WORKING PAPER

Addressing the fragmentation of discourses and governance for food and nutrition security

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FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AS AN OBJECT OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE IS NOT SELF-EVIDENT

What is today termed as global food security pertains to a set of different issues that have progressively emerged from crises and which have given rise to the creation of governance institutions, which are organised according to distinct mandates and discursive foundations (agricultural production, right to food and nutrition issues, humanitarian crises, trade and development). In addition, food security being a matter of sovereignty often claimed in international relations, its governance on a global level requires and relies upon voluntary efforts and initiatives.

THE 2007/08 GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS: A RED FLAG FOR POLICYMAKERS

The recent food price crisis that severely affected food importing countries highlighted this urgent need for a global coordination. Three specific post-crisis initiatives (G8:G20; CFS; HLTF) have therefore sought to act on the quality of international coordination. Relying on a cross-cutting approach, these meta-initiatives are an attempt to coherently build the issue of food security at the global level. However, the issue of global food security must be understood as a relatively recent construction and remains a work in progress.

THE FRAGMENTATION OF GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY GOVERNANCE: A POLITICAL PLURALISM

Despite the collective nature of food insecurity and malnutrition responses, the reality on the ground is of a deep fragmentation and a breakdown of agendas within and in-between institutions. It does not then constitute a spontaneously coordinated whole, and some decisions that are relevant for food and nutrition security are taken by a whole range of various institutions. While discussions on food security are mainly revolving around improving availability of food through increased agricultural production, the fragmentation of discourses and institutions could be an opportunity to enriching the existing architecture with alternative or complementary solutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The general increase in commodity prices in 2008/2009 brought the issue of agriculture and food production into the forefront of the international agenda. During this period many protests against the high cost of living occurred, which were often described as "hunger riots". A number of international agencies and analysts designated this period as a "global food crisis", highlighting the social, human and economic impacts of soaring food prices – the third post World War II combined price increase in agricultural products, the first having taken place in the 1950s, which was closely connected with the Korean War and reconstruction, while the second was in 1974, which was caused by the first oil shock (Gérard *et al.*, 2008; Timmer, 2010).

This dramatic increase was followed by an equally dramatic decline in prices, a collapse that was mainly due to the global financial crisis. Various factors – some typical, others more specific – have been described by analysts in an abundant literature (Abbot *et al.*, 2008; von Braun, 2007; EC, 2008; IATP, 2008; Lerin *et al.*, 2009; Voituriez, 2009). The explanations for this increase (speculation, biofuels, emerging market demand, dollar effect, etc.) continue to be the subjects of much debate and research. However, there has been some convergence on the idea that: in future, prices of agricultural commodities are likely to undergo a structural price increase, while a greater "volatility" should also be expected, *i.e.* largely unpredictable price spikes (Evans, 2009). This expectation has certainly proved to be the case so far, as we today witness an increasingly significant level of variability in agricultural commodity prices—this time not as combined prices, but on a market by market basis which is influenced by supply and demand circumstances—as observed in the summer of 2012 when the pressure on basic cereals (corn, wheat, soybeans) increased due to a severe drought in the United States, which led the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, to declare a state of natural disaster in more than 1,000 counties in the country.

Within the discussion about what is becoming systematically known as "global food security", price instability is only one aspect of a multifaceted issue that simultaneously relates to food security, markets and global trade, the fight against poverty, the vulnerability of certain economies and social strata, situations of climate or politico-military related crises, etc. The ambiguity of certain standpoints and the uncertainties related to the deployment of international coordination on this theme are partly explained by the fact that the subject encompasses problems of different types, which affect regions, populations and economies in specific ways. However, this ambiguity is acknowledged and widely recognized and the 2008/2009 crisis is considered as an important moment that, progressively and in a complex manner, transformed the food issue into one of global status, making it a subject of international coordination (Bricas and Daviron, 2008; Margulis, 2011; Lerin *et al.*, 2009; Oxfam, 2009; Shaw, 2009).

But to what extent, and in what way, is food security an international issue? The answer is far from obvious. The food supply of populations is a fundamental issue of modern political regimes. The inclusion of the poor and the starving, the urban food supply, the fight against food shortage and feeding the poor and the working population are all fundamental issues of sovereignty and citizenship. Therefore, the idea that food security is an international issue is not obvious, given that the principle of national sovereignty is at the heart of the system of international relations and that there exists even today, only a vague embryo of

international citizenship. The issue of global food security must be understood as a relatively recent construction and remains a work in progress. In this short article we hypothesize that "food security" consists of several layers—that we have termed institutional and discursive foundations "issue-areas"—and, secondly, we take stock of the most inclusive coordination initiatives that have been implemented in recent years, which we refer to as "meta-initiatives" for global food security.

2. INTERNATIONAL FOOD SECURITY, AN INTRICATE COMBINATION OF INSTITUTIONS AND DISCOURSES

What is today termed as global food security pertains to a set of issues that have emerged from crises and which have given rise to, in order to address these issues, the creation of institutions organized according to distinct mandates, resources, ideas and discussions. In this article we have identified five of these issue-areas.

2.1. Agricultural production

The first of these issue-areas relates to agriculture. Since the globalization of trade in agricultural bulk commodities, the issue of the availability of products has been the subject of much concern, both private and public. Divided between two hemispheres and five continents, global agricultural production, and in particular exportable cereal production, was soon identified as an issue where the coordination of information is required: to know the production situation, to evaluate the harvests and stocks, to estimate the exportable balances and the supply and demand (Shaw, 2007). In 1905, the *Bureau de l'agriculture* was created within the context of the unsuccessful construction of the League of Nations, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) was established in 1943 (McCalla, 2007). The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) established in 1972, the World Food Council that was created in 1974 and IFAD that was established in 1978 were all organisations created within the same perspective and that tended to address the issue primarily by seeking to generate increases in production to enable production to meet the global demand (Lele, 2009). Given that many food economies require a supply (temporary or structural) from the world market, global agriculture is a reality and it could or should be coordinated (information, research, policies) (Bertini and Glickman, 2011; Jacquet *et al.*, 2011; McIntyre *et al.*, 2009; Pretty *et al.*, 2010)

2.2. The right to food

The second issue-area identified is the one of rights. The "right to food" now exists as part of the economic and social rights connected to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted as a founding charter of the United Nations in 1948. It is well known, and often the subject of regret, that this right lacks jurisdiction through which it could be enforced and therefore implemented. It is a commitment that was made by nations on behalf of populations and individuals (Risse-Kappen, 1999; Sen, 2010). It is the extension of the universal declaration by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966, which defines this right to food as a so-called "second generation" right. In 2000, the Commission on Human Rights established the mandate of a Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in the United Nations (De Schutter, 2010).

2.3. Humanitarian crises and interventions

The third issue-area identified is one that has developed around humanitarian crises, including those caused by major climatic or physical disasters, or that result from situations of armed conflict or international or civil wars. Implicitly based on the rights of individuals (and the "duty to intervene"), a number of international interventions of this type have been designed to meet situations where people or communities are deprived of the relevant authorities or of a state that can offer protection or ensure they receive a minimum level of subsistence (Maxwell *et al.*, 2010; Hoddinott *et al.*, 2008). These humanitarian interventions are not only intended to solve or alleviate situations of extreme malnutrition and starvation in populations that may or may not be refugees, from the point of view of the intervening powers they are also a means to minimize political risks in the affected regions. Hunger is a powerful factor of disorder and rebellion. Interventions are therefore intended to limit destabilization and possible "contagion". Such food interventions are not limited to emergencies and a number of food aid operations have been conducted under the framework of the World Food Programme (WFP – which also deals with emergencies) that was created in 1961 to anticipate these situations of disorder and provide basic goods to the poorest populations. The US carried out such interventions following the end of the war in Europe, which it continued under the title of, firstly, the Agricultural Trade Development Assistance Act (1954), which was

later renamed by President Kennedy as "Food for Peace", and today remains a part of the US Farm Bill. All OECD powers are involved in similar activities, either via the WFP or through their own specific cooperation mechanisms and bilateral aid. We can therefore refer to such institutions and arguments as part of a "humanitarian-security" issue-area.

2.4. Trade and markets

The fourth issue-area identified is that which relates to trade and markets. Food production on its own cannot meet the global supply/demand balance, it is also essential that the principles of market organisation allow the movement of goods and that the markets, from an institutional and practical point of view, are able to meet this demand. The current discourse on food sovereignty, as well as on price volatility and market regulation, presents contrasting positions: some regard the world market and its liberalization as a factor that destabilizes local agricultural economies (and therefore the supply) and a mechanism that merely leads to the dominance of large intensive agriculture; while others stress that the movement of food is an essential condition for the optimal specialization of world agriculture, for the supply of populations and therefore to ensure global food security (Boussard *et al.*, 2005; Davis, 2009; IATP, 2008; World Bank, 2009).

2.5. Development and aid discourses

The last issue-area identified is that of development. Since the end of World War II and more broadly since decolonization, international cooperation (the World Bank in the first instance) and bilateral or regional cooperation have defined development assistance practices, a significant amount of which was originally intended for agricultural economies, for the eradication of famines and what was at the time called "the fight against hunger". Although this approach was in decline by the 1990s (it was transformed into the "fight against poverty"), these organisations have continued to be decisive actors for the generation of discussion and the development of mechanisms and resources which have the clear ambition today, through the fight against poverty and the aim to include the "bottom billion", to be a decisive factor in this collective coordination for global food security (World Bank, 2008). In this approach, access to food through increased revenues, as well as nutritional and environmental issues, is becoming increasingly prominent.

These institutional and discursive foundations do not constitute a spontaneously coordinated whole (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Arts and Buizer, 2009; Phillips *et al.*, 2004; Raustiala and Victor, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). Even if there are "links" between them, and if actors and organisations can in practice combine some of their arguments to make their efforts more efficient, these institutional and discursive foundations are discontinuous. Comprehending this fragmentation allows us to understand a little of what is usually described in the literature as the reasons for the perpetual failure of the objective of food security at the global level (Evans, 2009; Margulis, 2011; Maxwell, 1996; Oxfam, 2009), *i.e.* the lack of consensus on the international nature of the problem, on the delimitation of the issue and on the need for coordination. There is therefore both an overlapping and separation of organisations, mandates and interests. The consequence of the 2008/2009 crisis and of the debate on globalization and its detractors has been to put this fragmentation into centre stage, triggering a series of initiatives that have sought to find mechanisms to counteract the negative effects of the fragmentation of the institutions that are dealing with this set of issues.

3. POST-FOOD CRISIS META-INITIATIVES OF COORDINATION

The international institutional landscape is marked by a large number of institutions that are responsible for one or more aspect(s) of the food security issue. As discussed in the previous section, these institutions were created one after another as new problems arose and sometimes by explicit positioning against the action of existing institutions (Lele, 2009; Shaw, 2009).

3.1. A scattered governance

These international institutions cover a broad spectrum of institutional arrangements including treaties or conventions on particular aspects of food security, UN inter-governmental agencies, international organisations outside of the UN framework and international programmes such as the initiative of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food or the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN). To this we can add a whole series of actions or programmes from organisations that also act at the global scale (such as that of non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations or even regional cooperation programmes). This wide diversity reveals a situation where there is a lack of leadership from an

international institution in charge of food security issues, with none having sufficient legitimacy to cover the entire spectrum. It also reveals a growing complexity of global issues with increased interdependencies between countries and increasingly strong interrelations that need to be managed between issues that were previously addressed according to a sectoral division (Drezner, 2009; Bierman *et al.*, 2008).

3.2. Three different forms of global dynamics

It is in this context that it is worth highlighting three specific initiatives that seek to deal with the issues of coordination on food security issues. These three initiatives are explicitly aimed to act on the quality of international coordination by increasing the coherence and effectiveness of this coordination. They represent three different forms of global dynamics (for a more detailed description, see Lerin and Louafi, 2009 and Margulis, 2011):

- the first initiative is intergovernmental and centred on the United Nations instrument: the revitalization of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) within the FAO;
- the next is an initiative of donor countries: the coordination within the G8/G20 around a "Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition";
- the third is a bureaucratic type of initiative, established by the Secretary of the United Nations: the High Level Task Force on Food Security and Nutrition (HLTF) and its secretariat, which is responsible for the coordination of all 20 UN agencies at the global scale, but also on the ground in some target countries.

We assume here that these initiatives, through their complementarity, can have an inclusive function rather than extending the current fragmentation. In other words, they can be seen as a step towards the construction of food security as a global issue.

Established in 1974 in the context of the food crisis of that year, which followed the oil shock, the CFS should have been a forum of analysis and monitoring of food security policies (Lele, 2009; Shaw, 2009). However, it has remained confined to a technical role, centred only on the agricultural aspects of availability, without ever managing to assert leadership, whether politically or analytically. Its revitalization specifically addresses the need to establish, if not a leadership, then at least a genuine rallying point, a type of platform where all of the actors concerned can exchange, coordinate or even develop common standards. As emphasized

in the founding text of the "new" CFS, the purpose of its revitalization is to make it "(...) the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings"[1].

However, by remaining embedded within the FAO, the CFS runs the risk of consistently reducing, consciously or not, the issue of food security to purely agricultural issues. The presence of delegates with mandates and areas of legitimacy that focus on agricultural issues means that they are less able to consider the benefits to be gained from coordination with other issues or other sectors: schematically, it is often perceived that environmental issues are a distraction from focusing on concerns about production or agro-exportation; that a focus on health concerns generates additional regulatory costs in the industry and threatens competitiveness, etc.

In addition, the FAO is itself made up of staff that have developed, due to the organisational culture, an expertise in agriculture, who have little incentive (or legitimacy) to build bridges with other food security aspects. While some staff attempt, however, to promote contact between other groups, this is done through individual approaches, often almost in opposition to the wishes of the institution itself, rather than something that the FAO strategically plans and values.

The HLTF clearly stands apart through its firm adoption of a very wide range of themes that can be included under the banner of "food security". In the way that it is itself constructed, it covers all of the aspects that are dealt with by all of the specialized UN agencies, plus a few other international organisations. Through this need to involve all UN agencies to address the food security issue, the HLTF sends out a strong message on the need for overarching structures that go beyond the sectoral divisions of specialized UN agencies to meet global challenges. Although agency leaders are present in this task force, it is by no means guaranteed that the desired intersectorality will actually be achieved. It is within the special coordination team that this intersectorality expresses itself more with the coordination work carried out in the field.

Regarding the G8/G20, the multidimensionality of food security was not originally addressed since the focus was largely centred on the financial dimension of both emergency assistance and structural investment. It is therefore primarily an

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1. See document CFS:2009/2 Rev 2, paragraph 4, FAO, Rome.

attempt to strengthen the coordination of donor interventions by ensuring the sustainability of support beyond one-off humanitarian assistance. Since the 2008 crisis, successive presidencies of the G8/G20 have continued to show a commitment to delivering financial promises. Coordination did not stop here, however, and the issue of price volatility has appeared on the agenda, demonstrating a will to link agriculture and trade issues in the context of the Doha Round stalemate. Nevertheless, simply appearing on the agenda does not translate into the effective management of the issue, and few new measures or solutions have resulted from these discussions.

3.3. Discursive and organisational innovations

These three meta-initiatives are different both in the way they tackle issues and in their institutional processes (Table 1). While both the HLTF and the G8 (even when expanded to G20) are clearly designed as closed clubs (of UN agencies in the former case, of selected states in the latter), the CFS remains a universal intergovernmental forum (all FAO member states are ex-officio members). Beyond this formal legitimacy, however, the revitalization of CFS has also involved its opening up to all stakeholders (Louafi, 2012). Thus, the advisory group includes a representative sample of stakeholders who matter in the food security field: representatives of non-governmental organisations, professional organisations, the private sector and foundations, international "sister" and "like-minded" organisations and international financial organisations. This presence within the CFS advisory group provides a representation of these members beyond the annual meetings of the CFS itself: they are involved in the inter-sessional work to help define the direction of work and topics covered.

Table 1. Management of the institutional and discursive foundations by the three meta-initiatives

	CFS	G8/G20	HLTF
Agriculture	+++	++	+
Trade	0/+	+	+
Humanitarian	0/+	++	+
Rights	+	0	+
Development	-	+++	+

CFS: Committee on World Food Security. HLTF: High Level Task Force on Food Security and Nutrition. Source: Authors conceptualisation.

But the real innovation of the CFS is undoubtedly the formation of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on food security and nutrition (Louafi, 2012). Built on the model of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), this panel is intended to provide the most objective data and recommendations in a field that is marked more by a proliferation of competing expertise (referring to different issue-areas) than by a lack of expertise. The establishment of this panel is intended to cause the emergence of debates and solutions that are usually "filtered" by the interest—real or perceived—of existing institutions or states. In this respect, it should also allow a comparison of the different forms of knowledge and policy cultures in existence, whether they come from the world of international organisation bureaucracy, civil society, the business world or the academic environment. If this panel works as expected, it is destined to become a key element to define the foundation of a transversal approach to food security and it would be a total contrast with the method of expertise mobilization within the two other meta-initiatives. Within the G8/G20 there is essentially an instrumental conception of knowledge, which is rarely opposed as the national administrations in charge put it directly at the service of their governments, according to a predefined agenda. For the HLTF, the situation is more nuanced. In itself, the task force does not allow the mobilization of knowledge or the development of new ideas. It carries out bureaucratic coordination in which substantial issues are often relegated to the background. However, the HLTF also includes a more open process for the construction of its Comprehensive Framework of Action through major consultations with experts outside of the state or the UN framework, and through the coordination work carried out by the special team that works on this inter-agency coordination in the field. The experience gained locally is, potentially at least, fed back into the learning mechanism that is necessary for the development of this global action plan. However, this innovation potential remains limited by a double constraint: the first is of a bureaucratic nature, with the need to obtain the approval of all agencies; the second being statutory, because this inter-agency coordination can only exist within the UN if it limits its scope to the technical aspects and does not venture into the field of public policy, which is the prerogative of Member States. Such a boundary is obviously highly problematic for an issue such as food security, which is fundamentally political.

CONCLUSION

The meta-initiatives described are therefore attempts to coordinate organisations that are themselves, mainly, multilateral groups. It is thus

somewhat a coordination of coordination at the highest level. One can of course be sceptical about the effectiveness of these intentions and devices, highlighting the fact that malnutrition has not been eradicated. It is in the opinion of the authors, however, that they should only be considered for what they are: a willingness to coherently build the issue of global food security and give it, in one way or another, the status of global public good—as has been done for the environment. The fragmented landscape and issue-areas is obviously not resolved by such an intention. We can estimate, however, that these coordination meta-initiatives make it possible for an epistemic community to be constructed, which would only be able to "precipitate" (in the chemical sense) this fragmentation into an issue that is global and unified, and treated as such.

Although success will not be easy in this coordination process and in this attempt to generate collective action to provide a global public good, it is probably not within this process that we should seek for reasons to be sceptical, but mainly in the fact that the international economic system is today primarily, or even exclusively, driven by the economic coordination that is itself derived from the repair, caused by crisis after crisis, of the international financial system. ▮

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