

Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability

Christopher B. Barrett (Ed.). 2013. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0-199-67936-2. \$90.00.

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Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability, a volume edited by the prolific scholar and Association of Christian Economists long-time member Christopher B. Barrett, makes an important contribution to the literature on food security through a collection of impressive chapters addressing all dimension of the food security and economic, social, and political stability nexus. At nearly 500 pages, the book requires some work to get through, but it will prove to be a valuable resource for scholars and analysts working on food security issues. Additionally, intelligence analysts and scholars seeking to understand the interrelationships between food/natural resource issues and conflict/political stability will also find the book a reliable source for up-to-date surveys of the issues and evidence. Depending on one's research, the book may be most valuable in its entirety or, since the chapters largely stand alone, a chapter or set of chapters may be most relevant. The book consists of 18 chapters organized around general topics or geographic areas, and it involves 29 contributors. It is a substantial volume and an important resource for food security researchers.

Chris Barrett's first chapter, titled "Food or Consequences: Food Security and Its Implications for Global Sociopolitical Stability," provides an overview of the book's main themes, defines terms and concepts (such as food security and sociopolitical stability), and describes the objectives of the book. He states the goal of the volume as aiming "to offer the best feasible short-to-medium term analysis given the present underdeveloped state of the research, to be forthright about the limitations and unanswered questions, and to offer our inevitably flawed expert assessment of how, where, and why food security and sociopolitical stability will evolve—and in turn affect one another—in the particular geographic or thematic context studied" (p. 11). The focus of the volume is on the link *from* food (in)security *to* sociopolitical stability, not the reverse direction. Further, Barrett states that a key message of the book is that actions taken in an effort to address food security stressors may have consequences for food security, stability, or both—domestically as well as in other countries—that ultimately matter far more than the direct

impacts of biophysical drivers such as climate change or land or water scarcity (p. 5). For example, an export ban enacted during a time of peak global rice prices may exacerbate the global market thinness and lead to higher rice prices internationally.

Chapter 2 by Mark W. Rosengrant, Simla Tokgoz, and Prapti Bhandary (“The Future of the Global Food Economy: Scenarios for Supply, Demand, and Prices”) describes and analyzes the recent food price increases since 2007 and food price spike episodes. They discuss the roles of the declining stock-to-use ratio, weather shocks, biofuel uses, commodity market speculation, exchange rates, and food policies on price levels and price spikes. They also present results from an economic forecasting model for the global food market and price projections under different scenarios, such as increased agricultural research, improved research efficiency, and reductions in post-harvest losses.

Mark A. Cane and Dong Eun Lee in Chapter 3 (“What We Know About the Climate of the Next Decade”) analyze the link between the climate and food security. They report some evidence of a direct link between the number of conflicts in a year and climate variations, citing research by Hsiang et al. (Hsiang, Meng, & Cane, 2011) on El Niño years and the number of conflicts. They emphasize that government and international response and the overall enabling environment is critical in determining whether a significant link between climate variations and conflict or food security will result. Where access to food is maintained even in the face of widespread drought or extreme rain events and flooding, food security will be insured.

“The Global Land Rush” (Chapter 4) by Klaus Deininger reviews the social, economic, agricultural and historical context of recent large-scale land acquisitions. Further, he discusses the land governance and policy environment that has led to the pursuit of large scale land investments by international investors. He concludes the chapter with observations based on global experiences in land governance for practices and policies that will promote responsible land-intensive investments.

Upmanu Lall’s “Global Freshwater and Food Security in the Face of Potential Adversity” (Chapter 5) discusses the food security and water security link. In the interest of agricultural intensification driven by food security concerns, policies and practices that subsidize both physical inputs (land use, water use) and chemical inputs (pesticides and fertilizers) generate inefficiencies and negative impacts on water systems. Future

water security will in large part depend on correcting and addressing these policies and approaches that encourage inefficient use and overuse of water systems at the present time.

Timothy R. McClanahan, Eddie H. Allison, and Joshua E. Cinner address the food security and conflict/stability challenges present in the fisheries and aquaculture areas. They review the issues of counter-productive subsidies that encourage overuse, poorly defined and weakly enforced property rights, illegal and unmonitored fishery activities, human settlement and infrastructure development in fishery and coastal zones, trade and development policies that weaken access to fisheries by the poor, and increased demand for seafood arising from the growth of low-income- and middle-income-country economies. They conclude Chapter 6 (“Managing Marine Resources for Food and Human Security”) with suggested policies that promote sustainable and equitable use and development of fisheries.

Susan McCough and Samuel Crowell address the issues of crop technologies and the role of agricultural research and development in addressing food security in the coming decades (Chapter 7, “Crop Technologies for the Coming Decade”). They note the change in funding streams for agricultural research over the past several decades, as much more agricultural research and development is undertaken by private companies—much of it designed for producers in high- and middle-income economies with well-functioning supply chains and financial and marketing structures. Thus, the concern is appearing of a growing gap between technological haves and have-nots. Their chapter also reviews the issues of gene banks and ownership of the genetic commons, as well as breeding approaches and genetic engineering. They highlight the potential future contribution of plant breeding in addressing productivity challenges, as well as the environmental challenges around climate variability, drought, salinization, and poor soil quality.

John McDermott, Dolapo Enahoro, and Mario Herrero (Chapter 8) address livestock and its role in generating food security and economic growth for small-holder farmers. They point out the dietary transition that occurs as countries experience growth in incomes and greater urbanization, which are linked to increased demand for livestock products. Chapter 9 (“Labor Migration and Food Security in a Changing Climate”) by Robert McLeman examines the dual function of migration as both a cause of food insecurity in some cases and a factor that reduces food

insecurity in some cases. He examines the relationship between labor-related migration and food security in the situation of climate change, and he examines the cases when migration can generate political instability.

Kym Anderson (Chapter 10, “Trade Policies and Global Food Security”) examines the possibility for trade policy reform over the coming decade to reduce global poverty, improve food security, and increase sociopolitical stability. He provides advice on indicators to monitor the changing links between trade policy and food security and sociopolitical stability. He also offers recommendations on policies at the country level and at the multilateral level that would increase food security and sociopolitical stability.

In Chapter 11 (“Food Security and Political Stability: A Humanitarian Perspective”), Daniel Maxwell reviews the recent history of food security crises and the response from international humanitarian agencies and actors. He analyzes trends to draw out conclusions concerning the link between food security and political stability. Maxwell concludes by outlining common drivers of food insecurity and political instability, such as climate change, and presents a critique of the increasing focus of humanitarian actors on security and political stability.

Chapter 12 (“Moral Economies of Food Security and Protest in Latin America”) by Wendy Wolford and Ryan Nehring describes the factors shaping food insecurity in Latin America, with special attention to social movements that have worked for access to land and food. They focus on the case of Brazil, which presents an interesting case of a globally dynamic export agriculture sector and rural elites, contrasted with the existence of a large rural social movement of landless workers. Wolford and Nehring find lessons from Brazil’s experience of policy innovations in the areas of agricultural research, social assistance and the safety net, and minimum wage policy.

Barrett and Joanna B. Upton analyze the food security and sociopolitical stability intersection in Sub-Saharan Africa in Chapter 13 (“Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability in Sub-Saharan Africa”). They emphasize the distinct and unique relationship in Sub-Saharan Africa between deaths from conflict, high incidence of undernutrition, and deep poverty. Barrett and Upton describe how Sub-Saharan Africa has a disproportionate concentration of the “ultra-poor,” those living on less than \$0.62 per day. Africa is also unique in that its agricultural productivity is low and the available food supply in many parts of the continent is

a limiting factor for food security. They argue that ways for improving African agricultural productivity likely will involve a mix of new crop varieties (including genetically modified organisms), expanded irrigation, improved soil fertility management practices, and efficient development of animal agriculture as a source of nutrient-rich foods.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been the recent home of some dramatic instances of food price riots and associated protests, and Travis J. Lybbert and Heather R. Morgan address food security and sociopolitical stability in the region (Chapter 14, “Lessons from the Arab Spring: Food Security and Stability in the Middle East and North Africa”). They emphasize the region’s imports of more than 50 percent of its food (higher than any other region in the world), and thus the region’s dependency on the international market for food and price levels. The MENA region features an arid ecology, Arab culture, and strong security-oriented states with highly concentrated power. The countries have youth-heavy demographics and the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Furthermore, the private sector is generally weak and the public sector is large in most MENA economies. Lybbert and Morgan examine the specific cases of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Syria. They point out how food security in the MENA region in the future will be highly dependent on how security evolves, commodity price levels, and the development of agriculture with water-saving technologies.

Johann Swinnen and Kristine Van Herck in Chapter 15 (“Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability in Eastern Europe and Central Asia”) emphasize the high degree of heterogeneity across countries in the region, with post-conflict states in Georgia and Tajikistan and Armenia and Azerbaijan, and now the conflict in Ukraine. The region has experienced an enormous change from Soviet times to post-Soviet times. Some of the countries are extremely poor. Moreover, Tajikistan, Albania, and Azerbaijan have stunting levels of young children between 0 and 5—above 25%. However, Swinnen and Van Herck argue that little evidence exists for a strong link in the region between food security and sociopolitical stability. In addition, some of these countries are major agricultural exporters who may benefit from higher future food demand and shortages of high quality soils.

The last three chapters of the volume address the situations of South Asia, China, and East and Southeast Asia, respectively. Arun Agrawal

(Chapter 16, “Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability in South Asia”) treats the case of the region consisting of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. As a group, the South Asian countries have increased their agricultural productivity markedly since the 1950s. This phenomenon, along with food policies and safety net policies, have led to improved food security in the region, despite population increases and higher food demand that has resulted from growth of population and incomes. Agrawal reviews historical instances of famine in the sub-continent and the role of government action (or inaction) in many of the historical famines. Today, Agrawal points out that the main consequence of food insecurity is chronic malnutrition, illustrated by the high rates of stunting in the region. The issue in South Asia is undernutrition and significant levels of food insecurity. Further, Agrawal states that maintaining the agricultural progress of the previous half century will be difficult in the future as limited water resources constrain production, low levels of investment in agricultural research reduce productivity growth, and infrastructure and input-market inefficiencies constrain growth. To prevent conflict related to poverty and food insecurity, Agrawal points out that states need to strengthen social safety nets in the poorest regions where those most vulnerable to food insecurity live.

In Christiaensen’s provocatively titled “When China Runs Out of Farmers” (Chapter 17), a discussion of the Chinese situation is presented. China has succeeded in an amazing increase in agricultural productivity since the reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping started in 1978. Led by reforms in the control of land and greater flexibility and responsibility provided to farmers, the Chinese agricultural sector has been able to feed 20 percent of the world’s population on 11 percent of the world’s agricultural land. In the future, though, China will need to address its growing disparity between farm incomes and urban incomes if it is to keep labor in agriculture. Additional future challenges include climate change, the very high levels of chemical fertilizer and other inputs applied in China, and declines in water availability in some parts of China. Further institutional constraints that must be addressed include the structure of rural cooperatives and the land regulatory structure. Another important dimension of the answer to China’s future food security will be a more open policy toward imports of grain while shifting some domestic production into higher value crops.

C. Peter Timmer (Chapter 18, “Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability in East and Southeast Asia”) treats the food security and political/social security intersection in Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, and the other Southeast Asia and East Asian countries outside China. Timmer groups the countries into three groups, with countries like Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Singapore as the “rich Asia.” A second group of “emerging Asia” countries includes Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. “Least developed Asia” includes Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste. The range of food security and political security issues in the region is large, from conflict in Myanmar to a significant famine in the 1990s in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) where between 1 and 3 million people died as a result of the state’s decision. Timmer reviews the global rice market, whose major exporters and importers are in the region. He then analyzes the policy responses to the food price crisis of 2008 and 2010, and closes his chapter with a call for a “behavioral political economy” that would seek to explain political behavior and actions that arise in response to significant threats to food price stability.

For Christian economists and international development scholars, the volume Barrett has edited contributes to our understanding of food security and social stability by stressing the linkages across the concepts of food security, social and political stability, and environmental sustainability. Connections across these concepts match up with and support a richer understanding of the practical dimensions of the biblical concept of shalom, which emphasizes wholeness, human flourishing, and justice and peace. For many food security researchers, the inclination and temptation to focus on the food dimensions of hunger, malnutrition, and access to food, while necessary in many research contexts, may fail to help us see the connections between food security and other dimensions of shalom, such as social/political stability, justice, and sustainable natural resource management. This volume serves as both an example of such linking scholarship and a corrective to the strains of the food security research literature that focus solely on food and food policy.

Overall, *Food Security and Sociopolitical Stability* is a welcome survey of issues at the intersection of food/agriculture and political stability/social conflict. The book will prove valuable to economists interested in global food security and international development issues. I recommend

it as a resource for faculty teaching courses on international agricultural development and food policy, as well as for food security researchers.

Reference

Hsiang, S. M., Meng, K. C. & Cane, M. A. (2011). Civil conflicts are associated with global climate. *Nature*, 476, 438–441. ■