

Examining the linkages between trade and food security: What is your experience?

Discussion No. 111

There are many ways that trade agreements and rules may influence food security positively or negatively. The relationship is complex. Furthermore, agreements and rules governing trade are one force among many having an impact on food security. It is not surprising then that views about the effect of trade rules and agreements on food security vary depending on one's personal and professional experience and expertise, in addition to what is being measured and which affected stakeholders are being examined.¹ As the most recent State of Food Insecurity in the World report has stated, the need for coordination among “compartmentalized” interests “requires an enabling environment that allows and creates incentives for key sectors and stakeholders to sharpen their policy focus, harmonize actions and improve their impact on hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.”²

The dominant narrative put forward by advocates of trade liberalization is that food security is enhanced under an open trade model. Specifically, pro-liberalization advocates make the case that a more open trade regime promotes more efficient agricultural production, which results in an increase in food supply and in turn lower food prices. In other words, they argue that more open trade policies should make food both more available, and more affordable.³

Others argue that trade agreements and rules have facilitated the spread of high-input, high-yield agriculture and long-distance transport increasing the availability and affordability of refined carbohydrates (wheat, rice, sugar) and edible oils. Some parts of the global population have therefore been made more secure in terms of energy, but also more susceptible to the malnourishment associated with dietary simplification and to growing over-consumption and associated chronic diseases.⁴ In addition, it is argued that trade agreements and rules either leave out or undermine small-scale farmers. Of specific concern are small-scale farmers working in agro-biodiverse systems, because this group is particularly critical to food security both locally and globally.⁵

¹ See for example, Clapp, Jennifer (2014) [Trade Liberalization and Food Security: Examining the Linkages](#). Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva.

² FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2014. [The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014. Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition](#). Rome, FAO

³ See Pascal Lamy, 2013. “The Geneva Consensus: Making Trade Work for Us All.” Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁴ See for example, De Schutter, Olivier (2011) [Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter](#). A/HRC/19/59

⁵ (for more on the importance of these producers see, Bragdon, Susan (2013), [Small-scale farmers: The missing element in the WIOP-IGC Draft Articles on Genetic Resources](#) (p2&3) Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva and, Wise, Timothy (2014) [Malawi's paradox: Filled with both corn and hunger](#). Global Post.

Purpose:

The purpose of this online consultation is to share experience in order to unpack the linkages between trade rules, food security⁶ and the measures taken to support it.

Small-scale producers in agro-biodiverse systems are critical to the stability dimension of food security because of the resilience provided by a diversity of management practices and resources. This is especially important in an era of increasing and unpredictable global change. Dietary diversity is a critical health indicator flowing from a diversity of what is grown, again highlighting the importance of this type of producer. One question will therefore focus specifically on the relationship between trade agreements and rules and these producers.

Questions:

In order to learn from your experience I would like to invite you to reflect on the following questions:

1. From your knowledge and experience how have trade agreements and rules affected the four dimensions of food security (availability, access, utilization, stability)?
2. What is your knowledge and experience with creating coherence between food security measures and trade rules? Can rights-based approaches play a role?
3. How can a food security strategy, including components that explicitly support small-scale farmers in agro-biodiverse settings, be implemented in ways that might be compatible with a global market-based approach to food security?

We would like to thank you in advance for your participation in this online consultation. It will greatly help QUNO and FAO in further developing a knowledge base to support our shared goal of ensuring that global governance, and in particular trade agreements and rules, reinforces and does not undermine food security.

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⁶ The [1996 World Food Summit](#) defines food security as existing “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Four pillars of food security are associated with this definition: availability, access, stability and utilization.