

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY YEARBOOK, VOLUME 3

Pursuing Food Security

Strategies and Obstacles
in Africa, Asia,
Latin America,
and the Middle East

edited by

W. Ladd Hollist
& F. LaMond Tullis



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Pursuing Food Security

International Political Economy Yearbook, Volume 3

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To a world in which food security for everyone
may become as real as it is ideal

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Acknowledgments

We thank the Milton R. Merrill Chair and the Department of Political Science at Utah State University for sponsoring the conference that ultimately led to this book.

For more than forty years, Milton R. Merrill served Utah State University as a teacher, a scholar, and as an administrator. During his career he was head of the political science and history departments, dean of the College of Business and Social Sciences, and, in 1959, he became Utah State University's first vice-president. Active in public affairs, Professor Merrill was a longtime member of the Logan City Board of Education. He was also a member of the Council of the American Political Science Association.

Although Professor Merrill's achievements as an administrator and participant in public affairs were outstanding, he was best known as a superb and inspiring teacher by the thousands of students who attended his classes.

When he retired as academic vice-president and returned to teaching as professor emeritus in 1969, Professor Merrill's friends, associates, and former students envisioned a project to honor him on the occasion of his retirement. A national committee was formed, led by M. Judd Harmon and Phillip A. Bullen, to raise funds to establish the Milton R. Merrill Chair of Political Science that would bring distinguished political scientists and other scholars to Utah State University.

The initial response and continued support by contributors to the Merrill Chair Fund have made it possible to establish Utah State University's first and only endowed chair. The fund has brought a series of distinguished educators and public figures to the Utah State University campus and has greatly benefited students, faculty, and the general community. Seven manuscripts have resulted from conferences and research sponsored by the fund.

We express sincere appreciation to the participants at the Utah State University conference whose work with ours is here presented. And we thank faculty members and students at Utah State University whose questions and comments provoked additional serious thinking of the arguments and analyses that are presented here.

We also thank the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University for supporting the preparation of the final manuscript.

Ultimately, human experience and scholars' efforts to understand it combine to produce a book such as this. Accordingly, we voice concern for the human condition by inquiring into the questions of food security in developing nations, and we express appreciation to those from lesser-developed countries who have shared their experiences with us and who have, therefore, made our analyses possible. We join with them in hoping for a world in which food security for everyone may become as real as it is ideal. It is to that idea that we dedicate this book.

Preface

In launching the *International Political Economy Yearbook* series, we stated that our intention was to promote dialogue. To this end we suggested that the Yearbook “remain open to new ideas and insights,” and that “it ought not to become the ‘property’ of any one theoretical perspective or normative persuasion.” We did ask that every contribution to the Yearbook “clearly explicate premises, concepts, and values.” (See W. Ladd Hollist and F. LaMond Tullis, *An International Political Economy*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985: 9.)

In this volume we seek to promote debate concerning strategies and obstacles that confront the developing nations’ pursuit of food security. Contributors, all respected scholars, were selected because they advance reasonable but different theoretical and normative views concerning food security. Many, but admittedly not all, perspectives are represented. For example, some North American economists may rightly contend that their views are not amply represented. Whatever one’s views may be, however, the urgency of the task at hand—pursuing food security for all people—and the consistency with which past efforts have proven inadequate, require that we offer our best thinking while remaining open to views that challenge our perspectives.

Scholars have long noted impediments to its achievement in Latin America. Several African and Asian studies scholars with whom we have interacted¹ have amply shown that insights, theories, and explanations appropriate to understanding rural development issues in Latin America are inadequate for comprehending many of the world’s other lesser-developed regions. In this volume, we have continued our cross-hemispheric comparisons because we are confident that they will add significantly to an understanding of obstacles to rural development and related national food security issues.

To that end we brought together renowned scholars of rural development and international political economy whose studies have focused on food security issues (a biographical sketch of each participant may be found in the list of contributors). Opportunity to do so within the context of an international conference arose when Ladd Hollist was appointed visiting Milton R. Merrill Professor of Political Science at Utah State University. As many of that university’s faculty and several of its departments have long been active in research and outreach programs to promote rural development throughout the globe, it was natural that the university would be interested in hosting such a conference.² We are grateful for the graciousness of its faculty and administration and for the willingness of the Milton R. Merrill Chair trustees to fund the conference which met in Logan from May 2 to 4, 1985.

Of the several objectives to which rural development should aspire, none is more basic than food security. Food security is achieved either by producing food or by acquiring the resources necessary to purchase it. No surer sign of failed rural development exists than the widespread persistence of rural pov-

erty, hunger, and even starvation—clear signs that millions of people neither grow enough food nor acquire enough money to purchase it from food-surplus producers. As food security in many countries has remained an elusive ideal, we focused the conference on impediments to its achievement in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

We realize, of course, that rural development is a complex process in any setting, and that diverse obstacles have combined to thwart the attainment of food security in many less-developed countries. Floods, droughts, population pressures, and other “acts of God” have combined to contribute—each in its own way—to food shortages, most recently in Africa. “Acts of people” are equally or more devastating. Inappropriate technologies, government policies of cheap food for urban laborers, credit preferences to producers of cash crops for export, a bias for urban industrialization over rural development, and inadequate support for needed rural infrastructure have negatively affected rural development, particularly in the production and distribution of basic foodstuffs for the poor and “ultra poor.” Without ignoring such factors as adversely affecting a developing nation’s ability to feed itself adequately, we desired to explore features of the international political economy that may combine with domestic policies and natural conditions to increase a country’s misfortunes and its people’s afflictions in relation to food security. We chose to explore two sides of an argument: first, that many less-developed countries’ relations with the international economy severely strain their capacities to feed their rural and urban poor, thereby contributing to national food insecurities; second, and obversely, that the international economy has opened opportunities for developing nations to enhance their food security, and that insofar as impediments exist they are largely of domestic origin, quite unrelated to the external political economy.

On the whole, the first argument claims that the unfavorable terms of trade available to developing countries for food exports and imports, foreign demand for specialty and processed foods that are too high-priced for mass consumption, and the influx of transnational agribusinesses with their export emphasis and reliance on capital-intensive and labor-displacing technologies tend to undermine basic food production and thus, usually, food security for the masses. The second argument holds that regional specialization in comparative advantage production technologies not only offers the best hope for developing countries to actually develop, but for the lowest population quintiles to have any long-term prospects of improving the quality of their lives. International markets, international trade, and foreign investment are therefore given considerable plaudits in this perspective.

To explore the general meaningfulness of these and related conflicting international political economy arguments we sought participants for our conference whose published works had rigorously analyzed and argued these and related claims. In short, we sought respected scholars with dissimilar perspectives on the causes of food insecurity in Africa, Latin America, South Asia and

China, and the Middle East. We were delighted that they accepted our invitation. Among those who came were Keith B. Griffin and John W. Mellor. Perhaps no other scholars are better known for their work on rural development, although they approach the issues that we chose to consider from notably different perspectives. As we requested, they assumed a general or global view of rural development and food security. As evidenced in their chapters and in the associated discussions in Part 1 of this book, they set the agenda for the three days of our conference.

Papers on food crises in Africa, again from different vantages, were prepared by Cheryl Christensen, by Michael F. Lofchie, and by Keith B. Griffin. These papers comprise Part 2 of this volume.

What of factors contributing to food insecurity in South Asia? Bringing their knowledge to this question were F. Tomasson Jannuzi, a longtime U.S. observer of South Asian rural development, and Ronald J. Herring, whose book *Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia* has received much commentary and had provoked our interest. At about the same time as the conference at Utah State University, Keith B. Griffin presented a paper at an open forum at Brigham Young University entitled "The Chinese Economy After Mao." The insights it provides about rural development in China since Mao's death proved especially pertinent to the issues addressed at our conference in Logan. We are grateful that Griffin has allowed that work to be included in this volume. These papers by Jannuzi, Herring, and Griffin comprise Part 3.

Given our personal interest in food security in Latin America, we were particularly pleased that Alain de Janvry, whose arguments in his book *The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America* had long challenged our thinking, agreed to participate. His paper and ours appear as Part 4.

When we began this project we knew very little about the challenges that threaten food security in the Middle East and North Africa. We therefore sought a scholar who could succinctly unravel the complex dynamics that surround food problems in those regions. Colleagues repeatedly recommended that we invite Alan Richards, who accepted and contributed an understanding born of in-depth research on rural development there. His work appears as Part 5.

Quite predictably, the conference fielded excellent papers. Nevertheless, intense discussions in the workshop sessions challenged every author's arguments.³ Not only did the contributors criticize and debate each other's work, but various of Utah State University's excellent scholars added their own insights and vigorously stated their arguments. It is not surprising that when the conference concluded, each author chose to revise his or her work in consideration of important issues and insights that had been raised. These revised papers, and some of the debates, comprise this book. We consider that the issues addressed are essential to any understanding of why food security has remained such an elusive ideal in much of Africa, Latin America, South Asia and China, and the Middle East.

Ladd Hollist
LaMond Tullis

NOTES

1. See W. Ladd Hollist, "Dependency Transformed: Brazilian Agriculture in Historical Perspective"; F. LaMond Tullis, "The Current View on Rural Development: Fad or Breakthrough in Latin America"; and F. LaMond Tullis and W. Ladd Hollist, eds., *Food, the State, and International Political Economy*.

2. For many years Utah State University has sought to promote rural development and food security throughout the world. Few U.S. universities have been more consistently involved in such activity: USU scientists have researched how best to augment agricultural productivity and total output in numerous countries. USU's development experts—scientists; technicians; social, economic, and political analysts—and students have shared their knowledge about disease control, sanitation, water purification, irrigation, pest control, resource management, marketing, finance, and much more. In 1986 alone Utah State University administered in excess of \$6 million in contracts designed to contribute to the development of less-developed countries, principally in Africa and Latin America.

3. Were it possible, we would publish much of that dialogue here. However, we are limited to including only the comments made in response to Keith B. Griffin's paper "World Hunger and the World Economy" and to John Mellor's paper "Opportunities in the International Economy for Meeting the Food Requirements of the Developing Countries," as well as a response by Keith B. Griffin, in Part 1 of this book.

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1

W. Ladd Hollist
F. LaMond Tullis

Pursuing Food Security

“Food security” is sometimes equated, at a national level, with “food self-sufficiency.” That is not necessarily the meaning we have in mind. Some nations with food-production deficits enjoy considerable national food security. They import to satisfy their population’s food consumption needs. The volume and nature of these countries’ exports, which produce the income to pay for food imports, allow some food-deficit nations to enjoy considerable food security (for example, Japan). Such security probably will continue as long as the political economy of producing nations encourages food exports (for example, the United States). On the other hand, some countries have national food self-sufficiency but export so much food that many of their own citizens go hungry (for example, Brazil). Then, of course, some nations neither produce enough food nor have an import capability to satisfy consumption needs. There, chronic hunger is abundant. Thus, national food security is not to be understood simply as national food self-sufficiency but whether people, on the whole, are able to consume a minimum diet, the production sources of which are reasonably secure. While we have given the term food security a more expansive definition than is usual, in practical applications one will not go far wrong in assuming that it does refer principally to food self-sufficiency. The rural poor—most of the world’s hungry—are not likely to eat well unless they produce their own food in adequate amounts.

All societies have their health and nutrition-related afflictions. In affluent countries of Europe and North America these are heart and lung disease, cancer, drug addiction (legal and illegal), obesity, and diseases incident to old age. Among the causes are life-style, including excess consumption of food and beverages, and the fact that because of pervasive medical intervention people in those countries tend to live long enough for their bodies to wear out. By contrast, for many hundreds of millions living in the developing countries of Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East the afflictions are more basic.¹ They derive from the shortage, not the abundance, of food. Food short-

ages and related nutritional diseases that are devastating to mind and body are part of the daily experience of the third of humanity whose lives begin and end in the “developing” world.

People secure in their food entitlements consume what is necessary to enjoy a vigorous life. As many as 750 million people in developing countries consume but 90 percent of that amount, and it is estimated that 340 million of these are “acutely undernourished,” eating but 80 percent or less of a minimum nutritional standard.² For millions of people, life’s daily routines reflect a constant worry about and search for ways to provide sufficient food for themselves and their families. Frequently, neither worry nor effort produces satisfaction. Nutrition-related disease and early death result; malnutrition both takes and denigrates human life. In a world in which a “Green Revolution” of advanced technologies and hybrid seeds now combine to produce such prodigious harvests³ that much of the food produced can neither be consumed, stored, nor sold, why is there so much hunger?

Poverty, not global food insufficiency or the inability to produce more food (even in food-short Africa), assures that millions of rural and shantytown people in developing countries cannot either buy or grow sufficient food for their needs. Why is this so? One reason lies in how societies are structured. In Chapter 2, Keith B. Griffin contends that the social and economic inequities, reflected in unequal patterns of national income distribution, and the political institutions that sustain them are root causes of poverty and therefore of malnutrition among the poor. One policy implication is clear: Restructure society by replacing the existing political/economic elite with an alternative social, political, and economic order that is more agreeable to an equitable distribution of the national income and the eradication of poverty and hunger. A difficult order, indeed, that only a few nations have tried and fewer still have successfully delivered.

In addition to inappropriate social inequalities, contributors to this volume point out other factors that hinder the elimination of hunger in today’s world of actual and potential food abundance: counterproductive, if not actually malicious, government policies that favor urban areas at the expense of rural areas; too much emphasis on agricultural production for export; excess reliance on food imports (including food aid); and excessively foreign-financed, debt-creating industrialization. Mutually reinforcing relationships frequently exist among these domestic and international factors that make their cumulative effect more detrimental than a simple sum of their individual impacts.

All this calls for reform.⁴ One of the impediments to reform has been the resiliency of old institutions and the elites who back them. They have been unwilling to accommodate new social forces and a new distribution of the national income. Doubting that social, political, and economic reforms with sufficient force to significantly enhance people’s food security in developing countries will be forthcoming, John W. Mellor, in Chapter 3, advocates a