



## Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis

\*\*\*\*\*

A Programme of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural  
Research in Eastern and Central Africa

\*\*\*\*\*

### Electronic Newsletter

06 October 2006--Volume 9 Number 19

#### NEWS

**1-3 November:** Stakeholders workshop on Development of Postgraduate Programme for enhancement of skills in agricultural information and communication management in the ASARECA region, Entebbe, Uganda.

#### TEN YEARS AFTER THE WORLD FOOD SUMMIT: FOSTERING POLITICAL WILL FOR FOOD SECURITY

*The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations annually celebrates the World Food Day on 16 October, the day on which the Organization was founded in 1945. The theme for this year is "Investing in agriculture for food security." Agriculture may have become a minor player in many industrialized economies, but it must play a starring role on the world stage if the curtain on hunger is to be brought down. Yet foreign aid for agriculture and rural development has continued to decline from a total of over US\$ 9 billion per year in the early 1980s to less than 5 billion in the late 1990s. Meanwhile, an estimated 854 million people around the world remain undernourished. Only investment in agriculture-together with support for education and health-will turn this situation around. In this issue, **Jean-Charles Le Vallée** reviews recent developments in global and national political relations, thinking, and related institutional changes, the effect of such developments on the incidence of hunger, the ability and willingness of governments to eradicate hunger, and the efforts to foster greater political will for food security.*

#### Introduction

**F**OOD insecurity persists largely because of governance and policy failure at the national level. Where national governments have performed well in the developing world, hunger has been significantly reduced, while in those regions where hunger is not yet under control, improving governance at the national level must now be the highest priority. Good governance, including the rule of law, transparency, lack of corruption, conflict prevention and resolution, sound public administration, and respect and protection for human rights, is of critical importance to assure sustainable food security. Where national governments fail to take appropriate action, food security fails.

While such actions should involve a process of consultation and action by a full range of actors, the primary initiative lies with national governments and public investments. National governments remain the most appropriate, and frequently the only major supplier of essential public goods. Given the importance of these goods, national governments should foster political will in an effort to reduce food and nutrition insecurity

In this paper, political will is taken to mean the extent to which those with political responsibility for the well-being and food security of a country's inhabitants devote efforts and resources, through actions and policies, to fight food and nutrition insecurity. Within a given country, political will ranges from the highest political position centrally to the various local levels in government. Governmental programmes will benefit from the said leadership when national leaders come forward to adopt them: it would firm up the bureaucracy, sensitize the media, encourage social and volunteer organizations, and heighten personal commitments. Consequently, political will can translate into national will.

### **Actors and context**

From the international community to the consumer, many actors are involved in ensuring food security. Despite globalization, most food insecurity today is still highly localized and locally generated. Energetic and well-organized political advocacy is essential in mobilizing action, both domestically and internationally, as actors such as international donors to community organizations and other stakeholders, fight food and nutrition insecurity.

Efforts by national political institutions to fight food and nutrition insecurity are hampered by the complexities of food policy. The process of improving policy is also problematic. Some scholars have identified public pressure as one of the main drivers of policy change in the food arena, reflecting concerns about health and the state of the environment, and it is beginning to mount. In food security planning, policy requires reformulation, while institutions need restructuring.

Additionally, the will of such political institutions to address the potential impacts of marginal policy issues may be fostered by the actors and stakeholders concerned with, or affected by, food insecurity. Globally for example, trans-national civil society movements are emerging as powerful advocates for a more equitable world, demonstrating that there is broad popular support in both developed and developing countries for addressing hunger. For example, the governments of China and Brazil have begun taking steps towards improving their food supply and physical environment, as their populations confront transiting diets and nutrition, and are looking at how to influence public policy from community intervention to national programming.

When political institutions fail to address the inter-connectedness of food security, trust is lost. Trust is the central issue in food policy. This is most clearly seen in times of war or crisis, when food's multi-sectoral impact emerges from the analytical and practical shadows to take centre stage in political life. The need for a multi-sectoral approach in food policy is well appreciated in the study and management of hunger.

At the national level, renewed determination and commitment on the part of governments, strongly backed by international bodies and also by civil society, is paramount. Fortunately, in the U.S., Brazil and Africa, there are some positive signs of political mobilization around this issue.

For example, Inter-Action, an umbrella group of development and relief non-governmental organizations based in North America, is effectively lobbying for policy support in the U.S., as is the U.S. Alliance Against Hunger; and Bread for the World, an American anti-hunger advocacy group, has found that religious communities are a core constituency on hunger issues. In Brazil, political processes initiated by civil society led to the development of the Zero Hunger Program. In addition, grassroots groups in Africa have used the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper processes to reduce corruption, strengthen democracy and improve health and education service for impoverished and hungry people.

Hence, many non-governmental and civil society organizations are already deeply engaged in coping with food emergencies and in providing support services to small farming communities and households, often with an emphasis on sustainable land use practices or HIV/AIDS and nutrition education. Others have played a prominent role in the post World Food Summit consultative process on the right to food, led by the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These organizations are likely to form coalitions, taking advantage of improved networking possibilities, and to become increasingly effective forces in ensuring greater international and national commitment to addressing food issues.

Significant advances have been made in thinking on human rights issues as well, particularly on how concepts underlying the right to food can contribute to the design of effective programmes for hunger eradication. This thinking emphasizes the primary role of the individual, the household, and the community in meeting their own food needs, while attributing a fulfillment role to governments, activated when the assurance of access to adequate and safe food is clearly beyond local capacities. In addition, the ability of governments and governance structures to guarantee universal access to vital resources is a key element of their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Governments also have an important role to play in creating the conditions for local efforts to succeed, for instance by assuring internal peace, a public good and conditions for effective participation in political processes. They are also required to ensure that food is not used as an instrument for political or economic pressure. Well-targeted food and nutrition communication and education campaigns can have a profound effect on public opinion about issues concerning poverty, hunger and malnutrition. They can be a powerful tool for generating the popular will, for example consumer or public pressure, and consequently the political and national will, necessary to alleviate poverty and hunger.

Internationally, the elimination of poverty is a central theme of many policy statements by most of the development institutions. Many such strategies supported by these institutions have shown a conspicuous lack of focus on food security issues and have much to learn from past experience in the food and nutrition sectors. Furthermore, their concern about hunger has been confined largely to emergency situations. However, such emergencies have also contributed new insights, especially about the value of participation and the importance of political processes.

The simultaneous persistence of widespread extreme food deprivation and plentiful food supplies in a world with modern means of communications and transportation suggests that there are fundamental flaws in the ways in which nations function and the relationships between them are governed. Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) has appealed to governments to act to prevent the double burden of food related ill-health problems associated with under- and over-

consumption coinciding in the same country. The WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization are now in agreement that the productionist era in food policy has come to an end. Mere quantity is an inadequate policy goal. Quality, distribution and externalized social, health and environmental costs also have to be central to the policy framework.

Assessments of national political commitment to address food insecurity are bound to be subjective until firm evidence emerges of faster progress towards the eradication of hunger. Political commitment, policy-making and regulation present the familiar problem of how to deal with crosscutting issues, particularly in relation to new developments such as biotechnology that cut across national borders. There are indications that several developing countries are now recognizing the critical role that the rural sector plays in a process of broad-based economic development. These countries are committed to promoting agricultural growth, focusing particularly on new domestic and international market opportunities. But these countries are exceptions; many developing countries continue to pursue urban-biased food price policies, with little evidence of a genuine determination to stamp out chronic hunger and malnutrition or to promote rural development.

What's more, official development assistance for agriculture has fallen steadily in recent decades, and the proportion of the new international loan commitments to agricultural and rural development reached an all-time low in 2000. Public spending on agriculture has stagnated: in the 1970s it was 15.1 percent, in the 1980s, it came down to 5.1 percent, while it further declined to 1.3 percent in the 1990s. Until recently, there was little evidence of a rise in international or domestic resource allocation for agricultural development, which should be part of any programme aimed at reducing food insecurity.

There is also growing recognition of the negative impact of North American and European farm subsidies, and a political willingness of key actors, such as the World Bank, to take a high-profile position in arguing to modify them. Consequently, developed countries, backed by international institutions, especially those concerned with trade must also contribute to hunger eradication by opening their markets, to the agricultural exports of developing countries by reducing dumping and subsidies on farm products; by sharing technology; and by substantially expanding funding for relevant public goods.

### **Example of effective political will**

Misguided or insufficient political will can be detrimental to food security. Mounting pressure from concerned actors and stakeholders can also enhance political will, thereby becoming a key construct in support of alleviating food insecurity. Thailand imparts one example of how political will has been focused, providing a foundation to address food insecurity.

Over three decades ago, the government of Thailand recognized malnutrition as a national problem concentrated in rural areas. It decided to address the problem through a community-driven rural development programme. Improving the nation's nutritional status was considered to be a productive investment--a public good--and not a welfare expense. This was reflected in a national policy calling for accelerated action focused on the improvement of nutrition as a critical element in poverty alleviation. A national rural development policy and plan was developed with the involvement of planning officials, staff from many sectors, academics and community

representatives. Improved nutrition, closely aligned with poverty alleviation, became a central element of a broader economic and social contract between the government and people. Poverty was to be addressed in all its dimensions and not from an income perspective alone. It entailed integrated multi-sectoral actions linked to income generation opportunities in order to improve the nutrition of communities. Programme components included rural job creation, village development projects, complete coverage of basic minimum services for the community, and an expansion of food production (with an emphasis on improving diet quality). At first, these activities covered only the poorest third of the country, but they soon encompassed the entire nation.

The case study above shows that decentralization created opportunities. Coupled with good governance and partnerships, decentralization was critical to the success of community-based approaches to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition. Hence, a community-government partnership was developed and fostered through broad-based social mobilization strategies. Among other reasons for Thailand's success in eradicating malnutrition in a single decade was its decision, and political will, to invest in human capital. The country recognized that the measures introduced must have a social foundation, and that the concept of self-help is central to collective action against food insecurity and malnutrition.

Over the last two decades, decentralization has resulted in a diminished role for national governments in many developing countries. In addition, decentralization is expected to increase in the future, making possible new forms of farmer and consumer organizations to address food security, including governance of food systems. But institutional decentralization has yet to be adequately resourced for local institutions to fulfill an expanded mandate. And for the poor to benefit from decentralization, it must occur in the context of a genuine devolution of political power that permits the democratic participation of local people in decision-making. It is of questionable benefit, however, if the legal system cannot prevent the abuse of power by local elites.

### **Advancing the food security agenda: A political will perspective**

There is a pressing need to assess the practical steps that could be taken to build the necessary political will. The examples above of political will illustrate several key constructs that can become the building blocks for developing a political will environment that will end food insecurity. The following points are presented as individual tools; however, they reinforce each other and provide support to public policy as a whole.

*Rights-based policies:* Freedom from hunger is the most fundamental human right, proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in various international treaties. All people have a right to adequate and safe food, and actions by governments must respect, protect, and fulfill this right as shown above. Any denial of food on political or economic grounds is contrary to the human right to adequate food. Governments have a duty to promote the rights of people, especially the impoverished and food insecure. Tackling hunger is not about charity or food aid, but about fulfilling obligations to protect and promote rights to adequate and safe food. At the national level, over twenty countries, including South Africa and Malawi, have now included the right to food specifically in their constitutions.

*Self-reliance:* As highlighted by the example of Thailand, decentralization opens up opportunities for more effective collaboration at the local level among public institutions concerned with the

multiple dimensions of food security. It also greatly facilitates participative diagnostic and decision-making processes, which are increasingly recognized as important in contributing to local self-reliance in addressing critical issues, including hunger, and the basis for more sustainable livelihoods. Nonetheless, the primary responsibility for ensuring access to adequate food rests with individuals, their families, their wider social circles and the communities in which they live. Efforts to alleviate food insecurity therefore need to focus on empowering women, families, groups and communities to achieve inclusive food security, encouraging a maximum of self-reliance or self-help, but supporting this where absolutely necessary with external inputs to address priorities articulated at the local level.

*Protection from market failures:* Food insecurity is also the consequence of lack of access to adequate and safe food. It is essentially an extreme instance of market failure, in the sense that those people most in need of food are least able to express this need in terms of effective demand. Governments that are committed both to neo-liberal macro-economic policies and to eradicating hunger need to compensate for market failure by facilitating improved access to food and to the means of enhancing production through a balanced combination of policy adjustments and practical targeted measures that respond to local needs and opportunities.

*Improved national governance:* For the purpose of reducing poverty and food insecurity, a starting point for judging good governance at the national level is a government's performance in providing basic public goods to all of its citizens. Some essential goods include internal peace, rule of law, and public investment in infrastructure and research. Where hunger, malnutrition and obesity are on the rise, for example in much of rural sub-Saharan Africa, some of the most basic public goods needed for income growth and food security are not being provided in sufficient measure by national governments.

*Partnerships:* Non-governmental and civil society organizations work best when they are partnering with governments. If governments are willing to invest in public goods, these organizations can collaborate by providing essential help, mobilizing local participation in both the planning and construction phases. Local participation is key to ensuring affordable maintenance and successful management of public goods, through a greater sense of local ownership.

*Leadership:* The most important forces producing persistent food insecurity today tend to be local, and they are governed best at the local level. Where national governments have responded well to this challenge, food insecurity has come under better control. Willingness, high in the polity, brings increased solidarity, cooperation, and national will to address these concerns.

*Fiscal and donor pressure:* Fiscal pressure provides a strong motivation for states to re-think their public policies. Donor pressure through economic incentives enhances such motivation. However, although donor organizations shoulder public investments for example, they often remain silent on governance failures and on policies detrimental to the food insecure.

*Environmental pressure:* Examples include climate change, droughts, natural hazards, or rising sea levels. A one-degree increase in temperature can represent a ten percent yield reduction in tropical crops such as tea and coffee, central to many developing country agendas. Growing public awareness of the issues is being developed to mobilize political will.

*Civil society pressure:* Generators of public pressure, such as non-governmental organizations, labour unions, grassroots movements, well-organized farmer and consumer associations and similar groups, must push for a more balanced political will. They will triumph through greater engagement in the policy process to improve decision-making underlying public policy to redirect food security towards more equitable outcomes.

*Integration of food security within national policies:* Strong mechanisms for policy development are key to food security. Governments must ensure that food security is part of the mainstream of national, sub-regional and local policy design and implementation. Priorities and sequencing are essential as policy reforms and proposed actions need strong legislation, administrative measures, and institutional mechanisms for its implementation and monitoring.

Increasing awareness of the above blocks may be a useful reference point for policy debate and the setting of appropriate mechanisms. The aim should be to provide information to national leaders and policy-makers so that appropriate decisions can be taken, evaluation of progress made, to further foster and sustain political will in efforts to end food insecurity.

## **Conclusion**

Political will at the national level is required to direct the necessary resources, strategies, policies and program implementation to ensure food security. It is critical to invest in essential public goods. Efforts should continue by all actors to ensure that policies create appropriate incentives for investments in public goods such as infrastructure and research. Providing an enabling environment, comprising peace, the rule of law, democracy, and political, social and economic stability, are all equally essential.

It is necessary that those concerned with food security recognize that the political context, in which policies are formulated and implemented, is an integral part of understanding why those policies fail or succeed. While engaging in strategies for improving food security, governments could take into account the above constructs in moulding these strategies. The type of policies and programmes they adopt will vary. Solutions and options must be tailored, sequenced and prioritized to the context within each country, one state at a time. A common feature may be the support for decentralized community-led initiatives as in Thailand, designed to ensure food security, involving a strategic succession of measures aimed at bringing about immediate reduction in hunger and setting-up longer-term sustainable solutions. Implementing such programmes will require the commitment and partnership across all actors, government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, as they respond to the multiple demands made by communities and common interest groups committed to eradicating, or affected by, food insecurity.

Food security must be viewed as a problem of society not a problem for society, that is, as stemming from society not external to it. One of the strengths of the political will approach is the focus on the underlying structural causes of food insecurity as opposed to the proximate causes. The interconnectedness of food policy traces the multiple and interrelating processes operating on local, sub-regional, national, and global scales, and how they affect the food insecure. Such policy therefore shifts emphasis from solely the stimulus, to include socio-economic conditions. Consequently, poverty reduction, increasing levels of equality, institutional reform, and strengthening security and safety nets, become important objectives for reducing food insecurity.

**About the author:** Jean-Charles Le Vallée is a Development Gateway Food Security Guide, Co-Founder/Member of Food Secure Canada, Canadian Association for Food Studies, Ottawa Just Food, PhD Candidate at Carleton University and past Coordinator of the Food Security Bureau of Canada. The full text is available on: <http://topics.developmentgateway.org/foodsecurity> Comments about this article can be directed to him at: [levallee@msu.edu](mailto:levallee@msu.edu)

## COMMUNICATION

The Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) Research Network invites researchers originating from and residing in developing countries to submit research proposals on any of the following: "Poverty Monitoring, Measurement and Analysis (PMMA); and Modeling and Policy Impact Analysis (MPIA): Proposals may be submitted at any time. For details, visit: [www.pep-net.org](http://www.pep-net.org)

*This newsletter is an attempt to use e-communications to provide to a broad audience within and outside Eastern and Central Africa a mechanism for distribution and exchange of information relevant to agricultural policy issues. This newsletter is being sent to identified stakeholders of ECAPAPA. We want to respect your privacy and desire not to have your e-mail inbox filled with unwanted correspondence. If you do not want to receive this newsletter please send us a note at <ecapapa@asareca.org >, and we will remove your name from the distribution list. For back issues of this newsletter, go to 'View Archive' at [www.asareca.org/ecapapa](http://www.asareca.org/ecapapa)*

*ECAPAPA is a regional programme of the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA). ECAPAPA is receiving support from a number of organizations including, BMZ/GTZ, EU, IDRC, SDC, and USAID. This newsletter is supported by a grant from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The editorial content of the newsletter is solely the responsibility of the Co-ordinating Unit of ECAPAPA.*