

FSN FORUM DISCUSSION
**FOOD PRICE RISE AS A MOTIVE FOR ACTION AGAINST HUNGER AND
MALNUTRITION**
FROM 26ST MARCH TO 18TH APRIL 2008

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Duration:	26. 03 - 18. 04. 2008
Facilitator:	IAAH Secretariat
Number of participants:	15
Number of Contributions:	24

II. INTRODUCTION OF THE TOPIC

Dear Friends,

For many years world food production has kept ahead of demand, and, as a result, prices for most major food commodities have gradually fallen. Over the past few years, food supplies have become tighter, and global prices have risen very rapidly. As long as these rising prices are passed onto farmers, this will have a positive effect on their incomes and enable them to invest in expanding production and improving efficiency. Consumers in almost every country, however, are seeing their cost of living rise because they have to spend more on food. For very poor people, a dramatic rise in food prices becomes literally *a matter of life or death*. Unless urgent measures are taken, there seems bound to be an increase in the already huge number of families that are unable to grow or buy enough food to live a healthy life.

One positive impact of the rise in food prices is a revival in international interest in agriculture, food security and nutrition. During the coming months, the International Alliance Against Hunger (IAAH, <http://www.iaahp.net/>) will be speaking out on what needs to be done to turn the current crisis into an opportunity to get to grips with the problems of hunger and malnutrition that needlessly face hundreds of millions of people from the day they are born. We are revising the scope and content of the IAAH website and, throughout the rest of the year, intend to use it to share ideas and experiences on how individuals, communities and countries can use the food price rise as a motive for concerted action against chronic hunger and malnutrition.

Therefore, we would highly appreciate inputs from FSN Forum members on this important issue. Please share your thoughts, suggestions and experiences with us. The output of this discussion will be included in the April revision of the website <http://www.iaahp.net/>

Many thanks
Kind regards,

IAAH Secretariat

III. LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

Contribution by Abdullah Al Mamun, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for this new topic. This is very important for the situation of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh we are now facing the food crisis. The price of food increased about 60% within 4 months. The poor people are the most victims of food shortage. Our people are used to eat average 3 times per day. Now they are eating sometimes 2 times in a day. This is a very crucial issue. People are suffering from hunger. Especially, those people have lower income they can not buy supplementary food for their children. So, children and in poor household's women are more victims. Usually, in rural areas women eat least. If food shortage in the households, then men easily eat what they need but for women very big problem. Pregnant and lactating women need more food. But due to food crisis, they can not take food as much as their requirements. Anybody can share with me how we can solve our problem of high price of food.

Abdullah Al Mamun
Comilla, Bangladesh

Contribution by Professor George Kent, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, USA

The issue of food and agriculture prices certainly deserves closer attention. I have a question, not about the recent prices increases, but about discrimination in pricing across the globe.

There is a general illusion that producers everywhere get the same price for the same commodity, with minor differences attributable to quality differences, transport costs, and efficiencies of handling large volumes. However, I suspect that apart from those justifiable differences there is a SYSTEMATIC pattern under which poorer and politically weaker producers are paid less per unit than richer, more powerful producers. This is important because it would help to explain the persistent poverty among poor producers.

I am not talking about the fact that poorer countries tend to produce lower value products than richer countries. I am suggesting that when poor countries produce exactly the same thing as rich countries, they tend to get paid less for those products. For example, years ago, when Del Monte was paying American asparagus farmers 23 cents a pound for their crop, Mexican Del Monte contractors were getting 10 cents a pound. Prices paid for skipjack tuna landed at California canneries have been double or triple the prices paid at small Pacific island ports. The price differences are far greater than could be justified on the basis of transport costs.

One way to compare the value of farm products to farmers in different countries is to compare their value in exchange for similar products purchased locally. On this basis one study found that farmers in less developed countries "are paid less in real terms for the food they produce than are farmers in developed countries."

Referring to recent price rises, IAAH Secretariat has pointed out that, "As long as these rising prices are passed onto farmers, this will have a positive effect on their incomes and enable them to invest in expanding production and improving efficiency." The same point applies retrospectively. Clearly, if the prices received by poor producers have been low historically, this has limited their incomes and also their capacity to produce. If poor producers were to get the same prices as rich producers, maybe there would be little or no food shortage in the world.

There may well be discrimination in the recent price rises. I suspect that the increase in prices to rich producers has been far higher than those to poor producers.

It would be useful to gather data on these hypotheses. Given their potential importance in explaining sustained poverty and hunger, perhaps there should be a major project to explore them.

Aloha, George

Contribution by Robert Best, Director of the Caribbean Poultry Association, Trinidad and Tobago

I am the Director of the Caribbean Poultry Association and have been part of the Technical Working Group on Market Access and Agriculture in the Caribbean Community Regional Negotiating Machinery which leads the region in trade negotiations.

The issue I wish to raise is simply this: the nations which have high per capita incomes and can best afford food price increases, have strong GDPs and can keep in place farmer stabilization programs, and have the capability to grow their own food. In this case, the OECD has encouraged our trade officials that free trade is the main driver of economic prosperity.

The current WTO negotiations have strong and detailed provisions for reductions in tariffs and VERY weak and nebulous provisions for the PROTECTION (allow me to use the word which was once a dirty word) of the developing countries (and here I don't necessarily mean Brazil) agri food supply systems which are key to addressing EXACTLY the challenges of domestic food prices.

Should we not now target the way the WTO negotiations are being conducted (leadership and lack of details on at-risk food nations issues which are treated as marginal) as a key dimension of addressing the immediate and longer term food price issue?

Robert

Contribution by Alemu Asfaw, Food Security Analyst, FAO, Sudan

Dear all,

This is really a critical timely issue which is often ignored due to 'availability biased' (and 'food aid focussed') side of the food security equation. Even in a more sophisticated livelihood analysis models, there is no inbuilt tool which attempts to provide a forecasting element of prices though 'projections using adhoc market information' are their major methodology.

From the outset, it seems that current increase in prices are positively influencing farmers. However, in many developing countries, farmers are subsistence in nature and they are mostly net consumers and hence are negatively affected (if one looks at their annual food source, income and expenditure). They usually release their products at a time when prices are relatively lower and do the bulk of their annual purchase at a time when prices are very high. In addition, with a recent shift in urbanization (and/or globalization), the consumption patterns of many rural communities have changed implying that the increase in all consumable items will be affecting their consumptions significantly.

Currently there seems to be a general consensus that demand is outstripping supply and prices are showing their historical record highs and increasing hunger thereby malnutrition. Spending too much resource (time and money) on understanding the underlying causes of price increases may not pay off at this point in time. So, the top priority in our agenda should be to assess the magnitude of the problem and debate on ways of ameliorating some of the negative impacts that these soaring prices are having on the poor and their nutritional impacts.

While we are assessing the magnitude of the problem, we should ask ourselves - what kind of 'tested' advises can we provide to decision makers to reverse the current trend and/or minimize the impacts of current price hikes? In the short run (at this critical juncture), some of the advises may include:

- Support or encourage farmers or producers (mechanized large scale or small scale) to increase their production so as to hold the escalating price trends for the next season/ or year
- Support small processing industries

-Avoid or minimize some of the imposed taxes on imported food items and also minimize local tariffs on local production

-Support the transport and warehouse facility sector

-Release some of the grain to the market from the government reserves

-Subsidize selected food items rather than providing food aid (programs or non-programmed ones)

-Increase transparency of information provision - For instance, we've started producing Monthly Market Update in Sudan, in which we inform decision makers on regular basis.

In the information provision arena, what is required is not any sophisticated info, but availing all available information and package it in such a way that it is useful. While building a proper market information system, one can clean and qualify and circulate the available information. Other than price, this information may also include on market flows, transportations, warehouses, seasonality, etc.

We should also debate on the pros and cons of the above recommended advices without going to a high level micro/macro economic policies. It would also be extremely interesting if participants of this FSN group could share some of their experiences in evaluating tools used (both in times of depressed prices and galloping prices). It should also be realized that the method or policy advice should depend on the country context. In a more developed and integrated market, where resource commitments are clear, the policy options may be unambiguous. However, in a developing economy where markets are very thin and disintegrated, where the negative impacts are magnified and resource commitments are very low, prioritizing of options or selecting a tool or combination of tools with greatest impact is critical.

My best regards to all,

Alemu Asfaw

Contribution by Cheikh Ahmadou, LO Engineer in chemical Engineering, Senegal

Dear Abdullah, Georges, Robert, Alemu

Please find a fact sheet, you can also find some useful information regarding actions to overcome food prices increase effects in west Africa.

Senegalese government is also implementing a Rice program to reduce rice importation (senegal produce around 100000 tons and import 800000 tons for national consumption), the project aims to develop rice production in Senegal river basin, by giving some facilities as seeds, machineries, and develop Public Private Partnership, for larger production.

Rising food prices, rooted in increased energy prices, competition between biofuels and food, rising demand from economic growth in countries such as China and India, and increasing climatic shocks such as droughts and floods are affecting millions of people - hitting hardest those living on the razor thin line of poverty.

As never before, policymakers are being confronted by increasingly complex challenges occurring simultaneously - globalization, climate change, and rising energy and fuel prices - all in addition to increasing poverty and hunger in the developing world.

Due to increased prices of food and fuel, WFP now estimates it needs at least half a billion dollars more than it had anticipated to meet approved projects in 2008 (US\$375 million for food plus US\$125 million for transport).

This is in addition to the \$2.9 billion WFP estimated last year it needed to meet those same needs in 2008. The cost increase of half a billion dollars does not include new needs arising as a result

of soaring food prices (or for that matter, natural disasters etc). WFP's operational budget for 2008 now stands at US\$3.4 billion. Commodity costs alone have gone up by 40 percent since mid 2007 when WFP originally prepared its cost estimates. This year, WFP has approved projects to feed 73 million people in 78 countries.

- WFP is actively working to avoid the need to cut rations or to reduce the number of people to be fed. We are doing everything possible to mobilize world attention and support - through governments, the private sector and individuals - to stave off such drastic measures.

- WFP has held meetings with experts from a number of think tanks, academic and operational organizations and NGOs including the Food and Agriculture Organization, the USAID Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET), the Overseas Development Institute and the International Food Policy Research Institute to gain a better understanding of the situation.

- Higher food prices are already causing social unrest in a number of countries, with food riots reported on recent weeks in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Senegal and Morocco.

- Food reserves are at their lowest for 30 years and commodity markets extremely volatile, subject to sudden spikes and speculation. The situation has been exacerbated by the falling value of the dollar, which is the currency in which all major commodities are traded.

The way forward

- WFP is working with traditional donor governments, the private sector, foundations and academic institutions, as well as governments in beneficiary countries. This is both to meet the new funding needs and to help provide safety nets for the poorest and most vulnerable.

- The high price phenomenon is already taking its toll - poor families are eating less food and specifically less nutritious food. The resulting undernutrition will affect young children in particular - effects that will be felt for years in the form of longer-term poverty and lower economic growth (new IFPRI research shows that kids given proper nutrition up to the age of two earned 50% more wages thirty years later). Thus an urgent expansion of safety nets is necessary.
- While high prices on national and international markets are an opportunity to refocus on agriculture and rural development in poor countries, with a particular emphasis on small farmers, continued and persistent investments will be required. In the shorter term, efforts to protect the livelihoods of those suffering the effects from price hikes are a top priority.

Major drivers of high food prices:

- 1) rise in oil and energy prices which affect the entire value chain of food production, from fertilizer to harvesting to storage and delivering;

- 2) economic boom in nations such as India and China, creating increased demand for cereals (ie change in diet to include higher valued foods like meat);

- 3) weather-related events meaning bad harvests eg multiple Australia droughts;

- 4) competition between food and fuel -- shift to biofuels production leading to market speculation, eg food prices such as palm oil set at fuel prices.

Additional points

- For WFP, the impact of higher food and fuel prices will not just be felt in operational costs, but is likely also increase the incidence and depth of food insecurity.

- Poor households are likely to allocate greater expenditure to food to the detriment of non-food expenditure. Thus the effects of price rises may first be seen in lower school attendance or asset depletion, rather than in decreased food consumption

- Among the poorest households, we are already seeing a direct impact on food security,

because they already buy more food than they sell, spend a larger proportion of income on food and have fewer coping mechanisms to fall back on.

- These groups include the rural landless, pastoralists and the majority of small-scale farmers. But the impact is greatest on the urban poor.

Useful Stats

- Of the 5.1 billion people who live in the developing world, 1.2 billion still confront the ravages of poverty every day.

- Approximately 1 billion people still live on less than US\$ 1 dollar a day, the threshold defined by the international community as absolute poverty, below which survival is in question.

- 162 million of those are the 'ultra poor', living on less than dollar a day, and trapped in a vicious cycle of hunger and poverty.

- 854 million people in the world are food insecure while 170 million children are undernourished.

- The world's urban population has grown more than the rural population; within the next three decades, 61 percent of the world's populace is expected to live in urban areas.

- While poverty has traditionally been concentrated in rural areas, the urban share of the poor increased from 19 percent in 1993 to 25 percent in 2002. Still, 75 percent of the poor in developing countries continue to live in rural areas.

- With increased risk of droughts and floods due to rising temperatures, crop-yield losses are expected eg in more than 40 developing countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa where some experts expect cereal yields to decline with average losses of about 15 percent by 2080.

- By 2025, there will be 1.6 billion more people on the planet, putting even more stress on limited resources.

The impact on WFP operations in West Africa :

- In West Africa, WFP's food and operations costs are now 30 percent higher than at the same time last year because of increases in basic food commodities. An additional \$183 million are therefore needed for the region.

- High prices of basic commodities are also having an impact on people's purchase power, especially in countries depending on imports to feed themselves (Mauritania imports 70% of its food needs). In certain part of the region, survival strategies are already at play such as reduced number of meals per day and sales of productive assets.

- WFP and its partners, together with governments, have sent several teams to different countries to determine exactly the impact of high food prices on vulnerable households, to identify people, their locations and tailor the appropriate response to their needs.

- If the prices continue to rise, the 2008 lean season could start early for many households.

- Governments in the region have already taken measures to prevent a sustained increase in food prices, such as reconstituting cereal stocks in at-risk zones before the rainy season begins, providing price subsidies, and increasing the purchasing power of vulnerable populations by supporting off-season cash-crop agricultural production.

- If WFP does not receive additional funding, it will become extremely difficult to help people as the situation deteriorates. Not only WFP has already a funding shortfall but the higher cost of fuel for transport will also weigh a lot on our budget as many countries depending on imports are landlocked; an additional challenge to the upcoming rainy season.

Mauritania

- Food insecure households have increased by 15 percent compared to last study conducted in July 2007 by WFP jointly with the National Food Security Observatory (NFSO) and the National Office of Statistics. WFP, and the NFSO, are currently assessing food needs of the most vulnerable linked to the impact of increased prices through a joint WFP/Government/National Office of Statistics Survey (results to be known mid march).

- The government has taken some measures to curb this worrying trend. There are already no taxes on cereal imports since 2007. In addition, the Government has allocated USD 3.2 million budget, equivalent to 4,500 MT, to the replenishment of the National Food Strategic Reserve (NFSR) and is also reinforcing 1,200 Community-based Food Security Stocks put in place by WFP since 2005.

- In Mauritania over the next 5 months, WFP Mauritania faces a deficit of 6,400 tons, or US\$6 million, to cover life-saving activities and preposition food by July to carry out essential activities during the rainy season (nutrition, free distribution and returnee programmes) when most vulnerable areas are no longer accessible. If these funds are not made available and the prices continue to increase the ability of WFP to help the government to support severely food insecure households will be seriously hampered.

Burkina Faso

- The purchasing power of the vast majority of the population is very low. With the food price increases and the decline of the cotton market, households will start again to grow food crops rather than cash crops. However, even if household cereal production can be maintained to cover consumption needs, under-nutrition is very likely to further increase due to people's inability to access micronutrient-rich food.

- The Government has already implemented a mechanism of subsidized sales, which is activated every year where and when market supplies are reduced and/or prices too high. At present the Government has also some 30,000 tons of cereals as food security stock.

- If additional resources were available to WFP, supplementary feeding and school feeding would be the most appropriate response to complement subsidized sales. WFP activities would be targeted to those population groups that are losing the most out of the price increase.

- WFP in Burkina Faso in 2008 will assist 600,000 beneficiaries (through school feeding and MCH) if resources are available.

Sierra Leone

- In December 2007, the price of rice increased by almost 40 percent compared to December 2006. In the same period the price of palm oil increased by about 50 percent, and that of bread (wheat flour) by 25 percent. In January 2008, the Bread Manufacturers Association called its members out on strike against the rising price of wheat flour, which is manufactured locally with imported wheat.

- Any further price increases in food commodities would badly impact the majority of the population, who live below the national poverty line. Among these are some 120,000 smallholder farm households who produced less than 50 percent of their rice consumption requirement for the year and an estimated 20,000 low income urban households.

- Domestic cereal harvests meet about 67 percent of consumption needs (some 530,000 tons). The annual consumption gap, to be filled through commercial imports and food aid, is estimated at 175,000 tons. WFP supplies approximately 15,000 Mt of food annually.

Cheikh Ahmadou LO

Contribution by Andrew MacMillan, ex-Director of the Field Operation Division, FAO Italy

Abdullah Al Mamum has stressed the need to come up rapidly with solutions to prevent a further deterioration in the already difficult nutritional situation being faced by many Bangladeshi families in the face of soaring prices. Alemu Asfaw has listed some practical options for easing the impact of rising food prices on the poor in Sudan, but warned against the use of food aid programmes as a means of resolving the problem. Instead he argues for release of government-held grain stocks onto the market and possibly selective subsidization of selected foods. Robert Best dares to use the “dirty word” protection, and George Kent suggests that prices paid to producers differ considerably depending on their bargaining power and where they trade.

It is too early to draw conclusions from these initial contributions, but it seems that we have to look for solutions which combine immediate protection of the poor (whether rural or urban) from the disastrous impact of food price rises with the maintenance of food prices levels that encourage farmers to expand their production to meet growing demand, making sure through good market information that producers of all sizes can benefit from upward price movements.

Hopefully participants can tell us something of their experience with welfare programmes, targeted on poor households, that provide them with a predictable cash transfer that enables them to buy the food they need for healthy survival – effectively giving them the means of translating their need into demand. The best known examples of such programmes are from Brazil (the Bolsa Familia component of the Zero Hunger Programme) and Zambia (Kalomo District). Is there a tendency to look too much for agricultural solutions to problems of household food insecurity and to ignore the need for “reverse taxation”?

Andrew

Contribution by Eltighani Elamin, Agricultural Economics & Policy Research Center, Sudan

This is an excellent topic that needs to be reoriented to benefit small farmers and pull them out of poverty. However, the true explanation of the upward trends in food prices is not because of the fact that grain production is declining but, apart from trade policy, largely due to the conversion of food grain into bio-energy, at least in the last 5 years. Actually, food grain has been increasing steadily for decades mainly due to new technologies and currently is almost 5 times as much as food consumption, globally. Consequently, it is good for the surpluses to be converted into energy with ultimate double benefit of healthy environment and higher farm incomes as antidotes for increasing global poverty.

Truly
Eltighani Elamin (PhD)

Contribution by Ranjith Premalal De Silva, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka

The rise of Food prices is a very pertinent issue for most of the developing countries in Asia (perhaps this is true for developing countries in the other parts of the world) although the main factors attributable may be different. In Sri Lanka, the media highlights the R & D in use of food crops for biofuel while the real factor behind is apparently the actions of middle men who purchase the entire harvest and release the stocks gradually to maintain exorbitant prices. This is particularly true for rice and the 95% of the market share is with a few individuals who operate as a team. They have the power to control the policies related to import of rice and the price of rice increased 90 - 100% during the last six months. This would definitely change the status of food insecurity and vulnerability in the country.

When the entire situation is reviewed, the strength of the middle men and their strategies become obvious. Some time back, there was a propaganda against the consumption of bread and other products of wheat flour through national media. The political leadership also supported these actions quoting the obvious health related consequences of wheat flour consumption against rice based products and the prices of wheat flour increased substantially to promote rice based products. Some of the leading medical professionals also joined this campaign. The consumption

of wheat flour based products dropped significantly due to this awareness campaigns and increased prices which could not be borne by the poor. Urban poor were the worst affected. Then the demand for rice increased and then the manipulation of the rice market in the country became obvious.

I believe that it is necessary to discuss these issues and come up with some solutions to cut down the alarmingly high rates of increasing food insecure and vulnerable populations.

Ranjith Premalal De Silva

Contribution by Charles Lagu, National Agricultural Research Organization, Uganda

The food price rise as a motivation for concerted action against chronic hunger and malnutrition would be a great thing for primary producers (i.e. farmers). In developing countries like Uganda the food price rise in majority of the cases tends to benefit the middlemen who are secondary in the food chain. The middlemen who most times are few and rich exorbitantly deprive the farmers from benefiting from the rise in food prices. They buy at farm gate prices and pay the farmers very low prices. They are the ones who have positioned themselves to buy, transport and market the food products from the farmers to consumers. They have transport, money and means to reach the marketing centers coupled with high bargaining power and influence.

In Uganda for example you can see the disparities in some selected food prices at farmer's level and at middlemen's level.

Most products are sold in informal markets at farm gate prices this has been exacerbated with poor marketing systems and infrastructure. The price rise is ultimately a good thing but it has been hijacked by middlemen who are rich and tend to undermine the motivation of the primary producers i.e. the farmers. This de-motivates the farmers who are the majority and whose capital continues to shrink at the expense of these hijackers (middlemen).

Unless the market structures are corrected and, as Professor George Kent puts it, unless discrimination in pricing across the globe is corrected then the dramatic rise in food prices will continue wreck havoc among the poor population of the world most of whom are in developing countries.

Charles Lagu

(For further information, please refer to this
Tabular representation of food prices at farmers level and Middlemen's level) at:
http://www.web2fordev.net/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/CharlesLaguTable.doc

Contribution by Rainer Krell, Environment Officer Bioenergy, FAO Italy

I would like to pass the comments from a colleague here in FAO as regards the price differentials and actions taken by governments and the difficulty and perhaps additional measures needed in better balancing both low consumer prices for the neediest and higher prices for the farmers. I had placed the question in the context of price increases and recent bioenergy developments, which are the subject of on-going in-house discussions. Therefore some reference to bioenergy in the text, but the basic information and argument, I think, holds true with or without additional pressures from bioenergy demands.

In addition to those policy related price difference and solutions there may be additional differentials created by local supply and demand balances whether manipulated or not by large or extremely large buyers or local "power imbalances" due to uneven distribution of market access and information. Certainly addressing both issues in an integrated matter should bring more balanced and evenly distributed benefits to poor consumers and small, poor or market-distant farmers.

Here the comments from a colleague (J. Schmidhuber, Senior Economist, FAO, Rome):

Let me try to address your question.

1. Policies have always created a price wedge between international and domestic prices, both for consumers and producers. Hitherto, the price gap was generated by tariffs and other border measures and these border measures tended to keep domestic prices above international ones ('positive' price gap). In OECD countries, we have a rather precise gauge for the extent of this price gap: it is essentially the market price support element of the PSEs. For many developing countries, we have nominal rates of protection which capture the same gap. What ever measure available, it is important to note that these measures are aimed at protecting domestic producers.

2. As world market prices have risen sharply and swiftly, the traditional 'positive' price gap has shrunk and eventually vanished completely. As it vanished, traditional border measures became irrelevant and the need for market stabilization shifted from shielding producers from excessively low world prices to warding off excessively high world prices to protect domestic consumers.

3. As many developing countries were facing the same problem, they indeed started to reverse the traditional stabilization measures (tariffs, levies, quotas, etc.) and moved to export taxes, export restrictions or outright export bans. Some importers even started to subsidize imports. As more and more countries resorted to export restrictions and import subsidies, the upward pressure on world prices escalated. Export restriction reduced quantities available for purchases on the international market, import subsidies "artificially" increased demand.

4. With the exception of the US, Canada and the EU, essentially all exporters have now some forms of export restrictions in place. In the case of the EU and Canada, it could be argued that the massive appreciation of their respective exchange rates is akin to a de facto export tax.

5. For domestic markets, export restrictions and import subsidies meant that not only consumer prices but also farm prices remained lower than in the absence of these measures. I understand that's one of the concerns raised in your message.

6. All in all, export restrictions and import subsidies are important factors that have contributed to and accelerated the price increases on international markets and have introduced a negative price wedge in many countries – to the benefit of domestic consumers and the detriment of domestic producers. These measures also mean that those countries who cannot afford to subsidize imports or have too little domestic supplies to restrict exports (more precisely their consumers and their food security concerns) are hardest hit. Many LDCs/LIFDCs fall into that rubric.

7. Demand for bioenergy feedstock surely has exacerbated the current price hikes. But the policy measures described above are probably not directly linked to bioenergy demand.

8. More generally and importantly for the policy discussions and the discussions in the current WTO round would be to reconsider the question as to what binding disciplines are available to limit or completely avert such a situation spiralling prices in the future.

9. The only available discipline – at least to my knowledge - is stipulated in Article 12 of the AoA. The problem with Article 12 is that it is not binding. It reads:

Article 12

Disciplines on Export Prohibitions and Restrictions

1. Where any Member institutes any new export prohibition or restriction on foodstuffs

in accordance with paragraph 2(a) of Article XI of GATT 1994, the Member shall observe the following provisions:

(a) the Member instituting the export prohibition or restriction shall give due consideration to the effects of such prohibition or restriction on importing

Members' food security;

(b) before any Member institutes an export prohibition or restriction, it shall give notice in writing, as far in advance as practicable, to the Committee on Agriculture comprising such information as the nature and the duration of such measure, and shall consult, upon request, with any other Member having a substantial interest as an importer with respect to any matter related to the measure in question. The Member instituting such export prohibition or restriction shall provide, upon request, such a Member with necessary information.

2. The provisions of this Article shall not apply to any developing country Member, unless the measure is taken by a developing country Member which is a net-food exporter

10. In essence, this means that there is no binding constraint on export restrictions. That's an issue - at least in my humble opinion - that should be pursued more vigorously in the ongoing DDA negotiations.

11. Finally, and recognising the need for poor developing countries to address their imminent food security problems as well as their needs to stabilize domestic markets, we may need to embark on a policy choice debate or at least start weighing pros and cons of various policy alternatives. Export taxes for instance are a very unspecific approach to market stabilization; they keep prices low for rich and poor consumers alike. Ditto for import subsidies. They are easy to implement and that's why many countries have chosen to implement them. But where domestic food support schemes (food stamps, etc) are already in place, it would be better to beef up these (specific) schemes and keep prices low only for the most needy. This would also allow to keep prices high for farmers and afford them with an extra incentive to step up production for the next season.

Rainer Krell

Contribution by Alemu Asfaw, Food Security Analyst, FAO, Sudan

In responding to Andrew MacMillan's comment, yes the Ethiopian Productive Safety Net Program of providing predictable cash or food (or a mix) for more than 5 million chronically food insecure is being exercised since 2005. This obviously resulted in increasing the income of the poor and hopefully believed to have a positive impact on effective demand of the food insecure. However, this injection of money, among other things, were blamed to be one of the reasons for further escalation of prices both at a localized level and nationally in the years 2006/07. Even in some cases, the Government and donors were forced to revise the amount of money allotted for the poor due to further increase in prices. With the same reasoning, many poor households had also preferred food to cash at that point in time.

Options of non-agriculture looks be very difficult to use as quick solutions since that warrants a more structural shift in the LDCs Governments' thinking. Governments while using their strong arm in maneuvering the instruments at hand for a relatively rapid solution; can simultaneously start a more medium to long term solutions.

I want to end this quick note by posing another medium to long term solution – are there institutions which attempted to implement ideas of 'small town development' as part of the overall government rural development package?

Cheers

Alemu Asfaw

Contribution by El fadil Ahmed Ismail, Agricultural Research Corporation, Sudan

Dear all,

I think we all agree that, there is no one single causes for the recent surge in food prices, rather, multitude of reasons appear in the scenery among them stand the War against TERROR. For a while, it is really difficult to link between current food soaring prices and war against terror but when you see more than 4.8 trillions -until now- go directly or indirectly to war by US army in just two places (I guess the figure is correct) we can realize how poor policy is made around the globe in terms of allocation of resources.

Second reason for this dramatic rise in prices is associated with the substantial increase in the price of oil. For instance, the increase of oil prices in early 74's has lead to dramatic increases in food prices through affecting both transportation of food and also the prices of fertilizers and other inputs needed for crop production. Now, OIL price has reached more than three digits and this can obviously have an adverse impact on the poor non-oil producing counties, their farmers as well as their poor urban citizens in need of food. In fact, higher prices have caused turmoil in a number of countries important to U.S. security interests, for instance—Egypt-.

Thirdly, many experts believe that the race among western countries to produce ETHANOL from grain-based crops is responsible, and largely, as complementary or substitute goods, for the rise in prices of food. In such a situation, it could be strategically expected that food prices are to continue rising at these abnormal rates as long as OIL and TERROR wars are continuing for at least the next few years. Consequently, farmers in poor countries shall not gain the fruits of the increase in prices and all the UN slogans and the MDGs goals shall evaporate, be abolished or at least frozen till the reverse become true.

Options for international community are to turn the tune of struggle from war against TERROR to war against POVERTY for the former is just a seed of the latter. If this is achieved, then and only then, it can be expected that global food prices can tumble dramatically if resources to war go for development of poor countries.

A fourth reason for this price rise can be attributed to CLIMATIC CHANGE. I do not really rely much on the climatic change that caused GLOBAL WARMING as a major partner in this PRICE rise dilemma (though some blame, accuse or even anticipate it to cause further boost in prices) for direct evidence is not yet obtainable.

In conclusion, I find my self agree with Prof. Kent in the existence of discrimination in pricing across the globe. Moreover, I also do agree with him that there is a SYSTEMATIC pattern under which poorer and politically weaker producers are paid less per unit than richer, more powerful producers. Linking this to former talks of Prof. Kent about poverty and hunger and their role as endeavours to work and development, I wish he could revise his arguments about 'who is to be on top' and 'who is to be on bottom' of social ladder and let us all call for EQUITY and JUSTICE and forget about the awkward SELFISHNESS that made all these crisis. This is important because it would help to SOLVE the persistent POVERTY among poor producers, of course at affordable food price.

Dr. El fadil Ahmed Ismail

Contribution by Abdullah Al Mamun, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development

In Bangladesh Government is now providing price subsidy for the poor households members. The price of rice is about Taka 40 per kg which is very high for the poor. Government opened the OMS (Open market sale) for the poor households for Taka 25 per kg but only for 3 kg per person. One person has to wait for whole day to get 3 kg rice by $25 \times 3 = 75$ taka. So, one person can save only $120 - 75 = 45$ taka. But if this person work for 7-8 hours per day he can earn at least taka 100. So, my question is what is the benefit for this person due to price subsidy. This welfare approach makes the people dependent and I think this policy is the beggars' policy. There should be long term policy for overcoming this problem.

Abdullah Al Mamun

Contribution by George Kent, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, USA

Deeply embedded in all these excellent analyses relating to food prices, we find Cheikh Ahmadou LO's brief comment, "an urgent expansion of safety nets is necessary". Maybe we need to get beyond the detailed explanations of price dynamics, and give more attention to what could be done about the desperate situation of so many poor farmers and poor consumers.

We have a global food system, but remedies for people at the bottom, such as safety nets of various forms, generally depend on the resources of local and national governments--those least capable of providing adequate remedies. These are global problems, not merely local problems. The global community (which gains such great advantages from the present global food system) should be pressed to recognize its responsibilities. This is the argument of a recent book that I edited, *Global Obligations for the Right to Food*. A descriptive flyer is available at <http://www2.hawaii.edu/%7Ekent/GORFlyer.doc>

Aloha, George

Contribution by Lalita Bhattacharjee, Nutrition Consultant, FAO, Bangladesh

The National Food Policy Capacity Strengthening Programme (NFPCSP) being implemented by Food and Agriculture Organization in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and with financial support from the EC and USAID is presently conducting a 2 week training course (23 March to 4 April) on "Income, Price and Nutrition" for the officials of the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, GoB and officials of relevant partner ministries. This is being conducted as part of NFPCSP's on-going training and capacity building activities.

The course is being delivered by the School of Agribusiness Management, Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, Hyderabad, India. It is aimed to provide an understanding of the links between income, price and nutrition in the context of development. It provides an introduction to basic micro and macro economic concepts important to food policy, an emphasis on the understanding of economic and food policies, and how and why they affect food consumption and nutrition. Senior policy makers and experts in India from both central and state levels are deliberating with the GoB officials on a wide range of topics: Nutrition, Income and Prices, Contemporary Issues and Case Assignments. It is intended that concepts and issues will sensitize the trainees to appreciate the context and eventually develop tools that will be used to analyze the effects income and prices which are impacting food security and nutrition of the people, particularly the poor.

This course is timely in the wake of the soaring food prices all over, particularly affecting developing countries.

Our comments on the current FSN discussion topic of food price rise as a motive for action against hunger and malnutrition will follow soon

Kind regards,

Lalita Bhattacharjee

Contribution by Fatima Ali, Agriculture Economic Research Policy Center, Sudan

I think we all agree, there are several reason to rise food prices, for instance in Sudan the government policy, rise in prices is associated with the substantial increase in the price of oil, increase salary for employee, influction of season. For instance, the increase of oil prices, lead to rise the transport, and increase the food prices, also the government policy to raise food through increase salary, for influction of season effect indirect for food, so the farmer decrease the amount of seed planted so they are disappointed. I think the solution. if the government purchase the production from farmer and incentive them.

Fatima Ali

Contribution by Cheikh Ahmadou, LO Engineer in chemical Engineering

Dear George,

Thank you for the link!

I just want to get your attention about food prices increase and social and political stability of sub Saharan states. In these last weeks we assist at strikes in countries like Ivory Coast, Cameroun and Senegal.

This is some signs that this situation can be more difficult in those countries if food prices continue to increase, and actions have to be taken now to preserve Political stability in those countries.

But who can be guilty in the right to food approach, because when we read the guidelines of the right to food act most of the time governments are responsible for assuring the access to adequate food, and never the international community and stakeholders impacting on prices increase.

Countries producing oil have received super profits from oil prices increase which affects directly the food prices, I think one part of those profits shall be use to regulate the food market, by just putting a duty on oil benefits to be use on food market regulation.

The biofuels shall be only produce with non food crops like jatropha curcas and other crops like this.

At the same time, developing countries, the governments shall improve their national agriculture production by helping farmers to leave rain fed agriculture by developing irrigation.

Per example in the Sahel region we have 4 rivers but the agriculture is also dependent of rainy season, this is the major problem to achieve food security in this region.

Cheikh Ahmadou

Contribution by Professor George Kent, Department of Political Science, University of Hawaii, USA

Cheikh Ahmadou LO referred to recent food price increases and the turmoil this is causing in countries such as Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and Senegal. He asks, "who can be guilty in the right to food approach, because when we read the guidelines of the right to food act most of the time governments are responsible for assuring the access to adequate food, and never the international community and stakeholders impacting on prices increase."

Certainly, the international community has not acknowledged its responsibilities in this situation. However, I would not focus on the question of who is guilty. Instead I would focus on the question of what can be done what about the situation. And who has the motivation to act? The powerful are not going to do much because for them the price rises are little more than an inconvenience, and for some of them the price rises produce great benefits. The countries of Africa cannot do much to affect the decisions made in the US and Europe. But they can do more to control what goes on in their own countries.

Many poor countries are being hurt by these global price rises because they allowed themselves to be exposed to global prices through their imports. How is it that they are not benefiting from these price increases by getting more money for their exports? This relates to the point I made earlier. While the powerful like to promote the illusion of more or less uniform prices across the market place, the reality is that price structures are systematically patterned **to hurt the poor**. In

the global marketplace, the poor are in effect employees of the rich, and they have little power to demand higher wages.

The powerful promote the idea that globalization of the marketplace benefits all, but the reality is that it favours those that have the longest reach in the marketplace, the powerful themselves. The benefits of free markets are skewed in favour of those that are more powerful. The benefits of strategies of self sufficiency are skewed in favour of the poor. They need to protect themselves from predatory practices of the powerful.

I have an essay on this available at
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/globaFeb99.html>

It was published in "Globalization and Food Security in Africa," in Adelani Ogunrinade, Ruth Oniang'o, and Julian May, eds., *Not by Bread Alone: Food Security and Governance in Africa* (South Africa: Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research/ Witwatersrand University Press, 1999), pp. 17-34. This book was based on a conference on globalization and food security in Africa that I organized, held in Johannesburg.

I have another similar article at
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/AFRICAS%20FOOD%20SECURITY%20UNDER%20GLOBALIZATION.pdf>

Aloha, George

Contribution by Walter M. Mwasaa, Project Manager, CARE International, Somalia

Dear FSN community. I, albeit with scepticism would like to front a debate on food and nutrition insecurity in Somalia. How can I and others address this ever spiralling situation in the midst of war, droughts and failed or totally absent policies?

Can anyone share ideas or experiences from other countries or even Somalia itself? It is obviously frustrating!!

Defending Dignity. Fighting Poverty.

Walter M. Mwasaa

Contribution by Andrew MacMilan, ex-Director of FAO's Field Operations Division, FAO Italy

I am glad that ESA [FAO's Agricultural Development Economics Division] is turning its attention to the issue of high food prices.

We are faced with a situation in which it is self-evident that the rapid rise in food prices that has affected so many countries over the last year or so is bound to push up the number of chronically hungry and malnourished people in the world and, therefore, the scale of the related disease burden and the number of people needlessly dying early. If you earn less than \$1 per day and spend 70% of your income on food for your family, an increase in food prices of 50% will force you to reduce your food consumption to below levels that are already deficient. This is self-evident and demands no further research or investigation but simply the design and urgent application of remedial actions.

In a draft article the other day, I raised the spectre of what I termed a "new style famine" of people dying early in very large numbers around the world - but in an almost invisible manner - because of their worsening ability to acquire the food that they need to live a healthy life. As has been documented by Sen, local famines have usually occurred in spite of the adequate availability of food, but poor people have been unable to acquire their needs as prices have risen and hoarding occurred. The same is now happening at a global level, and the consequences will be of a similar but largely hidden, thinly spread, nature. Whoever reviewed that draft article in FAO did not like this conclusion and its publication by the International Alliance Against Hunger (!AAH) secretariat was blocked. Maybe it was too blunt.

FAO has correctly proposed a “twin-track” approach to reducing chronic hunger. But both FAO and IFAD tend to see the main response to chronic food insecurity as lying in the improvement of the performance of small-scale farming (the first “track”). This can indeed help reduce household food insecurity in certain circumstances (especially when improved performance is achieved by farm families that are able to meet more of their subsistence needs) but it will take time and will almost certainly not benefit many – usually the majority - of the very poor who, if rural, have no land or live in urban areas. WFP supports the second “track” – that of broadening access of the poor to food - but tends to see the answer in terms of extra food aid, because that is what they are set up to deliver.

If the current global rise in food prices is not to have a catastrophic impact on poor families in the coming months, immediate action must be taken by governments of all developing countries (and quite a few developed ones) to provide all susceptible families with the means to acquire the food they need for survival. This means putting in place, at the very least, targeted cash transfer or food stamp programmes, possibly supplemented by school feeding programmes, ideally based on local purchases. The impact of such programmes will be heightened if they are linked to nutrition education.

Many governments will say that they cannot afford to do this. The truth, however, is that they cannot not afford to because they will otherwise have to face the political consequences of overseeing through their neglect the needless death of many of their citizens. As already seems to be the case in many countries, they will be faced with food riots. In many situations, a predictable monthly cash transfer per family equivalent to the cost of 100kg of the staple grain (\$10-20) will be sufficient to make the difference between life and death. Though some may consider this a politically incorrect comparison, the marginal cost of keeping a family alive would, in many countries, be less on an annual basis than supplying anti-retroviral drugs for someone suffering from AIDS for the same period.

I would propose that ESA, rather than embark on studies or more fact-finding, invite IFAD, WFP, the international financing agencies, leading bilateral sources of assistance and international NGOs to an immediate meeting next week to agree on how they can assist developing countries to set up the required mechanisms, drawing on the experience of countries which have already successfully established effective “safety nets”.

Andrew

Contribution by Alemu Asfaw, Food Security Analyst, FAO Sudan and Daniel Molla, WFP

IFPRI Policy Brief, April 2008, by Joachim von Braun: Rising Food Prices - What Should Be Done?

The sharp increase in food prices over the past couple of years has raised serious concerns about the food and nutrition situation of poor people in developing countries, about inflation, and—in some countries—about civil unrest. Real prices are still below their mid-1970s peak, but they have reached their highest point since that time. Both developing- and developed-country governments have roles to play in bringing prices under control and in helping poor people cope with higher food bills...

Please click on the link to read this Policy Brief:

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=395&nocache=1

Alemu Asfaw and Daniel Molla

Contribution by FSN-Forum Moderator

IRIN Report: "Let them eat subsidies?"

Food prices have the potential to change regimes and the course of history. When Marie Antoinette allegedly said, "Let them eat cake" in 1789, she was wondering why higher bread prices were causing so much trouble in Paris. Food security analysts, NGOs, think-tanks and the

World Bank all say pushing the urban poor beyond their purchasing limits can and will cause unrest, and net food-importing countries are most at risk. Leaders may not be facing the guillotine in 2008, but some are already feeling the sharp edge of popular uprising...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4449&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

FAO Newsroom: Poorest countries' cereal bill continues to soar, governments try to limit impact

Forecast growth in 2008 cereal production could ease tight global supply. The cereal import bill of the world's poorest countries is forecast to rise by 56 percent in 2007/2008. This comes after a significant increase of 37 percent in 2006/2007, FAO said today...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4459&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

FAO Newsroom: Urgent measures required to reduce impact of high food prices on the poor

UN agency chiefs highlight role of agro-industries. Urgent measures are needed to ensure that short-term adverse effects of higher food prices do not impact even more alarmingly on the very poor, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf said today...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4460&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

Countries Policies and Programs To Address Rising Food Prices

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=397&nocache=1

Rising Food Prices: Policy Options and World Bank response

http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=396&nocache=1

JAPAN: The Rising Price of Food

It may seem like a cruel April Fool's joke, but it isn't: after dozens of years without change, the prices of many staple foods in Japan are set to rise steeply this month, following a trend that began with the price of bread, constant for 24 years but already up more than 10% over the past year...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4463&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=364&cHash=ab9ecbc866

Skyrocketing food prices threaten nutritional crisis for poor CENTRAL AMERICANS

Global food prices are rising, putting even basic commodities beyond the reach of the world's poorest people. WFP spokesperson Trevor Rowe says the most vulnerable people in Central America have been hit hard by economic forces beyond their control...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4465&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

IMF Survey: Coping With Food Price Increases in SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Inflationary pressures have been rising in Sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere in the world, due to higher prices for fuel and other commodities, especially food...

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4462&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

ASIA: Fear of shortages as rice prices keep rising

As food prices continue to skyrocket throughout Asia, many governments are intervening to try to stabilise their domestic rice prices for fear of acute shortages and possible food riots. World stocks of rice have fallen to their lowest since the early 1970s, and many agencies, including the UN World Food Programme (WFP), are increasingly worried that food shortages and price rises will mean cutting back on food assistance.

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4464&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=366&cHash=a

PAKISTAN: Signs of increasing desperation as food prices rise further

Within the last month at least two cases have been reported in the press of parents killing, or attempting to kill, children they felt unable to feed.

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4466&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=364&cHash=0ee6833eaf

THAILAND: Rising rice prices fuel fears of food shortages and starvation

International aid agencies are increasingly worried by the recent dramatic rise in food costs, and particularly rice prices, across Asia and the effect this will have on food assistance projects for the poorest people in the region.

http://km.fao.org/fsn/news_events0/fsn_detail.html?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4467&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=364&cHash=a601dfb725

We hope that the above news and resources are useful for the on-going discussion on Food Price Rise as a Motive for Action against Hunger & Malnutrition.

Kind regards,

FSN Forum Moderation Team

Contribution by E. S. Mwashia, Ministry of Livestock Development, Tanzania

The contributions from members on the rising food prices globally are interesting indeed. It is too sad that the countries depending on rain fed agriculture have no preparedness plans to cope with arising situations. By saying situations I mean little or no rain. In Tanzania we are having more rain than it has been for the past 3-4 years. The farming community here is predominantly small scale farmers. For example in Coast Region farmers are confused. The low lands they normally grow rice are not farmed. At the end of the season there will be no rice hence less food. Despite the fact that the rice in these areas is not much but somehow it mitigates the food shortage crisis.

Under such circumstances there are options in different locations that could help to increase the availability of food. A much localized suggestion for Coast Region such as:

- * Intensifying cassava cultivation and sorghum on the highland;**
- * Planting water tolerant food crops such as some varieties of taro.**

I am sure there leaves much to be done in many other localities.

Regards,

Mrs. E. S. Mwashu