

## Global Food Policy: A Primer

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of food is increasingly included on the urban agenda in many nations. Food systems consists of the various processes and infrastructures involved in feeding the society, including growing and harvesting, production, processing, transportation, distribution, and consumption. Food policy is designed to influence the operation of the food systems. Food insecurity (access to adequate food for all) is a global problem. So is the food policy. Global interdependence in the world's food market makes analysis of food policies more difficult. For example, China, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka are committed to solving the pressing problems of hunger and poverty in their nations. This paper provides a brief introduction on food policy at the global level.

**KEYWORDS:** food policy, global food policy, international food policy

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### INTRODUCTION

Food, like air and water, is needed for human survival. Across the globe, the health of millions of people is being compromised by the dominant food system. The food system was designed to encourage people to over consume because this contributed to the profitability of the food industry. The goal of the food system is to provide safe, high-quality food at reasonable prices. However, food systems around the world face some peculiar challenges such as hunger, poverty, overweight, obesity, environmental degradation, food price volatility, and food insecurity [1]. The diets of consumers in the developing world are constantly changing. The character of the food system and the nature of food policy are both changing with increasing population, industrialization, and urbanization.

Good food policies are important in achieving more just, equitable and sustainable food systems. Food policies are meant to influence the operation of the food system. Food policies govern a number of areas, including [2]:

- Food-related industries
- Agricultural and livestock extension
- Food labelling
- Certification standards
- Development assistance/food aid
- Trade

### WHAT IF FOOD POLICY?

Food policy is any policy that addresses or regulates the food system. It encompasses the collective efforts of governments to influence the decision making environment of food

system: production, marketing, and consumption. Food policy is very important to economic development efforts.

Food policy makers are responsible for a variety of political, social, environmental, and economic agendas that affect a nation's food supply. Both political and economic factors have an impact on food policy. Economic factors, such as price and income, directly affect food choices and food security. Food politics, both locally and internationally, play an important role in agenda setting, rule making, and implementation. Food policy is multidisciplinary in nature and requires the collaborative input of economists, anthropologists, and nutritionists.

The primary international agency for food policy is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, which was established in 1945 [3]. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), established in 1975, is an international agricultural research center founded in the early 1970s and based in District of Columbia as non-profit corporation. IFPRI has offices in several developing countries, including China, Ethiopia, and India, and most of the research takes place in developing countries in Central America, South America, Africa, and Asia [4].

### GLOBALIZATION OF FOOD

The globalization process involves the movement of food between nations. Every nation around the world has created national food strategies and policies. A national food strategy could save lives and positively impact the economy. A

centerpiece of any nation's food policy efforts is ensuring adequate food for families and individuals. Also, governments around the world increasingly engage in food governance so that they can address food system challenges such as obesity, hunger, poverty, food waste, or food insecurity. Figure 1 shows typical global food policies [5].

We now consider food policies of different nations of the world.

- **Food Policy in the US:** Millions of Americans live close to hunger. Food stamp programs and agricultural subsidies some main support beams in US anti-poverty efforts. This is not how America is supposed to operate. Food policies are made by government entities at the federal, state, and local level. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the US agency that is responsible for ensuring the safety of food products. FDA also ensures that food labels contain reliable information for consumers to make good health decisions. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is also involved in food policy. Several food policy councils (FPCs) work to educate the public and shape public policy [3,6]. Although the United States plays a major role as a leader in guide sustainable food security solutions, it is important for the US to listen to what works in other nations. The conduct of the American food system significantly affects the policies of other food exporting and importing nations.
- **Food Policy in the UK:** The UK's Centre for Food Policy has some goals for food policy including: sufficiency of production on ecological terms; preventing diet-related ill-health; harnessing all sciences to address the nature of production; lowering food's impact on the environment; international development and social justice. UK Food Policy had adopted market-oriented solutions in the past. Reconnection - to markets, the supply chain and the natural environment - had become a key theme in UK food policy since the publication of the Curry Report in 2002. What is lacking in the UK is a public health approach that focuses on the food supply chain. Policies also need to be developed to reduce poverty, allowing access to good food for all [7-9].
- **Food Policy in Canada:** The focus of recent Canadian food policy has been market-based interventions to improve diets of citizens. In Canada, food policy making is perceived to be top down ignoring the root causes of food systems challenges. Canada has no comprehensive or integrated national food policy like most industrial nations. Canadian food policies are designed to alter dietary practices through changes in the marketplace, providing consumers with a wide variety of foods that households can choose. Canadians are encouraged to choose whole grain products, dark green and orange vegetables, lower-fat milk products, leaner meats, poultry and fish, as well as dried peas, beans and lentils. Socio-economic differences in diet have been documented in several other nations such the US, UK, and Australia [10,11].
- **Food policy in Australia:** The Australian government has weaned farmers off subsidies and tariffs have gradually been lifted. The food policy in Australia has favored powerful industry and agricultural interests. The Food Alliance was established in 2009 and designed to promote food policy that integrates ecological, public health, social justice and economic objectives. It is located in the state of Victoria, which Australia's biggest agricultural producer and exporter. The Food Alliance is funded annually for health promotion activities. Figure 2 shows the policy triangle as applied to the establishment of the food alliance [12].
- **Food Policy in India:** In India, a country of 1.2 billion, tens of millions face hunger on a daily basis. Since independence in 1947, food security is one of the top policy priority for the Government of India. The central government has been actively involved in the management of food economy. The existing food management system has evolved in response to acute food shortages and lack of proper food distribution. India has spent the last 50 years fighting hunger and poverty by increasing its production of staple crops like wheat, rice, and maize. New policies could diversify India's diet with more nutritious foods such as millet, beans and lentils [13].
- **Food Policy in China:** Here, China refers to the People's Republic of China (PRC). In China, consumers in rural areas depend more on grains than consumers in urban areas. The Chinese government employs two basic techniques for controlling food demand and supply. Food demand is controlled largely by food rationing, while food supply is controlled by government-controlled price. Food reserves are built out of current production and imports. Reserves are held for two purposes: as a reserve against national disasters and for equalizing food "needs" among provinces [14].
- **Food Policy in Africa:** A number of organizations are pushing for the same priorities to end hunger and poverty in Africa. Lessons can be learned from other countries such as China and India. Many African nations are not getting any new lending from the World Bank and the IMF. The advanced capitalist nations have maintained development hegemony in Africa. Although the "structural adjustment" was couched in the language of restructuring African, the real motive was to resolve the widespread debt crisis that was threatening the international financial system.[15]. Major agricultural transformation in Africa requires policy reforms and the use of evidence-based research. For example, in Ghana global development priorities such as achieving Millennium Development Goals tend to influence policy processes and strategies [16].
- **Food Policy in Indonesia:** Indonesia is the fourth most populous nation in the world with the world's largest Muslim population. Like many developing countries, Indonesia is facing rapidly changing methods of food production, processing, and distribution. Rice has been the staple food for most households due to relatively low rice price policy. The high proportion of foods consumed by rural households were purchased [17].
- **Food Policy in Bangladesh:** Bangladesh, with more than 90 million people, is a food deficit country. Therefore, achieving self-sufficiency in food has always been a national concern. A food policy known as the Food Security Plan was developed by the Ministry of Food in August 1980. While the food security plan ensures people have the minimum desirable level of consumption, it also involves procurement of food at a price that gives incentive to farmers and an open market sale of rice and wheat. However, the impact of food

policy on meeting the food needs of poor people has been minimal [18]. Bangladesh has the potential to feed its people.

## CHALLENGES

The United Nations estimates that the number of hungry people in the world is over 1 billion. Food subsidy interventions remains a major policy instrument for reducing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty in many developing nations. Inefficiency continues to plague implementation of food subsidy programs. Sustaining political will is an important factor in defeating global hunger and undernutrition. Confusion exists on some aspects of current dietary advice. The argument that we should wait until we know for sure the links between food and health before we formulate a policy is not tenable. Ways to address these issues include more efficient agriculture, efficient water use; intensive crop breeding, and development of new crops.

## CONCLUSION

Food security and food sovereignty are being integrated into policy frameworks worldwide. National governments and international agencies such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) have been involved in formalizing national commitment to eradicating hunger and improving quality of life for all. Stakeholders are also involved in contributing comments to new national food safety legislation; designed for food policy, environmental science, or food culture. Policy change is necessary to addressing these factors in a comprehensive and enforceable way. Each national government and industry must embark on long-term policies and investments that will satisfy consumer demand and improve nutrition. More information about global food policy can be found in the books in [19-26] and related journals: *Food Policy* and *Food Review*.

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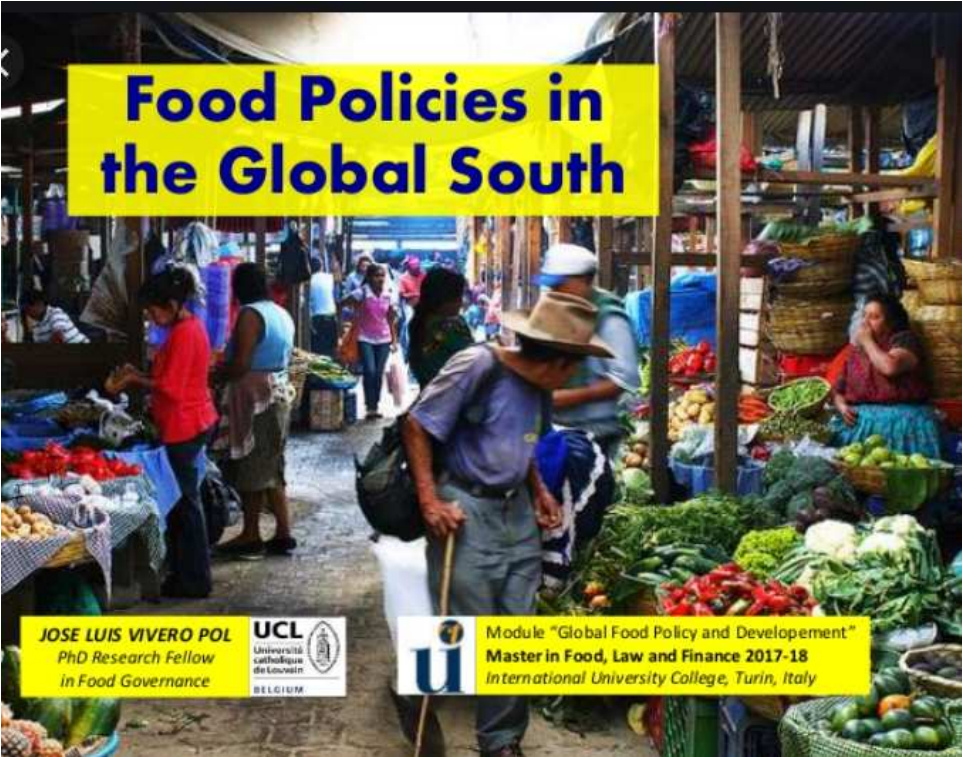


Figure 1 Global food policies [5].

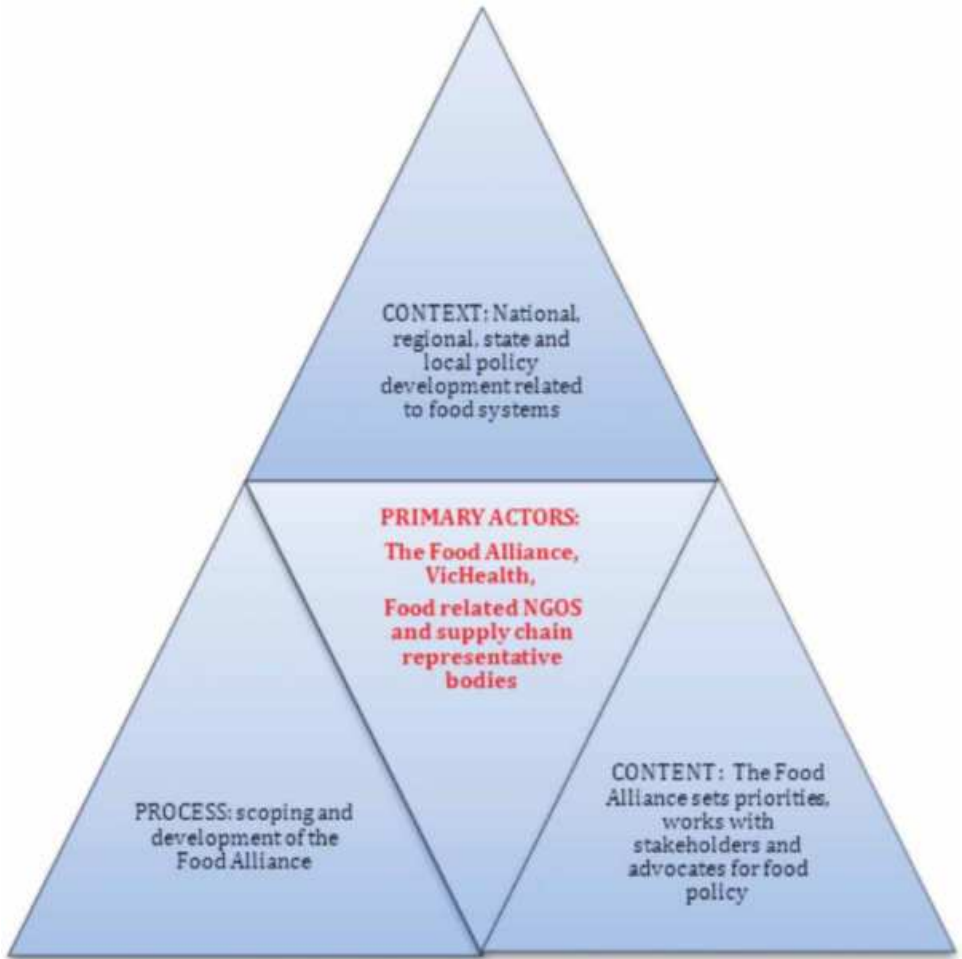


Figure 2 The policy triangle as applied to the establishment of the food alliance [12]