

## Food security

Author: Dr Ana Moragues Faus

### Introduction

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, food security is a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has four dimensions: availability, access, utilization, and sustainability of these three dimensions in time.

The UK is increasingly dependent on food imports which currently amounts to 40% of food consumed. This is coupled with a disappearance of small farms and a decrease in organically managed land. The UK food sector is expanding. The manufacture of food products is highly concentrated in a few big companies. Food retailing is also highly concentrated with at least two-thirds of sales accounted for by just four retailers - Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrison's. Food prices are one of the main concerns for the UK's population, with food prices rising 18% in real terms between 2007 and their peak in August 2012. This affects mainly low income households, who have changed their diet buying more pork, poultry and eggs before fruit, fish or more expensive meats.

Household food purchases do not generally match the Government recommended eatwell plate, as households consume more food and drinks high in fat and/or sugar and less fruit and vegetables. Government figures estimate that there are around 13 million people in poverty in the UK, with four million people suffering from food poverty and around three million people suffering from undernourishment or at risk of being underfed. Food security is not only about undernourishment, but malnourishment, including different diet-related diseases. In England, 64% of the population is overweight, affecting mostly low income families. Finally, there has been an emergence of food banks around the UK, with estimates of around 500,000 people now reliant on food aid e.g. the Trussell Trust food banks delivered 3 days of emergency food to 913,138 people in 2013/2014.

The purpose of our research was to analyse the different meanings and perceptions around food security and food poverty in the UK, so as to analyse the way in which different actors frame food security and food poverty challenges in the UK and therein advocate different solutions to these





challenges. To do this we conducted an analysis of UK media from 2007-2014 on the topics of food security and food poverty. The analysis comprised 475 text units from eight different media sources. We identified a total of eight different frames on food security, which were later discussed through open-ended interviews with experts. This led to the establishment of three main 'frames' mobilized in national debates.

### Findings

#### Productionist frame

- Problem: There is an insufficient amount of food to feed the world by 2050.
- Solution: Produce more food and increase productivity. *Double production by 2050.*

#### Individualistic frame

- Problem: People are responsible for their own choices and associated consequences.
- Solution: Individuals are the ones responsible for assuring food security in their households. *Employment.*

#### Technology frame

- Problem: Need of better technologies to produce safe, sufficient and affordable food.
- Solution: New technological developments would deliver food security for all. *Genetically modified organisms.*

### Recommendations

In reality, the problem of both food security and food poverty is the result of a failed food system that does not deliver appropriate food for all. Therefore the real solution to this problem is to radically alter the way in which we structure our societies and our economies so as to distribute the planet's wealth more fairly and environmentally sustainably between us all.

### Conclusions

- The way the media frames food security and food poverty debates is influencing the national debate, pointing out different interpretations of the same problem and therein different solutions to it.
- In the UK media, food security is presented as a global challenge related to food production, climate change and trade; while food poverty is portrayed as a national problem and an individual problem linked to economic crisis, austerity policies and individual choice.
- The main frames mobilised in the UK are productionist, individualistic and technology frames, side-lining the real environmental and social justice considerations in the debate.

---

### Further information

Our research aims to explore the meanings and controversies of food system vulnerabilities in the UK to deliver food security for all through the European funded project TRANSMANGO <http://www.transmango.eu/> where we work with thirteen partners from ten different countries.