

Aiming for food security

The proportion of people suffering from hunger should be halved by 2015 according to the Millennium Goals of the United Nations, set in 2000, while local communities in developing countries aim to democratise the decision-making process regarding food. Professor in Public Administration and Policy Katrien Termeer analyses the administrative processes involved at both ends of the spectrum. "Food security cannot be realised by means of idealistic plans or new technologies only. It requires advanced steering strategies that involve governments as well as companies, NGOs and citizen."

Termeer and her group are searching for innovative governance strategies to tackle food security issues. Unlike the traditional policymaking process, governance is a matter of creating alliances within a complex society. Termeer explains the difference: "Traditional policy is developed by governments only. Today however, national states and their governments can rarely succeed in isolation. Many issues are cross-border matters, and even within their own borders governments do not have a monopoly on effective policy. Governance is when policies are developed in collaboration with civilians, companies, social organisations and other stakeholders."

Food security is one of the so-called wicked governance problems. It involves conflicting problem definitions, contradictory facts, changing political agendas, inflexible policy systems, long-term deadlocks and tension between the different scales. Moreover, today's problems are often the result of yesterday's solutions. No politician in the world will ever be able to say that they solved the global food issue, but well thought-out governance arrangements can contribute to improving food security. It is all about taking small steps.

Termeer is studying which strategies are applied by governments and other parties in trying to achieve

Capabilities

There are five governance capabilities that are important for the governance of sustainable food security. They are focused on:

- a understanding complex issues (observation);
- b the policy strategies to tackle them (action);
- c the circumstances or institutional changes needed to enable these strategies (enabling).

Governance capability	Definition	Aspect of problem to be addressed	Effects of deficit
Reflexivity	The capability to appreciate and deal with unstructured problems and multiple realities	Unstructured problems Multiple frames and perspectives	Risk of tunnel vision or intractable controversies
Resilience	The capability to flexibly adapt one's course in response to frequent and uncertain changes without losing identity	Interconnected problems Unpredictable consequences of action Uncertainties	Risk of failure to keep fulfilling basic functions
Responsiveness	The capability to respond legitimately to unlimited demands and concerns	No stopping rule. Unlimited number of issues and demands Moral responsibilities	Risk of overreacting and losing citizens' trust and legitimacy
Revitalising	The capability to unblock stagnations and reanimate policy processes	Stagnating and unproductive interaction patterns	Risk of more of the same and of regression
Scale sensitivity	The capability to address cross-scale and cross-level issues	Problems stretch across jurisdictional, spatial and time scales	Mismatch between the scale of a problem and the scale at which it is governed

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a sustainable food supply. “We find all kinds of innovative solutions: Public-private partnerships, regional partnerships, social dialogues, self-governing communities, round-tables or private certification systems. These innovative strategies, ultimately aiming at changing the behaviour of people and organisations, often conflict with existing policy systems and power

was to limit the amount of production by introducing a milk quota system; an intervention on which the member states and lobby groups could not agree. The second was to reduce the milk price. This would irrevocably lead to increases of scale and the bankruptcy of small agricultural family businesses; companies that were previously explicitly supported

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relations, however. To develop new strategies it may sometimes be necessary to change the existing governance system.”

CAP

Organising food security in Europe after WWII was realised surprisingly quickly as a result of the newly developed and highly effective Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Although the policy instruments used (market protection through import levies, export subsidies and guaranteed prices) led to plenty of food at affordable costs, it also resulted in a range of undesirable side effects. Since the 1980s, the CAP has been through various consecutive rounds of reform. Every new turn in the CAP's history saw its own definition of sustainable food production problems. Termeer and her colleagues are analyzing how the presence or absence of five capabilities has produced or prevented progress in dealing with the issue of sustainable food production under the CAP.

Reflexivity

The main goal of the CAP – sufficient affordable food – quickly led to overproduction. However, it took until the early 1980s until this was framed as a problem. The framing of overproduction with metaphors like “butter mountains” and “milk lakes” helped to accelerate reflexive observations. In 1983, the European Commission saw two types of solutions with two different frames attached to them. The first

by the policy frameworks. Termeer: “This is a typical example of *reflexivity*, the capacity to look at the problem from various perspectives, reconsidering existing standpoints and reviewing perspectives where necessary. Finally the milk quota system was implemented in 1984. The production ceilings debate meant the weakening of the dominant frame of supporting production increases within the CAP.

Resilience

The actual *resilience* of the CAP was tested in the second half of the 1980s when the CAP became seriously criticised by its main international trading partners within the Uruguay Round of the GATT (General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade) negotiations for its distorting effects on international markets, and for dumping subsidised food surpluses. This ‘untenable’ European agricultural system even brought to a halt the GATT negotiations, with possible repercussions for other European export products as a result. At the same time, Spain and Portugal's entry to the EU, and the rising costs of the CAP led to tensions within Europe. As the CAP had resulted from lengthy negotiations and compromises between member states, it was difficult to address new developments in a flexible and resilient way. This lack of resilience was strengthened by the powerful agricultural lobby, which blocked fundamental reforms. To enable reform, European Commissioner MacSharry proposed a comprehensive CAP reform arguing that this was

necessary for budgetary reasons, but the foremost aim was to adapt better to international markets. The reforms he suggested would resolve the European budget problem by replacing the system of guaranteed prices with a direct income payment scheme to farmers to compensate them for declining incomes.”

Responsiveness

Initially the CAP had been developed within a closed agricultural policy community, consisting of a small number of public officials, politicians, experts and stakeholders; a closed stronghold that showed little interest in the growing social unrest over the side effects of the CAP, such as the impact on the landscape, pollution and the lack of animal welfare. Outbreaks of animal diseases such as BSE, swine fever and foot-and-mouth, combined with the resulting media attention to the drawbacks of our food production systems, led to a social debate about animal welfare and other sustainability aspects. It was no longer possible to neglect these concerns. In order to respond to these *post-materialistic* preferences the Agenda 2000 and the Fischler reforms were realised. It led to the introduction of the principle of *cross-compliance*, a requirement for farmers to comply

with a set of criteria (public, animal and plant health, environment and animal welfare) in order to qualify for the CAP payments. Rural development now became a definite second pillar of the CAP.

Revitalisation

With the passing of time, more new challenges have come up that are related to the production of food, such as the effects of agriculture on climate change, biodiversity, renewable energy and water management. In return for the subsidies, farmers should produce more public goods, such as landscape elements or agri-environmental products. Attempts to reform the CAP in these aspects have been difficult or unsuccessful. In order to revitalise the process and to prevent new societal conflicts and policy deadlocks, the European Commissioner Ciolos decided to change old policymaking routines by means of public debates about the future of the CAP. Today, 2013, the Dutch government is also organising various debates in local halls and via social media. This is resulting in innovative ideas, new alliances and raised expectations. Unfortunately, the financial crisis and reduced budgets are causing many traditional parties to fall back on the defensive routines, which in turn is threatening the revitalisation process. ■

Millennium goals



The proportion of people who suffer from hunger should be halved by 2015 according to the Millennium Goals of the United Nations. In 1990 the figure was 20%, with nearly a third of all children under five being malnourished.

The right to food, as agreed within the UN Millennium Goals, is not the same as a duty to accept certain (international) food programmes. A classic example is Malawi refusing to accept food aid from the US due to the presence of GMO crops from the company Monsanto. This is in line with communities in developing countries claiming food sovereignty. By doing so, they hope to make clear that they will not be told what to do by multinationals or the World Trade Organisation. To them, food security at a local and national level is a matter of democratising and decentralising the decision-making process with regard to production and the global trade in food.