - Government nomination, but actual support? — Full support, full media use — Regional support — Staff candidates — Domestic repercussions — FAO's balloting rules — Marathon balloting*

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS 41

- Recommendations 42**
- The Deputy Director General 46**
- The challenge 47**

TABLES

- 1. Directors General of FAO 15**
- 2. The distribution of votes in the 1993 election of the Director General 40**

PREFACE

Hunger is not simply a technical matter to be solved with better seeds, fertilisers, cultivation practices and marketing. To achieve freedom from hunger for humankind the issue must be placed in the larger context of freedom from want. The problem cannot be solved without drawing upon the ideas, skills and energies of whole societies.

When B. R. Sen, Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, launched the Freedom From Hunger Campaign in July 1960, he had already moved to involve the whole United Nations System. He placed his plans before ECOSOC twice and the Secretary General's Administrative Committee on Coordination twice. And, he had in hand a unanimous resolution of support from the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The second new dimension, added in 1960, was to open the dialogue to all interested and involved parties: universities, research bodies, non-governmental organisations (both international and national), churches, industry. If solutions were to be sought, all relevant parties needed to be at the table. Governments might be major actors, but they were not the only actors. Two major world food congresses in 1963 and 1970, mobilising actors from heads of state and governments to citizen leaders of local bodies involved in rural development actions, proved the efficacy of this strategy.

At the time of the writing of this essay, in late 1996, the realities of Sen's foresights of more than three decades ago stare starkly at us and the issues raised remain largely unresolved. When questions about the carrying capacity of this earth to feed all humankind—in fact to provide it with *adequate* nutrition—were first tabled for the international community to debate, the size of the challenge was 75 million additional mouths to feed annually. Today that number exceeds 90 million annually. And options for action may be narrowing.

For those who argued that annual increases in food production exceeded the rate of population growth and that there was no need for heroic measures, today's figures give grisly reminders that complacency is of false comfort. Rice yields barely increase and wheat yields have shown no increase while available figures indicate that world grain production which peaked at nearly 350 kilograms per person in 1980 has fallen to about 290 kilograms per person today. More worrying, world carryover stocks continue to drop and now stand at only 48 days of consumption, well below the minimum level of safety designated by FAO and below the lowest recorded level, that of 1973, which precipitated a crisis of sufficient proportion to cause the United Nations General Assembly to call the United Nations World Food Conference of 1974. How many recall, however, the pledge in the Conference Declaration that within a decade no child would go to bed hungry?

And the list continues with the declining efficacy of fertilisers; increased topsoil losses

from overcultivation; decreasing rangelands from overgrazing; bugs and pests resistant to pesticides and insecticides, requiring ever heavier doses, with increased costs to cultivators and increased health hazards from improper usages (but even so, percentage crop loss from insect and pest devastation remains virtually unchanged). Many great aquifers are being drawn down below replenishment, reducing irrigation and thus crops and crop yields. Great rivers like the Yellow in China and the Colorado in the USA dry up and disappear long before they reach the sea. Most of the major world fisheries are in decline and world production has not exceeded tonnages reached in 1989. Biodiversity is threatened, the tropical rainforest disappears and forest cover once protecting some 50 per cent of Ethiopia, for example, has now declined to less than 3 per cent of the country's land surface.

Beyond these strictly agricultural and environmental concerns, the broader issues of uneven income distribution between and within rich and poor countries, the growing debt levels of Third World countries and other measures of disparity and inequality are urgent considerations. As B. R. Sen observed, freedom from hunger must be approached within the wider context of freedom from want.

What, then, do these grave and challenging problems have to do with the subject of leadership in the United Nations System in general and the Food and Agriculture Organization in particular? Of what relevance is it to examine the procedures and rules devised for selecting leaders in one of the UN Specialized Agencies?

Writing at a time when the United Nations is faced with virtual bankruptcy, and when its Food and Agriculture Organization is grappling with substantial budget cuts, one might argue that pondering the subject of leadership is a luxury which cannot be afforded. Yet, throughout history, leaders have had a way of defining issues and directing solutions which have gone far beyond the actual conditions, or the power or authority of their positions. Is the apparent disaffection of governments and other bodies with the UN and FAO a product of the lack of utility of those bodies? Did governments err in writing the Charter of the United Nations or the Constitution of the FAO, enshrining in the latter the right to freedom from hunger? Or have agencies such as FAO simply lost their way and failed to find their areas of 'comparative advantage' in a welter of conflicting demands from governments, so that their work has become diffuse, their programmes reduced to small, disconnected bits and pieces, and their administration and effectiveness weakened?

Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers point out in *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal* that 'the smallest academic institution or well-established corporation virtually anywhere in the world devotes far more time, energy and systematic effort to searching for its executive head than do governments for the Secretary-General of the United Nations'.¹ Few would argue the

¹ Urquhart, Brian, and Childers, Erskine, *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 1996.

point or disagree that the same deplorable situation exists in the Specialised Agencies of the UN.

This study deals with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the various ways in which its leaders have been chosen during its half-century of existence. Who leads the FAO (and where FAO is led) is, in large part, a product of the process through which FAO's leaders are chosen. This study is predicated on the assumption that selecting the women and men needed to help governments and others reshape the way we work together is of highest priority and that leadership in the UN can—as has been recognised for three decades—either be 'part of the problem or part of the solution'.

When *A World in Need of Leadership* was to be reviewed and updated, the authors decided to take a somewhat more detailed look at FAO than was available in the original study. The Ford Foundation made possible a short study and Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers kindly entrusted this undertaking to me. While the general policy of the inquiry was discussed with them, this study is entirely my responsibility. If, in some small way it helps to kindle the debate over leadership of one part of the UN family, it will have contributed what those who commissioned it had in mind.

The challenge and stimulation of undertaking this task was, at its close, dimmed by the tragic and untimely death of Erskine Childers just as discussions on final editing were to be undertaken. Erskine Childers, a longtime colleague and friend, is outstanding among those who have dedicated their lives not alone to serving the United Nations but to strengthening it for its future. Erskine Childers had a truly encyclopedic mind, rare insight coupled with compassion, quiet courage and a great gift of expression. His foresight and spirit will live on while his presence is sorely missed.

Section I of the study highlights a number of unresolved problems including conflicting views on the relationship of FAO to the UN; the low status of agriculture in domestic political hierarchies—which results in agricultural authorities having little influence over the appointment of Directors General; indecisiveness over the length of term for Directors General; and deficiencies in election procedures, including an absence of qualifications criteria for prospective candidates. Section II provides a history of leadership elections from 1956 to the present and of the constitutional amendments relating to length of term that have been made during the same period. Section III, the key section of this study, argues that the hitherto haphazard process by which the executive leader of FAO is appointed should be replaced by new procedures to ensure a more deliberate and informed choice and makes seven recommendations to that end. It also briefly addresses the role of the Deputy Director General, arguing that this important post needs to be defined more carefully, and ends with some reflections on the challenge that the member governments must accept as one of their most fundamental responsibilities to the organisation.

Numerous people have been generous with their help, but this inquiry is not

exhaustive. I have not been able to talk in depth with all, worldwide, who have played key roles in FAO elections. Many have, of course, passed on, and memories in governments are short. In terms of record-keeping, FAO does not have a historian or a system for recording events of significance in the life of the organisation.

Some key players, like B. R. Sen and Adeke Boerma, left behind many collections of speech texts and commissioned articles but neither wrote privately about key events involving them personally, and particularly election politics. Issues treated here, key points in their careers and that of Edouard Saouma, must in some measure be reconstructed from recollections.

With these limitations, a sincere attempt has been made to track the FAO record in a fair and accurate review. Although so many players are gone or were unreachable, I have been helped at each stage of my work by kind, wise and considerate colleagues who have agreed to talk to me when assured that their views would not be quoted. Some who helped were colleagues from my days in FAO and as its Representative at the United Nations; most are or have been in the service of their government at FAO or the United Nations; some were from other walks of life but with connections to FAO or the UN. Ambassadors and senior officials of Permanent Missions to FAO and to the United Nations gave freely of their time and advice, and candidates from past FAO elections as well as candidates for the 1993 election were helpful in every possible way.

The former Director General of FAO, who was a colleague for more years than either of us might wish to count, gave of his time and his views without reservation. To him, as well as to all those veterans of so much of FAO's colourful past who offered advice, comments and suggestions to help me in this undertaking, I give my warmest appreciation and thanks. The omissions and commissions in this study are, however, entirely mine.

Portland, Maine, November 1996

Charles H. Weitz

I. LEADERSHIP OF THE FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

SELECTING A LEADER

With the 1956 election of B. R. Sen, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations moved from the quieter, more collegial atmosphere of its early years into the more intense political atmosphere characterising the UN System as a whole. In many ways this was inevitable. FAO was, after all, the first of the post-World War II UN agencies to be created, coming into existence on 16 October 1945, eight days before the United Nations. Moreover, with a mandate encompassing agriculture, forestry and fisheries, it deals, arguably, with the most basic and economically important of all subjects. Little wonder, then, that the affairs of FAO—more than any other agency in the UN System—were swept up in the economic and political debates of the United Nations. Candidates for the post of Director General were quick to understand the implications of this larger world. Since 1956, elections have been hard-fought contests with all the trappings, tricks and techniques of national political campaigns.

The FAO Constitution depicts a very formal but imprecise process: 'The Director General of the Organization ... shall be appointed by the Conference ...'. That 'appointment' is now the culmination of a long, high-visibility political campaign to garner support. Managerial experience, agricultural and development expertise, as well as technical and policy matters take the back seat to Western-style power politicking.

Organisations that are not agricultural—the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the European Union (EU), for example—have come to be important in contests for the post. When G. d'Arboussier's candidacy was withdrawn during the election of 1967, it was in the name of African heads of state, not the African ministers of agriculture; and no one has any doubt but that the current Director General's, Jacques Diouf's, margin of victory was due to the solidarity of Africa, masterminded and floor-managed by the Organization of African Unity, not African ministers of agriculture.

Thus, neither in the North nor in the South do the agricultural authorities determine the outcome of the contest to appoint the Director General of FAO, the one specialised agency of the UN focused on agriculture. Leaders and spokespersons for FAO who have argued loudest and most vigorously about its independence and its need for technical integrity have used first and foremost the political mechanisms honed in the United Nations to gain and maintain control of FAO.

In looking at the colourful past of FAO's struggle to come to a satisfactory method of seeking and appointing its executive head, it should be kept in mind that it is the Food and Agriculture Organization *of the United Nations*. The leadership problems posed for the United Nations need to be posed with equal force for FAO; the best solutions will serve both. Finding common solutions to the major political, social, economic and environmental threats to humanity's future wellbeing are vexing enough tasks for governments. Selecting the right person to head the secretariats of the major United Nations organisations has also proved frustrating and embarrassingly difficult.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization has adopted several different approaches to defining its role in addressing the demographic, environmental and societal stresses that increasingly beset the world. The first Director General, Sir John Boyd Orr, outlined bold concepts for a world food authority. FAO shifted to more technical preoccupations under its second Director General. Later, the organisation moved to wider policy issues, emphasising its Constitution's clause that humankind has the right to be free from hunger and taking joint actions with the United Nations such as creating the World Food Programme. FAO's current posture reflects a further shift. In light of the call for a new economic order from the General Assembly, it sees itself now as an activist organisation with a role in operational activities for development, focused on the most needy.

Each shift and change in direction, as well as the clear differences among the most recent candidates for election, reflects the difficulty governments have in agreeing on what they want the organisation to be. This unresolved policy dilemma is a result of the dynamic and political nature of agriculture domestically and internationally, the changing interests of national governments and their influence in shaping FAO policy, and conflicting views about its relation to the UN. Still today, many hold that the Specialized Agencies were set up to be politically separate and independent of the United Nations itself, so as to ensure that UN political stalemates, confrontation, or perhaps even paralysis, would not block or destroy the specialised work of the UN System.

While agriculture is a major factor in national (domestic) politics and programmes, agriculture ministers are rarely powerful or even important political figures. Furthermore, FAO is not a particularly important negotiating or technical instrument for many major agricultural producers and traders.

The number of ministers of agriculture attending important FAO meetings, or the General Conference, is frequently cited by FAO staff, including its Director General, as underlining the importance of the organisation. It is certainly a useful forum for airing

issues and for emphasising national policy hopes and concerns. But it has not been the primary action centre except on a number of smaller, albeit important, issues. Ministers' visits are brief, and they seldom do their real business at FAO.

Thus, a situation has developed, encouraged by FAO leaders, where mid- and low-level agricultural debates are played out in relative isolation in Rome, in a kind of club atmosphere. Government representatives to FAO often act virtually on their own, without political input from capitals, interacting mainly with their own counterparts and often at a low level in order not to risk raising awkward issues. In contrast to the large missions governments maintain at the UN, many representatives to FAO are virtual exiles, part of their country's diplomatic missions to Italy but of little interest to the ambassador and his political/economic staff. In some cases, these representatives have not even visited their own country for briefing in over a decade. Communication with their own government may be infrequent. The 'Permanent Representatives' are often seen more as 'Permanent Residents' of Rome as they roam the corridors of FAO.

Conflicting views about the relations of FAO to the UN, its relative isolation from centres of UN political concentration, and the low status of agriculture in domestic political hierarchies, have enabled Directors General of FAO over the years to secure greater freedom of action and executive initiative than is available to the Secretary General in New York. Internally, their power is considerable and their authority is unquestioned and virtually unchecked.

The selection of each FAO head since the early days has been influenced by the sometimes conflicting efforts to keep FAO insulated from the politics of the United Nations, by pressures from the United Nations' side for coherence within the system, and by the very nature of agriculture as a key factor in economics and social development. At no time were these dynamics sharper than in 1993, between those who spoke of reshaping FAO for improved international standard-setting (as a centre of excellence, gathering the best information to help governments define policies and programmes) and those arguing for a more activist involvement in development actions for the most needy and as vocal champion for the less developed countries.

The third major force shaping FAO leadership is the national interest of specific governments. In its early years, FAO was dominated by the United States and its allies. It was largely free of Cold War politics since the USSR—after attending the founding conference in 1945 and signing the final act—did not subsequently deposit its instrument of ratification and become a member state. However, FAO was drawn into conflicts between First and Third World countries and more recently has been dominated by the Third World.

LEADERSHIP PATTERNS IN FAO

The Preamble to the FAO Constitution

The Nations accepting this Constitution, being determined to promote the common welfare by furthering separate and collective action on their part for the purpose of:

- raising levels of nutrition and standards of the peoples under their respective jurisdictions;
- securing improvements in the efficiency of production and distribution of all foods and agricultural products;
- bettering the conditions of rural populations;
- and thus contributing towards an expanding world economy, and ensuring humanity's freedom from hunger ...

FAO's history can be divided into two distinct periods—from 1945 to mid-1956, and from 1956 to the present. From 1945 to 1956, FAO had three Directors General—Sir John Boyd Orr (UK), Norris Dodd (USA) and Philip V. Cardon (USA). Orr sought to make FAO the principal actor in allocating world food supplies through the creation of a World Food Board. For the United States, however, this was too direct an implementation of the words of the Preamble of FAO's Constitution. The USA wanted to start FAO on another path, primarily technical and concerned with production aspects of agriculture. Eccentric and brilliant, Orr was not known for administrative skills, patience or tolerance of budgetary and management disciplines. Resisting all attempts to make FAO a major policy instrument, the dominant states of that period stressed the need for sound management and budget practices.

What the USA wanted was what FAO got. FAO was housed in Washington, D.C., until 1951. The US candidate, Norris Dodd, was appointed as Director General. He was a pharmacist turned entrepreneur, businessman and political activist who had been Under Secretary of the US Department of Agriculture. He was successfully reappointed twice. His term ended in December 1953, not because of alternative candidates or dissatisfaction among member governments, but because political parties had changed in the USA. The new Republican administration in office wanted a Director General with solid party connections. Knowles Ryerson was nominated, but his total lack of FAO experience and his ill health—and, ironically, a US stonewalling of budget proposals—all doomed his candidacy. In his stead, Philip V. Cardon was elected. A well-known figure in FAO circles, Cardon was essentially a quiet, research-minded figure. He soon found the pressures and tensions of FAO and the USA 'budget cap' too much.

administrative budget is raised, like the UN's, by assessments apportioned among members according to relative capacity to pay. However, a ceiling on the budget was, in effect, imposed by a law passed by the US Congress which put both a percentage limit and a total dollar limit on the amount the US government could contribute to FAO. As the number of Third World members increased, and as programme demands grew and costs increased, so did pressures within FAO and among governments regarding the virtual US veto power over the FAO budget.

By the early 1950s this had grown into a major conflict which Cardon was unable to deal with and which probably caused his personal health problems. Third World determination to challenge the US hegemony increased, resulting in the first real political contest in the election of its Director General in 1956. With this event, FAO moved into the international mainstream, and North-South politics have been a feature of all FAO elections ever since.

During the period of US hegemony, a second issue also emerged. With the growth of UN development programmes, FAO was pulled into a development mode and into the programme-policy world of the United Nations in ways that discomforted those controlling FAO's governing organs. There began an influx of additional, voluntarily contributed funds from governments, with administrative overhead costs included. Though small at first, these amounted to a transfusion for an organisation whose administrative budget had been sorely restricted.

Many welcomed these outside voluntary funds as a means to enrich their work through direct field involvement and to enlarge their staffs from the overheads. Others sensed that this assistance and advisory work would divert attention from the basic mandates of FAO and feared that the influence of the donors of such funds would also soon bring unwelcome outside influence. It was as if there were two bodies: one for FAO's 'regular work' and one for technical assistance activities. This infusion of money for development programmes was part of a struggle, as many saw it, for the very soul of FAO. The election of B. R. Sen from India, in 1956, brought an end to the debate, if not the differing views on this major new element in the life of FAO.

B. R. Sen, a champion of the Third World, was well acquainted with agricultural and hunger issues from his service in India, but he lacked training or education in any of the technical disciplines of FAO. With his election, development programmes began to be financed through the UN and other sources external to FAO, and an overriding importance was assigned to development strategies debated not in FAO but in the United Nations. A type of FAO Director General representing a different perspective, and concerns beyond those of technical agriculture, began to emerge as a force generating controversy.

The Specialized Agencies are much more under the initiative and direction of their executive heads than is the United Nations. Both the UN Secretary General and FAO's Director General formulate and present their respective programmes of work and budgets

for each two-year period. But FAO's major programmes are developed primarily from the initiative of the Director General and then in the interaction between FAO secretariat members and the relevant technical committees of governments. These bodies are composed of technical officers (generally of intermediate grade) of national government departments (forestry, fisheries, agriculture, etc.). The interests of government officers and secretariat members in proposing and reviewing programme initiatives are often similar. Meetings of technical committees (which are part of the FAO Council² and report to it) are limited in duration.

The sovereign review by the FAO Conference is held biennially and is of short duration: the whole conference is completed within three weeks. Thus any political review of major programmes must be compressed into a few hours, or at most a few days. Since most initiatives begin with the Director General, and are negotiated largely between secretariats with parallel interests—with the result that there is limited time for review and debate before final decisions are reached—it is little wonder that the Director General controls in large part both programme and administrative issues.

► *Terms of office*

FAO has had a chequered and indecisive record concerning the length of term for its Directors General, with four different Constitutional provisions attempting to find the right formula. In moving toward its present policy, the 56th Session of the FAO Council requested its Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM) to detail the FAO history and practice. In its report of May 1971, the CCLM pointed out that the FAO Constitution had had no provision relating to the term of office of its Director General before 1961. From its founding in 1945 through to 1961, FAO's Constitution did not specify terms, but provided that the Director General would be appointed by the FAO Conference 'on such terms as it may determine'. There were no restrictions on the eligibility of the Director General for reappointment. From 1961 onwards the term of office was regularised. The record to date is outlined in Table 1.

There was no discernible pattern for the term of office of the Director General prior to the first Constitutional stipulation of 1961. John Boyd Orr served for just over two years; Norris Dodd under three separate contracts served a total of 67 months or just over five and

² The programme development mechanisms (the committees) are relatively large, whereas in FAO, the financial and programme review (evaluation) committees are small. The Programme Committee is composed of 11 people elected from member nations by the FAO Council. The Finance Committee has nine members also elected by the FAO Council. The General Rules provide that those elected to each body have 'continued interest in the objectives and activities of the Organization' and in the case of the Finance Committee also 'special competence and experience in administrative and financial matters'. There is no mechanism to ensure this provision is observed and a review of membership of both committees over the years would indicate that while members usually served well, geographical considerations and rotation were prime considerations in elections. There has been a noticeable progression from service on a committee into the Secretariat itself.

► **Table 1. Directors General of FAO**

Incumbent	Period of appointment	Months of service
J. Boyd Orr (UK)	October 1945–December 1947	26 months
	January 1948–April 1948	3.5 months
N. Dodd (USA)	April 1948–November 1950	30 months
	November 1950–November 1951	12 months
	November 1951–December 1953	25 months
P. Cardon (USA)	December 1953–September 1956 (resigned for reasons of health)	31 months
B. R. Sen (India)	September 1956–December 1959	39 months
	December 1959–January 1964	50 months
	January 1964–December 1967	48 months
A. H. Boerma (Netherlands)	January 1968–December 1971	48 months
	January 1972–December 1975	48 months
E. Saouma (Lebanon)	January 1976–December 1981	72 months
	January 1982–December 1987	72 months
	January 1988–December 1993	72 months
J. Diouf (Senegal)	January 1994–December 1999	

a half years. By the time of B. R. Sen, the organisation had stabilised its conference pattern into a biennium, meeting in November/December of each odd-numbered year. Director General contracts were therefore fitted to the conference chronology.

► **Election procedures**

At FAO, any member government may nominate a candidate for the post of Director General. No rules prescribe the qualifications required of a candidate. No guidelines exist spelling out the information to be submitted with the name; whatever data the government submits is accepted and circulated. The FAO Council sets time limits for submissions, but there is no formal or informal screening of candidates; all names duly submitted by governments within the time limit go forward directly to the biennial FAO Conference where they are voted on by member governments present on the first working day. Balloting is continuous until one candidate receives a majority vote. No speeches are allowed; no delays, other than the time needed for counting ballots and announcing results, are permitted. Generally, the field of candidates has been two or three individuals (other than when the Director General has been unopposed). The exceptions have been 1975 when there were seven nominations and 1993 when nine individuals were nominated.

Behind all the words about ‘regularising’ or ‘stabilising’ the Director General’s term of office were real concerns over the person and power of B. R. Sen. While he was never the subject of the debate, he was the real reason for it.

There was a far-ranging discussion of the US formula. A majority of voices from both industrialised and developing countries accepted the total of eight years. A few voices, which proved to be influential in later amendments, did ask, without pressing the point, why the organisation would limit itself to only eight years of service if an outstanding person were elected to the post.

► ***Pros and cons***

Arguments for and against the 4 + 2 + 2 year formula focused mainly on an alternative of four-plus-four years. No delegation proposed unlimited terms. Those favouring the US proposal spoke about flexibility and avoiding being saddled with an unsatisfactory Director General. Those favouring the four-plus-four alternative spoke of the divisive effects of frequent elections, their cost to the organisation, and the need for the Director General to have uninterrupted periods of service. They dismissed the argument of damage if an unsatisfactory person were elected, saying that the organisation would be unlikely to re-elect someone who did not satisfy the majority of members.

The debate became quite intense over what would happen after the first four years when other candidates stood for office. The incumbent would only be eligible to stand for a two-year term, whereas a challenger would be standing for a four-year term. Various suggestions were made for wording which might clarify the position, but nothing was decided, and when the 4 + 2 + 2 formula was accepted, it was without any modification. (Later, this specific point proved to be the undoing of the amendment, which was never legally enforced.)

► ***The impact on the incumbent***

A much more contentious point proved to be the effect of the amendment on the incumbent Director General. The United States had put forward its amendment with the clear stipulation that it should not affect the incumbent, and the point was made that adopting the change in 1961 would be fair in that it was not during an election Conference. Nonetheless, it was clear from the debate that those states interested in unseating Sen favoured a limited interpretation of the US proviso, i.e., if in 1963, B. R. Sen stood for re-election, it would be under the terms of the amendment for an initial term of four years with eligibility to be re-elected twice more for terms of two years each. The United States remained adamant that the amendment would not enter into force until after B. R. Sen left FAO either by being defeated in an open election or by voluntarily not seeking

re-election, i.e., Sen would not have to compete under the 4 + 2 + 2 amendment.

This issue was finally put to a vote, with a large margin favouring Sen's right to run again without the amendment applying to him. The 4 + 2 + 2 amendment fixing the term of office for future appointments was then also adopted.

► **Crucial omissions from the debate**

Virtually every intervention was framed in terms of what an incumbent would want. Would a candidate want four years? How would an incumbent view standing twice more? It is almost impossible to find in the debate a delegate speaking in terms of what his/her government wanted or believed to be correct. It is almost eerie to read the arguments saying, he would want this, he would want that, he may not favour such-and-such. The figure of the Director General, even in 1961, loomed so large that it was what he might want or not want that was the centre of government arguments.

Equally significant was the fact that not once in the whole long debate was it ever mentioned that a Director General could be anything other than male. Not one intervention, even those made by delegates who were female, ever suggested that a 'she' might be the object of this debate.

Finally, as a precursor of events to come, throughout the debate the delegate from Lebanon, who was Edouard Saouma, intervened entirely on the side of points and questions that protected or favoured B. R. Sen.

THE 1963 ELECTION

The 1961 amendment to the Constitution gave FAO a definite limit to the length of term of office for the Director General. As Sen's term was ending in 1963, the debate surfaced again in that year's General Conference, even though his was the only nomination received for the post.

In the proposed contract for Dr Sen, the General Committee of the Conference negotiated an agreement under which Sen would have a four-year term of office, taking him to a total of 11 years of service in spite of the then prevailing constitutional provision which limited a Director General to a total of eight years in office, with a provision added that this term of office would be non-renewable. The details of this agreement are treated later but the discussion before the vote on Sen's reappointment reflected the division between governments about how long an individual should serve as FAO's head. The divisions were reflected in the ballot.

A total of 91 ballot papers were issued. There were seven abstentions and four votes

against. In the words of the Chairman, Dr Sen was re-elected by 'an overwhelming majority'. Although the sole candidate, his reappointment had not been unanimous.

THE 1967 ELECTION

We can guess why an agreement that the incumbent Director General's contract would not be renewed was part of the Director General's contract.⁴ B. R. Sen had been a leader who had generated controversy. He had instituted significant restructuring of the organisation and altered its programme. He had initiated the Indicative World Plan for Agriculture Development and the Freedom From Hunger Campaign with its imaginative and challenging development education programme. He had involved NGOs and transnational corporations in the development dialogue, and he had greatly expanded the budget. All these changes, and others, made some governments nervous. Talk had begun about hegemony of power. There were fears that Dr Sen would be reappointed and reappointed again. Imposing limits to re-election was one way those uneasy governments could shut off the Director General's power without an open Conference fight.

We do not know why Dr Sen agreed not to seek re-election. Did he really intend to quit at the end of 11 years? Had he signed the contract really intending to run again in response to a groundswell of generated government support sufficient to overturn the General Committee agreement? Perhaps so, as the testimony of Hernán Santa Cruz suggests (see p. 22).

► Adeke Boerma

In making arrangements for the 1967 election, the FAO Council set 4 September 1967 as the date by which all nominations had to be submitted by Governments. A. H. Boerma, who had been an employee of FAO from its first days and since 1962 the first Executive Director of the Joint UN/FAO World Food Programme (WFP), was nominated by the Netherlands on 10 February 1967. Boerma did not resign from or go on unpaid leave from the WFP during the election campaign.

► Hernán Santa Cruz

Boerma's nomination was followed in quick order by the second candidate, Hernán Santa Cruz, whose papers were submitted by the Government of Chile on 14 February 1967. At

⁴ The contract, which is approved by the Conference, is drafted by the General Committee, consisting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Conference and seven elected members.

the time of filing, Santa Cruz was an FAO Assistant Director General for Latin American Affairs.

► **Sen again?**

To the great surprise of some, and dismay of others, the Government of India submitted the name of B. R. Sen on 12 June 1967. In its letter the Government noted that the eight-year term limit did not apply to Dr Sen and asserted that his present term was 'renewable by the FAO Conference'. The Government noted, 'It is not uncommon for the Heads of Specialized Agencies to continue in office for ten years or more'.

► **Gabriel d'Arboussier**

On 29 August, just before the deadline, the Government of Senegal filed the papers of Gabriel d'Arboussier. Mr d'Arboussier was Executive Director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and held the rank of Under Secretary General at the United Nations. The contest was widening.

► **Sen and Santa Cruz**

Evidence that Dr Sen had originally intended to accept the mandate of the General Committee can be found in the writings of Hernán Santa Cruz in his autobiography, *Cooperar o perecer: El dilema de la comunidad mundial*.⁵ In the second volume, Mr Santa Cruz details events before the 1967 election. Already in 1965, Dr Sen had privately given Santa Cruz indications that he felt that he should be his successor. At the conclusion of the FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean in Chile in March 1965, President Frei of Chile, who had opened the Conference, at its conclusion received Director General Sen and Mr Santa Cruz.

During this meeting, without having previously informed Santa Cruz of his intentions, Sen told President Frei that his (Sen's) major programmes and initiatives were not likely to survive him unless a person such as Santa Cruz, who had been so influential in developing them, were to become the next Director General. He asked President Frei to ensure the full backing and support of the Chilean Government, and to ensure Santa Cruz's nomination for the post of FAO Director General at the forthcoming FAO Conference. Both points were accepted. Shortly afterwards, President Frei offered Santa Cruz the appointment as Chile's Ambassador to the UN agencies in Geneva. Santa Cruz suggested waiting until it was absolutely clear that Sen would not run again.

⁵ Published in 1988 through Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, Buenos Aires.

Later that year in a meeting during the World Forestry Conference in Madrid, Sen informed Santa Cruz of his intention to run again and, declining to discuss the question, suggested to Santa Cruz that he could wait for another two years. From that moment, relations between the two men, which had been close and mutually supportive, became frozen. According to Santa Cruz, they exchanged only such words as were formally required, even though Santa Cruz had (extraordinarily as a secretariat member) been selected on Sen's initiative to be the chairman of the Joint United Nations and FAO World Conference on Agrarian Reform held in June 1966.

Saying that he doubted he could be elected, Santa Cruz resigned from FAO, not wanting either the appearance or the actuality of accepting favours as a senior FAO official and, equally, removing himself from the possibility that officers of the organisation could interfere with his campaign activities. He accepted the opportunity the President had previously offered and operated from Geneva as Chile's Ambassador to the UN agencies in Europe. He also took the seat which Chile held at that time on the FAO Council. He conducted an active campaign, which became even more complicated when, going against previous assurances given by the African Group, Senegal at the eleventh hour nominated Gabriel d'Arboussier.

► *Boerma's campaign*

A major factor in Boerma's campaign, which did not initially have broad support, was the widespread recognition of his name since he was the first Executive Director of the World Food Programme. This position had allowed him to travel widely to negotiate with donors and to dispense important projects. The World Food Programme, an entirely new programme, introduced 'new money' in the UN System.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the Six-Day War in the Middle East and the bitterness among some communities, insinuations based on religious considerations surfaced against Director General Sen and some senior officers, especially several with important programme responsibilities. Various authors have alleged that this further undermined support for Sen, who refused to discuss the issue, particularly in the bitter General Committee fight, and that it increased support for Boerma (who, without voicing an opinion, indicated he would deal with the matter), while hurting Santa Cruz, who responded to the states that raised this issue with a recital of his strong United Nations record on human rights and anti-discrimination, and a statement that he would never exclude or expel any official by reason of race or religion.

► *Sen denied*

The full story may never be told as to why Dr Sen was not allowed to stand for election in 1967. His agreement to a 'non-renewable' contract was held by many governments to be 'a

matter of honour': his word having been given and accepted, that was that. Sen had been a bold, innovative leader. He had annoyed or at a minimum made uneasy many industrialised countries. He was an autocratic personality and did not often appear approachable; his methods were often inflexible. All these features brought detractors. Naturally, too, the three new candidates seeking office, were likely to be united on one thing, namely that Sen should not be allowed to stand.

The ruling of the General Committee was clear: Sen's nomination could not properly go before the Conference. The ruling was put before the Conference, and by a 67 to 41 vote, the Conference upheld the General Committee.⁶

It was a dramatic end for one who had brought FAO out of relative obscurity and who had initiated so many important programmes.

► *A complex election*

When voting commenced, 115 ballot papers were issued. The majority required for election was 58. On the first ballot, d'Arboussier had 30 votes, Boerma 52 and Santa Cruz 33. In an unusual and not publicly recorded move, the meeting was adjourned for one hour. In the second ballot, taken at midday, again with 115 valid ballots, the results were d'Arboussier 24, Boerma 56 and Santa Cruz 35. There still being no majority, the Conference, in an

⁶ When the Conference reached this item it was presented with the Third Report of the General Committee (C/67/LIM/50) in which, *inter alia*, the General Committee agreed that the names of d'Arboussier, Boerma and Santa Cruz 'presented no problems'. The Committee said, 'with regard to Dr B. R. Sen various aspects of his *eligibility* [italics supplied] for election for the Office of Director General for a further term of two years gave rise to exhaustive discussion in the General Committee. The General Committee then asked that the Conference take a decision by a vote on this question: 'Does the Conference consider that the decision reached at its Twelfth Session in 1963 (para 594 of the Report) prevents the Fourteenth Session from accepting the consideration of Dr Sen?'

In the Report of the Twelfth Conference, para 594 read: '594, the Conference proceeded to a secret ballot as laid down in Rule XII.9(a) and, acting in conformity with Article VII.1 of the Constitution appointed Dr B. R. Sen to the Office of Director General for a period of four years, i.e. until 31 December 1967, *this new term of office being non-renewable* [italics supplied].'

No doubt one Conference can rescind the act of a previous Conference so the 14th Conference could have overturned the decision of the 12th Conference. Equally, the decision could have been confirmed—as it was. But what was the legal ground raised? Neither in the Constitution nor in the General Rules can the word 'eligible' or 'eligibility' regarding a candidate nominated by a Government be found. Indeed the Constitution is silent on this and only in Rule XXXVI.1(a) is 'nomination' covered. There are no words or concepts about a nomination duly made in accordance with the provisions being 'eligible' or 'ineligible' to stand for election.

So far as is known, up to the 14th Session of the Conference no properly nominated candidate had even been put to a vote of 'eligibility'; not had any candidate ever been declared 'ineligible'. In the absence of any Constitutional requirement or General Rule concerning 'eligibility' of a candidate how can a government's right to nominate be challenged?

India had nominated Dr Sen. The nomination had been accepted by the organisation; neither its Secretary General nor its Legal Counsel had questioned the validity of India's nomination. It was circulated to Member States as a Conference document like all other nominations. Therefore, raising the concept of 'eligibility' appears to have been based on grounds other than those found in the Constitution or in the GRO.

Perhaps one day this action might be subject to review and study and if 'eligibility' of a candidate properly nominated by a government is open to a simple majority vote of the Conference, then standards need to define what can be the legal basis for a challenge. If this question is left unclarified, it could again become the subject of manipulation or abuse.

unprecedented move, postponed the third ballot until the following Monday, 20 November 1967.

That day began with a second break with precedent, when the President announced that certain delegations wished 'to discuss this Item privately'; with the agreement of the General Committee the vote was postponed until 12.00 noon. Before the adjournment, however, Ivory Coast, speaking on behalf of the African Group, announced that the name of Gabriel d'Arboussier which had been presented by the African heads of state would be withdrawn and that their intention was to vote for Santa Cruz. The contrast with UN bloc discipline, and an indication of the gap between political bodies and agricultural authorities, is indicated by the subsequent furore. When Ivory Coast concluded its statement and the Conference Chairman attempted to silence an emotional outburst in support, the Ugandan delegate seized the microphone to protest that d'Arboussier was not 'the African' candidate and that his government did not accept any 'clannish organisations that [had] grown up in this building'. He even expressed 'shock' that the Chairman of the Conference could recognise such bodies as if they were constitutional.

When the third ballot was taken at midday, again with 115 valid ballots, Boerma obtained 60 votes and Santa Cruz 55.

► ***Secret or open voting?***

A parenthetical note relates to whether the appointment of a Director General should be by secret ballot or an open, roll-call vote. In his book on this period of his life, cited earlier, Santa Cruz claims that he came to know afterwards that at least three Latin American delegates whose countries had pledged their support for him to the Government of Chile in fact cast votes for Boerma in the final round. Three votes taken from Boerma's score and added to that of Santa Cruz would have changed the result. What effect this might have had on the future of FAO, if true, cannot be discussed here, but the question underscores the dilemma of secrecy in voting for executive heads in the UN System.

THE 1971 ELECTION

► ***Drawbacks of a four-year term***

By 1970, the governing organs of FAO began to lay the basis for Edouard Saouma's successful bid, under terms which would allow a Director General the time and freedom to master the intricacies of control without immediate pressure for re-election.

Again and again delegates had pointed out in the debates on the term of office for the

Director General that a person elected for a four-year term had to spend most of the first two years in office under his predecessor's programme of work and budget. At the same time, the new Director General had to prepare his own programme of work and budget for the forthcoming biennium, which would then be the platform on which—if he so intended—he would run for re-election at the end of his third year in office.

► ***The six-year proposal***

At its 55th Session in 1970, the FAO Council put in its Report a resolution introduced by 16 members of the Council (14 from developing countries and two from industrialised countries) to amend the Constitution to provide for a six-year term of office, and to provide that the person would not be eligible for reappointment. It further stipulated that the amendment would not apply to the incumbent Director General, A. H. Boerma. The Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters of the Council was asked to study the matter and refer the whole issue to the 56th Session of the FAO Council in May 1971, in preparation for the Conference later that year. This ensured that the matter would be discussed in a non-election year.

A number of arguments were put forth in support of a single six-year term. Elections, it was claimed, were divisive. It had not been possible to obtain a unanimous vote at FAO even in elections featuring a single candidate. With the present 4 + 2 + 2 term, a person had to run for election three times within eight years. The elections were also expensive for nominating states and the organisation. They did not give an incumbent time to put full energy into running the organisation. Member governments really did have the competence to select the right person to lead; if they used it properly they should not require such frequent reviews.

Accepting this resolution, the 56th Session of the Council recommended to the 16th Session of the Conference (November 1971) an amendment to the Constitution to provide for a single, non-renewable term of six years. This was coupled with an amendment which would allow the incumbent (A. H. Boerma) an additional term of four years.

► ***Debating a six-year term in the General Conference***

Discussions during meetings of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters and during the Conference were extensive; only examples of points raised will be cited here to indicate the range of considerations, particularly as predictions and warnings.

A delegate from the United Arab Republic supported the six-year term as giving a Director General the chance to concentrate on his work, and to speak to member governments with strength rather than trying to solicit their support for an extension of term. The delegate wryly observed that it would also cut down on the frequency of field

visits; it would ensure bringing new blood into the organisation at reasonable intervals; and it would also facilitate rotation of the post among different regions.

The Nigerian delegate observed that the Director General's post was highly political and, therefore, that every region wanted to provide a person for the post. He went on to suggest that the Council should recommend to the Conference specific qualifications for the Director General, and the requirement that the post should rotate among the regions. He suggested these matters be specified in the Constitution.

In supporting the six-year term, the delegate from India stressed that the term would leave the Director General free to organise FAO activities without political pressures, and would enable him to push the organisation towards agricultural objectives rather than lose his way in various political tensions. Speaking for the Arab Republic of Egypt, a delegate argued that the single six-year term would preserve stability, limit elections and ensure that the Director General could consult with member states from a position of strength rather than having to solicit support. He also noted the advantage of bringing in new blood.

France, which was to play a key role in this issue, questioned the advisability of FAO imposing limits on itself: if an outstanding figure were elected why should the organisation not be allowed to re-elect him? One major Asian power noted that this was precisely what they wished to avoid; the Director General should concentrate on the organisation's work and not on his re-election bid.

The representative of the USA observed that an additional benefit of the amendment would be that the organisation would thus have a general re-examination of the trend of its programme and overall work every six years.

The United Kingdom delegate said that electioneering by a Director General during his term of office was detrimental to the work of the organisation, and that most persons in jobs of high responsibility requiring great vitality and creative qualities have given all they have to give at the end of six years. He argued for a flexible approach, however, saying that he did not feel that a man should be denied a term longer than six years, particularly when he may well happen to be a young man.

There were many artful variations on these basic themes. All delegations took pains to speak in favour of not requiring the incumbent (A. H. Boerma) to have to stand for election under the unfavourable 4 + 2 + 2 amendment under which he had been appointed, and noted that Boerma had advised governments he did not intend to serve longer than four additional years (eight years in all). The delegates supported a specific act which would permit Boerma to be reappointed for a single four-year term. While never made part of any record, this deal appears to have been part of the larger agreement to move to the six-year non-renewable term.

A few delegates expressed preference for a formula of two terms of four years each, but no delegation pressed for serious debate on this. On 19 November 1971, the Conference

adopted Resolution 12/71 which provided, *inter alia*: 'There shall be a Director General of the Organization who shall be appointed by the Conference for a term of six years after which he shall not be eligible for reappointment.'

► **The election**

As part of the move to a six-year, non-renewable term for the Director General, the 1971 FAO Conference had exceptionally suspended and then cancelled the application of the Constitutional amendment for a four-year term renewable by two terms of two years each as it applied to incumbent Director General Boerma. A specific provision permitted the Conference to reappoint Boerma for a four-year term in 1971. This was part of an overall arrangement (not recorded as part of the official records of the organisation) that no government would nominate a candidate to oppose Boerma. Thus, in 1971 the legal procedures were followed, but there was no election contest, no campaigning, as had been done in 1967, and would be done in later elections. A. H. Boerma was unanimously reappointed in 1971 for a term of four years.⁷

THE 1975 ELECTION

The 'modern' age in FAO elections began in 1975. Conducted under the amendment which provided for a single, non-renewable term of six years, this election highlighted the importance of money in the election process for the first time.

A large field of seven candidates was initially nominated, though one, Bukar Shaib of Nigeria, was withdrawn. The six remaining were:

⁷ It is worth recalling that world food conditions continued to deteriorate during the period. Civil disturbance, droughts and unfavourable weather in major growing areas brought world food reserves down to dangerous levels. Skyrocketing prices for fossil fuels further complicated the situation and led to the 1973 United Nations General Assembly, at the initiative of the US Government, calling a United Nations World Food Conference to deal with these grave threats. This unprecedented action, i.e., the United Nations calling and holding a World Conference in the constitutional area of competence of a Specialized Agency of the UN System, can be explained in part by arguments advanced that governments had lost faith in FAO and because FAO had not shown the leadership or imagination to deal with deteriorating food conditions, etc.

All the conditions which led to the 1973 General Assembly action were already clear and in place in 1971. They only became marginally worse in the months which followed. So where were these voices in 1971? Where was the criticism which said FAO was failing in leadership and not fulfilling its functions? Where were the voices which suggested that FAO's leadership was not up to the job when its Director General was reappointed for four years without opposition or voiced criticism? This suggests that governments can pursue separate and even inconsistent policies when dealing with different UN agencies. It also suggests that the UN-launched effort might have been a deliberate act to weaken and demoralise FAO because its voice had become an annoyance. Finally, where was the voice of the UN Secretary General to remind governments that the action by the General Assembly was not the right way to proceed nor in the best long-term interests of the System as a whole?

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- ▶ Francisco Aquino (El Salvador), at that time Executive Director of the World Food Programme;
 - ▶ W. David Hopper (Canada), then President of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ottawa;
 - ▶ Eric Ojala (New Zealand), Assistant Director General of the Economic and Social Policy Department of FAO;
 - ▶ Jozef Ouniewski (Poland), Ambassador of Poland to the Netherlands;
 - ▶ Edouard Saouma (Lebanon), at that time Director of the Land and Water Development Division of the Agriculture Department of FAO; and
 - ▶ Samuel Sey (Ghana), First Deputy Governor of the Bank of Ghana.

It should be noted that three were 'insiders', international civil servants—Aquino, Ojala and Saouma. Of these, the latter two had extensive experience with FAO.

The first ballot went overwhelmingly to Edouard Saouma; he received 62 votes, with only 66 needed for election. The five other candidates then withdrew, and on the second ballot Saouma received 121 out of the 125 valid ballot papers cast.

Edouard Saouma's election was in part a result of a pro-activist charge against what was perceived as a too conservative organisation, a charge that tended to unite Third World countries against industrialised countries. It was also the result of Saouma's own extremely well-financed campaign. Additionally, as some government officials recalled, Saouma campaigned on the assurance that he fully accepted the six-year term limitation.

Saouma's campaign drew from the UN debates on the New International Economic Order (NIEO), claiming that industrialised countries were 'stonewalling', refusing to address NIEO goals. Criticisms of FAO at the UN World Food Conference were cited. The effect of the campaign themes articulated by the Saouma camp was to ensure that the next Director General would be from a Third World country. In this context, candidates from Canada, New Zealand or Poland never had a serious chance. Although the Canadian candidate boasted excellent qualifications, he had no direct connection with FAO. He entered the contest late, without full-scale backing from his government, and had a somewhat abrasive manner. Similarly, New Zealand's size and remoteness mitigated against a national from this country in any free, open contest, and the campaign was so poorly financed that Ojala was forced to pay for much of his travel personally, as well as having to organise country visits by himself.

Among the Third World candidates, the El Salvador candidate Francisco Aquino had support from Latin American countries, but this was insufficient. He was also seen as too closely allied to the incumbent Director General. The Ghana candidate was an outsider to the FAO System, and Africa was divided. With five candidates competing for votes, opposition to Saouma was badly split.

The most important feature of this election, however, was the years of careful preparation of Lebanon and its candidate, preparation that included an extensive campaign fund. Estimates of its size placed it at the USD 1 million level, according to sources closely

allied to Lebanon. Saouma travelled the world campaigning. He gained early endorsements from the Islamic Conferences, the alliances between Arab countries and Moslem countries of Africa and Asia, and from France, a major European power that had influence both within Europe and Africa.

The 1975 contest in FAO is worthy of a study by itself as the first major penetration of concepts and techniques of 'electioneering' in UN-System appointments of executive heads. Other candidates and their governments had moved to obtain regional support; endorsements had been sought and travel to various capitals had been undertaken. But nothing had come close to Saouma's long-term strategy: the years of careful prior planning, the injection of money in very important amounts, not from the candidate's country but from other states in the region with financial capabilities, and the uses to which funds were directed. All these elements were new phenomena. Nothing in FAO's many contests compared to 1975; nothing has been the same since.

THE 1977 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Edouard Saouma was elected Director General of FAO in November 1975 and took office in January 1976. The organisation had already heard his voice in the 1964 constitutional amendment debate, and his influence and interests were clearly expressed through a number of delegations in the 1971 amendment for the six-year term. But soon after taking office he informed senior aides in his confidence that he would move immediately to seek another amendment to the FAO Constitution to eliminate the single-term provision. The argument was that he would table the issue before it could become involved in an evaluation of his leadership, and that this would ensure action well in advance of the next election Conference in 1981.

The political ground had been prepared even before his election. In FAO procedures, a Council meeting is held immediately after a biennial Conference to follow up on its decisions and directions. On the close of the 18th Conference, the Council established a working party to consider a number of questions, including the term of office for the Director General. The working party noted that, unlike the governing bodies of other organisations in the UN System, the FAO Council had 'practically no role to play in connection with the election of the Director General'. The Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters (CCLM) in discussing the working party report also said that when the single-term amendment was adopted, the proposals 'might not have taken into account' (sic) the law and practice of other organisations. This might explain, CCLM opined, why 'FAO was opting for a solution quite unparalleled in the United Nations System, whereby its supreme governing body precluded itself in the future from exercising a free choice

about possible candidates, inasmuch as it was at present prevented by the Constitution from re-electing the incumbent whose term was expiring’.

It takes a huge leap of imagination to believe that no Secretariat officials, including FAO’s Secretary General responsible for Conference and Council Affairs or its Legal Counsel, and no government delegations, knew UN practices in 1971.

The Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters quoted further from the working party report ‘that Member Governments of FAO no longer need to deprive themselves of an important option which they enjoyed in other UN organisations, i.e., to decide whether or not to grant a further period or periods of office to the Director General if they should so desire’. The CCLM report containing suggested draft text changes in the Constitution and the General Rules of the Organization (GRO) went forward to the 71st Session of the Council held in June 1977.

The views of governments expressed in the Council and through the Council’s Report were quite clear. The Council unanimously agreed to provide for ‘the eligibility of the Director General for reappointment’.⁸ A great majority, the Council said, *fully supported* the case for ensuring eligibility of the Director General without limitations as to number of terms. The Council then quoted entirely the CCLM report about how FAO was the only organisation that had such a limitation. The Council ‘... also emphasised that the exclusion of the incumbent from eligibility would be discriminatory’.

Objection to the proposed change was muted; a few members were recorded saying that the amendment of 1971 had not even been tried yet, so it would be premature to change, certainly without more study than had been given to this proposal. If a change were to be made, the ‘few’ felt re-eligibility should be limited to a single term of four years, which would follow an initial term of four years (without prejudice to the incumbent’s six-year term).

The Council gracefully eliminated itself from any function in the selection of the Director General, saying there were evenly divided sentiments, with the majority considering that the Conference should remain the sole actor, while other members felt that a way should be found for an active role for the Council.

Most Third World countries spoke in favour of lifting the limits, with two (Brazil and Malawi) speaking for Council involvement. Industrialised countries in general favoured no change, or a four-year-renewable-for-four-years formula, and several strongly supported Council involvement.

The 19th Session of the Conference (November 1977) repeated the text of the Council

⁸ The words ‘appoint’ or ‘reappoint’ and ‘elect’ or ‘re-elect’ are used interchangeably in FAO official texts. The *Constitution* in fact says that the Conference *appoints* the Director General, so that is the correct legal word. However, as must be apparent, since competition for the post of Director General is not a selection process but is an open, world-wide competition between candidates, the term more accurately describing what goes on is ‘elect’, and that usage appears frequently in documents, speeches and even in texts such as the CCLM report just cited.

report, 'fully endorsed' its views and conclusions, and 'adopted unanimously' the changes in the Constitution. If there were any surprises in the long discussions in Commission III, it was again the short memories of governments. Most ignored the arguments made in 1971 and, with an enthusiasm just short of embarrassing, supported the shift to unlimited terms for the Director General. India ignored the logic of a single six-year term which it advanced in 1971 and stated 'It is true that the existing provision was made only a couple of years back and the present Director General is the first incumbent to be appointed under the amended provision; but FAO is a dynamic organisation and if changes are necessary in order to keep this organisation in tune with the spirit of the times, we should not fight shy of effecting good changes.'

Most speakers referred to the sovereign right of governments to renominate and re-elect if they wished, without acknowledging that sovereign governments equally have the right to limit their actions. They stressed the need for stability, and a longer time for the Director General to achieve his goals, and of course most spoke of the need for FAO to follow the law and practice of other UN organisations.⁹

In attempting to slow the momentum, some industrialised countries tried to revive the Council's role (and *inter alia* the full law and practice of other major UN organisations), suggesting that the question needed more study—by examining, for example, how the UNESCO Executive Board operated.

Nigeria was one of the few Third World countries to speak against the amendment. After reviewing the main elements of the 1971 debate, its delegate said those reasons were still valid. The new approach had not been tried, and while he understood why the Conference should not limit its own actions, he said Nigeria was 'of the opinion that it will *not* be in the best interests of the Organization not to limit the number of times the Director General can serve'. He continued that this open-ended resolution was not desirable for the organisation, as from time to time it needed to inject new blood in the form of new leadership which would give new ideas and direction.

Another African delegate then suggested a six-year term, followed by a further four years, 'but not more'. His ending was on a wry note: 'We believe that whatever programmes [a Director General] has helped to initiate on assuming his office should have made appreciable progress in ten years. In any case, an incumbent should be tired of being in the same job after ten years.' The delegate was later pounced on by a quartet of Third

⁹ Was there an active role for the United Nations during these prolonged studies and debates? The leadership issue for the United Nations had not surfaced publicly by this date but there is no evidence from a review of the records of the Council and the Conference that there was any intervention from the Secretary General on the 'law and practices' of the United Nations or any suggestion that the Secretary General had any interest in this subject. Nor was there any intervention from any delegation suggesting that he/she was putting forward a position which his/her government had advanced in the General Assembly. A reading of the record would seem to indicate that the 'law and practices' argument was more a term of art than of substance and that FAO in adopting a six year unlimited term amendment accepted only a select element out of UN 'law and practices'.

► ***Who will oppose the incumbent?***

A full recital of the efforts of the so-called Camberley Group (which first met in Camberley, UK), the manoeuvring within it, and the lukewarm support it received from other Northern countries, would entail a lengthy narrative. It would require recounting how France induced a split in their ranks, which not only brought Mediterranean countries on France's side but was also powerfully persuasive among African countries with close financial and commercial ties to France.

The immediate task, however, was to find a candidate to oppose the Director General. There were no volunteers from the industrialised countries, and although a number of soundings were taken, no Third World country came forward with a possible nomination. Eventually, Moise Mensah of Benin, then Vice President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), was persuaded to run and Benin agreed to put the nomination forward. Benin had not been prominent in FAO affairs (it did not even have a representative in Rome) and was not active within the Organization of African Unity (OAU), whose endorsement and full backing would be essential for an African candidate.

► ***A Northern sponsor for a Southern candidate***

This feature of open, active, direct support of a Northern country, Canada, in helping to identify and secure the appointment of a Third World candidate and in placing its overseas missions and other services at the candidate's disposal, is unique to the 1987 election. The Director General played the card of moral superiority to the hilt, characterising his opponent as a puppet. Though financially involved (perhaps up to the level of USD 50,000 or so in air fares, receptions, and staff), Canada could be accused of being halfhearted, given the odds it knew it faced and given the resources known to be at the disposal of the incumbent Director General.

Moise Mensah was, it should be noted, an outstanding person with excellent credentials, who was highly respected and widely admired. Certainly, from what can be learned, the campaign supporting him was late in being organised, never quite came into focus, and never had strong enough political thrust to challenge the incumbent Director General. The OAU offered neither leadership nor solidarity. Caribbean and Latin American countries were also disaffected. Thus, Mensah was unable to get sufficient momentum to break the Director General's hold.

This campaign produced no end of stories—about last-minute awarding of assistance projects, some delegations being given lavish banquets and receiving tangible gifts, others being shifted to different hotels so they could not be found in the days before the Conference, offers of appointments to chairmanships or secretariat posts, and so on. No inquiry has ever been made by governments about any of the many allegations that circulated about election tactics.

When the ballot was tallied, however, Edouard Saouma was re-elected. Did the Canadian connection hurt or help Moise Mensah? There can be little doubt that some countries were persuaded by the arguments that he was not his own man and therefore could not be counted on to be a strong leader in the Director General's post. Yet, it is equally obvious that without Canadian organisation, support and 'clout' with countries in all regions, Mensah could not have made the strong showing he did. With 159 votes cast, only 18 votes would have had to shift for Mensah to be elected, and perhaps within the donor bloc and Africa alone, this number could have been found among those who broke ranks.

One other factor also came into play during this election. Gonsalo Bula Hoyos of Colombia, long prominent in FAO affairs, had been nominated by his government as a candidate. At the last minute, for reasons not publicly known but assumed to be internal to Columbia, he withdrew. There is little doubt that his departure influenced the distribution of votes between the two remaining candidates, and most probably more in favour of the Director General than Moise Mensah.

THE 1993 ELECTION

With the announcement that he did not intend to stand for a fourth six-year term as Director General, Edouard Saouma threw open the contest for leadership of FAO. The response was not long in materialising. Governments nominated nine candidates by the deadline date fixed by the FAO Council, 2 April 1993. In the order in which they were received, the nine candidates were:

- ▶ Constantine G. Politis (Greece), at that time Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Greece to FAO;
- ▶ Salahuddin Ahmed (Bangladesh), Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme, who had held the equivalent position with the UN World Food Council;
- ▶ Jacques Diouf (Senegal), at that time Senegal's Ambassador to the United Nations; formerly State Secretary for Science and Technology in the Government of Senegal and former Director of the West Africa Rice Development Association;
- ▶ Maharaj K. Muthoo (India), Director of the Forestry Operations Division of the FAO Department of Forestry, formerly with the Indian civil service;
- ▶ Gerrit Braks (Netherlands), then Senator and former Minister of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries of the Netherlands;
- ▶ Rafael Moreno (Chile), the FAO Assistant Director General and Regional Representative for Latin America and the Caribbean, formerly a Senator;
- ▶ Geoff Miller (Australia), Secretary of the Australian Department of Primary Industries and Energy;

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- ▶ Christian H. Bonte-Friedheim (Germany), Director General of the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), and formally Assistant Director General for Agriculture of FAO; and
 - ▶ E. Patrick Cunningham (Ireland), Director of the FAO Animal Production and Health Division, formerly with the Irish National Agriculture and Food Research Institute.

A number of features which helped to shape the contest must be obvious at once. Five of the nine candidates were insiders, persons who were currently serving the organisation (including the Joint UN/FAO WFP) or had served it. Five candidates were from industrialised countries and four of the five were from European Community countries. Two candidates were from adjoining Asian countries. Only one candidate each was nominated from the Latin American and African regions.

▶ ***Government nomination, but actual support?***

In four known instances and perhaps in a fifth, candidates were nominated without the full involvement of the sponsoring government; that is, they were not selected at the level of the prime minister and cabinet. In some cases this resulted in less than full-scale support from the candidate's government, including restricted financial support (in one case because budget authority for foreign exchange had not been authorised in advance by the finance authority). Constraints such as these compelled the candidate himself very largely to direct his own campaign.

This phenomenon, of a nomination coming forward without full government review, yet 'by' government, calls into question the validity and reliability of a nomination paper. It also raises the question of how high a value governments put on a nomination for the Director General's post.

▶ ***Full support, full media use***

In the case of three of the nominations, however, there was full government commitment and involvement, up to and including the head of state and head of government level. Miller and Moreno had virtually unlimited campaign funds and access to the full range of government services, internally and externally. While neither sponsoring government has released official data on campaign costs, publicly available data indicate outlays in the USD 1 million range for both the Miller and Moreno campaigns. No financial figures are available for the Diouf campaign but it is understood not to have involved large sums of money.

Limits on support caused large differences in funds available for publicity about the candidates. The three finalists, Diouf, Miller and Moreno, produced extensive public relations materials: brochures, pamphlets, tapes, videos—materials of very high quality—

and, considering language and distribution requirements, quite expensive. The others had limited materials in modest format.

The purpose of the materials was to define the candidate and his goals, and to create an impression among the public by word and picture of a person to be trusted with leading a great public enterprise. A careful reading of campaign literature indicates that candidates presented different plans and priorities.

► **Regional support**

It is also obvious that the candidates faced the campaign with totally different regional backing. Despite several attempts stretching over months, the European Community failed to endorse any of the four candidates from Community states. Not only was the Community unable to agree, but there were conspicuous divisions within it that kept it from uniting even at the balloting stage. France, for instance, supported the French-speaking Diouf, while a number of other European countries waited with hope and expectation for Miller of Australia to outdistance their own nationals. Such variations in national and regional support and funding meant that most candidates were fatally handicapped from the start.

► **Staff candidates**

The 1993 election had a number of additional complexities. E. Patrick Cunningham of Ireland faced the contest with nearly insurmountable barriers. His entry into the race was not objected to by the Director General (who also may have encouraged Braks to enter), though this is not to say that the Director General supported directly their, or any other candidate's, campaigns.

When Mr Cunningham released his campaign brochure noting the need for changes at FAO, his FAO contract was not renewed and official contact with the organisation was denied. How could an FAO staff member question the wisdom of the incumbent Director General's programmes? When a fellow countryman was selected to head the GATT, an Irish Director General at FAO became impossible in any case.

Neither Maharaj Muthoo nor Rafael Moreno were required to resign or take leave of absence from their FAO positions. The Director General was not in a position, acting alone, to require Salahuddin Ahmed to go on leave or resign since the World Food Programme is a joint UN/FAO programme; apparently either the issue was not raised with the Secretary General of the United Nations or he had no objections to a staff member running for an elective office. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both Moreno and Muthoo enjoyed active cooperation from staff within the organisation who saw that their future could be connected with the success of either candidate.

The Greek Government, which had hardly been involved even from the start, withdrew the name of Constantine Politis before the Conference. Not without precedent in FAO, the Presidents of two countries became directly involved in the election. In Chile the candidacy of Moreno was decided at the presidential level. The Heads of State of Chile and Senegal took the unusual step of concluding a private agreement during a stopover of the Chilean President in Dakar arranged just for this purpose. The agreement was that whichever state fell behind in the balloting would withdraw in favour of the other (and attempt to bring its committed votes with it). Each state surely saw victory for its candidate by this agreement.

► *Domestic repercussions*

The election created adverse reactions in the governments of several candidates. In Australia, when Miller's nomination failed, there was political criticism centred on the financial and political costs. Australia's future role in FAO was even questioned. In Chile, the FAO election became an issue (however small) in the presidential election held late in 1993, on the grounds that too much money had been invested by the state and that it was inappropriate for the President to become involved in such an issue.

It was a high-level, high-tech, hard-fought campaign. Major candidates travelled the world to the point of physical exhaustion. Deals were made and unmade. Promises were offered and counteroffered. Images were created around leadership ability and results. Personal criticism of Mr Saouma was entirely absent, though implied criticism of his tenure was evident in the various visions of the future for FAO presented by candidates. A number of candidates faced election day with no prospects except a possible trade of their votes for future considerations. Certainly Diouf, Miller and Moreno each saw a real chance of victory. Each had worked hard, each had strong allies as they entered the voting process. Interestingly, observers in FAO saw the race boiling down to Miller and Moreno. Virtually no one considered Diouf the likely winner. Until the balloting actually began, FAO staffers engaged in lively discussions about Saouma's strategy and which candidate might benefit from his subtle but effective support—such was the respect for his political cunning and power. But, his hand was not to be seen in the campaign of the eventual victor.

► *FAO's balloting rules*

FAO rules prohibit speeches during the balloting. However, in this election, the President of the Conference permitted the delegation of Chile to take the floor after the fifth round for the stated purpose of withdrawing the name of Moreno; but the delegate in addition made a partisan intervention, outlining the agreement between the Presidents of Chile and Senegal and urging Moreno supporters to back Diouf. He directly thanked several

industrialised countries which had supported Moreno and might have thought of switching to Miller, and stressed the importance of keeping a developing country in charge of FAO affairs and, for good measure, overseeing philosophical differences between Northern countries as a group and Southern countries. This departure from the rules could have been challenged but was not.

► *Marathon balloting*

After the first two ballots, one candidate withdrew and two were eliminated, leaving five. After each of the next three ballots, the bottom candidate was eliminated, leaving the final ballot between Diouf and Miller. But the crucial ballot for Diouf—and for Moreno—may have been the third, when Diouf slipped past Moreno by a single vote. Charges and rumours abounded—centring on the whereabouts of two ‘Moreno’ delegates who were missing, literally ‘out to lunch’, at the time of the vote. Muthoo, who may have considered supporting other candidates, encouraged his backers to vote for Diouf. Though he might have expected some reward for his efforts, Muthoo was passed over for promotion and instead transferred—some might argue exiled—to the post of FAO representative to Turkey. In the end, Diouf’s victory was secured with the votes that had gone to Moreno and Muthoo on the previous ballots, as Diouf’s surge on the fifth and sixth ballots indicates. The balloting was not concluded until 18.55 hours. The ebb and flow of votes and the final results are given in Table 2.

It has been a long, interesting and challenging road from the easy reappointments of Norris Dodd to successive terms as Director General to the expensive, hi-tech, worldwide campaigns of Messrs Saouma, Miller, Moreno and Diouf. FAO has changed its mind many times as to the term its Director General should serve and even while it has debated these changes there have always been quite vocal opinions that an alternative would have been preferable. In a sense, these changes have been made so fast that except for the current formula, no term has lasted long enough for a real appraisal to be made.

Equally, with all the sound and fury about how long a Director General should serve and the endless hours that committees and governing bodies have spent debating ‘how long’, the issue has never arisen about what the organisation was seeking, what qualities it wanted in the person selected to be its Director General, nor has any thought been given to what methods might be employed by the organisation to make the selection less costly, less divisive, and less given to the rousing of passion and the involvement of external monies.

To some extent at least, this essay might have helped highlight the need for considerations other than the length of the term which the Director General might serve. It is not the purpose of this inquiry to judge whether the organisation has been served well or badly over its 50 years, but rather to examine what has been done in selecting its leader, to review the record of how this has been done. In the final section, recommendations will

► **Table 2. The distribution of votes in the 1993 election of the Director General**

Candidate	Votes at each ballot					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Diouf	39	38	44	58	71	90
Miller	29	42	47	55	60	72
Moreno	43	45	43	40	31	
Muthoo	22	23	20	8		
Bonte-Friedheim	16	11	8			
Ahmed	3	2				
Braks	9	1				
Cunningham	1	1				
Total votes cast	162	163	162	161	162	162

be made concerning how the current methods might—indeed should—be changed and improved with the goal of helping the organisation better fulfil its mandates, conserve its limited resources and ensure that each member of its staff is able to contribute to the achievement of the organisation's goals to his or her full capacity.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Viewed historically, there has been no consensus among member governments as to how the post of Director General shall be filled and under what terms of office the Director General serves. No criteria for selection have ever been agreed upon. The Rules of the organisation are silent on what information is required to support a nomination. There has been lack of consistency about what really constitutes a nominating authority for a candidate—whether the government endorses or is merely forwarding the name of a candidate. Incredibly, the Rules of the organisation do not even specify how, or even if, candidates are to be evaluated prior to election.

It has not been the purpose of this study to comment on the success or failure of past practices. One could argue that the results could have been better in some cases. Equally, one could contend that FAO has been lucky. Lacking established procedures ensuring a thorough and systematic examination of the qualifications, views, and character of the candidates, governments have, nevertheless, been able to find reasonably effective and strong leaders. But, as Urquhart and Childers pointed out in their study of the UN, ‘the conditions that would make the choice easier for governments, and ensure that the chosen were of the highest quality, have not been in place’.¹⁰

Can the case be made that such a haphazard process be prolonged? Could anyone be so bold, or so naive, as to argue that the current practices are in the best long-term interests of the organisation? Surely not.

Seven recommendations can be made, which if followed, would assist governments in securing and promoting effective leadership for FAO. None are particularly profound or revolutionary. This is to their advantage in an organisation struggling with so many overwhelming but scarcely less significant issues. Each recommendation emerges as a rational and common-sense response to a major problem identified in this historical survey. Taken together these seven recommendations may, figuratively speaking, be more important for the FAO to contend with than the seven hills of Rome. Their consideration by member governments in the FAO Council and Conference would represent a decisive step towards governments taking full responsibility for and ownership of the future of the organisation.

¹⁰ Urquhart, Brian, and Childers, Erskine, *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, *op.cit.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The FAO Conference should establish a job description and a set of qualifications for the position of Director General. The Council should initiate the search for suitable candidates.

A job description and set of qualifications would help focus the attention of governments on the tasks entrusted to the Director General and thus on the attributes a successful candidate should possess.

The recent phenomenon of governments 'nominating' candidates whom they are not prepared to support calls into question the legitimacy and efficacy of the nomination process itself. A structured search process could scarcely be less legitimate or productive than the current system which essentially permits self-nomination by a candidate.¹¹

The rules of the organisation should be changed so that the FAO Council, as the organisation's executive body, initiates and conducts the search for suitable candidates, which could include consideration of candidates nominated by governments. Undertaken by the Council, a search process would help to depoliticise the selection process as well as to open it to candidates who might otherwise not have a serious chance in a campaign-based process.

2. As a prerequisite for acceptance, the nomination by a government of a candidate for Director General should be submitted with the endorsement of a certain minimum number of additional governments.

Such a requirement would ensure that all candidates have a minimum basis of support among governments to merit further consideration. It would discourage the situation, observed in 1993, where candidates received the nomination but not the support of their own governments, and the equally awkward situation where multiple nominations were received from a single region or bloc. FAO needs to define what constitutes a 'nomination'. The approval of the prime minister or head of state would ensure that full government consideration and support had been given.

3. FAO should specify the form and content of information required to be submitted with nominations for the post of Director General. The Council should verify information supplied with the nomination and disseminate it to member governments.

Nomination papers should be standardised so as to provide consistent and comparable information about all candidates. Verification and distribution of this information through official channels would obviate the basic 'educational' role played by campaigns and make it easier for governments to make the first, preliminary evaluations of candidates.

¹¹ Urquhart and Childers discuss in detail the question of a search process for Secretary General of the UN in Chapter 7 of their study, *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, *op. cit.*

4. Internal candidates should be allowed, but under guidelines which ensure that they neither derive benefit from nor are discriminated against because of their special status, either before or after the election.

A number of safeguards must be adopted to avoid the abuses and appearance of abuses which have characterised past FAO elections. These conditions should be unambiguous and subject to monitoring by the external auditors for governments. The Director General should have no role in this process as he/she could be partisan.

A staff member nominated for the post of Director General should be placed on unpaid leave as of the date when his/her nomination is received by the organisation. From that date onward, the staff member would have only that access to and use of the organisation's facilities as would be available to all other candidates. A staff member, if elected, would be required to resign from the organisation as it would be incompatible for a person to be Director General while still holding the rights and privileges granted a regular staff person by FAO personnel regulations. The staff, as international civil servants, should remain neutral in a leadership contest. Active, partisan support of an individual candidate by FAO staff should be prohibited. However, staff (or their representatives) should be allowed to participate in organised and sanctioned candidate meetings and seminars, where their participation might help in defining the qualities needed in a Director General and in identifying the issues facing the organisation.

5. Election campaigns for the position of Director General should be replaced by a more informative and transparent system for evaluating candidates and their positions on the issues facing FAO.

The current and inevitable inequality in financial resources does not produce equal opportunity for member governments to judge and evaluate candidates. Candidates should be provided with a nominal budget to produce materials and attend meetings arranged or sanctioned by the organisation at which all candidates are given the opportunity of addressing issues concerning the organisation and its work. Governments' activities in support of a candidate should be limited to normal diplomatic actions and individual governments should be discouraged from mounting promotional campaigns for candidates.

International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) should be encouraged to arrange and conduct public appearance seminars regionally and in Rome at which all candidates appear in order to discuss their positions, views and qualifications, and to answer questions. Such opportunities would help minimise the role of money in the selection process and encourage substantive debate—antidotes to the dangers of increasingly glitzy but superficial election campaigns. Not only would such an organised approach to examining candidates be more informative and healthy than the present method, it would also contribute to better public knowledge and understanding of the work of the organisation.

New Directors General may be forgiven if at times they confuse the *personal*

mandate they have received as a product of a personal promotion campaign and election, with a *programmatic* mandate which can only come with a full disclosure, discussion, and debate of a candidate's views. Stronger mandates for both the individual and his/her ideas and programmes would be likely to emerge from a search/selection process where more inquiry and discussion would yield more informed consent. Transitions from one Director General to another can result in abrupt changes in organisational policies and strategies, staff confusion and inefficiencies, exacerbated when an election mandate is taken to indicate a desire on the part of governments for whatever the new leader may subsequently wish to change in FAO's programmes or structure.

6. There should be a single, non-renewable term of eight years for the position of Director General. In conjunction with this, a mechanism should be established for the removal of a Director General in certain defined circumstances.

A single term would focus the Director General's attention on the task ahead, removing re-election politics from consideration in the administration of the organisation. A term of eight years is long enough for a new leader to introduce his or her own programme and budgets, but not so long that leadership becomes spent, ossified, or all-powerful. An eight-year term would keep the election of the Director General in phase with the existing biennial schedule of the FAO Conference.

Logically, if elections allow governments to change leadership (and correct mistakes made in a previous election), then there should also be provisions for removal of a Director General in appropriate and extreme circumstances. This is particularly the case when a Director General serves a single term and cannot stand for re-election. It is therefore essential that the FAO adopt a constitutional amendment providing for procedures for the removal of a Director General.

7. Voting for the position of Director General should be public and by a roll-call of member governments present, and by absentee ballot.

The decision of a government to cast a ballot in favour of a candidate is not made by parliament and/or legislative authority of a country. It is essentially a decision made by civil servants and bureaucrats. It is an administrative act, not a treaty or legal act of a sovereign state and is essentially an act to hire (appoint) the head of the Secretariat which works for the government. The appointment of a Director General is an act of public employment—there is much more benefit than harm in having this act open, transparent and a matter of verifiable record. Unfortunately, there is sufficient evidence that in more than one election for Director General, delegates have, under extreme pressures or enticements, ignored the instructions of their own governments when casting their ballots.

* * *

The post of Director General of FAO is too important to be left to the vagaries of chance, much less to the increasingly sophisticated and monied election campaigns some countries are willing to mount. The qualities most needed by the organisation as it heads towards the millennium are not those which normally rise to the surface, much less dominate, such campaigns. Solid information about each candidate and sober reflection on the requirements of the job are necessary if deliberate and informed choices are to be made. The people of the world may deserve even more; but the governments of the world should want no less.

The position of Director General requires a person of extraordinary skill and personal integrity. The Director General should, first and foremost, be a capable and experienced manager. With a staff of 6,000 working in Rome and in numerous offices around the world, and with an annual budget in excess of USD 300 million, the Director General is both manager and leader—a director and a general.

The choice of leadership at FAO must be no less informed or deliberate than that of a professional officer or a secretary. No employer, no mid-level FAO manager, would countenance the selection of such a person without a job description, a search, an interview, and corroboration of pertinent nomination materials. Member governments might ask as much of the process they use to select FAO's Director General.

The selection process (in contrast to an election campaign) should allow governments to assess the leadership qualities and the management skills of the nominees. It should create multiple opportunities for candidates to discuss their ideas, positions and strategies—openly, before governments, NGOs and the staff of the organisation. Such opportunities will ensure that a broad range of subjects, from managerial to technical to political, will be addressed. Rules regarding financing and electioneering should be such as to create a 'level playing field', where nominees have an equal opportunity to put their ideas—and themselves—forward.

If selections are based on personality or regional-based selection campaigns, the successful candidate enters office with a personal, but not necessarily a programmatic, mandate; with regional, not necessarily global, support. The selection process should provide a forum for ideas to be discussed, for the future direction of the organisation to be debated, and for the nominees to be evaluated on their personal and professional merits. Ideally, the selection process should even help clarify and crystallise the direction and strategy to be taken by the organisation itself.

In the end, no selection process, however regulated, can ensure that the right person is chosen. It can only provide an environment conducive to consideration of the important factors and discouraging of other, less important or extraneous factors. It can make it easier for 'the cream to rise to the top'.

THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL

While this study is focused on the terms of service for the Director General of FAO, it does not seem appropriate to isolate that post from the important political considerations which enter into a candidate's or an incumbent's relations with member governments.

Appointments at the level of Assistant Director General are balanced by incumbent Directors General to ensure adequate geographical representation and to obtain or reward political favours, such as support for programmes, etc. In general, these appointments have reflected technical competence first and interests of geographical balance second. (FAO does not have any aspect of the UN formula which guarantees the five permanent members of the Security Council the 'right' to name a national of that country to one of five Under Secretary General posts; and as far as is known, governments have never suggested that there should be some mandatory geographical distribution of senior FAO posts.)

The Deputy Director General's post, however, is of a different character from any other senior post. According to the General Rules, the Director General appoints the Deputy Director General subject to confirmation by the FAO Council. While a Director General's nomination of the person to be the Deputy Director General has never been challenged or denied by the FAO Council, it is known that promises to consider a person for that post from a certain nation have been used by Directors General, either in campaigning or later while in office, to gain support or blunt criticism. Thus, the Deputy post is endowed with special political significance, and this significance is far greater now than in the early days of FAO. At a minimum, one would think that the post might be balanced with that of the Director General's, at least on North/South grounds. In fact, this has been so during part of FAO's history, but there have also been times when the occupants of both posts were from the same region. It is a legitimate question whether the Deputy post ought to be from the opposite spectrum (North or South) from the Director General and whether this principle should be written into the General Rules rather than being left unspecified.

Persons of excellent qualifications and capacity have been in the Deputy Director General post. Many came to the position with broad and substantial credentials in one or another of FAO's disciplines, and with records as administrators of proven capacity in running institutions with large budgets and staffs. Others have had few qualifications in FAO's substantive disciplines, and in some cases no experience in managing large enterprises. Some appointments have been viewed as political snubs to a member state. Others are best explained simply as suiting the personal wishes of the Director General.

What is the nature of the Deputy post and of what interest is it to the organisation, given its history? Is it a post to complement the Director General's technical competence, so

that the top leadership can deal with the broadest possible range of FAO subjects? Is it the administrative aide to the Director General, to relieve him of some of the burdens of running FAO? Is it a post primarily for the personal convenience of the Director General, to be used or ignored, to be elevated or diminished entirely as he wishes, or to be used, when so desired, to repay a favour or silence criticism?

The post of Deputy Director General deserves more attention than it has received in an organisation the size of FAO. Perhaps governments ought to inquire more thoroughly into why they finance a post with such high compensation and associated benefits and with such obvious political implications, without defining it more carefully. Perhaps governments might inquire into the role which the FAO Council plays in the confirmation of the Deputy Director General's nomination. There is little evidence to suggest that there has been a substantive exercise of the Council's responsibility which suggests it either be redefined or abolished.

Governments might even wish to consider whether a candidate for the chief administrative officer post might be asked, as part of the process of selection, to indicate his/her intended choice of Deputy. The appointment to the Deputy post is now part of the 'private' negotiation which a candidate uses to balance forces and gain bloc support. Since the post does have pay and other emoluments which separate it from other staff and carries with it the responsibility to act in the absence or illness of the Director General, it is time to elevate the post to the status it deserves. It is not, after all, a post without implications for the work of the organisation. Both the nature of the post and the role of governments in the selection or confirmation of the incumbent need examination.

THE CHALLENGE

This study has examined how one UN specialised agency, FAO, has chosen its leaders over the course of 50 years. It has focused on the process, not the result. I have not argued that the governments have made poor choices of the men selected to head the organisation. Indeed, FAO has probably been lucky, having had the services of several strong, dedicated and effective leaders. But I have argued, and I do assert, that the selection process could be improved to ensure that those choices are more deliberate and informed. Good luck is always welcomed in a selection process—but it is no replacement for clear procedures and a rigorous examination of all nominees.

FAO can now decide whether it wants to make a choice or take a chance when it appoints its next Director General. As FAO looks at an increasingly alarming world food situation, and as it approaches a new millennium, there could be no better time than now for the organisation to determine how its most important leadership post will be filled.

Member governments must accept this challenge as one of their most fundamental responsibilities to the organisation. As international civil servants, the current leadership at FAO should embrace a move in this direction as a victory for planning and continuity, a triumph of purpose over fate.

* * *

The past is prologue. The world now appears to be getting close to the limits of global food production capacity. We can already perceive a nearly inevitable collision between expanding human numbers and the demand for food and the limits of many of the earth's natural systems.

Does the past tell us that the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations will be a major player in helping to avoid a collision? Does the past tell us that governments have found the right way to search out and employ the person most qualified to mobilise, direct, and manage the resources which FAO can bring to this struggle, and who can, in harmony with the Secretary General of the United Nations, help nations cement the 'global partnership' U Thant called for?

Author and Sponsors

Charles H. Weitz'

association with the United Nations System spanned more than three decades starting with UNESCO in 1947 where he was Director of Administrative Management and Budget. One of the early officers in the UN Technical Assistance Board, he also served as a UN Resident Representative in Turkey and in Sri Lanka before becoming International Coordinator of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Freedom From Hunger Campaign (1960–1971) and finally FAO's Representative to the United Nations. After retirement he did consulting work for both the United Nations and the UN Development Programme and was one of the consultants to Messrs Childers and Urquhart in the preparation of 'Renewing the United Nations System'. When it was decided to revise and update the 1990 'Leadership Study', he was requested to undertake the task of preparing this study, *Who Speaks for the Hungry? How FAO Elects Its Leader*. He has lectured widely in the USA and Canada on the UN and UN programmes.

The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was established in 1962 in memory of the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. It is an operating, not a grant-making foundation, and its main purpose is to organise seminars and conferences on social, economic, political and cultural issues facing the Third World and to publish materials arising from these activities.

The Ford Foundation is a private philanthropic institution dedicated to international peace and to advancing the well-being of people throughout the world. Under the policy guidance of a Board of Trustees the Foundation grants and lends funds for educational, developmental, research, and experimental efforts designed to produce significant advances on problems of world-wide importance.

WHO SPEAKS FOR THE HUNGRY? HOW FAO ELECTS ITS LEADER

By Charles H. Weitz

No employer, no mid-level FAO manager would countenance the selection of such a person [a professional officer or secretary] without a job description, a search, an interview, and corroboration of pertinent nomination materials. Member governments might ask as much of the process they use to select FAO's Director General.

This study examines the history of elections to the leadership of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The injunction in the FAO Constitution that the Director General 'shall be *appointed* by the Conference' has in practice been replaced by 'hard-fought contests with all the trappings, tricks and techniques of national political campaigns'.

The study traces the chequered record of Constitutional Amendments to establish an optimum length of term for the Director General's tenure. Preoccupation with this issue, never satisfactorily resolved, has obscured other equally important considerations.

Neglected issues include the supremacy of the interests of foreign affairs ministries over those of agricultural authorities, confusion about national or regional endorsement of candidates—exacerbated by secret voting—the problem of unequal electioneering resources and the role of the Deputy Director General.

Above all, no serious thought has been given to the overriding need for an informed 'search' to ensure that candidates of the highest quality for the executive head of FAO are identified. Although FAO has 'probably been lucky, having had the services of several strong, dedicated and effective leaders', the author of this study demonstrates that the selection process could clearly be improved to ensure a more deliberate and informed choice.

The study concludes with seven recommendations including a fixed eight-year contract, a rigorous examination of all nominees, and clear procedures to ensure that an incoming Director General has a programmatic as well as a personal mandate.

FAO can now decide whether it wants to make a choice or take a chance when it appoints its next Director General. As FAO looks at an increasingly alarming world food situation, and as it approaches the new millennium, there could be no better time ... to determine how its most important leadership post will be filled.

Who Speaks for the Hungry? How FAO Elects Its Leader forms a companion study to *A World in Need of Leadership: Tomorrow's United Nations—A Fresh Appraisal*, by Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers.

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