



**Global  
Forum**  
on Food Security  
and Nutrition

# **Global Governance for Food Security: Are the current arrangements fit for the job?**

Summary of discussion no. 68

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### About the Document

This document summarizes the results of an online discussion held on the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition <http://km.fao.org/fsn>

Please refer to the complete proceedings document which can be found online at:

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## I. Background

Due to the difficulties encountered by the existing global agriculture and food governance systems to effectively respond to the world's new challenges, the 2007/2008 food price crisis prompted the emergence of new institutions and initiatives. In addition, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) has been reformed and has now become the main inter-governmental platform for achieving food security. While the reform process has been welcomed by most actors, more time is needed for the effectiveness of these institutions to be assessed.

Andrew MacMillan and Hartwig de Haen invited Forum members to comment on:

- the main services that need to be provided by an adequate global governance system;
- to what extent and how effectively they are now provided by existing institutions;
- what a global governance system should look like, including the major issues it needs to address and through which processes it could emerge.

## II. Issues discussed

### A clear vision of the drivers of food insecurity

The initial need is to study and understand the economics behind food insecurity and identify its causes. A clearly articulated vision of how global food security may be achieved is essential. Such vision may be obtained by looking inward for remedies and working from the ground up.

### The need for a multidisciplinary approach

It is important to address food insecurity through a multidisciplinary approach, which includes attention to environment protection, the socio-economic and political environment, the performance of the food economy, care and nutrition practices, hygiene practices, and water and sanitation.

### The refocusing of the scope

Responsibilities spread out amongst a number of international organisms generate overlaps, conflicts and policy incoherence. A refocusing of the roles of the big players in the fight against hunger is essential.

### Communication

Outcomes of conferences devoted to food security should be made available to everyone and circulated widely. Communication is a vital tool, needed to empower the vulnerable. It is also essential to ensure a fair representation of all countries within the systems dealing with food insecurity.

### The dangers of a global market: industrial farming, unequal food distribution and financial speculation

Industrial farming systems, tied to the global markets, in addition to their high demand for water, rely on fuel sources which are not sustainable and which produce a large quantity of greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, industrial farming has disastrous consequences on

soil erosion, water-table and aquifer decline. Developed countries should also start to tackle resource wastage, the use of land for bio-fuel and feedstuffs for animal husbandry and the production of expensive foods (e.g. Eco or Bio). It may be necessary to explore the benefits of using alternative crops, although concern regarding the safety of GM crops was expressed.

Food distribution is a major component of the food insecurity problem. Therefore, the establishment of an institution for equitable distribution of food was identified as being a possible way forward. The latter could be an international organisation that provides a common pool in which production surpluses are stocked by the countries producing them and from which deficit countries borrow them. The suggestion that such a system could be placed at African Union level was raised.



#### Food insecurity as food entitlement failure

"The Bengal famine in 1943 happened even when there was no overall shortage of rice in Bengal. In fact there was higher production in 1941. There were no crop failures at the time. But what happened? Rumours of shortages gave rise to hoarding and generated rapid price inflation. It was further coupled by a shift in exchange entitlement. Thus some groups were unable to access the food as they were suddenly too poor to afford it. There was a food entitlement failure. This is the same scenario that we observe today especially in the developing countries but at different levels. The solution given for Bengal then is still applicable today. Food imports to reduce prices, improved transportation, and food relief will continue to be part of the solution to tackle food security. We need to enlarge the capacities of all those affected and give them a real choice when making investment in food production and distribution." (*Patrick Ngwiri Muiruri from Arrizzo Consultino, Kenya*)

In addition, some participants identified financial speculation as responsible for price increases and starvation, and called for a UN Resolution to prohibit it.

#### A local solution...

A possible solution to the hunger problem could be a cellular approach, by which the global problem is addressed by treating it in every locality with the different geographical cells functioning under a set of rules based on an agreement between them. One of the most important principles which should be taken into account is that of subsidiarity, according to which global interventions should not address issues that can be handled locally. Economic systems and social institutions should be formed and run locally; at best, there should be exchange of methods and practices. Many identified the need to improve local food production through adaptation based on local resources, and requiring everyone's input to achieve set goals. The focus should be placed on farmers and pastoralists, taking into account all the issues that affect costs of production, limited technology, lack of land and the meagre profits involved. Farmers and pastoralists need to be empowered and motivated through subsidies and government policies on landownership. This can be achieved through work with communities, follow-ups, monitoring and reporting of the challenges being faced.

#### ... through a State approach...

Many advocated for a strong need to work through regional and local public intervention.

The Canadian model illustrates the benefits of state intervention on agriculture, which allows prices to be set according to production costs, rather than being market-driven.



### The Canadian Model: A State Approach

"In Canada, agricultural production of milk, eggs, poultry meat and hatching eggs is strictly regulated by a production quota system that balances consumption and production, while farm prices are established based on production costs. driven. In principle, the mission of a country or government is to defend and promote the public good, rather than private interests. Food security needs political renewal to achieve a binding type of legal renewal capable of restoring the governments' capacity to set the rules of food trade. Consequently, international governance should not strive to replace governments, but rather to recuperate their power to exert their public responsibility." (*Frédéric Paré, Coordinator, Coalition for Food Sovereignty*)

### .... with international support

Nevertheless, factors that occur beyond the control of local and national institutions call for the intervention of global governance systems. The main issues that require action at the international level include food prices and trade, food safety and standard, stability of food supplies, conservation of natural resources, knowledge share, financing, coordination of activities and others.

### Food as a fundamental human right

The governance system should also ensure that governments adhere to certain obligations to harness some benefits in order to provide food to everyone. A number of participants suggested the idea of strengthened communities, in which the principle of caring for each other prevails. Access to food should be declared as a fundamental human right.



### Access to food as a fundamental human right

"In Mexico, the Constitution states that education should be "public, free and secular", with the government expressly obliged to provide it to the entire population, regardless of social status, religious or any kind of discrimination. This means that in Mexico we have full awareness that no matter what their family situation is, all children have the right to study and there should be public schools for them. No one dares to think that if a child has no parent to pay for his studies, he may stay without education. Then, why not give the same treatment to other human rights, specifically, food and health?" (*Moisés Gómez Porchini from Mexico*)

### Improved investments

Finally, services aimed at installing sustainable food security should guarantee investment continuity (through a flexible investment deadline) and improved monitoring.

### III. Global Governance for Food Security: Are the current arrangements fit for the job?

The Forum discussion has reflected the conflicts and diverging opinions that global governance for food security faces today.

On one hand, the reformed CFS has already addressed many of the issues raised by participants, such as calls for:

- information by the global governance structures
- stronger representation of civil society
- help and assistance to countries in the form of advice, advocacy and capacity building, specifically for the development and monitoring of nationally and regionally owned plans of actions
- the monitoring of progress and compliance with international goals and obligations
- promotion of accountability and sharing of best practices.

As a result, it is considered mostly fit for the job while still in need of more time to demonstrate its effectiveness.

On the other hand, the CFS cannot respond to requests that involve intrusion in areas of national sovereignty. Political will must be mobilized at national levels and, at the international level, a stronger sense of solidarity must emerge.

In conclusion, this discussion has only been the beginning of a very important debate, which needs to draw ideas and suggestions from the workings of the new and reformed initiatives. Hope is that this discussion has provided an input to those working within the global governance systems and that the ideas abovementioned will be taken into consideration.

## IV. References

**Disclaimer:** the following list is a compilation of references shared by the participants in their contributions. All positions and views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of FAO.

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