

## Under what conditions could the implementation of SDGs contribute to food security?

Matthieu Brun, Sébastien Treyer (IDDRI), Matthieu Boussichas (Ferdi)

The year 2015 will see the definition of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the culmination of a process that began in the wake of the 2012 Rio+20 Conference. These SDGs will be “action-oriented, practical, concise and easy to communicate, limited in number and universally applicable”, according to *The Future We Want* declaration. In July 2014, the UN Open Working Group, which focuses on the development agenda beyond 2015, proposed that the second SDG should aim to “end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”. Given the mixed results of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in terms of food security, the challenge of the development agenda beyond 2015 is significant. The intention is to forge a link between the four dimensions of food security—access, availability, utilisation, stability—and sustainability, a no less complex concept. How can SDG implementation achieve greater success than the MDG experience, in a context where global change is likely to make the attainment of objectives even more problematic? This article reviews the lessons that can be drawn from the MDGs for food security and nutrition, identifying the conditions under which the implementation of SDGs could have a real impact.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- To ensure a greater capacity to achieve food security, the definition of SDGs should not be disconnected from the design of their implementation conditions and their accountability processes.
- An increase in agricultural production, set within the context of the food system, must be regarded as a means and not an end. The conditions of agricultural transformation must be assessed to anticipate the impact on food security and nutrition.
- The eradication of hunger and malnutrition by 2030 requires coherent national policies, particularly with regard to social protection, investment in essential services and the guarantee of the right to food. Ensuring sectoral policy cohesion will require the confrontation of resistance from often powerful actors. The challenge is therefore not only technical but also political and legal
- While the MDGs largely involved donors, it is now crucial that the SDGs more clearly establish the accountability of governments and help to build a multi-stakeholder framework of mutual accountability and of accountability to global and national civil societies.
- International cooperation (global and regional) has a central role to play in enabling the structuring of a comprehensive discussion on development trajectories and to enhance the conditions of accountability.

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Food security, along with the reduction of poverty, was the first of the eight MDGs adopted in September 2000. While the fight against poverty is regarded as a relative success of the MDGs, progress towards the objective of “reducing food insecurity by half” has been far less satisfactory, or even mediocre. To some extent this can be explained by the fact that the MDGs addressed the issue of food insecurity in an incomplete way, without taking its multiple dimensions into account, namely access, availability, utilisation and stability. In retrospect, from an analysis of the MDGs one could conclude that they were used to treat the symptoms of food insecurity, rather than simultaneously trying to address its causes. At this moment in time, what do we know about how the issue of food security and nutrition should be tackled, and how could the implementation of SDGs enable progress in this direction?

## COHERENT NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY POLICIES, BEYOND AGRICULTURAL POLICIES

Agriculture is back at the forefront of the development aid agenda, a situation that has much to do with the 2008 World Bank Development Report. While it is important not to diminish the efforts to develop agriculture—specifically those that have targeted family farming—nevertheless, we must not consider agriculture as an end in itself (quantity produced) but as a means to deliver food and nutrition security. An increase in agricultural production must be a component of a broader package of strategies aimed at strengthening the resilience of individuals to shocks, along with taking households out of chronic food insecurity situations, including complementary interventions to address the other pillars of food and nutrition security. The development of infrastructure, services—especially financial—in rural areas and the introduction of conditional cash transfers and social protection are all credible means of reducing vulnerabilities and enabling risk sharing that is favourable to investment.

It is in this perspective that the choice of indicators will also be crucial to enable measurement, for example, of micronutrient excess or deficiency throughout human lifetimes, not only at the stages of pregnancy and during a child’s first two years. Suitable indicators and targets would enable the consideration of two phenomena that sometimes coexist within the same household, i.e. malnutrition caused by overnutrition and by deficiency. This is particularly important if the

aim is to establish universal objectives that apply to both the North and South.

While the increase in agricultural production is only a means to an end, the social, environmental and economic conditions of the transformation of production systems and of the entire supply chain however require particular attention because they are critical to future access to food, to the resilience of rural as well as urban households, and to food diversity, which is essential in nutritional terms. It is therefore vital that the definitions of food security policies are accompanied by:

- precise details on the development trajectories of agricultural structures (or changes in the food industry) that they are intended to trigger;
- an assessment of their impact on employment, income distribution, access to resources, environment and food security.

In view of the controversy surrounding the changes required to achieve the SDGs at the 2030 horizon (agroecology or industrial agriculture, family farming or agribusiness, for example), it is essential that the considered changes are highlighted to ensure policy coherence and so that they make a credible contribution towards achieving the food security objective.

It is necessary for public policies to be designed at the national level with a high degree of coherence to increase synergies and reduce contradictions, thus better addressing the multi-dimensionality of food and nutrition security. Indeed, it is essential that there is coherence between investment and food security policies and that there is a fine integration into social or health policies of the issue of access to nutrition that goes beyond mere access to commodities and also concerns the fight against poverty. For example, an oft-overlooked dimension is that of the protection of intellectual property and the use of plant genetic resources for food security.

Within the context of SDGs it therefore appears necessary that the food and nutrition security issue must be approached through the entire food system, encompassing all activities relating to the production, processing and consumption of food, which may affect nutrition and human health. The food system as it operates today—in the North by encouraging economies of scale and standardization; and in the South by hybridizing industrial and more informal models—may be subject to techno-organizational, economic and social “lock-ins” which can prevent the achievement of food security in all of the above-mentioned dimensions. Approaching the subject from the perspective of the entire food system also enables issues to be addressed such as the impact of agricultural

measures on health or the influence of health services and education on nutrition. Through the integration of different economic, social and cultural components, bottlenecks could be removed in sectors where development is currently unsustainable from a social or environmental perspective.

Making the necessary changes to ensure food security in a sustainable manner may therefore seem an onerous task: ensuring consistency between sectoral policies not only requires coordination, but also the confrontation of resistance from often powerful actors who stand to lose from any reorganization. The challenge is therefore not only technical but also political and legal. In the face of this political economy and the existing power relations, it is vital that there are some institutions that guarantee the right to food. The success of the coherent Brazilian food security policy known as *Fome Zero* is strongly linked to the presence of institutions that guarantee the right to food, such as the National Council of Food and Nutrition Security (CONSEA), through which the weakest actors in society can hold the State accountable for achieving food security.

How can States without similar resources carry out similar initiatives? Do governments always have the political space they need in the area of the national production of standards, but also in terms of international negotiations? While the MDGs largely involved donors, it is now crucial that the SDGs more clearly establish the accountability of governments with regard to their citizens, but also between governments, to ensure that the necessary national policies for food security can be implemented.

## INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION AND THE ROLE OF SDGS

Besides the implementation of coherent national policies, food security and nutrition is also based on certain essential types of international cooperation. The review of the MDGs and, most of all, the price crisis on international agricultural markets highlight the need for coordination, which can be a cause of varying degrees of controversy. Some of the least controversial examples include the value of public financing of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to support the development of national policies, the catalysis and guidance of private investment in the agri-food sector and also the need for scientific cooperation or public financial support for the establishment of national agricultural and food research systems to embed innovation in specific national ecological and social contexts.

In terms of price volatility, the need for better access to information on stocks seems to be generally accepted (this is the purpose of the Agricultural Market Information System [AMIS] that was launched by the G8 in 2011), although it remains politically difficult to implement. Conversely, the design and operating conditions of a system of stocks or regional reserves remain highly controversial.

In terms of trade, regional common markets provide a well-established positive effect for agricultural producers and for food and nutrition security, which invites us to focus not only on national public policies but also on regional policies and strategies. On the other hand, the impact of the liberalization of global agricultural trade on the development trajectories of industries and on food security in the short or longer term is subject to very contrasting analyses and predictions.

In this landscape where different international governance regimes can have a major impact on food and nutrition security, what can SDGs bring? Firstly, their implementation should lead to the establishment of a dialogue on policies, between countries and with the civil society, informed by the analysis of national and regional policies (for example at the scale of the African Union and the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP)) and of their performance. If this dialogue is based on a critical discussion of the considered development trajectories, it could constitute a real learning process for the construction of coherent public policies that are context-specific while at the same time addressing universal challenges.

Secondly, while it is neither likely or desirable for SDGs to supersede other negotiation forums on international regulations, for example with regard to trade, the governing body for the implementation and monitoring of SDGs can provide a major forum in which to discuss the accountability of various actors. These actors can include governments in regard to their policies on food security and to the impact of their decisions and intergovernmental commitments, but can also encompass a more complex accountability of institutional agreements that include private and public actors or the accountability of transnational private actors.

## THE GOVERNANCE OF A FOOD SECURITY SDG: WHAT APPROACHES AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS?

Addressing the issue of accountability mechanisms and SDG governance in terms of food security and nutrition raises three questions: Who is

accountable for what? Which approaches should be chosen to ensure both accountability and operability of the objectives? What international coordination is needed?

The major innovation of the new SDG framework is that it tends to develop inclusive approaches as much as multi-stakeholder platforms, which reinforces its legitimacy. The “traditional” actors in international relations, namely States, are the first to be affected and targeted by the mechanisms of accountability and of the monitoring of SDG implementation. Due to the need for universality, derived from the SDG process, it would be counterproductive for only developing countries to be made accountable. Developed countries, which are increasingly exposed to the problem of malnutrition and thus to food insecurity, will also have to face up to their responsibilities and show clear commitment in terms of the transition of food systems and of the promotion of sustainable agriculture. Also, it is no longer sufficient to question the State, independently of the networks or communities in which it is integrated. It would be necessary, for example, for joint initiatives involving several States, such as the G8’s New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, to be assessed with regards to the commitments made by the States involved, and the commitments made by private actors should be clarified in terms of the benefits they receive.

The role of private investment in reducing poverty and eradicating hunger is recognised as very important, and it gives rise to innovative institutional arrangements with private and public actors, but often without a clear account of the counterparties that private stakeholders have committed to, in exchange for the benefits that can be conceded by the States. For these reasons or due to the impact of global value chains that national policies cannot regulate, it is important to clarify the role of private actors in the accountability framework for food security. Standards of transparency and accountability applied to businesses and States in the framework of the United Nations or the World Bank show that it is possible to evaluate the initiatives taken by the private sector. In addition, donors are also a key player through their intervention in agriculture and in all sectors that affect the food system; these actions should be considered in the accountability framework for food security.

The needs-based approach that focuses on technical and economic solutions is imperfect in terms of providing accountability and ensuring that the SDGs have a real impact on the ground. The rights-based approach, which encourages all actors to

take responsibility and which bases the development of individuals on legal instruments, is an essential component of the implementation and accountability of SDGs. The implementation and enforcement of the right to food that is enshrined internationally<sup>1</sup> entitles citizens to oppose discriminatory decisions and ensures that the different modes of access to healthy food are protected by political and legal mechanisms. It is therefore part of a vision that is clearly very different to that which governed the MDGs, which deliberately avoided clarifying the means to achieve food security, and only focused on the result; the rights-based approach indeed highlights the causal chain that leads to situations of malnutrition or food insecurity. The operationalization of these rights remains problematic, but the examples of national implementation confirm their importance as a remedy in situations of an asymmetry of resources or power.

The implementation and monitoring of the effects of the SDGs on food security and nutrition therefore require international coordination because the issues and means go beyond State borders. An intergovernmental approach, but also a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral one, which seems necessary to end world hunger, also requires the creation or strengthening of innovative international institutional platforms. To avoid adding to an already fragmented governance architecture, it appears essential to use the complementarities between existing international institutions to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of SDGs. The High-Level Policy Forum that should monitor the political mechanisms would also be periodically assisted in these tasks by the Council of Human Rights or the recently reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The CFS can go further than the High-Level Forum in terms of identifying ways to fight hunger, the comparison of experiences and the exchange of best practices, as stated in section 115 of *The Future We Want* statement at Rio + 20. The dynamics of the SDG review, if it operates according to the conditions identified above, could further strengthen the accountability framework and put into perspective the development trajectories of food systems in a more transversal discussion on the changing of development model patterns at the societal scale. ■

1. See Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.