

Rosamond L. Naylor (Editor): The evolving sphere of food security

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The food price crisis of 2008 brought agriculture and food security is back onto the global policy agenda with a renewed sense of urgency about dealing with the problems of global hunger and malnutrition. Anticipated impacts of climate change add to that sense of urgency. It is therefore not surprising that there has been a steady stream of books in the last few years addressing the food security challenges that we face and providing us with a wide range of solutions to the way forward. Naylor's "Evolving Sphere of Food Security" distinguishes itself from the plethora of recent contributions on the subject in three important ways: first, it takes a strong multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to food security; second, it discusses food security across the development spectrum, from food availability and access problems faced by the bottom billion to the political economy drivers of food policy in the high income countries of North America and Europe; and third, it highlights the close links between food security and environmental sustainability and even ventures into a discussion on the consequences for international security. Naylor has successfully induced a strong group of highly experienced development specialists to contribute their best in succinct yet well-documented and insightful chapters.

Naylor's volume of almost 400 pages is divided into five parts. Part I provides the overall conceptual framework for the book, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of food security and the evolving nature of the food security problem with

economic growth and development. The overview chapter by Naylor provides the logic for the organization of the book, choice of chapters and authors. The "Connecting the dots" figure (page 4) is a great representation of the food security challenge and is worth keeping in mind as you read through the book. Part 2 provides a discussion of the political economy of food and agricultural policy as countries transition from low to middle and to high income status. Part 3 is focused on the unique challenges the poorest countries face as they try to meet the food needs of their populations. Part 4 discusses the interdependence of agriculture and the environmental resource base, and the final part of the volume presents the interconnections between food security and national security.

The political realities of food policy formulation are particularly well presented in this volume. In the four chapters of Part 2, countries across the development spectrum are shown grappling with the political challenges of transitioning from an urban biased food policy in low income countries to one that is overly protective of an increasingly stronger rural lobby even as the share of agriculture in the economy declines with growth. The Indonesian case presented by Falcon, drawing on decades of personal involvement in that country's food policymaking, is particularly insightful in this regard. It is extremely helpful to consider the evolving food policy challenges as the country made the transition from low to middle income status. Falcon's personal anecdotes add to the richness of the story. Middle income countries face unique challenges: persistence of poverty and food insecurity despite growth; the need to look beyond the Green Revolution era emphasis on growth of staple crop productivity; promotion of a diversified food basket; and managing the human costs of structural transformation from predominantly rural societies to increasingly urbanizing and industrializing economies. Rozelle and Huang draw on their decades of intensive field based research in China to describe the "middle income trap" and the potential

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policy pathways out of it. In high income countries, the agricultural sector is small in relative value and in terms of population dependent on it for their livelihood, yet it exerts a disproportionately large influence on politics and policy. This volume is unique in presenting the challenges of high income countries, the United States and the European Union, alongside those of developing countries thereby highlighting the policy continuum.

The poorest regions in the world are caught in a “low agricultural productivity trap”. In these countries, enhancing food security and poverty reduction is very closely associated with growth of smallholder productivity. Lagging regions in middle income countries could also benefit from a focus on the growth of smallholder productivity as an engine of poverty reduction. Part 3 addresses some of the technological, institutional and infrastructural constraints to increasing smallholder productivity in the least developed countries. I found chapter 8 on the evolution of land tenure and land policy in sub-Saharan Africa to be particularly instructive, although I would have liked a more definitive discussion on the current debate on large-scale land acquisitions. The question of the policy environment under which the lagging regions would see productivity improvement was left unanswered.

I found the discussion of agriculture environment interactions in part 4 of the volume to be particularly strong. The trade-offs between agricultural intensification and resource use and resource degradation are clearly presented, particularly in the case of water and nutrient use. Competition for resources outside the agricultural sector and their impact on food security are also highlighted. Recent expansion of area under biofuel production and the consequent trade-off between food and fuel production is a case in point, although low fuel oil prices today have moved biofuels off the developing country

agendas, at least temporarily. The fact that biofuel production is not necessarily climate friendly is brought out very clearly in chapter 9. Part 4 emphasizes that it is indeed possible to improve resource use efficiency without a loss in yields, but requires significant institutional and policy reforms that are often hard to do. Hence the growing divergence between the high income and the rapidly developing economies in terms of resource use efficiency and resource degradation.

The final section of the volume discusses the nexus between food security and national security. As recent crises in the Middle East have shown, countries that have made significant progress in enhancing their food security can quickly spiral back into a state of food insecurity as their overall security situation deteriorates. On the other hand, sudden shocks to food security, such as a sharp rise in food prices, can quickly unravel political stability and lead to periods of national insecurity. Analytical and policy thinking has not advanced enough on exploring the nexus of food and national security. Stedman’s chapter provides us with a starting point for much needed work in this area.

As with any effort that tries to provide a comprehensive coverage of a topic as wide as global food security, there will be some shortcomings. Not all chapters are equally strong and the geographic coverage of the volume is limited to the areas that Stanford and its collaborators were actively involved in. I would also have liked to have seen a comprehensive chapter on food security in Sub-Saharan Africa and one on South Asia, similar to Falcon’s chapter on Indonesia. The role of trade and food security also deserved attention. In any case, this volume is a valuable addition to the literature on food security and will be read widely. I teach a course on Global Food Policy at Cornell University and I certainly expect to assign several of the chapters in this volume as required readings.