

## **POLITICAL ECONOMY AND GOVERNANCE** Agriculture and Food Policy from Local to Global

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### **Key messages**

- Policymaking is shaped by political economy and governance factors such as incentives, institutional structures, ideological biases, and power dynamics. Over the past 50 years, these factors have intersected with major trends affecting the international development policy landscape, with important implications for agriculture and food policy.
- Major government reforms have shifted the influence of different actors in national policy processes, given greater leverage to local actors in decision-making and implementation, and elevated attention to power asymmetries in global governance.
- Research on governance and political economy has highlighted limits to overcoming power imbalances and capacity constraints, as well as the importance of incentives, ideas, and coalitions in the politics of agricultural policy reform.
- In-depth case studies, active engagement with government decision-makers, and innovative tools have supported the policymaking process and generated evidence on the types of institutional arrangements and enabling environments that can ensure investments are translated into effective service delivery and development outcomes.

Looking ahead, research should address:

- **Decentralization and local engagement.** Assess the impacts of decentralization on service provision and ways to improve subnational capacity to support the delivery of policy goals, and identify the role that local leaders can play in more integrated food system policy approaches.

- **Political economy of policy reforms and distribution.** Strengthen understanding of who has voice and power in policymaking processes, evaluate whether multistakeholder platforms and food policy councils are equitable and socially inclusive, and assess opportunities to overcome political economy challenges and ensure cooperation.
- **State capacity.** Build better understanding of how states can improve their capacity to manage trade-offs across sectors and tackle implementation of policies that affect multiple ministries, as well as how leadership and electoral turnover affect implementation of national food systems transformation pathways.
- **Global governance.** Identify ways to bolster global governance for food systems, building on the strengths of both multilateral objectives and multistakeholder viewpoints, and support the establishment of accountability platforms that transparently track how institutions are delivering on promises to tackle hunger, food security, and sustainable agriculture.

Policymaking is shaped by evidence as well as by political economy and governance factors such as incentives, institutional structures, ideological biases, and power dynamics. Over the past several decades, these factors have intersected with significant trends affecting the international development policy landscape, with important implications for agriculture and food policy. Informing evidence-based policymaking has been central to IFPRI's mandate since its inception. This chapter examines four key areas to which IFPRI has made significant contributions in research, methodology, and policy: decentralization, agriculture and food policy reform processes, political economy of distribution, and state capacity. Looking forward, challenges such as urbanization, debt distress, climate change, conflict, rapid technological advances, and corporate concentration of supply chains will increase food system complexity and cross-national externalities. Given these challenges, the chapter concludes by addressing a fifth critical area: the need to build effective and legitimate global institutions for food systems governance.

## Decentralization and local engagement

Decentralization—which involves the transfer of autonomy, resources, and accountability from upper to lower tiers of government—has been one of the most important governance reforms in recent decades. This reform gained

popularity in the early 1990s due to multiple pressures, including dissatisfaction with the results of centralized planning, structural adjustment reforms, demands for regional autonomy, and democratization across the Global South. A broad recognition of the limits of state capacity and the ability of local groups to manage resources has also driven decentralization reforms (see Chapter 6) (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2008). Although decentralization can, in some cases, lead to positive development outcomes, it is not a panacea.

Research on the consequences of decentralization for development outcomes has focused primarily on two pathways. In the first, decentralization brings policy decisions closer to those affected by them, creating the opportunity to leverage local knowledge, to incorporate local preferences, to enhance citizen participation, and to improve accountability and responsiveness of government. This first pathway emphasizes decentralization's potential to improve quality of governance, and studies have tested its impacts on public service delivery, public investment choices, and outcomes for citizens like health, education, and poverty. Second, decentralization expands the number of decision-making actors, necessitating coordination for policy coherence across jurisdictions and attention to potential for elite capture, which occurs when powerful individuals or groups dominate decision-making or divert resources for private gain. This second pathway highlights how decentralization can complicate the achievement of policy goals that span jurisdictions or reinforce existing local power structures.

The global literature on decentralization's impact through these pathways, to which IFPRI has contributed, finds mixed effects of decentralization on public investments and services, recognizing that "the devil is in the details" when it comes to understanding whether services and programs work as intended in rural areas (Raabe et al. 2010). For example, uneven subnational government capacities can result in unequal public service delivery and policy outcomes across localities (Gingerich 2013; Ziblatt 2008). In this vein, IFPRI research found that staffing local governments with bureaucrats with greater knowledge of local agricultural conditions and higher intrinsic motivation results in higher access to agricultural extension services for rural households in Nepal and matters more for policy outcomes than traditional capacity indicators like budget and staff education levels (Kyle and Resnick 2019a).

Additionally, local norms and inequalities often exclude some groups from decision-making. In settings where women face limited mobility and restrictive gender norms, they are less likely to contact local officials or speak up in community meetings (see Chapter 14) (Kosec et al. 2024; Palaniswamy et al. 2019). Variations in the level of democratization can also condition whether

decentralization results in more pro-poor policies (Faguet 2005) and the mix of public investment choices made by local governments (Kosec and Mogues 2020). Even when decentralization succeeds in enhancing accountability to local populations, electoral pressures can push subnational governments to prioritize infrastructure projects because of their high visibility to citizens, such as the construction of roads, health clinics, and schools, at the expense of agricultural services (Resnick 2022).

Increasingly, governments are seeking analysis of the impacts of decentralization on service provision and on how to improve subnational capacity so that local governments can deliver policy goals (see Box 15.1). As mayors and other local leaders start to gain greater policy autonomy globally, bolstered by transnational networks such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and efforts to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is critical that research identify the role that such local leaders can play in more integrated food systems policy approaches—either as complements or substitutes to national policy processes. For instance, IFPRI work in Mali highlights how local leaders, including both mayors and traditional authorities, are pivotal in helping vulnerable populations manage climate crises (Bleck et al. 2024). This research finds that when crises occur, local leaders can leverage their knowledge of communal needs as well as the trust of local populations to help governments and donors to identify beneficiaries of humanitarian support, handle transport and logistics of aid distribution, provide advice on local needs, and manage local disputes around aid distribution. Identifying approaches to enhance the decision-making power of women, youth, and marginalized groups within local governance is also critical to ensure that localization does not reinforce preexisting inequalities (Adida et al. 2024; IFPRI 2010).

## **Political economy of policy reforms**

Decentralization processes often occurred in parallel to structural adjustment reforms during the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapters 3 and 18). As governments were compelled by donor agencies and macroeconomic instability to shift resources and priorities, a rich scholarship on the political economy of agricultural policy reforms emerged to understand when and why the preferences of rural agricultural producers had more influence in policy reform processes (Anderson et al. 2013; Krueger 1992; Swinnen 2010). Some pointed to the primacy of decision-makers' policy beliefs as a reason why agriculture faced distortions in developing countries prior to structural adjustment reforms

### **BOX 15.1 Government demand for governance research: Cases from Ghana and Nepal**

As governments consider public sector reforms, they need to better understand how these reforms may impact agricultural service provision, financing, and incentive structures. Moreover, governments sometimes see a disjunction between policies and outcomes in rural areas, and they want to understand whether public sector reforms could help close those gaps.

IFPRI has provided demand-driven analysis on the impacts of governance reforms, both through its country offices and in partnership with local institutes. For example, in 2012, Ghana began to devolve responsibility for its agriculture sector to more than 200 metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies (MMDAs), a process that involved transferring the responsibilities of agricultural staff and budgets from national ministries to the MMDAs. Several years later, IFPRI partnered with Ghana's Center for Democratic Development to assess the impacts of devolution on agricultural service provision by using district-level budget data, along with surveys of district agricultural bureaucrats and almost 1,000 households. The findings showed that devolution had a negative impact on expenditures on agricultural extension because local citizens preferred their MMDAs to prioritize investments in physical infrastructure rather than low-visibility services such as extension. The research was used to inform Ghana's Ministry of Food and Agriculture that the underinvestment in extension could be reversed by addressing time lags in the distribution of resources to the MMDAs and halting the continuous subdivision of MMDAs, which reduced their internally generated revenue (Resnick 2022).

Similarly, in 2015, Nepal's constitutional referendum and resulting transition to a federal system entailed major shifts for the agriculture sector. First, authority and autonomy for many agricultural and livestock activities was shifted to seven newly created provincial governments and more than 700 local governments. Second, elected executives, rather than appointed ones, would oversee these local governments, which would be able to determine their own policy priorities. An analysis of lessons learned from countries that experienced similar reforms—as well as primary data collection with national policymakers, local bureaucrats, and rural households, conducted in collaboration with Nepal's Integrated Institute for Development Studies—provided critical guidance to the Ministry of Agricultural and Livestock Development about how to implement reforms with consideration for clear lines of institutional authority, accountability, autonomy, incentives, and coordination across the new tiers of government when the reform process proceeded in 2016 (Kyle and Resnick 2019b). Overall, this type of granular research on how decentralization reforms interact with local context can support policymakers in ensuring that policy reforms translate into the desired policy outcomes on the ground and avoid some of its pitfalls.

(Grindle and Thomas 1989). One study (Krueger 1992), for instance, highlighted that governments historically levied distortionary agricultural export taxes as a way to finance rapid industrialization, while another (Van de Walle 1989) claimed that aspirations for food self-sufficiency compelled distortionary measures during the 1970s and 1980s.

Others emphasized that the nature of post-structural-adjustment reforms for agriculture reflected regime changes. A study in Africa showed that distortions that were negatively affecting agricultural producers decreased when much of the region transitioned to multiparty democracy in the 1990s because rural voters had more influence over politicians (Bates and Block 2013). Elsewhere, researchers focused on the importance of the ideological leanings of the political party in power (Olper 2007; Swinnen 2010), the role of the media (Olper and Swinnen 2013), and whether elites had linkages to agriculture businesses (Tyce 2020; Widner 1994) as reasons for agricultural policy decisions. More recently, the role of coalitions in agricultural policy reforms has garnered more attention, with researchers noting that traditional distinctions between rural producers and urban consumers are no longer realistic, especially given the rise of new interest groups within food systems (such as processors, banks, insurance companies), and the importance of global agricultural value chains (see Chapter 7) (Swinnen 2015; Swinnen and Resnick 2023).

Some analysts further combined these insights with theoretical advancements in the public policy field, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). The ACF highlights how individuals leverage their beliefs about the causes of and solutions to a policy problem within a particular policy subsystem (such as agriculture, health, education, or environment) to form coalitions with likeminded partners, sometimes with the aid of “policy brokers” who foster compromise and minimize conflict.

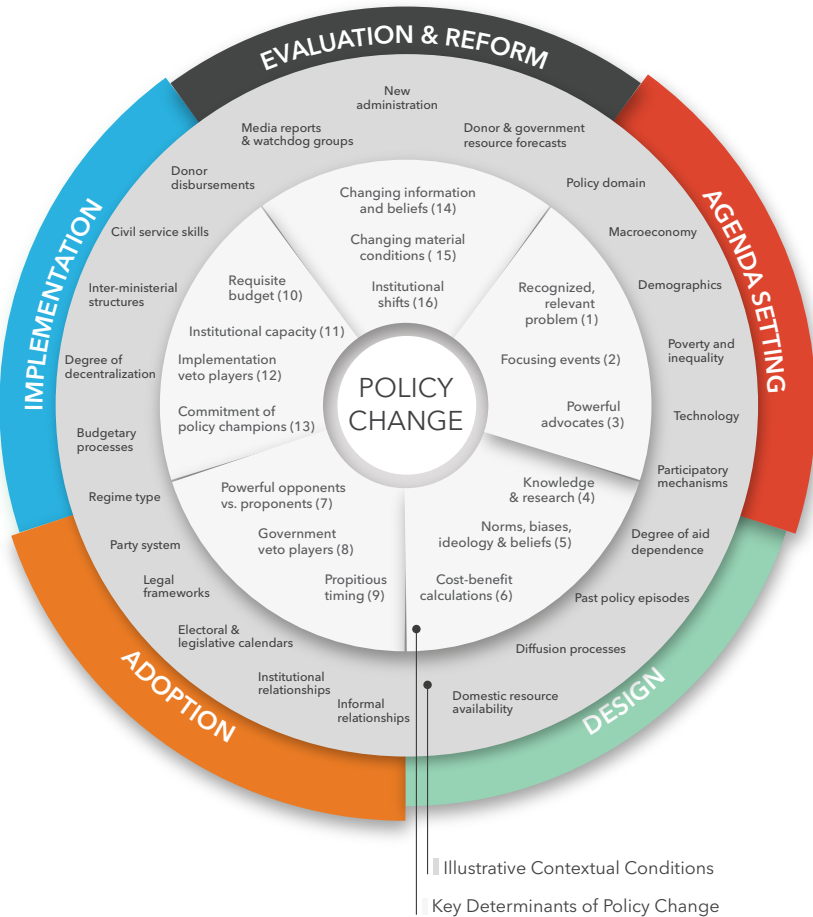
As part of a robust agenda on participatory policymaking analyses, IFPRI researchers and partners adapted the ACF and utilized narrative approaches to study the role of beliefs in agricultural subsidy policies and programs, including in India (Birner et al. 2011), Ghana and Uganda (Mockshell and Birner 2015), and Senegal (Mockshell and Birner 2020), as well as in advisory services programs in Uganda (Rwamigisa et al. 2018). These studies showed that relevant policy reforms were hindered by contrasting belief systems and causal assumptions and corresponding competing advocacy (and veto) coalitions. For instance, the study in Senegal uncovered two distinct coalitions that diverged in their policy beliefs about the contributions of subsidies to agriculture;

namely, government policymakers saw subsidies as indispensable to address poor soil fertility and low agricultural productivity while donors viewed them as costly and inefficient (Mockshell and Birner 2020).

To ensure that many of the insights above could be translated into applied political economy analysis, IFPRI and collaborating institutions developed replicable tools and frameworks to both understand and anticipate policy decisions. The NetMap tool, originally applied to northern Ghana and since adopted by many organizations, provides a low-cost, interview-based mapping approach to uncover sources of conflict and cooperation, examine informal and formal networks, and highlight power relations (Schiffer and Hauck 2010). NetMap enables communities to offer their unique perspective on the policy process, ensuring that researchers and government officials properly interpret it. The Kaleidoscope Model, an applied framework for understanding the drivers of policy change, focuses on five stages of the policy process—agenda setting, design, adoption, implementation, and evaluation and reform—and identifies 16 key variables and conditions that facilitate change (Resnick et al. 2018). By integrating power dynamics and political conflict into the analysis of policymaking and recognizing the diverse range of actors, including donors, civil society, the private sector, and government, who can influence the policy cycle, the model provides valuable insights for identifying entry points into the policy process (see Figure 15.1). The Kaleidoscope Model has been applied to many areas of policy reform, including fertilizer subsidies, large-scale food fortification, and environmental sustainability (Baca et al. 2024; Dhehibi et al. 2023; Resnick et al. 2018).

The Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Governance (WEAGov) assessment framework builds on the Kaleidoscope Model to examine the role that women's perspectives play in the policymaking process (Ragasa et al. 2022). In partnership with Krea University in India and the Agricultural Policy Research Network in Nigeria, IFPRI has piloted the framework with over 400 agrifood policy experts to evaluate the extent to which women's voices, needs, and preferences are included in the policy cycle (Ragasa et al. 2023, 2024). This tool has yielded actionable insights for policymakers. For example, agrifood policy experts involved in the WEAGov assessment in Nigeria highlighted lack of funding, implementation resources, and monitoring efforts toward gender targets already set within national agrifood policies as key constraints for improving policy outcomes for women. They identified that greater coordination with the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning before budgets are set for each line ministry could improve responsiveness to women's preferences in agrifood policies (CGIAR 2023).

**FIGURE 15.1** The Kaleidoscope Model of policy change



Source: Resnick et al. (2018).

Understanding who has voice and power in policymaking processes continues to be a critical issue, especially given that inclusive participation remains central to food policy discussions, most notably with the dialogues approach that emerged from the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). The growth in multistakeholder platforms and food policy councils across all regions of the world has spurred further interest in understanding the extent to which participation leads to genuinely transformative outcomes (see Chapter 13) (Moragues-Faus 2021), leading IFPRI and its partners to assess whether these platforms are equitable and socially inclusive (Ratner et al. 2022).

## **Political economy of distribution**

Following structural adjustment reforms, which were seen as overly donor-driven, the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness became a major impetus in the power dynamics that dominated the subsequent decade of development, including in the agrifood sector. The Paris Declaration established five key principles—ownership, harmonization, alignment, results-based outcomes, and mutual accountability between donors and partner countries for development results—to which heads of state committed to accelerate the Millennium Development Goals (OECD 2005). These principles were intended to rectify longstanding imbalances between high-income northern donors and donor recipients in the Global South. To enhance ownership and donor coordination, the Declaration advocated for two-thirds of aid, by 2010, to be distributed through budget support or sectorwide programming—both of which would enable partners to decide how to allocate funding according to their own national development and sectoral strategies (Lundsgaarde and Engberg-Pedersen 2019).

In Africa, the confluence of budget support and expenditure targets under the Maputo Declaration of the African Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP) resulted in the revival of direct government support to agriculture, most notably through input subsidy programs (Jayne and Rashid 2013). As evidence emerged that such programs might not be appropriately targeted or the best use of resources, scholars at IFPRI and various universities began to focus on the political economy of distribution. By combining data on subsidy distribution with local election data, researchers uncovered distinct political economy reasons why subsidy programs might be retained despite questionable impacts on productivity, cost effectiveness, and poverty reduction. For instance, in Ghana, fertilizer

subsidies were disproportionately targeted to anti-incumbent districts in an attempt at vote mobilization (Banful 2011). By contrast, in countries such as Zambia, fertilizer subsidies more frequently went to ruling party districts (Mason et al. 2017). In Malawi, subsidies were not targeted along partisan lines but did benefit the ruling party in subsequent elections (Dionne and Horowitz 2016).<sup>1</sup> Extensive research on fertilizer and electricity subsidies in India also showed that concern over losing farmer votes proved a key barrier to removing subsidies (Birner et al. 2011).

Many governments disproportionately favored input subsidies due to their high visibility and easy attributability, even as they displaced funding for longer-term but higher-return investments in agricultural research and development (Mogues 2015; Mogues and Do Rosario 2016). Qualitative discourse analysis revealed the emergence of two opposing coalitions. Government partners, on one side, emphasized the narrative of poor soil fertility and claimed that input subsidies could increase incomes, food security, and jobs for youth. Donors, on the other side, marshalled narratives about poor implementation of subsidies, displacement of the private sector, poor targeting, and corruption (Mockshell and Birner 2015, 2020). Such narratives reveal that some divisions over policy direction, which the Paris Declaration intended to minimize, instead remained quite sizable between donors and recipient countries.<sup>2</sup>

The intersection between narratives, electoral incentives, and agricultural productivity is also relevant to the broader agenda on repurposing global agricultural support: of the approximately US\$800 billion in total support, more than \$86 billion goes to input subsidies (see Chapters 3 and 18) (Gautam et al. 2022). Incentivizing communities to accept a reduction in subsidies for their reinvestment into ecosystem service payments, agricultural research and development, or other domains requires grappling with political economy dynamics (Vos et al. 2023). In many cases, this has been achieved by compensating potential losers from reform, earmarking subsidies for these new investments, and taking advantage of windows of opportunity, including shifts in political administrations. Overcoming political economy challenges will be critical

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1 These dynamics may be very different in other policy areas. For instance, research in Malawi has found that partisan political economy targeting may be more prominent for humanitarian aid transfers (Duchoslav et al. 2023).

2 Twenty years on, the Paris Aid principles have been further battered by the rise in many more aid actors—foundations, philanthropists, and nontraditional donors—as well as sovereign wealth creditors, and the growing use of local NGOs as delivery mechanisms (Dietrich 2013). As a result, national governments are again losing ownership over aid resources, with one study highlighting that four out of five aid projects are managed by nongovernmental agencies (World Bank 2024).

to ensure global cooperation on repurposing subsidies: even though all countries may benefit in the long term from smarter investments in sustainable food systems, governments may fear alienating powerful constituencies in the short term. For example, analyses of fuel subsidies in Indonesia highlight that when corruption is common, citizens may strongly oppose reforms because they lack trust in their government to replace subsidies with something better (Kyle 2018).

### **Unpacking state capacity**

The return of input subsidy programs in the 2000s presaged the resurgence of state-led development, which remains pronounced to this day. Inspired by the example of the so-called Asian miracle economies, some development economists began to emphasize the importance of industrial upgrading for the growth of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) and highlighted need for governments to play a central role in facilitating that process (see Chapter 3) (Lin 2013; Page and Tarp 2017; Rodrik 2007). IFPRI contributed to this discussion with a robust research program on structural transformation processes in Africa, delving into multiple case studies and tracing patterns of productivity growth, both within agriculture and between agriculture and other sectors (McMillan et al. 2014, 2017). A key finding is that neither structural transformation nor fundamentals like high human capital and strong institutions alone can drive rapid and sustained growth; both are needed, and policy sequencing affects growth trajectories. On the ground in Africa, agro-industrial policy became increasingly prominent, including creation of growth corridors, agro-industrial zones, and agricultural growth poles. The goal of these policy actions was to add value through integrated investments in infrastructure and logistics, as well as trade, tax, and regulatory incentives (Picard et al. 2017).

Yet, for agro-industrial efforts to succeed, they need to be guided by well-capacitated states that can work with the private sector to provide missing inputs such as research and development, identify new products that can be profitably produced, and facilitate upstream and downstream coordination (Hausmann et al. 2008). Consequently, scholars have examined why and when governments are incentivized to take on this role and for which agricultural value chains, noting the importance of the “political settlement”—that is, the distribution of power and influence between political and business elites (Behuria 2020; Whitfield et al. 2015). Research in Ghana highlighted how a state that was strongly democratic but weakly capacitated could be a barrier to agriculture-led

industrialization, causing the state to be driven more by electoral considerations than transformation goals (Resnick 2019). In parallel, in-depth case studies on the political economy of agricultural commercialization showed how the state subjected key agricultural value chains to ad hoc policy interventions, such as import and export bans, which aimed to extract electoral gains rather than generate transformative benefits (Chinsinga and Naess 2022).

With the shift from structural transformation to food systems transformation, there is a growing need to consider implications for policy coherence (Dewi et al. 2024). This will require better understanding of how states can improve their capacity to manage trade-offs across sectors and tackle implementation of policies that affect multiple ministries (Resnick and Swinnen 2023). In doing so, much can be learned from IFPRI's prior work on governments' improvements to multisectoral coordination for nutrition policies (Gillespie and van den Bold 2017), on-the-ground experience supporting Ethiopia's Agricultural Transformation Agency (Zandstra et al. 2024), and cross-ministerial surveys of bureaucratic staff about incentives and political interference in service provision (Birner et al. 2012). Following the UNFSS, burgeoning research work also considers how ministry leadership and electoral turnover affect implementation of national food systems transformation pathways (Resnick 2024). All of these cases have emphasized the need for much more research on the black box of food systems bureaucracies to better understand ministerial motivations and performance criteria to implement complex, multisectoral policies.

## **Global governance**

The UNFSS represents one example of the broader shift toward multi-stakeholderism in the global governance of food systems, occurring in tandem with a growing skepticism of the multilateral system. While multilateralism commits national governments to implement decisions, multi-stakeholderism brings together diverse participants—from civil society, business, and government—to collaboratively decide on solutions (Gleckman 2018). From the end of World War II to the mid-2000s, multilateralism predominated in global food and agricultural policy through institutions such as the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, International Fund for Agricultural Development, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization as well as the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. Multilateral policy processes, such as negotiations through the UN's Congress of Party (CoP) summits, also facilitated inter-governmental cooperation.

Several concurrent factors began to gradually weaken the multilateral system. These included the rapid expansion of nongovernmental organizations and private enterprises through the political and economic liberalization of the 1980s and 1990s, a lack of agreement on agricultural trade disciplines since the WTO's Doha Round started in 2001 (see Chapter 16), and the growth of new global bodies, such as the Group of 20 (G20), in the wake of the 2008 global food and financial crisis (Clapp and Murphy 2013; Gleckman 2018; Lele 2021; Paarlberg 2002). The 2008 financial crisis also stimulated the World Economic Forum to launch a Global Redesign Initiative to revamp global governance through multi-stakeholderism (WEF 2010), and an emphasis on multistakeholder partnerships is now embedded within SDG 17. More recently, growing populism, geopolitical tensions, and a sense of unequal power on the part of LMICs within the post-World War II institutional framework have further eroded the legitimacy of multilateralism (Resnick and Swinnen 2023). Convening processes that sometimes include UN entities and sometimes exclude them, including the G20's Global Agriculture and Food Security Program in 2010 and its Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty in 2024 as well as the G7's Global Alliance for Food Security in 2022, have further fragmented multilateralism.

Yet, while disappointment with multilateral cooperation is not new, there are few viable alternatives. Using the UNFSS as an example, many scholars and activists have been just as disappointed with the multistakeholder approach, arguing that it creates entry points for corporate influence and allows governments to outsource responsibility for decision-making and implementation (Anderl and Hißen 2023; Canfield et al. 2021). At the same time, intergovernmental coordination remains essential, both for responding to crises, such as rising food prices from trade protectionism (Martin et al. 2024), and addressing longer-term collective action issues, such as escalating sovereign debt, rapid technological change, and climate change.

In the coming decades, IFPRI and its partners can play a key role in identifying ways to bolster global governance for the food system, building on the strengths of both multilateral objectives and multistakeholder viewpoints. Such an agenda can consider the viability of different global governance mechanisms proposed in recent years, such as the Food Systems Stability Board comprised of national representatives from key ministries and which would serve as a food systems risk body to help countries anticipate and mitigate food crises through early warning systems and monitoring of potential shocks to trade and price stability (Dixson-Decleve et al. 2021). Building on recent IFPRI work on global commitments to SDG 2 (Zorbas et al. 2024), there is also a need to

establish accountability platforms that transparently track how institutions are delivering on their promises to tackle hunger, food security, and sustainable agriculture. Such efforts could be enhanced by bolstering the institutional efforts of the UN's Committee on Food Security, established in 1974 and reformed in 2009, and whose primary mandate is to promote policy convergence toward improved food security. As part of CGIAR's Policy Innovations Program (2025–2030), greater attention will be given to additional options for addressing the frailties in global governance of the food system.

## Conclusions

Over the last 50 years, development trends have shifted the influence of different actors in national policy processes, given greater leverage to local actors in decision-making and implementation, and elevated attention to power asymmetries in global governance. These trends have intersected with important policy issues in the food and agricultural spheres, including input subsidies and agro-industrialization. Although space constraints prevent this chapter from providing an exhaustive review of all key political economy and governance areas relevant to food and agricultural policy, it does highlight the ways IFPRI and its partners have contributed to the governance and political economy scholarship around major policy trends. This has been achieved not only through in-depth case studies and active engagement with government decision-makers but also by creating innovative tools to navigate the policymaking process and generating evidence on the types of institutional arrangements and enabling environments that can ensure investments are translated into effective service delivery and development outcomes. Notably, these advancements have coincided with a broader recognition in the international development community of the centrality of political economy analysis for the success of what otherwise seem to be technical policy reforms (Whaites et al. 2023).

This research has shown that decentralization and local engagement are not panaceas for overcoming power imbalances and capacity constraints. It has also highlighted the importance of incentives, ideas, and coalitions in the politics of agricultural policy reform. Looking ahead, global challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, and rising inequality raise new questions about the governance and political economy of food systems. While past research emphasized governance arrangements believed to be most effective for rural services and agrifood systems, we do not yet know enough about governance arrangements that are most adaptive to rapid change or that best foster policy coherence for achieving the SDGs. Even as the development

landscape becomes more unpredictable and complex in the coming years, IFPRI and its CGIAR partners will remain committed to ensuring research recommendations are politically grounded and to advancing knowledge on the institutional prerequisites for, and political risks to, sustainable and healthy food systems.

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