

An evidence-based response to the global food crisis

Key fact:

As the food price crisis became global news during 2007-8, IFPRI was able to respond quickly and effectively by producing 30 publications based on its extensive research findings. The Institute's analysis of trends, provision of data, and policy recommendations led to seven of IFPRI's eight recommended urgent actions appearing in the United Nations' Comprehensive Framework for Action on food security.

Summary:

When global food prices began to rise in 2007, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was one of the first institutions to warn of an impending global food price crisis. With an extensive research portfolio and expertise ranging from markets and trade to nutrition and food consumption, IFPRI was well placed and well prepared to answer questions from the public, media, and policymakers with regard to "What happened?" and "Why did it happen?" The Institute provided evidence-based information through a coordinated communication campaign to inform policy debates through publications, media interviews, face-to-face meetings with policymakers, testimony before legislators, press releases, and the communication of research findings through the internet.



IFPRI also provided innovative and workable recommendations on what could be done to mitigate the effects of the food price crisis and to help prevent such a crisis from reoccurring. Evidence-based policy recommendations, developed by a large number of IFPRI staff working closely together, were used as the basis for discussions at several high-level meetings and summits, including a joint UN-FAO High Level Meeting on Food Security for All.

Facts & figures¹

- ❖ Seven of IFPRI's eight urgent actions released in May 2008 appear in the UN's Comprehensive Framework for Action as policy recommendations and are now being implemented through the High Level Task Force on the global food security crisis.
- ❖ A joint UN-FAO High Level Meeting on Food Security for All (Madrid, January 2009) used IFPRI's work on the food price crisis in two roundtable background papers.
- ❖ The Philippine Agriculture Secretary, Arthur Yap, praised IFPRI's proposal for establishing emergency food reserves to help stabilise prices of agricultural commodities.
- ❖ IFPRI produced 30 publications on the food price crisis in addition to presentations and briefings by senior staff at high-level venues, resulting in more than 700 media citations as well as references in blogs and social networking pages on the internet.
- ❖ During the crisis, IFPRI registered food price-related media hits from 61 countries between August 2007 and August 2008.
- ❖ Once IFPRI's name had been cited in prominent media outlets, several new journalists requested information from IFPRI. IFPRI received 99 media hits related to food prices in December 2007 and more than 600 in 2008.
- ❖ IFPRI's activities played a key role in getting agriculture back on the political agenda.
- ❖ The G8 and others have promised US\$20bn in funding to agriculture over three years, with the initiation of schemes such as the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative - a prominent example of a trend since the crisis in which agriculture is given more priority.

An evidence-based response to the global food crisis

As food prices began to rapidly rise in 2007, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was one of the first institutions to warn of an impending food price crisis. While the underlying causes and lessons to be learnt from the crisis itself have been well documented, IFPRI's part in alerting the world to the severity of the crisis, and in making policy recommendations for urgent action, arose from its strategic evidence-based communication campaign.

With a comprehensive research portfolio on markets and trade, gender and agriculture, nutrition, and food consumption, IFPRI was well placed to provide up-to-the-minute analysis and data to the media and policymakers around the world. Even before the crisis began, the Institute had warned of likely outcomes. Established relationships, developed over preceding months and years, allowed the Institute to effectively and comprehensively target the media and to gain further recognition amongst the world's policymakers. For example, IFPRI already had a high reputation with the media for highlighting world hunger through the publication of its annual Global Hunger Index (GHI) in collaboration with two NGOs -



In 2008 IFPRI published an Action Plan proposing emergency measures (IFPRI)

Welthungerhilfe (Germany) and Concern Worldwide (Ireland). Since 2006, when the GHI was first published, media hits for each subsequent edition have increased by about 30 per cent, from 66 hits in 2006 to 145 hits in 2009. There have also been almost 50,000 downloads of the GHI pdfs to date.

IFPRI published an Action Plan in May 2008, well before many others, proposing an emergency package containing two sets of policy actions: one that could yield immediate impacts and another outlining medium and long-term activities. Details of an innovative virtual food reserve to help prevent future market price spikes were released with recommended global policy actions. How this reserve might best be implemented is still the subject of ongoing discussions among policymakers.

Other outcomes of the Institute's campaign included the use of IFPRI data in the UN's Comprehensive Framework for Action, published by the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in July 2008. Seven of IFPRI's eight proposed urgent actions (see box) released in May 2008 appear in the document as policy recommendations.

Eight urgent actions proposed by IFPRI

Emergency Package

1. Expand emergency responses and humanitarian assistance to food-insecure people and people threatening government legitimacy,
2. Eliminate agricultural export bans and export restrictions,
3. Undertake fast-impact food production programs in key areas, and
4. Change biofuel policies (freeze or reduce production, impose moratorium on biofuels based on grains and oilseeds).

Resilience Package

5. Calm markets with the use of market-oriented regulation of speculation, shared public grain stocks, strengthened food-import financing, and reliable food aid,
6. Invest in social protection,
7. Scale up investments for sustained agricultural growth, and
8. Complete Doha Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations (*not yet been achieved*).

The Institute actively engaged the media through blogs, social networking sites, face-to-face presentations, and meetings by providing information on the food price crisis. Analyses of the shortcomings that had led to the crisis were accompanied by suggestions of what might be learned. Research results were made freely available and helped inform governmental policy debates, enriching policy options for bodies such as the UN and the World Bank.

However, analysis did not just focus on the past and the present. By providing innovative and workable policy recommendations, IFPRI was able to devise answers for policymakers on how to mitigate the effects of the crisis and on what needs to be done to prevent a similar scenario from happening again. IFPRI highlighted the essential role of agriculture in reducing poverty and hunger during the next 40 years by contributing to global debates on the need for targeted programs and social protection, the connection between food and biofuel policies, the effects of export bans/restrictions and market speculation, and the role of grain reserves.

IFPRI's research on food prices was cited in media outlets from prominent international news sources including the BBC, CNN, the Wall Street Journal, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, Time Magazine, and Newsweek, to other newspapers, websites, and radio shows around the



IFPRI's recommendations played a key role in getting agriculture back on the political agenda (IFPRI)

world. IFPRI's work received more than 700 media citations during 2007-8, and in 2008 the Institute received the COM+ Communications for Sustainable Development Award in recognition of its response to the food crisis in real time.

IFPRI was not an isolated actor during the food crisis: other centres within the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research were also active. However, IFPRI's communication efforts triggered and influenced others in a ripple effect, so that research results and recommendations on the food crisis "percolated" through policy circles. With the G8 and others making a commitment to direct US\$20bn toward agriculture over the next three

years, the sector has recently become more prominent in the global food policy system. Ultimately, the systemic shift toward greater attention and commitment to agriculture was aided by IFPRI's communication and policy recommendations, which have played a key role in placing agriculture back on the political agenda.

Testimonials:

- **Arthur Yap, Agriculture Secretary, The Philippines:** "We at the Department of Agriculture welcome the recommendation of the IFPRI on the setting up of small physical reserves for essential farm commodities, which we believe would help stabilize food prices especially now at a time when a global crisis triggered by the US economic slowdown is sweeping across the globe."
- **Peter McPherson, president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC)** in his testimony to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March 2008: "The International Food Policy Research Institute [IFPRI] is providing excellent analysis and policy advice on the food price issues."

Additional case study information

Costs and benefits:²

The cost of the communication campaign pioneered by IFPRI during the 2008 food price crisis was moderate as IFPRI was able to utilise existing research findings and established communications channels and resources. The campaign helped to generate, promote, and disseminate the key message that agriculture must become a global priority to prevent such a crisis in the future.

DFID contribution to research:

DFID's project-related and core funding to IFPRI over the years has helped the Institute build key research results on food security as well as the communications tools that allowed it to respond rapidly and effectively to the food price crisis - thereby ensuring the influence and impact of IFPRI's research in critical global, regional, and national policy debates.

Time-scale of communication activities:

- 2007 IFPRI ramped up its campaign to build relationships with journalists and establish itself as a trusted source of information. By the end of 2007, more than 1,150 journalists were subscribed to IFPRI's press service.
- August 2007 IFPRI Communications Division began to register media hits related to food prices.
- December 2007-December 2008 IFPRI produced five key publications on the food crisis.
- January-March 2008 IFPRI sustained attention to the topic through high-level presentations, summits, and meetings. Coordination efforts were strengthened.
- April-June 2008 IFPRI received 392 media hits - more hits on a single subject than the Institute had ever received before, resulting in widespread citations.

Photo credits:

IFPRI: For high res images contact Klaus von Grebmer (k.vongrebmer@cgiar.org)

Links:

International Food Policy Research Institute: www.ifpri.org

Main references:

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Contacts for further information:

Klaus von Grebmer

International Food Policy Research Institute

2033 K Street, NW

Washington, DC 20006-1002

USA

Tel: +1 202 862 5600

Fax: +1 202 467 4439

Skype ID: ifprihomeoffice

Email: k.vongrebmer@cgiar.org

¹ Facts and figures sourced from: IFPRI, (2009) *Food price crisis: IFPRI's response and influence*, CGIAR briefing paper

² Personal communication Klaus von Grebmer



DFID, the Department of International Development, is the part of the UK government that manages Britain's aid to poor countries and works to get rid of extreme poverty.



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