To register its concern, and in keeping with the institution’s motto, ‘Our dream is a world without poverty’, the World Bank organized and hosted a *World Conference on Overcoming Global Hunger* that was held at The American University in Washington, DC on 30 November and 1 December 1993. The conference was attended by over 1,200 participants, including former US President Jimmy Carter, the UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the president of the World Bank, Lewis T. Preston, and the administrator of USAID, Brian Atwood.\(^\text{12}\) The World Bank had responded to the call of US Congressman Tony Hall’s appeal\(^\text{13}\) for a conference to be organized at which those most knowledgeable about hunger and malnutrition in the developing world could meet to formulate an agenda for action (Serageldin and Landell-Mills, 1994).

The objectives of the conference were to:

(a) identify the major elements of an effective strategy to reduce hunger and to generate the necessary political will;
(b) build consensus on a priority agenda to reduce global hunger;
(c) assist the World Bank in defining what it can do; and
(d) raise international awareness of the scope and magnitude of the problem.

Conference participants were organized into three groups that addressed: the impact of macroeconomic reform on poverty; the lessons from targeted interventions; and the political economy of hunger. The conference was preceded by a one-day preparatory workshop attended by representatives of NGOs, researchers and staff members of bilateral and multilateral agencies, including IFAD, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and the World Bank.

The report of the conference noted that ‘hunger is not a simple phenomenon that yields to simple solutions’. The means to overcoming hunger cut across the whole spectrum of development challenges, including raising agricultural production, developing human resources, creating jobs and improving governance. The UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, said that no one seriously disputed that hunger was an evil that should be eradicated. Nevertheless, hunger existed despite the universal consensus that it should not, and despite all efforts to
eradicate it. He recognized three basic causes of hunger: it arose during a sudden crisis, it came from poverty, and it was caused by an imbalance between the growth of population and food supply. He went on:

The world now produces enough food to feed its population. The problem is not simply technical. It is a political and social problem. It is a problem of access to food supplies, of distribution, and of entitlement. Above all, it is a problem of political will . . . Economic growth and prosperity, peace and stability, institution building, and targeted assistance would all help eradicate hunger. We have the understanding, we have the means, we have the tools to remove the shame of hunger from the world. With the political will we can, together, so do.

(Serageldin and Landell-Mills, 1994, p. 81)

Jimmy Carter spoke of the need to develop collaboration between NGOs and international organizations to fight hunger from his perspective as head of his own non-governmental organization (Serageldin and Landell-Mills, 1994, pp. 103–6). He identified a number of the ‘generic problems’ that existed. Major agencies were reluctant to change basic policies, even in the face of failure. There were too many fragmented, uncoordinated, even competing, programmes within developing countries. Assistance programmes needed to be country-specific and comprehensive, for which a co-operative task-force approach was needed both among donors and within recipient countries. Top priority should be given to the development of the capacity of local people to meet their own needs. The relationship between research and practical needs in the developing world was inadequate. Assistance programme managers were moved around too frequently. NGOs were mostly excluded from participation in a comprehensive approach to alleviating hunger. Public interest in eradicating hunger had waned because there was enough food but inadequate attention was focused on the critical problem of unequal distribution both internationally and within developing countries. There was also a failure to acknowledge that disease was still ‘the greatest cause of malnutrition’.

Protectionism in rich nations was ‘a cruel and most often ignored affliction on starving people’. Deforestation was rapidly becoming the most critical issue in many poverty-stricken areas. And perhaps overriding all other issues in the long run was population growth. He recognized that a lot had been learned, ‘sometimes the hard way’. Whenever possible, efforts had been combined in health, nutrition and agriculture. For food production alone, the efforts of his organization were based on the lessons learned during the green revolution in India and Pakistan. Top national leaders should share responsibility with donors. Self-reliance should always be emphasized. Poor people, and particularly women, should be directly involved, with minimal impact on people’s culture. Advanced technology should be introduced, where appropriate. And regular meetings should be held involving top government officials, agricultural experts, farmers and others for a frank assessment of successes and failures.