Who Makes Global Food Policy?

Robert Paarlberg

Abstract:

Internationally, many different institutions compete or combine to make policy in the area of food and farming. In our modern age of globalization, the most influential institutions are sometimes expected to be those from the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors that have global reach, such as transnational corporations, intergovernmental organizations, and international NGOs. Following the international food price spike of 2008, food and farming issues did grow in prominence on the agenda of global intergovernmental organizations such as the G8, G20, FAO, IBRD, and IMF, and also with a number of transnational non-governmental organizations, most conspicuously the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Yet despite globalization, separate sovereign national governments remained stubbornly in political control. Even global corporate actors – including international banks, and agribusiness firms such as Monsanto or Cargill – can be heavily constrained by the sovereign powers of individual states. As for intergovernmental organizations both within the UN system and beyond, these are little more than assemblies giving voice to separate nation state authorities. In the global food system, nearly all politics – and nearly all public policy – still operates at the national level or below. The first task of food policy researchers should be to understand why these national governments so often act in ways that compromise our economic or social ideals, and to seek changes in those adverse national policy actions.
For better or worse, we do not yet have a single centrally governed world food system. The world is better understood as one broken into many relatively separate national food systems. This should not be too surprising; separate sovereign nation states (or their empires) have been the dominant actors in international politics at least since the 1648 European Peace of Westphalia. Food and farming, to the present day, remain firmly governed within this fractured Westphalian world.

Since national governments are suspicious of others and jealous of their own authority, most have never wanted to be part of a “global” food system. They typically set in place policies with a strong bias against imports of staple foods, to international markets today still supply only a small portion of the world's primary food consumption. Even for heavily traded crops like wheat, imports currently satisfy only a bit more than 20 percent of total consumption worldwide. For rice, it is just 5 percent. For packaged foods, about 10 percent. The rest of the world’s food is produced, processed, and consumed entirely within the borders of separate nation states, under the separate and exclusive jurisdiction of the governments of those states. This pattern persists despite today’s much lower transportation costs, because most national governments do not want to depend on other countries for their basic food supply. Even if they have significant unsatisfied food needs within their own borders, they will still set in place import restrictions intended to preserve national “self-sufficiency” in food. India, the country that is home to the largest number of undernourished people on earth, still imposes an average 50 percent tariff on imports of food and farm products, and as a consequence in most years it accepts virtually zero commercial imports of wheat or rice.¹

The foundations of national control

National governments remain the dominant actors in food and farming because of the exclusive legal jurisdiction they enjoy, as sovereign states, over the farms and food markets trapped within their borders. Farming systems are uniquely tied to the land, which is a physical resource that cannot be transferred electronically offshore. By determining who owns the land, and by maintaining restrictions over food exports and imports at the border, state authorities have most of the tools they need to reduce external control over their own domestic food markets.

Sovereign states have an array of policy instruments at their disposal to employ

in governing their food and farm sectors. Prosperous and productive farm sectors in rich countries not only get protection from imports at the border; they also get lavish producer income and insurance subsidies behind the border. In rich countries it is not unusual to find a significant share of total farm income dependent on these national policy interventions (In the European Union, 19 percent of farm income was derived from such government measures in 2012, and 65 percent in Japan). Food systems in rich countries are also heavily shaped by national tax and competition policies, plus the presence (or absence) of strong national regulations for food safety, animal welfare, and environmental protection.

Meanwhile in poor countries, state interventions in the agricultural production and marketing sector are just as powerful, but less likely to be pro-farmer; they are traditionally consumer-biased (“urban biased”) rather than farmer-biased. Some developing countries in Asia have long asserted control over the food and farming sector through the centralized regulation of river valley irrigation systems. In other cases, national programs governing the ownership and distribution of agricultural land (including periodic efforts at redistribution under the slogan of “land reform”) have also been a powerful governmental prerogative. State subsidies for fertilizers and pesticides, or electricity for irrigation pumps, can provide benefits to some farmers even while counterpoised macroeconomic policies, such as over-valued exchange rates, are placing a net burden on others. State-run monopolies over farm input supplies, or over commodity purchases, frequently put a price squeeze on growers. Public sector food distribution systems are also maintained to deliver cheap commodities to urban constituencies, often including the middle class as well as the poor.

Public budget spending by national governments is also decisive in determining outcomes in the food and farming sector. India had a green revolution in the farm sector in the 1960s and 1970s in part because the central government dedicated more than 20 percent of its public budget to agricultural development. A green revolution has been slow to come to Africa in part because public spending levels on that Continent are far lower, typically only 5 percent of the budget, and in some cases less than that.

This dominant influence that is exercised over food and farming systems by national governments is by itself neither a good nor a bad thing; different states have used their authority in dramatically different ways, and with dramatically divergent effects. Consider North and South Korea, states on the same peninsula

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that share a common language, culture, and national history, and states with a history of powerful central policy guidance. Yet the entirely different food and farming policies since the 1950s in North versus South Korea have left the South today awash in food abundance, while the North has struggled since the 1990s with the specter of famine. Or, consider the record of China. When the government of China experimented with fully collectivized farming during Mao’s Great Leap Forward in 1959-61, production collapsed and a needless famine claimed 30 million lives. Then after Mao’s death, far more enlightened Chinese leaders chose a new policy direction that extended land rights and marketing privileges to small farmers, triggering an agricultural boom that lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty and providing to the present day a foundation for broadly based industrial growth in China.

*The relative weakness of global governance institutions*

Because separate national governments so often select policies that are self-serving, and at times harmful to their neighbors, policy reformers have long championed the creation of “global governance” institutions above the level of the nation state. Particularly since the Second World War, and most explicitly within the new United Nations system, a number of supra-national institutions have now been created to provide improved global governance over food and farming. The resources controlled by these institutions remain meager, however, and the jurisdictions where they seek to act remain almost entirely under sovereign national control.

Today’s global system is cluttered with intergovernmental organizations, but most have limited means to influence core activities within national-level food and farming sectors. For example, when food prices spiked on the international market in 2008, the secretary-general of the United Nations set up a High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, purportedly to produce an “action plan” for an appropriate global response. From the language this Task Force used, it might have seemed that the United Nations was taking charge of the crisis. Yet upon a closer look no new authority and no new funding had been granted by national governments to this UN Task Force, so it posed no threat to national governmental control, and in the end it had no measurable impact on anybody’s food production or consumption. The Task Force held meetings and commissioned reports, but little more. This was to an extent a repeat of what had happened during a much earlier world food crisis in 1974, when the UN created a comparably toothless Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which also lacked the independent authority needed to influence events.

The more significant reactions to the 2008 price spike came not from the global governance institutions of the UN system, but instead from the national
governments of the major economic powers, partly coordinated through international groupings of governments such as the Group of 8 (G8) or the Group of 20 (G20). The G20, which includes emerging and transitional economic powers such as Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey, was established in 1999 in the wake of the East Asian financial crisis as a means to broaden international consultations beyond the older and smaller G8. Both the G8 and the G20 now meet on a regular basis at the head of state (or “summit”) level, and these meetings have become settings in which significant national policy changes can be pledged or pursued. For example, after the food price spike of 2008, at a G8 summit meeting in Italy in July 2009, that the world’s leading powers concluded a financially significant “L’Aquila pledge” to increase their spending for agricultural development assistance. Such G8 meetings can sometimes help national governments act by forging an expectation that others will act as well, but these expectations are not always fulfilled, it will always be separate national governmental actions that are at stake in the process.

The purpose of G8 and G20 meetings is to facilitate cooperation among separate sovereign nation-states, not to replace or override those states. Efforts to override state preferences at these international meetings regularly fail. When President Nicolas Sarkozy of France attempted in 2011 to use his temporary chairmanship of a G20 Summit to impose reforms over commodity futures trading policies, to reduce subsidies for biofuels, and to discipline commodity export restraints, he was effectively blocked by the other major economic powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Russia.4

Groupings of national governments can act only if the national governments agree, and the same can usually be said of organizations of national governments (so-called intergovernmental organizations, or IGOs). These IGOs may have secretariats of their own, but their budgets are typically dependent on national government contributions, and their authority is still constrained by state power and the nation state sovereignty norm. One example is the World Trade Organization (WTO), originally created as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) at an international conference in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in 1944. The WTO offers its Geneva headquarters as a venue where national governments can negotiate agreements on trade, including agricultural trade, but if the national governments fail to reach an agreement – as when the 2001 Doha Round of negotiations was suspended without a result in 2008 – there is nothing the WTO secretariat in Geneva can do about it. The WTO does have a Dispute

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Settlement Body (DSB) to adjudicate claims by member governments regarding non-compliance with existing international agreements, but governments can defy this body if they wish. For example, the United States was told by this Dispute Settlement Body in 2005 that elements of its cotton subsidy program were illegal under the 1993 Agreement on Agriculture, but the United States refused at first either to change its policies adequately or to pay compensation. In 2008, the U.S. Congress even passed a new farm bill explicitly preserving some of the policies the DSB had found to be illegal. Brazil, which had brought the complaint against the United States, eventually threatened retaliation in 2010, at which point the United States responded not by changing its cotton policy but instead by offering compensation payments to cotton growers in Brazil. The outcome was ironic double-violation of free trade principles: America’s taxpayers were now paying for trade-distorting cotton subsidies in two countries rather than just one.\(^5\)

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD) are two additional international institutions created at the Bretton Woods conference in 1944. Both have been criticized for bullying national governments into unwelcome stabilization and structural adjustment agreements, and these institutions do have influence over smaller states, yet they exercise that influence mostly on behalf of the larger states. Both of these institutions are largely funded by the world’s wealthiest countries, and their senior leadership is appointed by those countries, so they most often do the bidding of those countries.\(^6\) They are the agents of the major economic powers that originally created them and continue to pay to sustain their activities.

Moreover, like the WTO these international financial institutions are often unable to control the governments that challenge their guidance. Even the poorest governments have a long history of defying the Bank and the Fund. In 1994, the World Bank completed a study of 29 governments in Sub-Saharan Africa that had undergone structural adjustment and found that 17 of those 29 had reduced the overall tax burden they placed on farming, but some, because of persistently overvalued exchange rates, had actually increased that burden. Only 4 of the 29 had eliminated parastatal marketing boards for major export crops, and none of the 29 had set in place both agricultural and macroeconomic policies that measured up to World Bank standards.\(^7\) Later, the International Food Policy

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Research Institute (IFPRI) found that many of the reforms undertaken in response to World Bank pressures were reversed when conditions changed, or in response to subsequent external shocks.\(^8\) The World Bank in any case reduced its influence over developing world agriculture following the 1980s, when it began to cut the total value of its assistance work in the sector. Between 1978 and 2006, the agricultural share of total World Bank lending fell from 30 percent to only 8 percent, and in 2005, World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz even admitted in an offhand comment, “My institution’s largely gotten out of the business of agriculture.”\(^9\)

Within the United Nations System, there are three “Rome institutions” with specific responsibilities in food and agriculture: IFAD, WFP, and FAO. The youngest of these is the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), established in 1977 to finance development projects focused specifically on food production and rural poverty alleviation. Ideologically, IFAD is less constrained than the Bank or the Fund by the neo-liberal Washington Consensus, but in part for this reason it has been given fewer lending resources by the major economic powers. A second Rome organization, the UN World Food Programme (WFP), was established in 1961 to manage the delivery of humanitarian food assistance to poor countries and refugee populations. Individual national governments are still the source of nearly all international food aid, but more than half is now at least channeled to its destination by the WFP. The WFP has a proven record of preventing famine, as in the case of the 1991–1992 and 2001–2002 droughts in southern Africa, yet WFP does not have the authority or resources to overcome national governments that object to its presence (for example, the government of North Korea), or the armed groups (for example, the al Shabaab militia in southern Somalia) that prefer to keep its operations away.

The oldest and most prominent Rome-based UN institution is the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Founded in 1945, the FAO devotes most of its energy to gathering and distributing information about food and farming around the world. It also provides a forum for nations to meet to set goals, share expertise, and negotiate agreements on agricultural policy. FAO itself controls few financial resources and exercises little or no political authority. Periodic UN “Food Summit” meetings at FAO produce only bland unfunded resolutions. In


some cases these resolutions are negotiated by junior officials before the actual meeting gets underway (this was the case for the 2009 summit). FAO data collection activities are of considerable value, and FAO’s technical advice has been world class in some niche areas (such as integrated pest management, IPM), but its operations are heavily dominated by an oversized central bureaucracy. FAO has had lethargic leadership over the years from a string of non-accountable officials, many of whom hold their positions because of their political friends rather than their professional competence. As a UN agency, FAO operates on a “one country – one vote” model of governance, which gives a great deal of influence to the so-called “G-77” group of poor countries that tends to vote as a block. The rich countries that are understandably mistrustful of this outcome respond by limiting the financial contributions they make to FAO, further weakening the organization.10 Reviews of FAO also criticize the fact that more than half of the staff and budget spending remains at headquarters in Rome, rather than in the field where actual needs exist.11

In the area of agricultural technology development and research, the most important international institution is the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a network of 15 separate research centers created in 1971 and chaired by the World Bank. The multiple centers of the CGIAR have had a four-decade history of success in developing useful new farm technologies for the developing world. The improved rice varieties originally developed by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) have now been released in more than 77 countries, allowing the world to more than double total rice production since 1965. Two thirds of the developing world’s total area planted to wheat is now planted to varieties that contain improvements developed by the CGIAR’s International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). Yet the CGIAR depends heavily on national governments for its funding, and since the 1990s it has struggled to sustain this support. In addition, the CGIAR is disadvantaged in reaching poor farmers because it typically operates at a distance from national-level research, extension, policy-making institutions in the developing world. It is these national-level institutions that enjoy the jurisdictional access needed to move innovations into farmers’ fields.

By itself, the CGIAR can do little to address agricultural science deficits in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, because national government leadership is

essential and most national governments in Africa have long been underinvesting in agricultural science. According to a 2006 study by Beintama and Stads, between 1991-2000, the annual rate of growth of agricultural research spending in all of sub-Saharan Africa (minus Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa) was actually a negative 3/10ths of 1 percent.\textsuperscript{12} Since 2000, there has been scant improvement. Africa’s own governments (through NEPAD) have established an investment “target” for R&D spending of 1 percent of agricultural GDP, but as of 2006-08, out of 11 countries for which data was available, only 5 had met this “research intensity” target, and many were actually going in the wrong direction. In fact, according to data from Pardey, Alston, and Chan-Kang, out of 43 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2009, 20 actually had a lower research intensity for agriculture than back in 1980.\textsuperscript{13} All agricultural science must eventually be local, so if separate national governments fail in this manner to take a local lead, there may be little an international research such as CGIAR can accomplish.

*The limited power of multinational corporations*

Activists, and quite a few academics, like to argue that national governments enjoy less control over global food and farming outcomes than private multinational corporations. The power of these corporations, it is said, comes in part from their monopoly position in private markets but also from the corrupting influence they exercise over national governments. In fact, some intergovernmental organizations such as the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank are routinely described by these same critics as little more than subordinate agents, operating on behalf of their global corporate masters.\textsuperscript{14}

Assertions of corporate monopoly in the food sector often begin with claims that 90 percent of international grain trade goes through the hands of just four private companies: Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill, and Louis Dreyfus—known collectively as the ABCD traders. A 2012 study commissioned by the NGO Oxfam described the control of these companies as far-reaching: “Through their


\textsuperscript{14} An example of this line of thinking would be the 2001 book by David C. Korten, endorsed by the World Economic Forum, titled *When Corporations Rule the World* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers).
roles in biofuels investment, large-scale land acquisition, and the financialization of agricultural commodity markets, the ABCDs are at the forefront of the transformation that is determining where money in agriculture is invested, where agricultural production is located, where the produce is shipped, and how the world’s population shares (or fails to share) the bounty of each harvest.”

Such assertions are often made, but it is important to remember that only about 10 percent of world food production ever enters international trade, so there are strict limits on the global “control” over food that is available to any company that specializes in international trade. Moreover, despite market concentration, the four large trading companies do compete with each other, ensuring that a measure of control resides with consumers. Finally, it is telling that those who claim to see corporate control over grain markets seldom make a consistent argument regarding the impact of that control. Some say the companies conspire to make international grain prices artificially low (through a “dumping” of surplus production into poor countries), but others blame the companies for driving grain prices artificially high. In reality, grain-trading companies make money whether international prices are low or high, but they do so by skillfully responding to price and supply changes in the market rather than by controlling those changes.

Corporate control is also said to derive from seed patents, such as those registered by companies like Monsanto. The chief limitation to this argument is that in most countries, including nearly all developing countries, national laws prohibit local patent claims on seeds. Because the national governments of most developing countries do not recognize intellectual property claims on seeds, patent claims made by Monsanto in the United States or in Canada are worthless within these countries. Out of the 71 countries that have promised to enforce at least some intellectual property rights claims on seeds, by becoming party to the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, only two are from Africa — Kenya, and the Republic of South Africa — and neither of these two has joined the 1991 Act of the Convention that promises to recognize patent claims. The other governments of Africa, and most in Asia as well, have simply opted not to recognize such claims.

In addition, seed companies are not yet in a position to control farming in these


countries because so many developing world farmers still replant seeds saved from their own harvest. In the Indian Punjab, 74 percent of farmers still plant their own saved seeds, and when Indian farmers do buy seeds they have 500 private Indian seed companies to turn to, not just the big multinationals like Pioneer or Monsanto. The weak influence of Monsanto over farming in the developing world is also revealed by the fact that the national governments of most developing countries have not yet made it legal for farmers to plant any of Monsanto’s genetically engineered seeds. Among all of the developing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, only one – Burkina Faso – has yet legalized the planting of any GMO seeds, and the only crop approved in Burkina is cotton, an industrial crop rather than a food crop. Globally, in fact, national governments nearly everywhere continue to block the planting of GMO food staple crops such as wheat, rice, or potato. When it comes to country-by-country approvals for GMO food crops, the supposedly powerful Monsanto company has been blocked nearly everywhere by the policies of national governments.

Critics of biotechnology seed companies also underestimate the extent to which these companies compete with each other. For example, when Monsanto tried to market a new corn seed variety in the United States called “Smartstax” in 2010, it overpriced the product and lost market shares to a competitor seed company, Pioneer-DuPont. In the end, Monsanto had to reduce its price premium by 67 percent in order to win back customers, and even then it failed to recover market share.

The allegation that private food and agribusiness companies exercise influence over national governments by paying bribes does have some foundation. In one sensational case in 2012, investigators learned that a subsidiary of Wal-Mart in Mexico had bribed local and national officials to make possible the building of 19 large new stores, in some cases without construction permits. Wal-Mart paid nearly a million dollars in bribes for some of these individual stores. The limit to Wal-Mart’s influence was dramatically illustrated in 2013, however, when the company gave up a six-year effort to open multi-brand stores in India because the government had imposed a local purchase requirement on this foreign company that it was not imposing on India’s own firms. Wal-Mart could not accept this discrimination and had to walk away.

In a similar vein, it is true that Monsanto was required to pay a $1.5 million dollar fine (to the U.S. Justice Department) for having bribed an Indonesian official in 2002, hoping to get around an environmental impact study on its cotton seeds. Yet in this case the bribe was unsuccessful, because the requirement for the

study was never officially waived, and Monsanto’s cotton seeds are still not legal to plant in Indonesia. Even in countries where bribery is common, then, the final result may not always reflect corporate control.

Are NGOs Challenging National Governments for Control?

International non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have become influential players within food and the farming sectors, especially in the developing world. Some of these NGOs exercise influence through projects on the ground. For example, Heifer International operates roughly 900 projects in 53 different countries to promote food self-reliance through gifts of livestock and training. Other NGOs work almost exclusively through social mobilization and advocacy. One example is La Via Campesina, an organization founded at a meeting in Belgium in 1993, which calls for organized action on behalf of small farmers to weaken the influence of globalized agribusiness. Via Campesina comprises about 150 local and national organizations in 70 countries, and it champions an agrarian vision of local control that it calls “Food Sovereignty.” Greenpeace, an environmental advocacy organization based in Amsterdam, also campaigns against globalization and agribusiness, particularly against genetically engineered crops. Greenpeace claims 2.8 million members worldwide. Consumers International, a global federation of more than 240 advocacy organizations in 120 different countries, promotes consumer food safety.

In areas such as food safety and farm technology, NGO advocacy does sometimes succeed in blocking or restricting corporate behavior. In the 1970s, a network of NGOs accused the Nestlé company of promoting infant formula products through unethical methods, such as giving away free samples in maternity wards. An NGO-led boycott of Nestlé products – animated by the sensational slogan that “Nestlé Kills Babies” – eventually led to a new International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, which Nestlé pledged to follow in 1984. Also in the 1980s, an international NGO advocacy campaign led by the Pesticides Action Network (PAN) managed to produce an International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticide, and later a binding international agreement, the Rotterdam Convention. In the 1990s, European-based NGOs spread alarms about genetically engineered crops that led in only a few years to a virtual ban on the planting of those crops in Europe, plus regulatory blockage in most of the rest of the world as well. In 2013, an activist from the United Kingdom who had participated in the early anti-GMO campaigns, (but who later changed his mind about the technology and apologized), admitted

that, “This was the most successful campaign I have ever been involved in.”

Not all NGO advocacy works to block things. In the area of food security, some groups like Bread for the World use information and advocacy campaigns to promote food aid and agricultural development. Others, like Oxfam, combine research and policy advocacy with actual development projects on the ground (Oxfam calls itself a “do tank”). Still others, like Catholic Relief Services, work almost exclusively delivering humanitarian relief. In the area of agricultural development, however, there are limits to what NGOs from the outside can accomplish on their own. They deliver excellent training and services but are less able to provide the expensive investments in road construction, electricity, irrigation, and agricultural research needed in many of the poorest countries. National governments in the developing world, often supported by donor agencies with still more taxpayer derived resources, must take the lead here.

Among NGOs, independently endowed philanthropic foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation built an early record of influence in agricultural development, helping to launch Asia’s original green revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. Today it is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that does the most to promote the green revolution cause. The Ford Foundation in New York, with roughly $10 billion in assets, has now moved away from promoting science-dependent approaches to farming, and the Rockefeller Foundation had assets only one-third the size of Ford, so it cannot do the task by itself. In 2006, however, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which had $37 billion in assets, moved decisively into grant-making in agricultural development (adopting Rockefeller as a junior partner). This work began with a $150 million joint venture called the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), chaired by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan. This initiative centers on an effort to improve the varieties of seed available to small farmers for staple food crops in Africa. By 2012, the Gates Foundation had made grants for agricultural development totaling more than $2 billion.

This is a significant resource commitment, but without stronger fiscal and institutional support from national governments in Africa, the AGRA program will struggle to reach scale, and so far national government commitments from Africa have been weak. At an African Union summit meeting in Maputo in 2003, Africa’s heads of government pledged to be spending at least 10 percent of their budgets on agriculture by 2008, but as of 2009 only six countries had met that target, while 39 had not, and in many of those 39 the share of spending going to agriculture had actually declined between 2003 and 2009. In 2013, the ONE

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campaign did an updated review of the spending patterns of 19 African countries, and found that only 4 of the 19 had met the 10 percent target. Meanwhile 7 were “seriously off track,” with less than 5 percent of their expenditures going to agriculture. If national governments do not act, the efforts of philanthropic foundations will fail to accomplish the task.

Conclusion

This review of the current influence over global food and farming by national governments, intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, and transnational NGOs leads to a single unavoidable conclusion: Despite globalization, it is still national governments that have the most to say about final outcomes in the food and farming sector. In his long career as a food policy analyst and advocate, Per Pinstrup-Anderson never lost sight of this reality. In fact, In Pinstrup-Anderson’s most recent project, a review of the political economy of national policy responses to the international food price spikes of 2008 and 2010-11, provides us with yet another major scholarly contribution precisely because it emphasizes this reality of national governmental control. At a time when far too many policy analysts, not to mention nearly all journalists, were inferring from higher international prices that poor consumers everywhere must be facing a new “food crisis,” Pinstrup-Anderson organized a research project that focused on actual price fluctuations within national markets, country by country. He and his team found in many cases weak price transmission from international to national markets, due to high transport costs (especially in poor land-locked countries) and also because of deliberate trade and procurement policy actions taken by national governments to stabilize domestic prices (even when this meant fiscal losses, and a further destabilization international prices). In some cases price instability persisted at the national level, but it was completely out of phase with international price fluctuations.

It was within separate markets at the national level that most world citizens confronted the “food crisis” of 2008, and the great strength of Pinstrup-Anderson’s most recent research project is precisely its focus on those separate national markets, and the separate national political systems that continue to manage (or mismanage) them. By resisting the seduction of global market models, and opting instead for a careful review and comparison of descriptive statistics, and a time-line tracing of policy decisions and decision processes inside more than a dozen different national governments, Pinstrup-Anderson’s most recent work has captured the real world of food and food agricultural policy, far better than the work of those who are perhaps more recently trained, but far

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less experienced, and not as keenly attuned to the demanding imperatives of policy relevant basic research. For those of us who work in the field of international food policy, Pinstrup-Anderson's work has always been attuned to the political realities facing individual national governments, because of his uniquely keen sense that this, in our time, is where both the policy problems and the potential policy payoffs will continue to reside.