How Can the Global Food Security Challenges be Addressed in a Multilateral Trading System?

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

Eradicating hunger and meeting food security expectations remain global goals. In the multilateral trading system (MTS) they can only be met through cooperation among countries in the form of international trade. Yet a number of trade-related incidents have eroded confidence in the capacity of the MTS to address food security issues.

The research question here is “How can global food security challenges be addressed in a MTS?” The main focus is on the role of the World Trade Organization (WTO), but the research also covers its interaction with other organisations and the context in which it operates, that is, the MTS.

The study covers four topics:

- What is food security?
- Does the WTO have a mandate and the capability to contribute to food security?
- What policy measures are used to address food security issues and are they effective?
- What significant changes in the context of the debate complicate or ease the quest for a consensus on how to respond to food security challenges?

The method used was to collect information on the views of delegates, researchers and officials, by an online survey and from interviews, and to analyse the data using different tools.

Views on “What is food security?” were grouped according to combinations of ‘orientations’ and ‘dimensions’. The former refers to a focus on people, trade or resources. The latter refers to availability, accessibility, stability and utilisation. Views on the nature of food security, while apparently showing a systematic variation by the frequency of responses, were not found to differ significantly in statistical terms over the development levels of the respondents’ countries. Lack of progress on food security issues in the WTO is therefore not caused primarily by a lack of a common understanding of the concept.

A majority view was that the WTO mandate on food security is limited, although the less developed economies supported the counterview. Respondents also confirmed that WTO rules are inadequate in addressing food security issues. Lack of policy space was an issue for the least-developed and developing countries; inadequacy in disciplining trade-distortive measures was also a concern for the developing, developed and research/official groups; and lack of transparency was especially undesirable for the developed and least-developed countries.
Import/export restrictions and subsidies (including domestic support) are widely used policy instruments for food security goals, despite their trade-distortive aspects. However, respondents had mixed views about the effectiveness of these policies, especially in the context of the inadequacy of rules to discipline them. The lack of case law through the dispute settlement system is compounding that issue.

The food crisis of 2006–2008 raised the profile of food security but other dynamics have made it difficult to reach a consensus for change. These include greater diversity in the interests of the developing group as a whole, the shift in the negotiating positions of emerging developing countries, and protectionist concerns related to the increase in green box spending.

For all these reasons – the uncertainty about the WTO’s mandate, the inadequacy of its rules and the diversity within the developing economy group – negotiations that are relevant to food security have been hindered and little progress has been made. The MTS could contribute to food security, but resolving these issues is the next step to doing so.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Lakmini P Peiris Mendis
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I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Christopher Findlay, my principal supervisor, firstly for agreeing to be my supervisor and for his time in spite of his busy schedule as the Executive Dean, Faculty of Professions; and secondly, for his style of mentoring, which was instrumental in drawing out the potential in me, for his guidance, patience, advice, support and understanding throughout the four years – for this, I thank him profusely.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my other two supervisors, Mr Keith Wilson (Institute for International Trade – University of Adelaide) and Dr Alec Zuo (Centre for Global Food and Resources – University of Adelaide), for their guidance, helpful comments and support, which was available any time I needed it.

This research is based purely on the views of Agriculture Delegates in Geneva, researchers and officials. Therefore, I am immensely thankful to each and every one who shared their views and country positions to make this research a success. I take this opportunity to thank the Director General and staff of the WTO for extending their support and allowing me to conduct interviews at its premises.

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I believe nothing just happens, but everything is planned for a purpose. Therefore, I hope this thesis will facilitate the noble cause in question to bring glory to the Lord almighty, whose hand I have experienced in every moment in this journey!
Dedication

to

my son Nikhil
### Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>African, Caribbean and Pacific</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACWL</td>
<td>Advisory Centre on WTO Law</td>
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<tr>
<td>AMS</td>
<td>Aggregate measurement of support</td>
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<tr>
<td>AoA</td>
<td>Agreement on Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia – Pacific Economic Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South-East Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>developed</td>
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<td>DDA</td>
<td>Doha Development Agenda</td>
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<td>DSB</td>
<td>Dispute Settlement Body</td>
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<td>DSM</td>
<td>Dispute Settlement Mechanism</td>
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<td>DSU</td>
<td>Dispute Settlement Understanding</td>
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<td>Dv</td>
<td>developing</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EU CAP</td>
<td>EU Common Agricultural Policy</td>
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<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agriculture Organization</td>
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<td>G-10</td>
<td>Group of 10</td>
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<td>Group of 20</td>
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<td>G-33</td>
<td>Group of 33</td>
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<tr>
<td>GATS</td>
<td>General Agreement on Trade in Services</td>
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<td>GATT</td>
<td>General Agreement on Tariff and Trade</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNI</td>
<td>gross national income</td>
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<td>HD</td>
<td>high-income developed</td>
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<td>HDV</td>
<td>high-income developing</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICTSD</td>
<td>International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>ITO</td>
<td>International Trade Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDCs</td>
<td>least-developed countries</td>
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<td>LDV</td>
<td>lower middle-income developing</td>
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<td>LIFDC</td>
<td>low-income food deficit country</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MFN</td>
<td>most-favoured-nation</td>
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<td>MTS</td>
<td>Multilateral Trading System</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFE</td>
<td>net food exporters</td>
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<td>NFG</td>
<td>net food group</td>
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<td>NFI</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFIDC</td>
<td>net food-importing developing country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCA</td>
<td>Principal Component Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>preferential trade agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM</td>
<td>recently acceded member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RDev</td>
<td>Rest of the developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTA</td>
<td>regional trade agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCM</td>
<td>subsidies and countervailing measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SDT  special and differential treatment
SPS  sanitary and phytosanitary measures
SSM  special safeguard mechanism
TRIPS  Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN  United Nations
UNCTAD  United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNIDO  United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UPDV  upper middle-income developing
US  United States
WHO  World Health Organization
WTO  World Trade Organization