

### Developing a Global Food Security Policy

Codrin Paveliuc-Olariu

Department of Economy and Rural Development, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, University of Liege. Corresponding author: C. Paveliuc-Olariu, codrin.po@gmail.com

**Abstract.** The world agrifood system continues to be in a vulnerable state as we fast approach the 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger. Although a number of countries have made important changes towards developing food related policies, at the level of the global community, the challenge of food (in)security has not been able push policy makers to develop a common solution to be applied, solution that could include the regional and national specificities registered around the world, while also integrating a global view of increasing agricultural productivity, higher farm competitiveness and without relinquishing the national or individual right for food governance.

**Key Words:** Food security, globalization, global policy, agriculture.

**Rezumat.** Sistemul agroalimentar mondial continuă să fie vulnerabil pe măsură ce ne apropiem de termenul limită din 2015 al Obiectivului de Dezvoltare ale Mileniului de a înjumătăți proporția din populație care suferă de foame. Deși un număr de țări au făcut importante schimbări pentru dezvoltarea unor politici legate de alimentație, la nivelul comunității globale, provocarea (in)securității alimentare nu a fost suficientă pentru a convinge factorii de decizie să dezvolte o soluție comună care să poată fi aplicată, soluție care ar putea include specificitățile regionale și naționale înregistrate în jurul lumii, integrând, de asemenea, o viziune globală de creștere a productivității agricole, productivitate agricolă crescută fără a renunța la dreptul național sau individual de guvernare a lanțului agroalimentar.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Securitate alimentară, globalizare, politică globală, agricultură.

**Introduction.** For centuries countries have relied on trade in agricultural and food commodities to supplement and complement their domestic production. The uneven distribution of land resources and the influence of climatic zones on the ability to raise plants and animals have led to trade between and within continents (FAO 2003). While historical patterns have since change with the appearance of modern trade marked by bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and the birth of WTO, the appearance of transnational firm in the global production and distribution systems haev changed the paradigm, leading to both a change in consumers` taste and access to food, but also to an even greater unequal distribution of food.

The liberalisation of agricultural trade was a goal of policy makers for decades, being considered as a pilon in the construction of a food-secure world. But as trade barriers started falling, both companies and governments started to protect their agricultural competitiveness by strongly subsidizing national agriculture, inflicting real costs on both the countries that depend on these policies and on their trade partners. This paper analyses the stakeholders` opinions on the possibility of changing the policy instruments status quo that would enable a coherent exchange of good practices and information throughout the world to a global approach to food security and food quality that is necessary for overcoming problems like famine in Africa, obesity in North America and high risk and vulnerability for human health and the environment.

To help decision makers in the agri-food chain realize what is at stake and how a global policy can be realize and how it should look like, the present study has been constructed on the analysis of food security related policies that are present at local, national, regional or global level through trade agreements, development aid, agricultural policies or others.

**Material and Method.** The present study is part of a larger study on global food security policies named "A Global Agricultural Policy: how to feed the world?".

The present paper is the result of this long term analysis of food-related policies. At different levels of deployment (global, regional, national), both agricultural and rural policies (such as the EU Common Agricultural Policy or the US Farm Bill) have been taken into analysis, as well as macro and microeconomic policies that impact the agrifood system (trade agreements, bilateral cooperation plans etc.) or influence global food security (development aid policies). The purpose of the research was to analyze if present policy options are adequate to use in solving the food crisis and if new policy solutions can be developed and implemented.

The second part of the research, related to global food security governance, was developed in order to assess the creation of new policy options. For this, the methodology was based on a series of questionnaires contained eleven (11) open ended questions grouped in 4 categories: current status of food security policies, acceptance of a Global Agricultural Policy (GAP), managing the GAP, the perspective of a GAP. The questionnaire was sent to a pre-selected sample of policy makers that included: 189 Ministers of Agriculture (or equivalent) in countries signatory of the Millennium Declaration, top 25 international agribusiness corporations (according to revenue in 2011), 2250 smallholder farmers in 27 countries (Europe, Africa, Asia, South America), international organizations (Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Environment Programme, World Food Programme, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Bank, European Parliament, European Commission-Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development), 12 development agencies, AR4D networks (GFAR, EFARD, FARA, YPARD), farmers unions & associations and food security experts (10 at selected universities worldwide).

The following answers were received:

- 21 out of 189 Ministers of Agriculture have answered;
- 7 international agribusiness companies have answered;
- 1721 smallholder farmers in 21 countries have answered;
- 8 international organizations have answered by assigning the task to experts (FAO, UNCTAD, UNEP, WFP, IFAD, WB, IMF, EP, EC). The IMF declined to answer;
- No development agency answered the questionnaire;
- No AR4D network answered the questionnaire;
- 4 food security experts have answered;
- 6 international farmers unions and associations have answered.

The questionnaires' answers have been critically analyzed and the results classified according to the respondents groups.

The present represents a summary of these answers and their analysis from the perspective of the necessity of developing a global policy to ensure food security.

**Results and Discussion.** Today, food insecurity expresses itself in three ways. At the most extreme level, some 900 million people remain so poor that they are chronically hungry or malnourished. They have no margin of insulation. Another 500 million people live on less than \$1.25 per day, mostly in rural areas and mostly dependent on farming for their meager incomes. While their subsistence-oriented economies mean that they are not chronically hungry, they are vulnerable to food crises brought on by civil disorder, natural disaster or politically-imposed famine. The third group, primarily comprised of women and children, faces nutrient deficits that stunt physical and mental development while increasing vulnerability to disease (Thompson 1983, 2008).

Research on hunger has shown that massive crises of widespread hunger and increased mortality often occur despite aggregate food supplies that are no less adequate - and sometimes even more abundant - than usual. In such cases, the underlying cause of hunger is lack of access to food rather than lack of food. When such an upsurge in food poverty occurs, increasing aggregate food supplies will not necessarily improve the situation; the basic challenge is to develop and safeguard mechanisms of entitlement to food for those who have been denied access to existing food supplies.

Widespread entitlement failure may coincide with shortage, as when poor harvests undermine the livelihoods of farmers, reduce aggregate food availability, and drive up prices. Or it may occur quite independently, as when unemployment or rising prices of other goods reduce the amounts of food that certain groups can afford to purchase, or when food supplies are directed away from civilians and toward military needs. The point is that famine has multiple causes: we cannot conclude simply from the fact that some households are food poor that there is any shortfall in aggregate food supply (Derose et al 1998).

Similarly, although food poverty is probably the most obvious cause of food deprivation, many go hungry in households that can afford to feed all their members adequately. Disease, voluntary abstention, discrimination, and misunderstood nutritional needs are among the additional causes of hunger that operate at this level (Sen 1982).

Disease impairs absorption and utilization of nutrients, raises nutritional needs, and may also reduce appetite. In addition, food may be withheld as part of therapy for certain diseases.

Food intake is also deliberately restricted by individuals desiring to conform to cultural values for slimness or abstention. In the extreme, hunger strikes for political or religious reasons are carried to the point of starvation.

As you can see in Figure 1, the structure of hunger is a complex one, with underlying processes that determine immediate or distant food crisis.

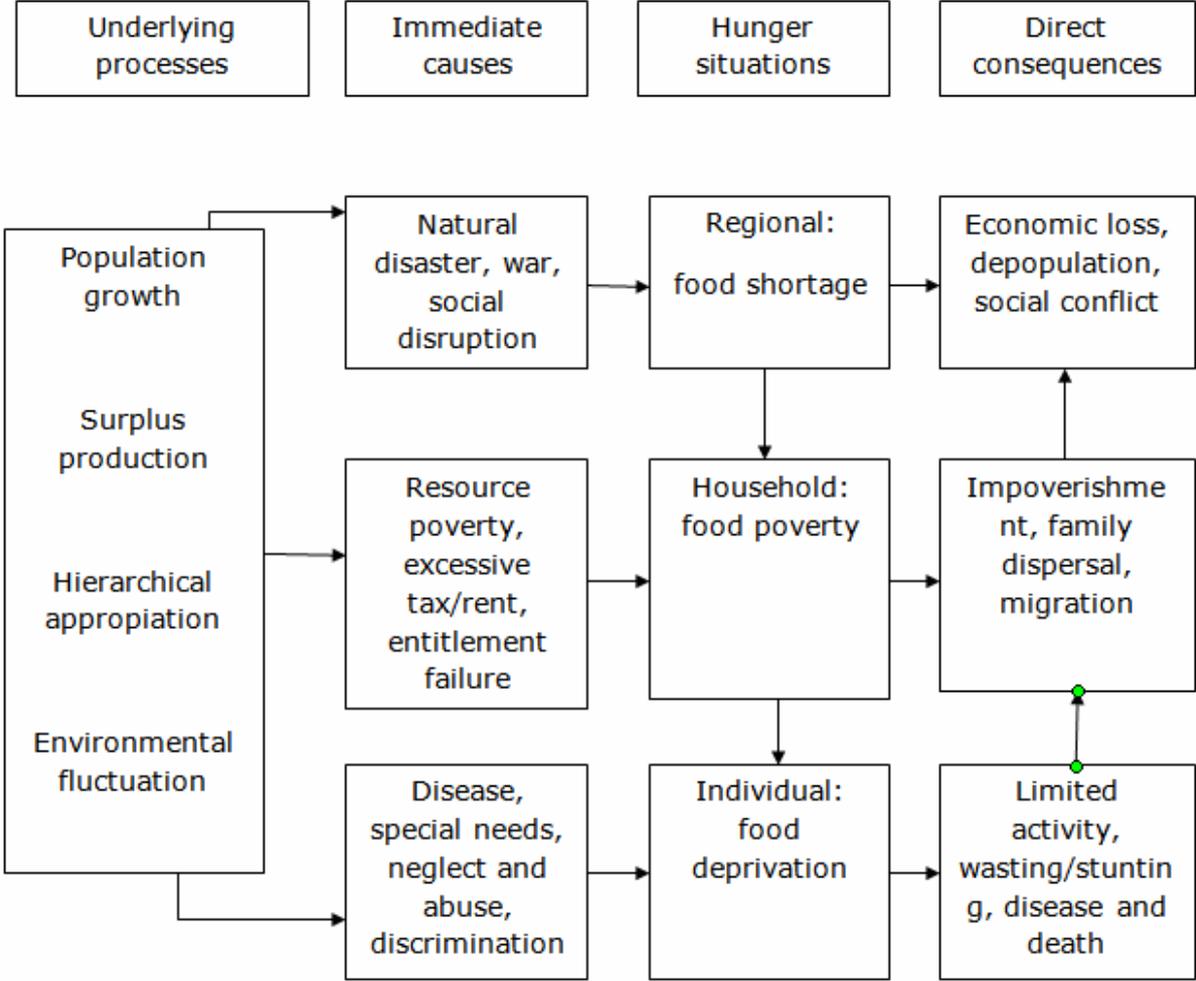


Figure 1. A causal structure of hunger (source: Newman et al 1990).

While researching possible solutions for global food security, it was clear that tens of solutions have been proposed in the past 50 years, proposals ranging from those with high feasibility (development assistance to poor countries, aid for agricultural

competitiveness growth etc.) to the unlikely (moving all people out of Africa) and scary ones (another World War was proposed by a person). Over the course of years, few proposals have been made regarding the improvement of public policies, all of them proposing either changes in trade policies or in development assistance.

In the past two years, when the reforms of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the U.S. Farm Bill began to come into the spotlight, the debate about a Global Agricultural Policy began, the emphasis being put on the trade of agricultural products. In 2012, Jim Harkness, President of the Institute for Agricultural Trade and Policy, declared that such a policy would increase the discrepancies between regions and the number of undernourished people because "the poor would engage into a bidding war with the wealthy".

A policy should not be analyzed just from one perspective. An agricultural policy (local, national, regional or global) is not merely a trade policy for agricultural products. If we look at the CAP, we see that the emphasis is put on agricultural competitiveness and development of rural communities.

When being asked about the possibility of a Global Agricultural Policy being developed, Victor Villalobos, Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), responded "I think all countries ideally would support such a policy, but the conditions are the sticking point. We all know that the work of global organizations in this area is complicated and achieving agreement on standards, trade, supports, levels of aid, etc. are always going to be a challenge". While the creation of such a policy is welcomed (see Figure 3) by 90,11% of all respondents and by all respondent groups, there is an unanimous opinion that it would be a challenge to obtain a consensus among the countries regarding its development and implementation.

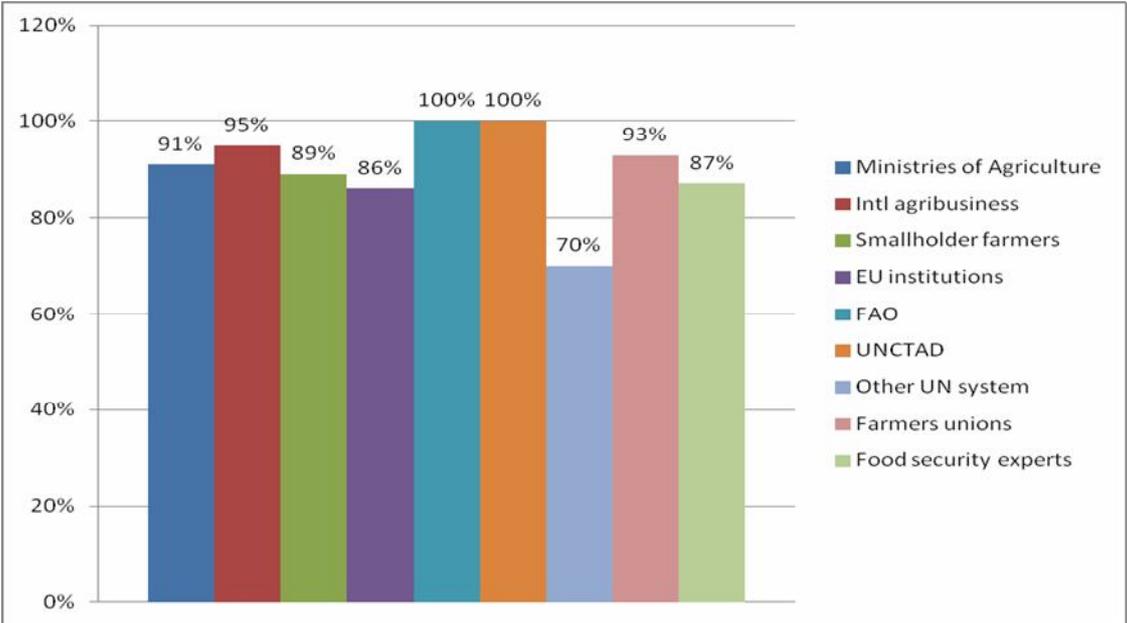


Figure 2. Stakeholders` opinions on the necessity of an integrated approach for tackling global food insecurity Source: Elaborated by author using data from own research (2013).

While a policy for regulating global agriculture in order to ensure global food security is perceived as a possible approach for integrating all proposed solutions, respondents fear that the management of such a global policy might lead to the overregulation of agriculture and, as a consequence, to the increase of the number of undernourished people.

**Conclusions.** The "limits of growth" of Malthus (1798) were those that first stated the risk of food security. Since then, the interest for measuring the number of

undernourished people (and diminishing it) has increased considerably, becoming a clear objective of the United Nations Secretary General.

In order to achieve global food security, decision makers from the entire agrifood chain agree that we need an integrated approach that should go past the current views of increasing agricultural productivity. An integrated approach must be capable, whilst it would lead to the increase of productivity, to reduce food waste, increase competitiveness of developing countries, regulate the use of chemicals and GMO`s and others. It must be based on a constant increase of agricultural competitiveness in both developing and developed countries, giving access to all resources needed (funding, energy, land and water rights, research and training etc.) to all farmers (smallholder and industrial size), while easing the regulatory burden.

Creating the policy framework at global level based on stakeholders needs and demands requires a more indepth analysis related to the regulation of each field (agriculture, livestock, forestry, fishery etc.), support mechanism, risk management schemes and others. It has to be complemented, in order to be implemented, by a strong institutional framework supported by both a bottom-up and a top-down approaches, thus ensuring a higher particularization of projects and programmes.

**Acknowledgements.** The project "A Global Agricultural Policy: how to feed the world?" is funded through a postdoctoral fellowship by Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech at the University of Liege.

## References

- Derose L., Messer E., Millman S., 1998 Who's Hungry? and How Do We Know? Food Shortage, Poverty, and Deprivation. United Nations University Press, New York.
- Malthus T. R., 1798 An Essay on the Principle of Population, Library of Economics and Liberty.
- Newman L. F., Crossgrove W., Kates R. W., Mathews R., Millman S., 1990 Hunger in History: Food Shortage, Poverty and Deprivation. Basil Blackwell, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Sen A., 1982 Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation. Oxford University Press.
- Thompson R. L., 1983 The Role of Trade in Food Security and Agricultural Development. In: D. G. Johnson and G. E. Schuh (eds.), The Role of Markets in the World Food Economy. Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, pp. 227-257.
- Thompson R. L., 2008 Thoughts on the Challenge of Agricultural Development. IPC Discussion Paper.
- United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization, 2003 World agriculture: towards 2015/30 - An FAO perspective.

Received: 17 November 2013. Accepted: 06 December 2013. Published online: 06 December 2013.

Author:

Codrin Paveliuc-Olariu, Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech, University of Liege, Department of Economy and Rural Development, 2 Passage des Deportes, B-5030, Gembloux, Belgium, E-mail: codrin.po@gmail.com

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

How to cite this article:

Paveliuc-Olariu C., 2013 Developing a Global Food Security Policy. AAB Bioflux 5(3): 169-173.