

# **Comments on the V0 Draft of the HLPE report**

## **"Food security and nutrition: building a global narrative towards 2030"**

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In my view, the report is an important building block for enhanced policy to achieve SDG 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. The report draws impressively on diverse literatures to advance a nuanced argument about the ways in which various components of the food security concept, and governance and institutions influence food security and nutrition outcomes. The report presents an important channel for conveying facts and information from the scientific community to policymakers and the general public. By enlightening society about the scientific consensus in relation to food security and nutrition challenges, general awareness among policymakers increases. One of the report's significance lies in the way it interprets the implications of its central findings, and in its attempt to fill the "know and do" gap. The following are some comments that might be useful to take into consideration for the next versions of the report:

### **1) Regarding the need to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to food security**

In my opinion, the single most important message from this report is the need for a more holistic "food systems" approach to food security and nutrition. The report 'broadly' points out that it is essential to adopt a holistic and integrated approach that considers all the elements and activities which relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food, and the output of these activities, including socio-economic and environmental outcomes. However, more emphasis should be placed on conceptualizing the approach by describing how various components of the food system interact in various spatial, agronomic, and socioeconomic contexts. We all know that ignoring the interconnections in the global food system is a major factor behind many unintended consequences that will have dire consequences for future food security and nutrition. Reconnecting the food system by acknowledging these interconnections from a holistic perspective will allow new levels of optimization at the scale of the whole system (rather than its parts). It will allow us to identify fewer and more synergistic interventions that reduce a far larger number of risks. As noted by Abu Hatab et al. (2019), a food system consists of both the core components of the food supply chain and key features of the broader biophysical and socioeconomic institutional context within which food production, processing, distribution, marketing and consumption activities occur. Moreover, given the complexity of the food system, it is essential for frameworks aiming to assess a food system to define the system's internal components and boundaries, as well as its linkages to the "external" world. The external world here refers to stressors (e.g. climate change, changing lifestyles and aspirations, new food habits and market structure), which influence the linkages and interdependencies between the components of the food system. In a holistic approach of this kind, the determinants and outcomes of the activities are considered as components in a complex system undergoing numerous dynamic exchanges, constantly evolving and responding to both internal interactions and the influence of external stressors. Furthermore, a system approach of this kind also recognizes that a food system consists of various elements that, when combined, include criteria that may not be present individually. Changes in one element of the system are systematic and thus may induce changes in another element. They are also dynamic as a result of feedback loops, while causes can become effects and vice versa.

**Reference:** Assem Abu Hatab, Maria Cavinato, August Lindemer and Carl Johan Lagerkvist (2019). Urban Sprawl, Food Security & Agricultural Systems in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Cities* (Elsevier), 94(2019), 129-142.

### **2) Conceptual vs. actual approaches to achieve food security and nutrition**

I find that a large proportion of the text of the report (particularly, the first sections) addresses the evolution of the Food Security 'concept' in recent years. This is important and needed; however, there should also be an equal focus on the evolution of policies, strategies and interventions at various levels (local, regional, national and international), which address food insecurity and nutrition issues, and aim to achieve the sustainable development goals one and two. Thus, I would suggest that the report builds a more balanced structure between conceptual and actual approaches to achieve food security and nutrition.

### **3) Food Security dimensions—Stability vs. Resilience**

In the first section (A more comprehensive approach to food security and nutrition), the report discusses the the four dimensions of food security concept, and adds “agency” and “sustainability” as two vital dimensions that deserve to be elevated in conceptual and policy frameworks. My comment here is about the “stability” dimension of food security. In my view, under the burgeoning challenges presented by climate change, urbanization and other socio-economic and environmental issues, “stability” is not enough to ensure long-run food security and nutrition. I tend to believe that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in many developing countries would depend greatly on the ability of these countries to build “resilient” crop and livestock production systems that foster food security to meet the needs of massive surges in the human population. Thus, we need to adopt a “resilience thinking” for food security and nutrition. System resilience can be understood as the amount of change a system can undergo and still retain the same controls on function and structure while maintaining option to ‘develop’. Resilience thinking accepts that the fundamental nature of a system is ‘change’ and hence the focus of management should be on ‘flexibility’ and not ‘stability’. Hence, a resilient system not only responds but also takes advantage of the opportunities, for example, through innovation. When there is a stress or disturbance, a resilient system is characterized by its ability to self-organize, its capacity to learn and capacity to absorb change. The transformative processes – deliberate or inadvertent – and system adjustments, then determine the outcome, which is, adaptedness of the system. The outcome of these transformative processes is how ‘adapted’ the coupled systems are, reflected by the ability to respond to food security challenges. The adaptedness is also reflected in how well the system is able to innovate and make use of newer opportunities.

### **4) Migration has multiple forms, not only rural to urban migration**

In section 3.1 (Demographic changes and urbanization, page 18), the report acknowledges the links between food insecurity and ‘rural to urban migration’. Indeed, food insecurity influences population dynamics and serves as a ‘push’ factor’ for out-migration from rural areas. However, we should not neglect the fact that internal migration can refer to a multitude of movements varying across space and time, i.e. that internal migration can refer also to rural-to-rural, urban-to-rural and urban-to-urban flows. While the interrelationships between each migration stream and food security may vary substantially, it is crucial to refer to each of these spatial patterns of migration in order to capture the full picture of human mobility in relation to food and nutrition insecurity. In connection with this, an important dimension to capture is the interlinkages that exist between food insecurity and both internal and international (irregular) migration flows. Abu Hatab et al. (2020) point out that international and internal migration in the context of some developing countries are inextricably interconnected, with internal migration a step towards international migration. Villarreal and Hamilton (2012) illustrate that internal migration may facilitate international migration when internal migrants move within the country to collect information and establish networks and contacts that can make further cross- border movements less costly. If countries do not like seeing migrants trying to get across their borders, they are really going to hate it as climate change and other environmental challenges in the future increase food insecurity.

**Reference:** Villarreal, A. & Hamilton, E.R. (2012). ‘Rush to the Border? Market Liberalization and Urban-and Rural-origin Internal Migration in Mexico’, *Social science research*, 41/5: 1275-1291.

### **5) Food Value Chains and food supply chains**

Surprisingly, the report mentions food ‘Value Chains’ only once, whilst it refers to ‘supply chains’ 20 different times. According to FAO (2014), the development of sustainable food value chains can offer important pathways out of poverty for the millions of poor households in developing countries. Food value chains are complex systems and they consist of all the stakeholders who participate in the coordinated production and value-adding activities that are needed to make food products, including farmers, agribusinesses, governments and civil society and other stakeholders. Further compounding the challenge, improvements to the value chain must be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable: the so-called triple bottom line of profit, people and planet (ibid). Thus, the report should emphasize the roles and importance of various actors along the food value chains in achieving food security and nutrition.

**Reference:** FAO. 2014. Developing sustainable food value chains – Guiding principles. Rome

### **6) Recognize “indigeneity”— peoples and foods**

There is a need to acknowledge the roles of indigenous peoples and foods in achieving food security and nutrition. Particularly, indigeneity has two dimensions in the context of food security; peoples and foods. Food insecurity is a serious public health issue for many indigenous populations in developing countries. Little information is known about the characteristics of the individuals or households experiencing this problem. While some food system studies have been published on indigenous people living in developing countries in recent years, many gaps remain

about the nature and extent of food insecurity for indigenous people in these countries. More knowledge can help tailor food security programs and policies to the unique needs of these communities and population. Second, of particular relevance is the nutritious value of indigenous foods. While some of them are known and have been extensively analyzed in terms of micro and macronutrients, others remained considered as nutritious but few proper nutrition composition analyses have been undertaken. In many cases, government policies and development processes contribute indirectly to nutrition-related disease by not making timely and effective efforts to stimulate the use of nutritionally superior foods, including traditional indigenous foods and diets.

**Reference:** FAO. 2013. Indigenous Peoples' food systems & well-being: Interventions & policies for healthy communities. Rome

## **7) "Synergies and conflicts"— great opportunities, but also potential disastrous outcomes**

The report raises multiple questions about the tradeoffs of achieving food security. However, I see a need to emphasize this further in the summary and recommendations sections. For instance, using land resources for climate action can contribute positively to eliminating hunger or eradicating poverty – think better managing pastures and forests making them more resilient, increasing the amount of carbon retained in soils thus making them healthier, or making our food system more efficient by increasing productivity and cutting out food losses and waste. There are also pitfalls when betting on land and nature to take up too big a role: zealously relying on excessive amounts of bioenergy, carbon-dioxide removal or nature-based solutions to get to net zero is a risky and unwise strategy. When badly implemented, these measures can result in further land degradation or counteract food security and sustainable development.

## **8) Acknowledging the rural-urban “connectivity gaps”**

In section 3.1 (Demographic changes and urbanization, page 18), it could be useful to highlight the spatial dimensionality of the food system. As Akkoyunlu (2015) notes, linkages between urban centers and the countryside play an important role in processes of rural and urban change and sustainable development. Emerging trends and opportunities – such as increasing demand for food, as well as the changing nature of food demand as consumer preferences evolve, demographic patterns and environmental changes – all point to the importance of ensuring that rural-urban interlinkages are taken into account in urban planning and urban food security analysis and projections. In this sense, the food system increasingly links rural and urban communities within a country, across regions and between continents. Accordingly, cities play an important role in shaping their surrounding and more distant rural areas, and therefore land use, food production, distribution, marketing, consumption, resource use and environmental management should be viewed as matters of concern in both urban and rural areas. Acknowledging the rural-urban “connectivity gaps” is crucial for developing countries to establish more integrated and inclusive links within food systems and agricultural value chains to integrate the “rural-urban” dimension in strategies aiming for the development of more resilient food systems and more sustainable urbanisation. In this respect, the concept of city region food systems (CRFS) has recently emerged as a promising approach to support developing countries in making informed decisions to enhance the sustainability and resilience of urban and regional food systems while taking into consideration a more integrated view of territorial development across urban and rural areas (Dubbeling et al., 2017). The CRFS approach recognises the fact that urban food security is dependent on rural production areas and that the food system affects both urban and rural communities. Therefore, it promotes more integrated rural-urban linkages and more inclusive territorial governance structures in which cities and other regions can work together constructively to build resilient food systems that promote sustainable methods of food production, processing and marketing, and ensure food and nutrition security for all consumers and value-chain actors.

### **References:**

S. Akkoyunlu. The potential of rural–urban linkages for sustainable development and trade. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Policy*, 4 (2015), pp. 20-40  
M. Dubbeling, G. Santini, H. Renting, M. Taguchi, L. Lançon, J. Zuluaga, ..., V. Andino Assessing and planning sustainable City region food systems: Insights from two Latin American cities *Sustainability*, 9 (8) (2017), p. 1455  
Assem Abu Hatab, Maria Cavinato, August Lindemer and Carl Johan Lagerkvist (2019). Urban Sprawl, Food Security & Agricultural Systems in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Cities* (Elsevier), 94(2019), 129-142.

## **9) Address "missing middle" within food value chains in research and policy interventions**

Customarily, research and policy interventions have extensively concentrated on production and consumption, and has widely ignored other elements and actors along the crop and livestock value chain. However, the value chains in developing countries is rather complex and characterized by long marketing chains featuring large distances, many levels of traders and transactions, multiple steps and stages of processing, and a variety of employment-creating services and inputs. Particularly due to urbanization processes, traditional supply chains are

lengthening and becoming more complex. In this regard, lengthening food value chains present opportunities for chain actors; however, it does not guarantee improved outcomes for all actors and stakeholders along the chain. The reason is to a great extent because the transition in the food system generates new challenges to farmers who face additional challenges with fulfilling new standards, to supply chain actors whose livelihoods may be threatened, and to consumers in the form of increasing food price and quality. Together these issues emphasize the need for research and policy to address the “missing middle” in value chains by considering the full continuum of the chain from production to consumption, including inter-linkages, distributional benefits, and institutional arrangements across different production and marketing channels.

**References:** Assem Abu Hatab, Maria Eduarda Rigo Cavinato and Carl Johan Lagerkvist (2019). Urbanization, livestock systems and food security in developing countries: A systematic review of the literature. *Food Security*, Springer, 11(2): 279-299.

## **10) The dual directions of interrelations between Food Security and Conflict**

In section 3.13 (Civil Strife and Conflict), the report properly acknowledge that conflict is an increasingly important cause of food insecurity and malnutrition. That is, people living in countries affected by conflict and violence are more likely to be food insecure and malnourished, particularly in those countries characterized by protracted conflict and fragile institutions. However, conflict and social unrest have historically coincided often with periods of high and volatile food prices. After 2008, spikes in international food- and agricultural commodity prices had severely affected vulnerable population groups in developing countries and are now understood to have contributed to the emergence of various social unrest events. One of the most important recent cases of political changes that coincided with a period of high and volatile global food prices was the "Arab Spring" movement in 2011. This apparent simultaneity between food price inflation and food price volatility, on the one hand, and the likelihood for sociopolitical unrest to occur, on the other hand, has fueled a renewed interest in understanding the interlinkages and the channels through which food prices may cause social unrest (e.g. Abu Hatab, 2016; Arezki and Brückner, 2011; Raleigh et al., 2015; Abu Hatab and Hess, 2020). Therefore, there is a need to highlight the dual directions of interrelations between food security and conflict. Addressing these interactions can help identify critical components and develop a framework that can break links between food and conflict and enhance food and nutritional security in developing countries.

### **References:**

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Arezki, R., and Brückner, M. (2011). Food Prices and Political Instability. IMF Working Paper WP/11/62. Washington, D.C: IMF.