

Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: New Challenges for International Organizations¹

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Introduction

This contribution examines the roles and challenges of international organizations in the context of global governance systems for hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Firstly, we define how the concepts of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition have evolved over the years, in line with emerging challenges. We draw particularly on FAO's experience and analytical work in recent years. Secondly, we review the wide range of international stakeholders addressing hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, with their different but sometimes overlapping roles and mandates. Thirdly, we examine how international organizations are responding to emerging food and nutrition security challenges and whether the current global institutional and governance architecture is adequate to address these challenges. Fourthly, we bring into sharp focus the challenges involved in bringing coherence to the governance of a global system for food and nutrition security (FSN).

Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition: an evolving nexus

The terms 'hunger' and 'food insecurity' are often used interchangeably. However, the range of situations that these terms describe is enormous, stretching from famine to chronic undernourishment; and from acute or seasonal food shortages in emergencies to chronic access issues. FAO is confronted with all of these, even though its most well-known contributions are regular reports on the number of undernourished, e.g. the State of Food Insecurity in the World (SOFI).

The definition of malnutrition has undergone a significant shift over the past decade. At the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN), held in 1992, participants extended the parameters of malnutrition beyond caloric intake to include deficiencies in macro and micronutrients, now commonly known as undernutrition. The Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN 2), held in November 2014, shifted the focus yet again on the triple burden of malnutrition comprising undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity.

Estimates for the global cost of the various forms of malnutrition hover around 5% of global GDP. There are still 161 million children living under chronic undernutrition, and an

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estimated 51 million children are acutely malnourished. In addition, about 2 billion people are subject to hidden hunger (due to a lack of micronutrients in their diets), a condition with severe health consequences. Furthermore, it is estimated that more than 500 million adults are obese, with an approximately 42 million children under the age of five being overweight. Food security is the condition in which every individual has access to sufficient food in quality, quantity and nutritional value at all times. However, hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition cannot be resolved with the linear solutions that characterized development work at the time when international organizations were set up. Today, interventions need to go beyond the supply of food to address key issues which prevent "at all times" access to food of sufficient quantity and quality and at the same time, deal with obesity. A few examples of the key factors which underline hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition and which pose challenges for policy, including agricultural and food policies are discussed below. Poverty and low incomes remain key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition. They require broad-based income growth, coupled with social protection measures and policies for the most vulnerable. This is not new. It is reflected in the twin-track approach that is used by many international organizations as a common framework for food security policies and programmes. What is new, however, is the attention that is given to social protection and safety net programmes and to how these can best be used to bring people out of poverty and enhance agricultural productivity at the same time. The FAO State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) 2015 report focuses on this issue, examining how social protection contributes to hunger reduction and promotes inclusive growth.

Those parts of the world where agricultural capital per worker and public investments in agriculture have stagnated are the epicenters of poverty and hunger today. Investments in agriculture are thus essential for reducing hunger, improving productivity and incomes in rural areas and promoting sustainable agricultural production. Policies in the past have focused primarily on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and public investments, underplaying the fact that farmers are by far the largest source of investment in agriculture and must be central to any strategy for increasing investment in the sector (SOFA 2012). Policies in all sectors (and not only in the food and agriculture sector) need to help shape a conducive environment for farmers to invest. What is particularly important is that the role of women in agriculture and food security is fully recognized, and that strategies to improving women's access to resources are put in place (SOFA 2011).

Climate change is a new driver of food insecurity and malnutrition with vast implications for agriculture and food systems. Agricultural economists and policy-makers are faced with the challenge of broadening the evidence base on how climate change will affect food systems and of identifying adjustments in agriculture and food security policies and programmes in a way that they integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. There is still a lot to learn, and responses are uncertain and politically difficult.

Food systems have undergone a rapid transformation in recent years, with important nutritional implications. Globalization, expanding food trade, and technological innovations have led to longer food chains and altered relative prices of food commodities, with significant implications on people's diets. Improving nutrition depends on each and every aspect of the food system. A good understanding of food systems and agricultural value chains is thus essential. As far as nutrition is concerned, actions in food systems need to be

complemented with interventions in public health and education. The management of food systems is complex, as it involves more than agriculture production. Further, sustainability does not merely involve doing more with less natural resources, but a careful review of the environmental, social and economic implications of food systems (SOFA 2013).

Food insecurity situations in protracted crises affect 22 countries in the world today. The duration of the crises has increased dramatically in recent years. In Africa, in the early 1990s, only four countries were considered as to be in protracted crisis whilst now there are nineteen. What used to be an exception now is becoming the norm. The prevalence of undernourishment in these countries is three times higher than in other LDCs. The multi-causality of these crises includes repeated natural disasters, livelihoods depletion, and local conflicts particularly over natural resources, poor governance and marginalization. Therefore, they cannot be treated only with short-term responses that do not address the root causes of the problems.

High and volatile food prices in 2007-2008 and thereafter and the associated food security crisis brought renewed attention to agriculture, food security and malnutrition and their underlying issues. The next section focuses on how international organizations have responded to the evolving context and on measures that can help to render global and national food security governance more efficient.

Challenges for International Organizations striving for global food security

International organizations include private sector, civil society, philanthropic organizations, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, research agencies and think-tanks, ministries and national institutions, with differing goals and mandates. Here we focus especially on UN specialized agencies active in the area of global food security, hunger and malnutrition. Each UN agency is part of a network of actors and stakeholders all of whom strive for a world without hunger. How does an organization like FAO help countries achieve food security and nutrition?

In their response to underlying challenges of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, international organizations apply a set of core functions, some of which are common to all and some of which are specific to each agency. Core functions at global level include: a) act as a Forum and build consensus around global policy and accountability frameworks through the support of technical services and logistics (plans of action, indicators, monitoring mechanisms), e.g. World Food Summits (WFS), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); b) provide data and information for tracking progress against goals, and issue early warning of emerging threats, e.g. undernourishment figures, food security information updates; c) agree on general/indicative plans of action; d) carry out in-depth analysis and state of the art reviews of topical development issues, e.g. gender and food security, sustainable development, climate change; e) support the development of international instruments and voluntary guidelines, e.g. Code of Conduct for responsible fisheries, Principles of Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI), Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT); f) set standards, e.g. food

safety standards, standards for food and agricultural statistics. Similar functions occur at regional level.

At country level, international organizations have the challenge to: a) raise awareness and reach consensus on the root causes of hunger and malnutrition, especially on the effects of emerging issues, such as climate change; b) provide technical support to identifying policies and programmes for FSN; c) create an enabling environment whereby sectoral policies and stakeholders better focus on food and nutrition security. This involves: integrating FSN targets and indicators, together with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into sectoral policies and programmes; supporting cross-sectoral governance mechanisms better suited to FSN problems; engaging in policy dialogue and assistance; creating partnerships with strategic actors for promoting the FSN agenda and its accountability; and developing frameworks for financing of development work.

However, given the emergence of a more complex international architecture for FSN, and a relatively high number of stakeholders involved at international, regional and national levels, how to achieve coherence of objectives and interventions is emerging as a key challenge. The Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (FSNA) involves a plethora of partners: in addition to the so-called "Big Five" (i.e. FAO, IFAD, WFP, WB, CGIAR system) directly dealing with agriculture and food security, there are a host of other organizations whose mandate affects FSN. We refer, for example, not only to international organizations dealing with health (WHO), employment and labor standards (ILO), and international trade and investment (WTO, UNCTAD); but also to regional institutions and development banks. In addition, the importance of actors such as civil society and the private sector in the FSN has grown substantially over the years.

The food security crisis following high and volatile food prices in 2007-08 and beyond has brought about renewed attention to agriculture and sustainable development, food security and nutrition and has led to the emergence of new actors in addition to existing ones. For example, specific attention to FSN was given by the G-20 through the initiative on Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) and by the G-8 (L'Aquila) as well as private foundations (e.g. the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Also, the High Level Task Force on the global food security crisis (HLTF) promoted a comprehensive and unified response of the international community to the challenge of achieving global food and nutrition security. All these initiatives acted as coordination mechanisms of various categories of stakeholders (G-20, G-8, UN system).

The food security crisis and the questions it brought into focus gave rise to new initiatives aiming at hunger and malnutrition, e.g. the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Global Movement and the Zero Hunger Challenge (launched by UN Secretary-General in 2012). Renewed plans of action together with appropriate financing mechanisms for agriculture and food security have also been promoted, e.g. the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) and the EU Food Facility (EUFF). Additional global and regional time-bound commitments to eradicating hunger include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Malabo Declaration, the Initiative without Hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In this context, the danger of mandate creep, duplication and inefficiencies in the delivery of services is high. A recent panel on "Food for all" held during the Expo in Milan in 2015 included experts of the "big five" and examined whether these agencies are still fit for

purpose, raising issues such as overlapping mandates, mission creep and lack of coherence in approaches and the need for a better governance for agriculture and food security. Reaching a consensus on what should be done across and within international organizations in order to increase the coherence in global FSN governance, enhance the effectiveness of responses, increase efficiency in delivering products and services, and agree on issues involving stakeholders with diverse interests and points of view (e.g. RAI) is of paramount importance.

International organizations are therefore called to retool, re-organize intervention methods and adjust their approaches in supporting countries to meet their policy and development goals. For example, as far as the SDGs are concerned, FAO has changed its strategic framework with eleven strategic objectives, most of which were sectoral, to one that focuses on five cross-sectoral objectives, covering the elimination of hunger and malnutrition; promoting sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry; reducing rural poverty; enabling inclusive and efficient food systems; and increasing the resilience of livelihoods to disasters. FAO has also strengthened its strategic partnerships with the private sector, academia and civil society, enhanced the multi-disciplinary dimension of its programmes, and emphasized cross-cutting issues and the importance of country level results.

Towards more coherent food security governance

What is the way forward for more coherent food security governance? Is there a model approach to enhance coordination, coherence and efficiency within the complex international set-up and architecture? Among the global governance structures that have emerged, the Committee for Food Security (CFS) deserves a special mention. The Reform of the Committee on World Food Security in 2009 created a global multi-stakeholder platform to address issues around food security and nutrition, involving governments, civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders. It is still an inter-governmental body but it is characterized by multi-stakeholder participation. The CFS developed a global strategic framework for food security and nutrition, which applies a cross-sectoral approach to food security. It has established a high-level panel of experts to provide scientific background for the negotiation of key items and has negotiated important voluntary guidelines (e.g. VGGT and RAI). It also promotes policy convergence, shares best practices and supports and advises countries and regions.

The CFS, in order to enhance its role in the overall co-ordination of food security and nutrition, could probably enlarge its advisory group to include organizations such as WTO, UNFCCC and other important players. It could provide policy direction to those institutions in matters of food and nutrition security, strengthening its scientific base and accountability framework as well as its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (already an on-going process) and creating multi-stakeholder platforms at country level.



Conclusions

International organizations in the field of global FSN are increasingly adopting cross-cutting interventions and approaches and are becoming more similar, with the risk of creating mission creep and lack of coherence. Organizations are therefore asked to adjust their approaches and intervention strategies and to re-focus their core business.

Coordination mechanisms such as the CFS have the potential to enhance coordination, coherence and efficiency within the complex international set-up and institutional architecture of the global governance for FSN. However, efficient food security governance will require further investment in such coordination entities and in the Institutions that form their pillars which deserve equal attention and investments. Only if this is realized the world will benefit of a strong food security global governance

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