



YEARS



LOOKING
BACK

LOOKING
FORWARD

EVENT SYNOPSIS

FOOD POLICY IN A COMPLEX, CHANGING WORLD

Food policy—at global, regional, national, and local levels —operates in an increasingly complex world that is changing faster than ever. In the past several decades, many important food policy questions have been answered and challenges have been overcome. Since its founding in 1975, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) itself has been instrumental in producing rigorous, policy-relevant research to improve the lives of hungry and malnourished people. IFPRI helped make the case that agriculture, as a driver of poverty reduction and broad-based economic growth, requires investment. It helped explode the myth that the Green Revolution technologies benefited only large-scale farmers and showed that agricultural growth has powerful spillover effects. It highlighted the role of gender, both in society and within households, in improving food security and nutrition. And IFPRI continues to work closely with countries to support strategies and find on-the-ground policy solutions.

“It’s probably fair to say that when IFPRI was born, starvation and poverty were seen as inevitable, intractable features of our modern world. Look how far we’ve come! Today, thanks to IFPRI and other partners, we now know so much more about what needs to be done to improve agriculture, food security, and nutrition.”

—Melinda Gates,
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

“Food policies today face multiple challenges. Agriculture must become more sustainable on a dwindling resource base, while having to feed and nourish an increasing number of people.”

—Roberto Ridolfi, European Commission

“The future will be more and more dependent on technology generation and adoption.”

—Geraldo Martha, Embrapa-Labex-USA

Still, more must be done to achieve a world in which all people have access to a healthy, nutritious, safe, sustainable diet. The year 2015—IFPRI’s 40th anniversary—offered an opportunity not only to look back at what has been achieved, but also to look ahead to the promise and challenges the world faces. On November 18, IFPRI gathered partners, donors, board members, staff, and friends of the Institute to consider how food policy has evolved in the past four decades and how we can best move forward.

Producing Enough Food Sustainably

In IFPRI’s early days, much of the focus of food policy research was food production—how can the world produce adequate supplies of rice, wheat, and maize? The question has now broadened, given population growth in the context of increasingly scarce and degraded natural resources and the uncertainties and difficulties posed by climate change. Now we need to ask another question: How can we sustainably produce enough food for 9 to 10 billion people by 2050 and beyond?

Population growth is still rapid, especially in Africa. The world is becoming increasingly urban. Water scarcity is projected to worsen. Climate change will reduce yields of some crops such as rainfed maize, raise food prices, and increase hunger.

At the same time, per capita food consumption in Africa and South Asia is projected to rise, putting pressure on food supplies. In China, agriculture has grown rapidly, and so have people’s incomes more broadly, bringing a shift in focus from food security to food safety and quality, which remain problematic. More investment is needed in agricultural research to help meet all of these challenges, and more research is needed to understand how successful programs and policies can be scaled up.

Greater agricultural productivity—that is, growing more food with given resources—will be key, and it will require larger investments in agriculture than many countries are now making. Despite abundant evidence on agriculture’s power as an engine of growth and poverty reduction, in many countries investment in agriculture is still low. It will also require more attention to ensure the spread of new technologies and practices to farmers and others along the food supply chain. Such investment should include postharvest management and technologies, transportation, marketing, and finance to create a productive and well-functioning food system.

Work by IFPRI researchers and others points to promising avenues of progress. New farming technologies and practices—such as no-till

farming and precision agriculture—could contribute to significantly reducing the number of undernourished people projected for 2050.

Making Markets, Trade, and Macro Policies Work Better for Poor People

Over the past 40 years global food markets have experienced clear periods of price volatility and market failure. Indeed, the food price crisis of the mid-1970s was a factor that contributed to IFPRI's creation in 1975, and IFPRI research during the next several decades did a great deal to show how distorted trade and macroeconomic policies dampened agricultural growth. Then, after decades of steady decline, food prices spiked again in 2007 and 2008, revealing how ill prepared the world was for this kind of market failure and how few effective policy innovations were available. IFPRI has worked to better understand the roots of market failure in food markets and ways of resolving it that do not threaten people's food security.

Yet more remains to be done—we have not yet achieved world food markets that can generate stable food prices for consumers, reliable profits for producers, and adequate investments in all elements of the food system. The risk of food price instability causes policymakers to focus on addressing short-run macroeconomic problems and creating safety net programs for the poorest people, but it can lead those policymakers

“We need to look at every value chain, from the beginning to the end, as a big cooperative, and we share the income of that cooperative amongst all members.”

—Berry Martin, Rabobank Nederland

ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF 40 YEARS OF POLICY RESEARCH

What do we know about IFPRI's policy influence and impact over the years? Has IFPRI been a worthwhile undertaking? How might it achieve even greater policy influence and impact in the future? To help answer these questions, Peter B. R. Hazell and Roger Slade recently took a careful look at IFPRI's influence and impact both in the research community and in terms of policy change.¹

The most widely recognized measures of IFPRI's performance within the research community are the number of papers published in leading journals and the number of citations received in those journals. By the end of 2014, IFPRI had published 1,515 papers in leading journals and received 21,249 citations in those same journals—an average of 14 citations per paper.

Policy impact is more challenging to quantify, but a few attempts have been made. The estimated benefits from a small fraction of IFPRI's work—the PROGRESA program in Mexico, Vietnam's rice market liberalization, rural roads investment in India, the Productive Safety Net Programme in Ethiopia, abolition of the rural rationing program in Bangladesh, and ASTI's influence on research and development investment in Kenya and Tanzania—could exceed US\$1 billion, the equivalent of IFPRI's total spending from 1975 to 2014. If cross-country spillovers were included, the full benefits could be much larger.

¹ Peter B. R. Hazell and Roger Slade, *The Bang for Its Buck: Impacts of 40 Years of Policy Research at IFPRI*, IFPRI Impact Assessment Brief (Washington, DC: IFPRI, 2015), <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/bang-its-buck-impacts-40-years-policy-research-ifpri>.

“We need to figure out ways to build confidence in food trade.”

—Peter Timmer, Harvard University

“Agriculture has to be seen as a productive sector and has to be provided the same incentives that many other sectors receive in most of the world.... Many countries have public and investment policies that are not focused on agriculture, even though agriculture is the main economic sector they have.”

—Martin Piñeiro, Grupo CEO

to neglect longer-term investments that could reduce risk by raising productivity.

Many countries and organizations assume that national self-sufficiency in food is the key to food security, but often this is not the case. Instead, free and open trade can help improve food security and raise rural incomes by allowing food demand to be met at the lowest cost. A well-functioning global food market can help absorb shocks that disrupt food production in any one place, especially given the rising risks associated with climate change. And trade in high-value food commodities can help boost rural incomes.

Although Doha Round trade negotiations through the World Trade Organization have not been completed, large-scale preferential trade deals involving many countries are becoming more common. These regional trade agreements can fragment the world economy and have fostered the idea that export restrictions are acceptable outside of these preferential trade areas. Thus, it will be important to study the macroeconomic and distributional effects of these deals. How do regional trade agreements affect low-income countries, low-income farmers, and low-income consumers? It will be important to identify the winners and losers that inevitably result from such agreements and find ways to compensate the losers.

Those who seek to develop well-functioning food markets as part of larger national and global food systems will also face emerging challenges. Rapidly increasing urbanization will affect local, regional, and international markets and supply chains. Urban populations are likely to consume different kinds of food, including more animal-source foods and more foods that are processed, packaged, transported, and stored. Food systems worldwide have found it challenging to consistently deliver healthy diets to urban populations. At the same time, outmigration will change the demographic and social structure of rural areas, with implications for agriculture and food systems. Increasingly organized and integrated supply chains and demands for goods and services will open new markets and create new opportunities, benefiting some people but not necessarily all. And climate change will lead to demographic and dietary changes, while requiring food markets to become more resilient to shocks.

Bringing Together Agriculture and Nutrition

Even though agriculture is the source of the calories, vitamins, and minerals that people require, until relatively recently agriculture and nutrition were not integrated in terms of research or programs. IFPRI has been a leader in drawing attention to the links among agriculture, health, and

nutrition. Beginning in the 1980s, IFPRI researchers conceptualized the pathways through which agriculture affects nutrition and studied how the commercialization of agriculture affects people's incomes and nutrition status. In the 2000s IFPRI significantly boosted its efforts on agriculture, nutrition, and health, generating new evidence and filling in knowledge gaps on how to make agriculture improve nutrition. Among these efforts was a major international conference on agriculture, health, and nutrition in 2011. IFPRI has been instrumental in moving the discussion of food security beyond calories to include nutrition and diet quality.

One point where agriculture and nutrition clearly intersect is biofortification—an idea IFPRI introduced in 1993. Over the past two decades the HarvestPlus program has invested in biofortification—that is, breeding crops for high levels of micronutrients such as iron, zinc, and vitamin A—to develop more nutritious varieties of a number of crops commonly eaten in some developing countries.

But we still have a long way to go to build agricultural and food systems that deliver good nutrition. There is a large gap between the world's current food supply and healthy diets for all people, and at the moment no country is immune from poor nutrition. Malnutrition remains a significant problem in poor rural areas, and as rural people move to cities they will likely bring hunger and malnutrition with them. Yet many in the agricultural community do not feel responsible for nutrition, and many nutritionists do not see the relevance of agriculture to their work. There has been little attention to the prices of fruits, vegetables, and other non-staple foods, which have doubled over the past 40 years. Prices of food-based sources of iron, vitamin A, and zinc are also rising, even though deficiencies of these micronutrients are serious public health problems.

We now know more about the importance of diverse diets for good nutrition, and agricultural systems should reflect this new understanding. In many countries, poor people's diets lack diversity. In Bangladesh, for example, diets rely heavily on rice, which is low in nutrients. In many African countries poor postharvest management of fruits and vegetables leads to high levels of food waste and high prices. To promote high-quality diets and dietary diversity, it will be necessary not only to supply a variety of foods, but also to communicate to households about changing their dietary behaviors. Water, sanitation, and hygiene are another area where improvements are needed to promote both agriculture and nutrition. Recent evidence shows that empowering women is also crucial to improving households' diets: improving incomes without empowering women appears to do little to improve diets.

“The nutrition community has to create demand for dietary quality. . . . In my mind that includes also creating demand for bio-fortified crops, for food staples that have more minerals and vitamins.”

—Howarth Bouis, HarvestPlus

“I would change nutrition-sensitive agriculture or nutrition-smart agriculture to nutrition-driven agriculture.”

—Shenggen Fan, IFPRI

“As a result of IFPRI's work, attention has now changed from food security to nutrition security.”

—M. S. Swaminathan,
M. S. Swaminathan Research
Foundation

“If we care about being able to produce enough food to feed not only a growing population, but the growing incomes of our population, then we must invest in and prioritize women, because their success is going to be crucial to the world’s success.”

—Catherine Bertini, Syracuse University

The recent attention to nutrition, and to the links between nutrition and agriculture, have opened a window of opportunity for policy dialogue and change. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 presents a platform for helping integrate agriculture and nutrition. The challenge now is to institutionalize it. National governments are still struggling with how to deliver integrated agriculture and nutrition activities. Policy advances and documented successes in this area could help generate enthusiasm and action, keeping the window open.

Pushing Forward on Gender Equity

Understanding the different rights and opportunities enjoyed by women and men is crucial to ensuring that development efforts are effective. IFPRI’s pioneering research on gender has helped change development paradigms and had an impact on how development programs are designed. Its evidence-based approach to examining gender roles both within households and within society has contributed to overturning old presumptions about how households operate; shown what actual patterns of decisionmaking mean for different household members; and revealed how women’s roles affect productivity, food security, and nutrition.

Looking ahead, to promote gender equity, governments and donors will need to exercise political will. Research on food and agricultural policies must start by including both women and men. We will need to

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Over four decades, IFPRI’s work has had a significant impact on thinking and actions surrounding food, agriculture, and development policy. Some of these impacts are captured in a series of 12 stories called “IFPRI at 40: Making a Difference in Food Policy Research.” The stories describe IFPRI’s work on key topics and places around the world (to see the whole series, go to www.ifpri.org/40):

- Building Innovative Tools
- Closing the Gender Gap in Agricultural Development
- Collaborating for Food Security in Ethiopia
- Informing a Global Agenda for Food Security
- Investing in Sustainable Agricultural Production
- Making Agriculture Work for Nutrition
- Partnering for Food Security in Bangladesh
- Putting Agriculture at the Heart of Development in Africa
- Setting Priorities for Public Spending
- Social Protection by Design
- Strengthening Capacity for Research and Policymaking
- Unlocking Markets and Trade for Rural Development

commit to truly educating all girls and to promoting literacy for women. We will need to invest in supporting women's health, as well as in breaking down the silos between agriculture, health, and nutrition. To help women be productive and gain control over resources, we need to ensure that women have legal rights to land, access to financial services, and access to agricultural extension, which is currently often targeted to men.

At the same time, it will be important to recognize the needs and capacities of men. As we work toward gender equity, men must also be given the skills and resources to be as productive as possible.

Supporting Country and Regional Policies

Many of the most important policies affecting poverty, agriculture, food security, and nutrition are formulated at the country level. Recognizing this, IFPRI has worked in more than 70 countries around the world and is currently active in about 50 countries. In its country-level work, IFPRI has been committed to long-term engagement with national governments. In some cases, this engagement takes the form of IFPRI country strategy support programs, which offer an on-the-ground presence through which IFPRI researchers can work closely with officials and build relationships over time. Researchers located in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, and other countries can generate answers to policy questions and help build local capacity to conduct food policy research and analysis. This two-pronged approach not only helps build better partners for researchers by expanding knowledge of food policy but also provides ready answers to policymakers' questions.

IFPRI has had a particularly long-standing presence in Bangladesh, for example. It has been involved in policy research and policy decisions as the country has made remarkable progress moving from chronic food shortages and severe poverty to significant reductions in poverty, hunger, and undernutrition. In Ethiopia, IFPRI's research contributed to a major innovation in the form of the Ethiopia Commodity Exchange, initially established by an IFPRI researcher. IFPRI also worked closely with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute and made a major investment in capacity strengthening there, as well as conducting important work on the country's safety net program, agricultural transformation, soil quality, and other areas.

Regionally, IFPRI has provided support for the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP)—now 10 years old—since the beginning. This bold program was designed to raise agricultural investments and improve policies, but it has not been easy to move from commitment to action. IFPRI has invested heavily in this effort by

"I express my sincere gratitude to IFPRI for its strong presence in Bangladesh conducting demand-driven food and agricultural policy research and providing evidence-based policy support to the government."

—Matia Chowdhury, Minister of Agriculture, Bangladesh

"For the past 11 years, we at the Ethiopian Development Research Institute have benefited from the opportunity to work closely with IFPRI through a program of research activities on agricultural development in Ethiopia known as the Ethiopian Strategy Support Program."

—Newai Gebre-ab, Ethiopian Development Research Institute

“Agriculture as we know it will change fundamentally in the next 40 to 100 years. Transformation issues relate to structural change in farming but also sectoral change between agriculture, industry, and services.”

—Joachim von Braun, University of Bonn

“Eliminating global hunger by 2030 will require us to recognize a more complex reality: that hunger and malnutrition exist in rural areas, cities, and in between, and that we have to attack food insecurity at all points along the rural-to-urban spectrum.”

—Nancy Stetson, US Department of State

providing data, policy options, and partnerships, in an effort to improve evidence-based policymaking. Agricultural policies and investments in African countries are improving, but the continent is still feeling the effects of several decades of stagnation, so it is important to sustain and broaden recent progress.

Building a Food System for a Complex World

The complexities we face suggest the need for a systems approach to food policy—one that is designed to achieve a whole food system that sustainably produces enough healthy, safe, and nutritious food for all people.

This implies that narrow approaches to small segments of the challenges we confront will miss the mark. Rather, solutions will need to involve multiple stakeholders, who must be at the table from the very beginning. Breaking down silos and opening dialogue between disparate groups and sectors can be difficult, and doing so will require political will at the highest levels in countries, agencies, and institutions. A better understanding of the political economy of such an approach will help ensure its effectiveness.

Navigating the needs of people and the planet has not been easy over the past four decades, and it will likely get no easier in the decades to come. In this complex, fast-changing world, IFPRI will work to understand new and ongoing challenges, unravel the thorny issues that affect food and agriculture, and identify promising policy options so that we can build a sustainable food system that works for all.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES ON IFPRI'S
40TH ANNIVERSARY, GO TO WWW.IFPRI.ORG/40.

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