



# The BAFUNCS Newsletter

March 2016

N° 69



*The Annual Reunion this May takes place in Bournemouth, as well as its famous beaches, promenade and pier, Bournemouth is close to much beautiful scenery, including the tranquil river Stour*

## In this issue

- **FAO in the 60s**
- **UNA-UK and the Secretary General on the climate conference**
- **Members write to *The Times* on diverse topics**
- **Round-up of regional activities**
- **Report of the Executive Committee for 2015/2016**
- **Membership news**

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**British Association of Former United Nations Civil Servants**

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# BAFUNCS Newsletter N° 69

March 2016

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Sheila Macrae (UNFPA)

David Nott (ILO)

John Stares (UNFCCC)

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## Note from the Editor

**BAFUNCS** next major event is in Bournemouth, 39th Annual Reunion, This is a great opportunity to relax by the beautiful English seaside. As usual, this Newsletter brings you much of the documentation for the General Assembly part of the meeting. Don't let their bureaucratic appearance put you off. Most of the weekend will be dedicated to leisure and enjoyment. So, if you are hesitating, now is the time to contact the registrar and set out for a great weekend.

One member gives us his recollections of his experiences in Rome in the 1960s. I am sure it will awake many similar memories among us. If you would like to share yours with your fellow retirees, why not submit an article or two for a forthcoming edition of the BAFUNCS Newsletter? Experiences, relatively normal or quite bizarre interest a lot of us. If you are worried about writing style and accuracy, don't. We can edit material, with your approval

Once again, Sheila Mackay has gathered interesting information from all the regions and sent in a great collection of pictures.

Putting together a newsletter is complicated by the need to print pages in fours, Sometimes the material available needs to be expanded to fill the requisite number of pages and sometimes cut. Perfectly good articles have to be left over for future editions, or even left out altogether just because of space considerations.

The deadline for contributions to the **September 2016** issue is **Monday, 8 August**. If you wish to try out an idea before writing, I can be contacted by phone: 0033 68 117 5387, by letter: Magheross, Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan, Ireland or, preferably, by e-mail ([editor@bafuncs.org](mailto:editor@bafuncs.org)) easily accessed by clicking on the link on the contacts page of the BAFUNCS website.

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## Alan Hall

remembers what life was like in Viale delle Terme di Caracalla in the 1960s.

When I was working at FAO, I shared an office with an Australian, whose uncle had been there in the early days. His descriptions of life as a P2 were quite amazing—penthouse overlooking the Tiber, live-in maids and banking most of his salary.

Other colleagues told of the FAO car park full of exotic cars.  
*Editor*

For a British FAO staff member, Rome in 1965 was the plumiest of plum postings: all the amenities, with the fascination of an ancient capital city only two hours from London; and instead of having uncertain employment on a fixed-term project in Mauritius, I now had a permanent contract. So far, my relations with Rome had been little different from the long-distance links with Dar es Salaam when I was in the Colonial Service, out-posted up-country in Tanganyika (as Tanzania was, pre-Independence).

The director general when I joined the Organisation, was B.R. Sen, a distinguished Indian diplomat who was obsessed with the nightmare of impending world starvation – an understandable obsession, bearing in mind his personal experience of the seething millions of the poor in India who genuinely were in that condition. As it happened, the ‘Green Revolution’ advances in plant breeding (chiefly of wheat and rice) by permitting vast increases in crop yield, in the event largely averted that catastrophe—at least on a world-wide scale. Nevertheless, when I joined the Organisation, it was the spectre of world hunger that dominated a huge range of its activities. These ran from ‘hands-on’ things like the international Desert Locust Campaign (tracking swarms and destroying their breeding grounds), irrigation projects, land reclamation, animal husbandry, plant production, storage and processing; and extended to forestry and fisheries as the wider implications of rural development became evident. The corridors and meeting rooms of FAO teemed with politicians and boffins from all over the world.

My post at headquarters, when I joined it, was in the Economic Analysis Division, whose Director was a chain-smoking Englishman named Barter. Dr Barter, who looked rather like Eric Morecomb (of Morecomb and Wise) had been a senior civil servant in the British Ministry of Food during the war; a languidly clever man, he presided over a division whose senior staff were almost all British – rather odd, you might think, in an organisation that recruited from virtually all the countries in the world. Yet that was how things worked when I first joined FAO: if Economics had been cornered by the Brits, Nutrition, for example, was a preserve of the French, and Statistics a happy hunting ground of the Indians. The field programme (that is, all the projects out-posted from Rome) was also run very much on an ‘old boy’ basis. A project would be cooked up – or ‘formulated’, as we would say officially – by somebody in one of the technical divisions keen to improve his (rarely her) standing with his superiors, who, if impressed by the number of noughts after the dollar sign, would then have to convince one Karl Olsen, FAO’s chief of ‘programme co-ordination’, that the project was feasible. In the mind of the eager HQ progenitor, ‘feasible’ meant: ‘will New York cough up the money to finance my brilliant scheme?’ In the mind of Karl Olsen the question was more likely to be: “Who is this guy, and does he know what he’s talking about?”

Olsen was an Americanised Swede, or Swedish American, a tall, lean man with an engagingly pleasant manner and an amazing capacity for work. With two equally

*The buildings at Viale de Terme di Caracalla when FAO first moved in, appearing to be virtually in a rural setting apart from the Roman remains all round.*



## FAO in the sixties

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hardworking secretaries, he performed a function in the Organisation which, five years later, would occupy the attention of two whole divisions. Of course, corners were cut; they had to be cut when literally all the projects submitted to New York for funding were channelled through one man. You'd get a call to go with your Chief to Olsen's office, and there he'd be, sitting behind his desk in his stockings feet (he hated wearing shoes) talking to somebody on the phone in Laos or Afghanistan, or Upper Volta, perhaps. While this was going on, he'd be looking through the papers on his desk; and then, with the phone hardly put down, he would immediately launch into an animated discussion of your project with as much authority as if he had drawn it up himself – in fact, with more authority, as he was quite likely to know more about the country in question than you did.

If Karl thought the project was OK he'd send it on with his comments to one Miles Cohen, the executive head of the UN Technical Assistance Board in New York. I don't know what sort of a staff Cohen had in New York – probably, in those days, not much more than Olsen in Rome – but incredibly, bearing in mind that he had to deal with proposals coming in from all the other UN agencies (ILO, WHO, UNESCO, etc.), Cohen would have an opinion or comment to offer in return, before approving the necessary funds. “Dear Karl” and “Dear Miles” were not exactly inspired amateurs, but they recognised no limits to the depth of interest they were prepared to take in the details of project proposals that streamed uniquely through their offices for their personal scrutiny. It was these two men, operating quite informally, without any bureaucracy, who masterminded the release of literally millions and millions of dollars for FAO's programmes throughout the world. But the days of control by dedicated professionals and a few omnifarious administrators were about to end.

Between 1968 and 1970, there was the great 'post-Jackson' upheaval in the United Nations system. The old boy network (which in many ways had worked well) was broken up, and the 'managers' were brought in. For FAO, this meant that, instead of John Abbott being responsible for all the UN agricultural marketing projects in the world, he would now be responsible for none of them: he and his staff would merely provide technical support to a headquarters administrator who would look after all the division's projects in a whole group of countries. This sort of 'managerial revolution' is well known: the BBC had it with John Birt's hated reforms; the National Health Service has it with its hated managers telling the doctors what to do; British Rail got fat cat accountants instead of engineers to run trains. Thus it was, in the first stage of FAO's version of this 'efficiency enhancement' makeover, that I drew the short straw in the Marketing Branch, and instead of being a marketing specialist, I now became a hated manager: in FAO-speak, a 'project operations officer'. In this capacity I was charged with headquarters responsibility for all Rural Institutions' projects in English-speaking Africa and francophone north Africa, only a few of which had I visited before.

My new chief was Don Kimmel, an American 'good ol' boy' (with an English wife), who presided over weekly meetings with great joviality and good nature. He had a great booming voice and, unintentionally, put on a fair impersonation of John Wayne (in more amiable mood). He made great play of 'kicking ass' when things went wrong, but was really a bit of a softie, and his 'world' team (about eight of us) was given – for all the regular weekly 'reviews' – a pretty free rein. Strangely, I now recall little of the technical aspects of my work at that time. It is the countries themselves, their people, and the FAO staff that served in them, that I shall always remember, many of them with much affection. This was a period when most African countries were exulting in a recent achievement of political independence; for most of them it was a period of huge optimism and relative peace. Yet looking back now, after just over fifty years, during which something like two generations of Africa's politicians have held their countries' destiny in their own hands, the present reality in many of them – of poverty, war and disease – appears to contrast dismally with those hopes.

Or, more likely perhaps, is it that now, from our comfortable arm-chairs, we have the bad news thrust daily at us in our newspapers and on TV, and we are inclined to forget that the evolution of nations is a long story, and that our own had some pretty bumpy patches, too.

Last December's historic agreement in Paris heralds a new focus on the problems of climate change, as outlined by Ban Ki-moon on his return to New York after the conference.

*Calling the Paris Agreement on climate change "a health insurance policy for the planet," United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said he never lost faith over his nine years in office that the international community could rise to the challenge and take steps to curb emission and boost climate-resilient growth.*

*"The countries of the world have made a historic choice," he told a news briefing at UN Headquarters in New York on his return from attending the so-called COP21 conference in Paris, as he called on Governments to put their pledges into action.*

*"They have unanimously decided to work as one to rise to the defining challenge of our times. The Paris Agreement is a victory for people, for the common good, and for multilateralism.*

*"It is a health insurance policy for the planet. It is the most significant action in years to uphold our Charter mandate to 'save succeeding generations.' For the first time, every country in the world has pledged to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and act internationally and domestically to address climate change."*

*The 195 Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on Saturday adopted the Paris Agreement after two weeks of intensive negotiations at the summit.*

*The accord covers all crucial areas identified as essential for a landmark conclusion: mitigation – reducing emissions fast enough to achieve the temperature goal; a transparency system and global stock-take – accounting for climate action; adaptation – strengthening ability of countries to deal with climate impacts; loss and damage – strengthening ability to recover from climate impacts; and support – including finance, for nations to build clean, resilient futures.*

*Mr. Ban said it embodies a successful new approach to global cooperation on climate change, with countries acknowledging that their national interest is best served by acting for the common good by transforming the global economy to low-emission, climate-resilient growth.*

*"It marks a decisive turning point in the global quest for a safer, more sustainable and prosperous future," he stressed. "It will save lives, improve human well-being and promote more peaceful, stable societies."*

*He highlighted the agreement as one of his top priorities since the day he became UN Secretary-General. "For nine years, I have spoken repeatedly with nearly every world leader about how the growing human imprint on the planet threatens our*

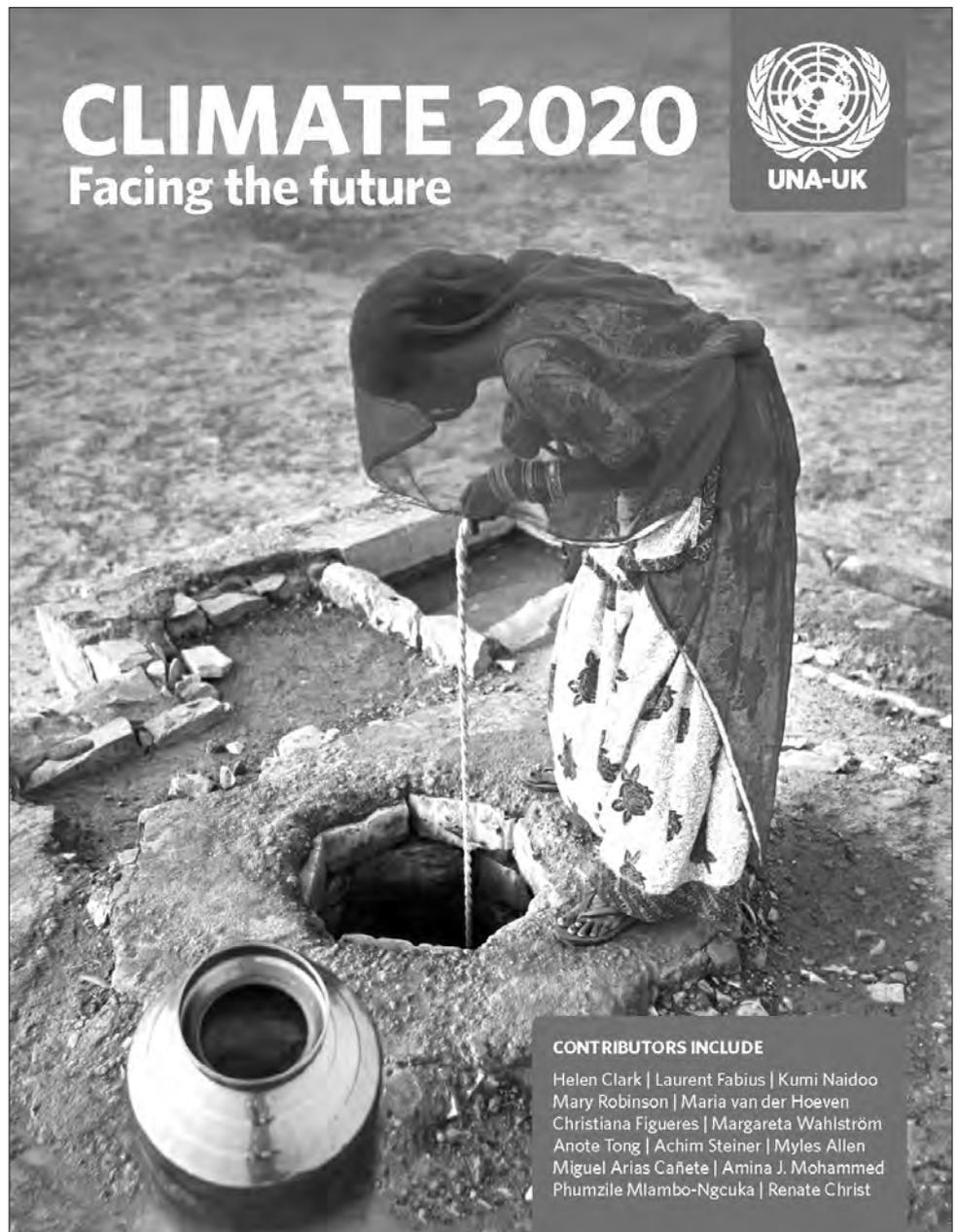
*lives, our economies, our security and our survival. I have mobilized business and engaged civil society.*

*"I have never lost faith that the international community could rise to the climate challenge. Now I count on Governments, and all sectors of society, to turn these commitments into urgent, decisive action," he concluded.*

Ready for the historic climate conference in Paris, UNA UK published a compilation of articles from many of the most important and influential actors on the climate scene. The contents list shows just how valuable a contribution this is.

The book is available in hard copy or as a download from their website <http://www.una.org.uk/media/publications>.

As well as the contributions in this list, the book includes eight sponsored articles by businesses and agencies with a direct interest in the subject.



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