



Multi-scalar policy uptake of the six-dimensional food security framework

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ABSTRACT

In 2022, along with colleagues, we proposed a six-dimensional food security framework in a *Food Policy* viewpoint article that argued for the need to expand the commonly cited four pillar approach (availability, access, utilization and stability) by adding two additional dimensions: agency and sustainability. The proposal was not just for a new conceptual framework for scholarly analysis, but also for its application in policy settings. Over three years later, we are humbled to see widespread uptake of our call to embrace agency and sustainability as dimensions of food security in multiple types of policy settings at different scales. This brief policy comment outlines the growing recognition and application of the six-dimensional framework for food security in policy contexts from the global to the local level. We are hopeful that the growing application of this idea will help to make improvements in the global quest to end hunger.

1. Introduction

In 2022, along with colleagues, we proposed a six-dimensional food security framework in a *Food Policy* viewpoint article (Clapp et al., 2022). The article argued for the need to expand the commonly cited four pillar approach (availability, access, utilization and stability) by adding two additional dimensions: agency and sustainability. The proposal was not just for a new conceptual framework for scholarly analysis, but also for its application in policy settings. Our articulation of this wider approach emerged from work we had done with the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE-FSN) for its 2020 report, *Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030* (HLPE-FSN 2020) (a report that had the same lead authors as the *Food Policy* article).

Our call for the inclusion of agency and sustainability to be recognized as dimensions of food security arose out of several key conclusions from our analysis. First, we found that the lack of progress on addressing food insecurity was in part a result of policy frameworks paying too little attention to strengthening the agency, or voice, of those who are most affected by food insecurity. Food security frameworks that ignore or downplay the significance of agency are increasingly out of step with growing recognition of the importance of strengthening human rights –

including the right to adequate food – for the world's most marginalized people who typically face the highest rates of hunger, especially in a context of growing power imbalances in food systems (UNDP, 2025). Our motivation to incorporate agency into the conceptual understanding of food security was also to address a growing rift between two diverging literatures and policy drivers: food sovereignty for which agency is central, and a technocratic take on food security that tiptoes around agency. The six-dimensional framework bridges this gap, creating more common ground for these two communities to work together.

Second, our analysis also pointed to the growing need to account for sustainability – encompassing ecological rights and realities, such as climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as economic and social dimensions – in both conceptual and policy approaches to addressing food insecurity. The ability of food systems to contribute to food security is intimately connected to healthy ecosystems, societies and economies, and their resilience is mutually interdependent.

While many scholarly papers and policy statements have recognized agency and/or sustainability as fundamental elements of food security (e.g., Berry et al., 2015; Burchi and DeMuro, 2016; UN, 2015; HLPE-FSN 2019), they had not at that point been formally incorporated into conceptual and policy frameworks, prompting us to make the case that they

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should be.

Over three years later, we are gratified to see widespread and multiscale uptake of agency and sustainability as definitional elements of food security in both scholarly (e.g., Galanakis et al., 2025; Mockshell and Ritter, 2024; Hassoun et al., 2024; Iversen et al., 2023)¹ and policy settings (the latter outlined below). We are hopeful that the growing application of this idea will help to make improvements in the global quest to end hunger. Here we briefly discuss some of the policy settings in which this framework has been acknowledged or adopted. These examples were collected through connections with colleagues in various organizations that reached out to the authors to discuss implementation of the framework as well as systematic online searches of policy documents and scholarly literature.

At the international level, the six-dimensional framework has been noted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and other UN bodies in their flagship report *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (e.g., FAO et al. 2021, 53). The framework has also been operationalized by the UN's Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and World Food Programme in a project – Insights on Food Systems Risks (INFER) – which tracks food system risks and outlines their impacts on the six dimensions of food security (UNESCAP and WFP, 2024). A UNDP White Paper on how policy can support resilience in food systems also uses the six-dimensional framework, noting not only that climate change threatens all of these dimensions, but also that women are particularly vulnerable along all of them, which results in greater food insecurity for women compared to men (UNDP, 2024). The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) – the widely accepted standard for the measurement and evaluation of the scale of food insecurity that guides humanitarian responses – is studying how to update its Analytical Framework to incorporate all six dimensions (Drimie et al., 2025). The European Commission also utilizes the six-dimensional framework in several documents, including a working paper on the drivers of food security (European Commission, 2023a) and a scientific brief – *Food Security and Food Crises* – that teases out implications of recent food crises (European Commission, 2023b). In addition, a UN report for the Arab region develops a tool to assess food systems which integrates data on specific indicators for agency and sustainability, providing an excellent example of operationalization of the six-dimensional framework into policy-relevant metrics (UNESCWA, 2024).

At the national level, the 2024 United Kingdom Food Security Report defines food security using the six-dimensional framework – highlighting the addition of agency and sustainability to the traditional four pillars – and links indicators in the report to each of these dimensions (UK Department for Environment and Affairs, 2024). The importance of agency and sustainability is also underlined in a recent report of the UK Food Standards Agency on citizen and industry understandings of sustainability (UK Food Standards Agency, 2022). Along similar lines, the Canadian federal department responsible for food and agriculture policy – Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada – is in the process of developing a community food security indicator framework that identifies metrics for each of the six dimensions of food security (personal communication). National aid agencies have also taken up the framework. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), for example, included agency and sustainability as key dimensions in its 2021 brief on food security (SIDA, 2022) and the German aid agency GIZ also features the six dimensions in a recent report on assistance for soil protection for food security (GIZ, 2025). A report by UK Aid and Work and Opportunities for Women employs the six-dimensional framework in its analysis of why food insecurity is more prevalent among women than among men (Forsythe, 2023). Submissions from various parties to parliamentary committees in Australia and in the United Kingdom have also

referenced the framework as being important in policy approaches to address food insecurity in those countries (e.g., University of Melbourne, 2024; Parsons, 2022). The framework has also been embraced by national organizations in several countries, including Dietitians Australia and the New Zealand Zero Hunger Collective (Dietitians Australia, 2021; Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective, 2024) Dietitians Australia, 2021; Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective, 2024.

At the sub-national level, the six-dimensional food security framework has been adopted by a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations. The New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate in the United States, for example, has embraced the framework in its policies to address food security in that state, even featuring it in a primer on food security on its website (New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate, 2024). Local organizations have also taken up the framework, especially those working with marginalized and vulnerable communities to address food insecurity, such as Vancouver, Canada's Gordon Neighbourhood House and the Foodprint Melbourne project that partners with various cities in the state of Victoria in Australia (Gordon Neighbourhood House, 2022; University of Melbourne, 2024).

The examples cited above show that the six-dimensional food security framework has proven useful to those working in food security policy contexts at different scales, from the global to the local. The continued poor performance in addressing world hunger, combined with an acceleration of the ecological crisis that is undermining the resilience of food systems, has prompted food security policy organizations to seek new approaches that capture these important dynamics. In our assessment, given the broad interest in these ideas in a variety of policy contexts, the six-dimensional food security framework is likely to continue to gain acceptance as these problems become more entrenched and the urgency of finding alternative approaches increases. Already, we have seen the framework taken up across a wide range of institutions that approach food security issues from different angles, showing that these ideas have the potential to bridge divides in the literature in ways that can move policy forward in productive ways. It is our sincere hope that the policy application of this framework will enable tangible changes that uplift the voice and agency of those most affected by food insecurity and prompt a fundamental transformation of food systems toward more ecological agriculture and sustainable diets.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jennifer Clapp: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Investigation, Conceptualization. **William G. Moseley:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Paola Termine:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Conceptualization. **Barbara Burlingame:** Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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¹ As of July 31, 2025, Clapp et al. 2022 had been cited approximately 550 times according to Google Scholar (just over three years since publication).

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