



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Bureau of European Policy Advisers

Adviser

Brussels, 18 November 2012

Abstract: Panel on Food Security

The global food crisis of 2007/2008 brought the issue of food security to the top of the world policy agenda. It became clear just how serious the consequences a sudden price surge or an acute food shortage could be. One of the main factors that triggered the Arab Spring unrest was food insecurity. Food Security became a constant topic of the G20 meetings and many other international forums.

Global food security governance is a key question. Several processes are already underway: AMIS to improve up-to-date market information; CFS having a strengthened mandate and structure; L'Aquila Food Security Initiative of the G8 for coordinated finance and investments in production efficiency, and many others. One could ask, however, if the global governance structure is right, well-coordinated, efficient and effective?

During the first decade of this century, the world food security question seems to have shifted from a problem of distribution to one of overall scarcity. Also, the perception of food security has been evolving: from a simplistic view of supply/demand ratio over to a complex access assessment, and then to a wider concept of utilization, that includes aspects on how food may or may not be adequately made available, prepared and consumed. This leads also the dimension of nutritional concerns. This development has helped the international community to realize that food insecurity can be much more nuanced than a simply an insufficient intake of calories per capita.

When developing the futures' and derivatives' markets for trade of agricultural products the aim was noble: better predictability, improved stability, better certainty of availability of commodities for food processors. However, certain specific aspects of agricultural commodities were ignored or not taken into account. Actors who have only a financial interest and no interest in commodities themselves came into the play. This has led to some unwanted consequences, not least an excess instability in the markets.

Competing uses of agricultural land have added to the complexity of food production. Loss of agricultural land: erosion, salination, desertification, rising sea levels, change of agronomic conditions and other climate change related phenomena, urbanisation. Other uses of agricultural land: biofuels. This has led to greater attention being paid to land tenure, including land grabbing. A link to energy through biofuels has created a direct link and interdependence between food prices and energy prices. A price change in one is immediately observed in the prices of the other.

Governments have largely dismantled their structures of food and agricultural research and extension education. This is partly linked to tight economic situation but also mirrors the overall trend to reduce public involvement and leave room for market driven business activity. In many respects, private research has been able to replace former publicly financed research. There are, however, reasons which argue for a strong presence of public power in research policy, coordination and also funding of agricultural and food research.

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