

Food Security: Myth and Reality

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ABSTRACT

Food security issues in India acquired prominence in public policy debate through the 2000s, resulting in promulgation of schemes like the National Rural Health Mission, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the National Food Security Bill.

The aura of high hopes built around these interventions almost completely absolves the role of the present social, economic and political system in leading to the precarious situation of the people. The mainstream debate on poverty and hunger has been sequestered within the safe margins defined by the present system. An alternative opinion critical of the present, social, economic and political structure has been an anathema to the mainstream debate. The present Modi government is intent on giving a go by even to the marginal gains that may have resulted from the social sector interventions mentioned above. The book – Food Security in India: Myth and Reality is an effort to articulate an alternative for which there seems little scope in the mainstream debate. It is a political treatise on food security in India and an argument for the implementation of radical land reforms as the fulcrum of India's social, economic and political transformation. The arguments there in are 'polemical', 'tremendous' and 'value laden' because there can be no a-polemical and value neutral position vis-a-vis issues that hinge on the power relations in the society. Dr Vikas Bajpai teaches at the Center for Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Dr Anoop Saraya is Professor of Gastroenterology and Head of the Department of Gastroenterology and Human Nutrition Unit at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi.

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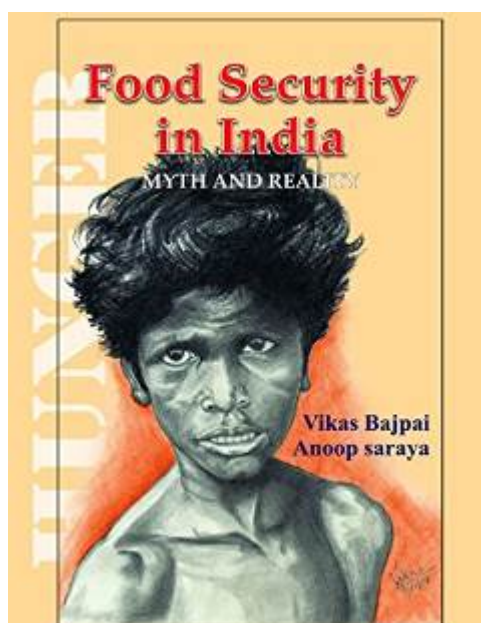


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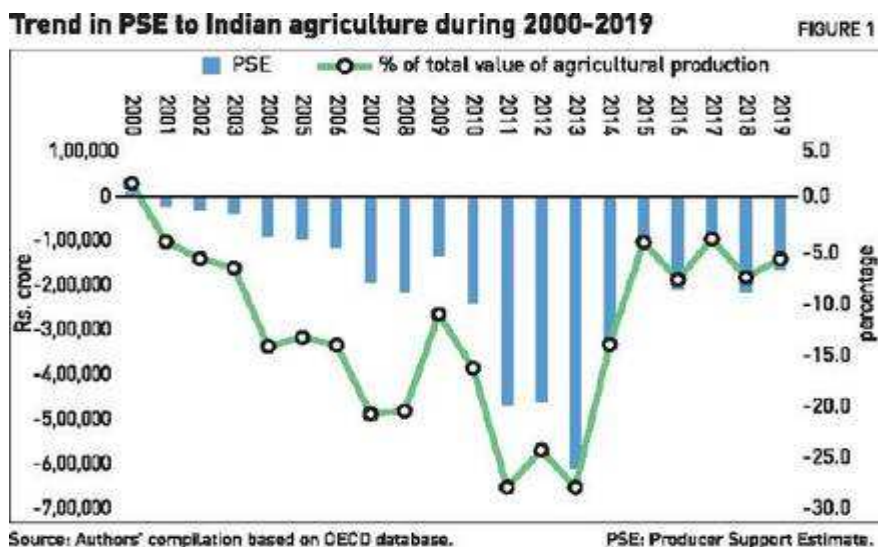


KEYWORDS: food security, myth, reality, rural, Modi, government, economic, political, socio, India

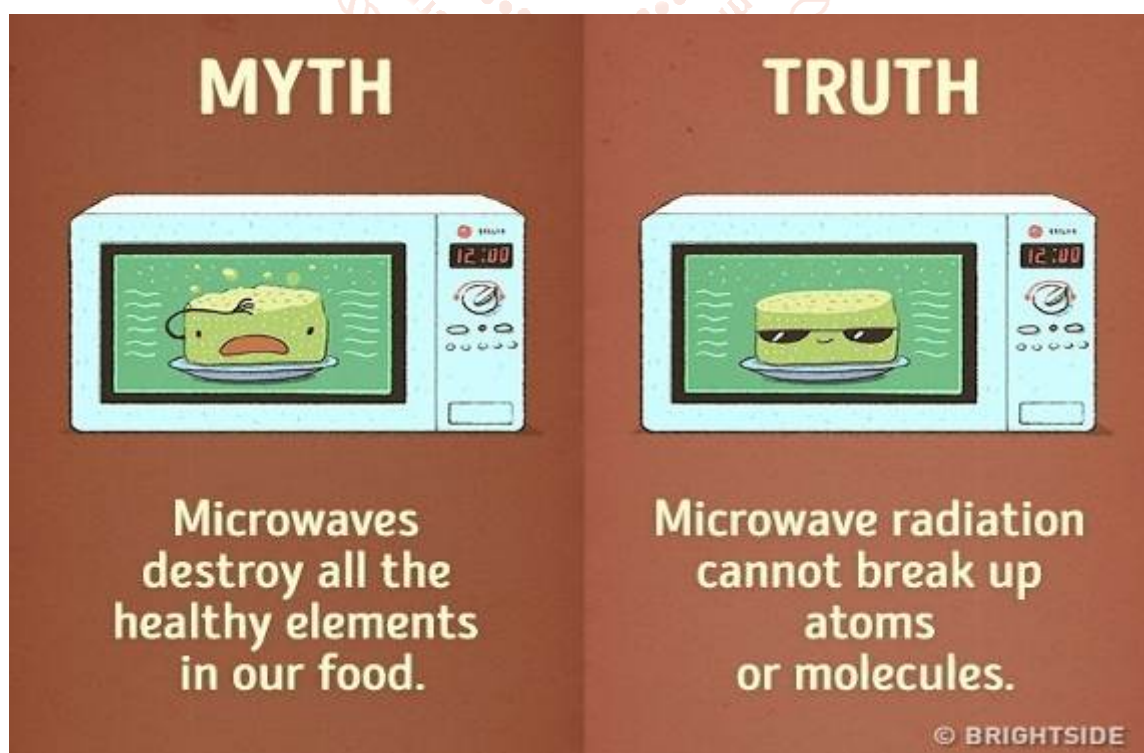


INTRODUCTION

MYTH 1 There is not enough food to feed the world population. According to FAO, all food produced worldwide would feed between 12 and 14 billion people.



Therefore, there is enough food in the world today for everyone to have a proper **REALITY**: nutrition for a healthy and productive life. However, the production and distribution of food must be more efficient, sustainable and fair. This means supporting small-scale farmers (the majority in developing countries) and ensuring that they have adequate access to markets in order to sell their products. It is also necessary to extinguish food waste, which represents a huge loss in economic, environmental and social terms. **MYTH 2**: Hunger and malnutrition can be solved with an increase in food production. The increase of food production, which has been evident over the past decades, **REALITY**: was not enough to eradicate hunger and to solve food insecurity problems. The focus on production growth has generated other problems, such as large-scale losses and food waste, increase of agriculture and food systems environmental footprint or degradation of natural resources such as land or water. In addition, the extensive use of fertilizers, pesticides and chemicals are increasingly threatening some of the types of crops dependent on pollination, affecting biodiversity and ecosystems, as well as human health. Thus, the focus must be more on agricultural and food systems transformation, rather than in increased production. On the other hand, people can starve even when there is a lot of food, since the problem is often a matter of access: lack of financial conditions to buy food, inability to travel to the local markets, etc.

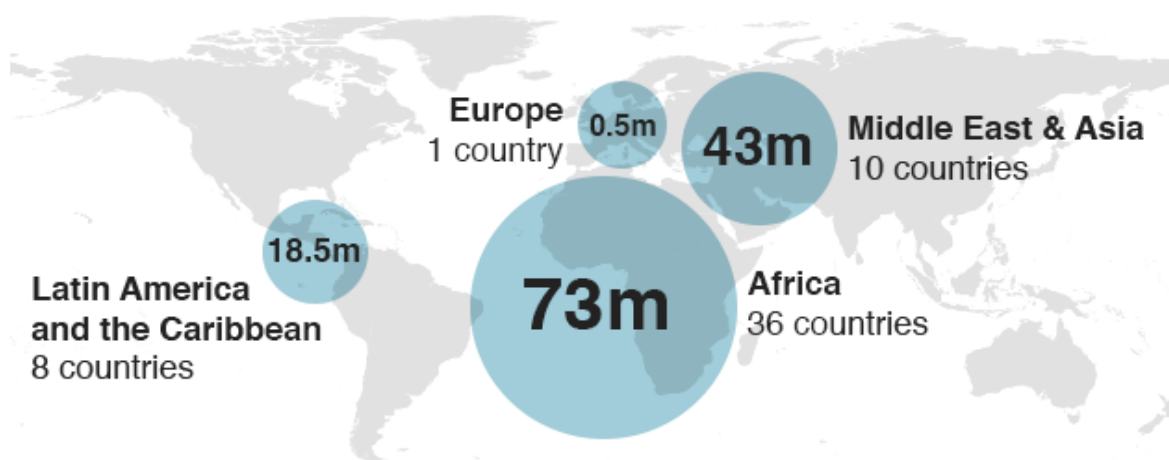


Finally, it is not only the quantity but also the quality of the food that is a concern. Good nutrition means having the right mix of nutrients and calories needed for a healthy development. **MYTH 3**: Hunger only is a problem in

the poorest countries. It is true that hunger mainly affects developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, food shortages and malnutrition are major problems in [1,2] REALITY: the United States (where 50 million Americans face food insecurity) and in several European countries, where inequalities are increasing and social exclusion exacerbates the problems of food insecurity. One in every nine people in the world do not have access to food, and this affects humanity as a whole. Hunger slows progress on important areas that connect nations and is affecting global development. On the other hand, other nutritional problems have also become increasingly global. Obesity and chronic diseases that are associated with it began to affect particularly the poor in developed countries and have also extended to developing countries, taking the lives of almost 3 million people annually, in addition to placing great pressure on health systems. Nowadays, obesity is a global problem which exacerbates social inequalities and removes income and ability to work to the poorest of the society. MYTH 4: Hunger stems from emergency situations. It is caused by natural disasters. Emergencies are only responsible for 8% of world hunger, according to FAO.

People facing food shortages by continent

Acutely food-insecure populations (million)



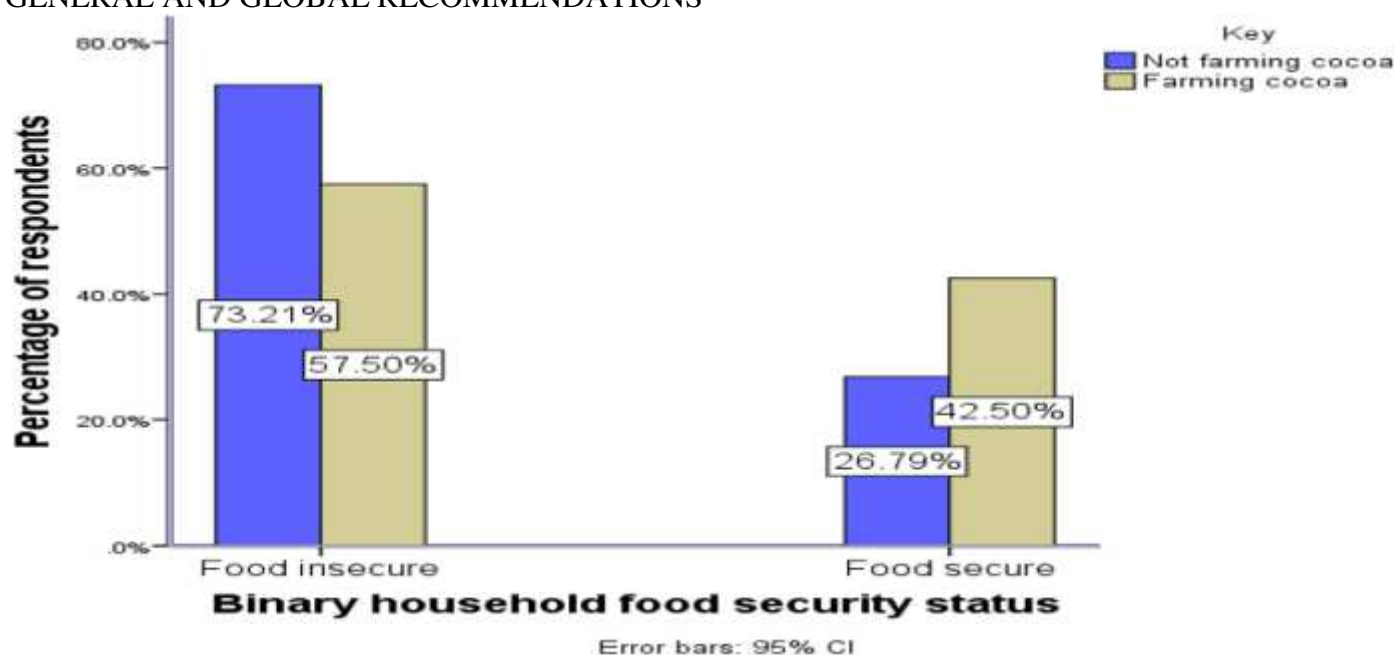
Source: FSIN, GRFC 2020

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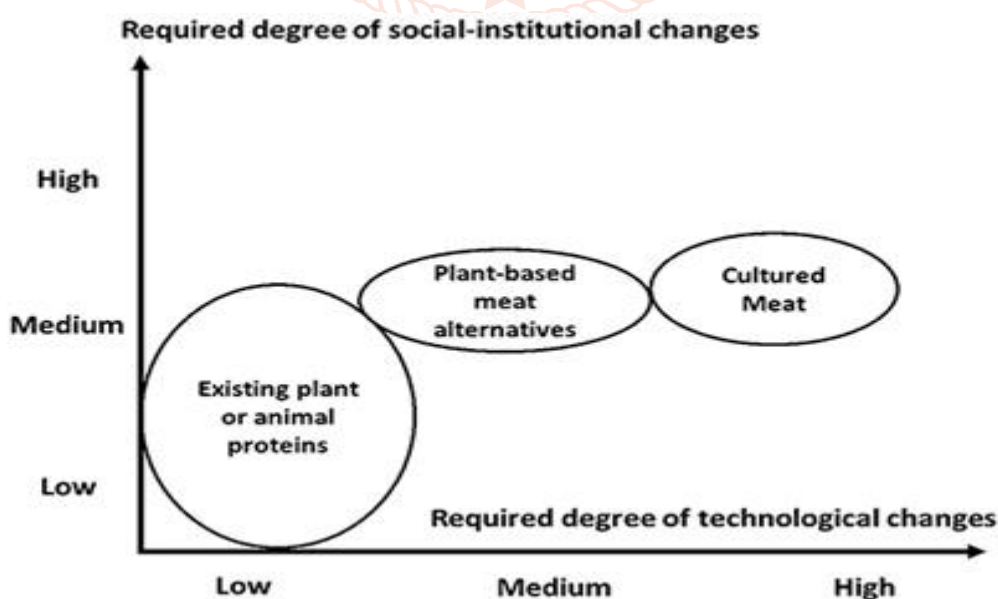
Therefore, REALITY: actions and long-term projects, such as programs of school meals, or actions that transform the systems in the agri-food industry that improve the resilience of communities are so important to fight hunger in a sustainable way. Thus, these populations are able to ensure the subsistence means even in times of drought or mitigate the destructive effects of natural disasters. Nature is just one of the factors that influence hunger. [3,4]The proportion of food crisis that are connected to human causes is growing, including factors related to violent conflicts, dynamics of global markets, among others. In fact, hunger is in its essence a political problem, that needs to be tackled with political, economic and social responses. MYTH 5: Hunger is a health problem. Hunger, under-nutrition and malnutrition have effects not only on people's health REALITY: but also broader and multidimensional impacts in societies and economies. A high prevalence of hunger and nutritional deficiencies affects human development, hurts the economy, fosters social tensions and conflicts, affects productivity and growth, reducing significantly the potential for development. It is proven, for example, that access to adequate food is fundamental to the education and learning process of children, influencing also later qualifications, working conditions and wages, and their contribution for the economies of their countries. Hunger is, thus, a key framework condition for which it is possible to solve environmental, security and economic issues. MYTH 6: Economic growth generates food security. Economic growth does not solve chronic malnutrition problems or food insecurity REALITY: by itself. In fact, a non-inclusive economic growth that does not involve a reduction of inequalities and does not include concerns about the more vulnerable sectors of the society can even exacerbate food insecurity and malnutrition problems. [5,6]Food (in)security considerably influences economic growth. Countries with high levels of poverty and chronic malnutrition face major limitations to human development, which is necessary to a sustainable growth. High rates of undernutrition and malnutrition may represent a loss of 4% to 5% in the Gross Domestic Product, according to FAO. To involve actions in sectors as varied as finance, agriculture, health and nutrition, infrastructure and others, the promotion of food security has benefits not only for health, but it is a good basis for the promotion of sustained economic growth

Discussion

GENERAL AND GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS



1. To implement a human rights based approach with the integrated and holistic view of development of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a basis of action to improve food and nutritional security and to achieve the human right to food and adequate nutrition. 2. To strengthen global mechanisms of coordination and governance of food and nutritional security, including the Committee on World Food Security, that being the only international body with a clear mandate for food security and a platform for integration of several actors, should constitute the main reference for States and international organisations in this matter. 3. To promote the effective application of international guidelines and a systematic assessment of the compliance of such, including Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive execution of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security (2004), Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forestry Resources in the context of National Food Security (2012) and FAO's principles for sustainable agriculture, in particular in the development and implementation of strategies, programs, policies, and laws. 4. To increase commitments and funds for the empowerment of small local farmers and family agriculture, as well as to respond specifically to the needs of the most vulnerable groups to food insecurity, including the strengthening of local food systems, short food supply chains and territorial markets, traditional varieties and seed diversity.



As specific support measures, emphasis should be placed on institutional capacity building, support for the formulation and implementation of adequate legislation, participatory planning and inclusive dialogue mechanisms, creation of banking services and credits, specific support for small companies, support for local cooperatives and organisations, creation of public seed banks, promotion of investments that complement the

investments of the producers themselves, provision of public goods and services and definition of social protection schemes, among others,[7,8] 5. To support the strengthening of connections in supply chains between producers, markets and consumers as an essential factor for the increase of income, employment creation and poverty reduction, both in rural and urban areas. 6. To support and defend environmentally sustainable agriculture models, taking advantage of the potential of agriculture and food systems to climate mitigation and adaptation, refusing the increase in agricultural productivity at the expense of the environment and the sustainable management of natural resources, both in developed and developing countries. Options such as agroecology should be more disseminated, supported and included in agricultural and rural development policies and practices, in order to increase the resilience of farmers and their communities, which is increasingly important, given the growing markets and climate volatility. 7. To support countries in the definition and implementation of administrative frameworks and inadequate legal safeguards to ensure the full protection of land ownership rights by local communities and indigenous people. In particular, to promote greater security of land ownership through transparency of securitization and land tenure certification schemes, the recognition of land rights to legitimate and legal security regarding land tenure. The implementation of an international legal instrument on the rights of peasants and other people in rural areas, foreseen in the framework of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, can be a relevant contribution at international level. 8. To support national policies that contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women regarding access to land and other productive resources, as well as services and funding schemes, in addition to a higher involvement of women in the design and implementation of policies in this area. In cooperation projects and programs for development in the agricultural sector, including specific – and not just abstract or formal – concerns with gender equality and the empowerment of women.



9. To make food systems more participatory and democratic at a local, national and global level. This implies, for example, strengthening the participation of actors directly involved in projects in all stages: definition, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, through a bottom-up approach that considers not only the beneficiaries but the main actors of change. 10. To ensure access to information and the existence of rigorous and independent reviews on the impacts of investments, contracts and projects in terms of social, environmental, and human rights. 11. To promote long-term actions that enable a sustained support, as well as multisectoral approaches, and multi-actor partnerships, including civil society, private sector and other partners, in order to achieve sustainable investments and long-lasting results. 12. To promote private sector social responsibility and strengthen the rules on transparency and control in this sector, as well as to encourage public-private partnerships that contribute to food and nutritional security, and provide transparent, inclusive and participatory governance mechanisms. At the international level, to promote the implementation of the principles for responsible agricultural investment – most notably the United Nations’ “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” and OECD’s “Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises” – and to set rules legally binding at the international level about the activity of the private sector and human rights. 13. To strengthen statistical capacity and data and information collection in this area as the basis for the definition of more coherent policies. To define and apply indicators on sustainable food systems, which go beyond the classic measures of agricultural productivity, and to include measures which matter for long-term development as the health of ecosystems, the interactions between agriculture and the economy more generally, the sustainability of the outputs, the resilience of communities, among others.

Results

In a globalised society and interdependent world, where challenges of development are complex and multidimensional, it is necessary that public policies on migration, climate change, trade, security or food sovereignty contribute to an effective transformation and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this framework, Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) stands as a concept, an approach and a tool for ensuring that the several sectoral policies do not collide with the efforts of eradicating poverty and promoting development at global, European, national and local level. The European Union (EU) and its Member States have ensured PCD as a political commitment and legal obligation in the framework of the Lisbon Treaty, but will the institutions and European countries continue to pursue sectoral policies that effectively contribute to sustainable development? In this sense, there are major incoherencies that should be tackled: unsustainable patterns of food production, imbalances in distribution and access, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and climate change, food waste and unsustainable consumption patterns are among the multiplicity of factors that affect development prospects, while being influenced by the development models pursued. At the same time, hunger, under-nutrition and malnutrition are important aspects of food and nutritional insecurity, both a result and a hindrance to sustainable development. These problems particularly affect the poorest countries, with a higher incidence in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, they are rooted in a global growth paradigm that needs to be urgently redesigned. Thus, the promotion of more sustainable, resilient, responsible, competitive, diverse and inclusive food systems is an imperative for development, which requires the participation of all. This is not an impossible task.[9]

Conclusions

To have access to affordable food that promotes health and good nutrition remains a major international challenge to a growing global population. However, we live in a world with a basic incoherence: 815 million people are starving in a global population of 7.8 billion people, while the sum of currently produced food would feed nearly 12 billion people and 1/3 of all food is lost or wasted. • Food and nutritional insecurity is a cause and an effect of poverty: if, on the one hand, malnutrition perpetuates poverty and deprivation, on the other, poverty exacerbates malnutrition and generates food insecurity. Unsustainable food production models, imbalances in distribution and access, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and climate change,

food waste and unsustainable consumption patterns are among the multitude of factors that affect development prospects, while being influenced by the pursued models of development. • Smallholder farmers provide over 80% of the food in the world, but more than 70% of the extremely poor are in rural areas, where a family or small-scale farming prevails. The need for investment in integrated rural development is proven by the potential of agriculture as an engine for poverty reduction, employment generation and the promotion development for the poorest sectors of the population. • The overall framework for the promotion of food and nutritional security in the world has evolved particularly after the 2007-8 food crisis and in particular with FAO's guidelines in these matters, the work of the Committee on World Food Security and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG-2, specifically on this subject, is interdependent with almost all of the goals). • The CPLP strategic and institutional framework has been an evolution only in the framework of the regional organisations, although with the inherent difficulties of implementation. • Although the Portuguese cooperation has never had a sector of priority action in nutrition and food security, neither in terms of policy nor of resources, it has been able to develop some relevant projects to the development of partner countries in priority areas. In recent years, public institutional cooperation lost its capacity and the critical mass of knowledge in this area has decreased. There is also a reliance on external financing and delegated cooperation. • The incoherencies identified in international and European activities concerning the interconnection between food security and development are related to the divestment of the development sector in this area and to the vagueness about the involvement of the private sector (including the inadequacy of the regulation on business and human rights). They are also related to measures that reinforce a competition that is less free and less fair in the agri-food sector and to the European policy on biofuels as well as to the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy.[9]

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