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## T7 Task Force Sustainable Economic Recovery

### POLICY BRIEF

# SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS: ADDRESSING MULTIPLE VULNERABILITIES WITH A NEW PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

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**Mehmet Sait Akman** The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV); **Fabrizio Botti** Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); **Clara Brandi** German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE); **Michael Brüntrup** German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE); **Markus Dietrich** Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH/Inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN); **Ilaria Espa** - Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI); **Stormy-Annika Mildner** – Aspen Institute Germany; **Bettina Rudloff** German Institute for International and Security Affairs/ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP).



# Abstract

The ongoing compound and acute crises of Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine meet longer-term but no-less pressing crises of social and environmental sustainability in and around agriculture, food and nutrition security. At the same time, they irritate existing frames on (and perceptions of) how to address trade and sustainability. External shocks must be increasingly considered when addressing food security, following the FAO's observation that conflicts and migration have developed into major reasons for food insecurity and hunger.

Additionally, climate change, biodiversity loss and human rights are generally most challenging and partially conflicting for many developing countries. They have to address them by aiming at increased and more nutritious food production, job creation, poverty alleviation and resilience to shocks of a still strongly growing and urbanising population.

Many international mechanisms are already in place on agriculture and food systems which are almost unavoidably not (yet) sufficiently coordinated. A new generation of due diligence laws recently is added mostly by industrialised countries to that existing mix of policies in place addressing serious sustainability gaps of supply chains into these countries. However, these regulations also bear the risk of generating unintended negative consequences, particularly for smallholder farmers in poor countries.

Against this background, we conclude for proposals at different degree of specificity: 1) Reacting to geopolitical risks: Immediate and long-term measures to safeguard food security in light of Russia's War on Ukraine, 2) Balancing and integrating food security and sustainability, 3) Initiating a joint observatory on new due diligence measures, and 4) Starting a process to improve harmonised global governance for agriculture and food systems.

# Challenge

In light of the latest crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine in combination with longer-term challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and other planetary boundaries but also in light of the long-term global food and nutrition security problems, it is time for renewed action by the G7. As sensibilities and vulnerabilities differ a partnership approach should address these differences by jointly developing answers. This supports a fair and trustful cooperation between the Global North and the Global South at eye level.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed severe vulnerabilities in many global supply chains. High geographic and supplier concentration, low degrees of diversification, and just-in-time supply and production have made value chains in many sectors very vulnerable to external shocks, such as extreme weather, seismic events, and geopolitical tensions. Value chain security was thus one of the priority areas of the UK G7 Presidency. The focus was, however, mostly on industrial value chains. Even though agriculture was seen as a comparatively stable sector locally, agricultural trade was disturbed in manifold ways which negatively affected vulnerable countries in particular. There are alarming signals that Covid-19 and the counter-measures such as lockdowns and travel restrictions had serious consequences for agriculture, food markets and food and nutrition security. Since mid-2020, food and fertiliser prices climbed to the highest levels since the food price crisis in the period 2007-2011. According to the World Bank (2022), the Agricultural Commodity Price Index was 35 percent higher in February 2022 than its January 2021 level. Maize and wheat prices were 26 percent and 23 percent higher, respectively. It is estimated that around 118 million more people were facing chronic hunger in 2020 than in 2019 and nearly 2.37 billion people (or 30% of the global population) lacked access to adequate food in 2020 – a rise of 320 million in just one year. Also global poverty increased sharply with about 97 million more people living on less than \$1.90 a day because of the pandemic, increasing the global poverty rate from 7.8 to 9.1 percent; 163 million more are living on less than \$5.50 a day (Sanchez-Paramo et al., 2021).

The likely consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine underlines that more attention needs to be placed on geopolitical risks and their effects on agricultural value chains. The Ukraine, Russia and its ally Belarus are major suppliers of many commodities such as wheat, maize, barley, and vegetable (sunflower) oil as well as fertiliser and pesticide raw materials and end products. In the short run, direct importers from these countries are most affected, but the global price hikes affect all importing countries. Many of the strongly food importing countries are already food insecure and some are politically sensitive to the food price hikes, particularly in North Africa and the middle East (e.g. Lebanon, Egypt) (von Cramon-Taubadel, 2022). In the medium term, also other countries will be affected, for instance Brazil which is importing about one quarter of its fertilisers from Russia which in turn means that supply of agricultural products is at risk<sup>1</sup>. High food price inflation does not only mean more hunger and less nutritious food intake, but also risks to create food riots, political instability and new security crises.

At the same time, agriculture and food systems are increasingly perceived as the pivot of many sustainability challenges and solutions. The Agriculture, Forest and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector is responsible for just under a quarter of anthropogenic GHG emissions mainly from deforestation and agricultural emissions from

livestock, soil and nutrient management (Smith et al. 2014). Agriculture is also the largest user of water resources and the key polluter of water bodies through nitrogen and phosphate leakages, and the biggest threat to biodiversity (FAO 2021, Gerten et al. 2020). Additionally, the sector is seriously suffering from the effects of climate change, while it is uniquely able to sequester large amount of carbon in biomass and in the soils and create sustainable landscapes and biodiversity (Smith et al. 2018). As to socio-economic sustainability, about 70-80% of the poor and of food insecure households are smallholder farm families (IFAD 2021, FAO et al. 2021). Child labour in agriculture accounts for almost 100 million children or more than 60 percent of all known cases in any sector<sup>2</sup>. More generally, working conditions of smallholder farmers and agricultural workers are often most worrying (IFAD 2021). Labour, social and environmental conditions are also precarious on many smallholder farms who supply into export value chains (Meemken et al. 2021) – about one fifth of all smallholders are engaged in such cash crops as a part of their farming systems (Adjognon et al. 2017). Women have particularly important but locally different roles in agriculture and food systems. On the other hand, regional and global agricultural value chains offer great potential to improve their socio-economic sustainability and therefore advance income opportunities for smallholders through inclusive business models as endorsed by the G20<sup>3</sup>.

To meet the growing food demand of an estimated 9.7 billion people in 2050 and to support fossil decarbonization, sustainable and nutritious food production but also the non-food bio-economy need to increase significantly, and trade in agriculture needs to become more crisis-proof. At the same time, losses along the value chains and consumption patterns have to change to dampen the needs for production increases. Sustainability has to be improved at production, processing, trade and consumption levels as well as in and through recycling, i.e. in a (food) systems perspective. The private sector, including farmers, are key players in these systems.

Many partial international coordination mechanisms are in place on agricultural policy, food security, value chains and environmental issues, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) – and the linked standards setting bodies Codex Alimentarius Commission, World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the World Trade Organisation with two special Agreements on Agriculture and on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and others. In many other international organisations, additional aspects are negotiated and regulated, for instance the mentioned issues of climate change, biodiversity, soils and drought, water and other environmental issues, labour standards, price speculation, health aspects and nutrition, inclusive business models, and others.

Aside from these international organisations, several G7 countries including Germany (and as well the European Union) are increasingly addressing sustainability through a set of younger generation of due diligence approaches (EU Commission 2021 and 2022). These attempt to improve the social and environmental conditions of production along the supply chains into their territories by making the economic entities responsible for improvements and violations of respective standards along their supply chains. Yet, these approaches do not only promise to improve these conditions but also risk to do harm in particular to the millions of smallholder farms for whom it is difficult to comply and to prove or certify compliance and



who risk to experience higher costs, to drop out or to be abandoned due to costs of induced necessary adjustment, of surveillance and of undetected non-compliance and reputational or even legal damages. In addition, for the time being these due diligence approaches are diverging and mainly unilaterally applied, although affecting partner countries and especially small delivering entities such as smallholder farmers.

In summary, despite or exactly because of the dispersed and scattered institutional governance landscape, a lot remains to be done to achieve better governance of the broader agricultural and food system. There are many (partially) conflicting goals around agriculture and food systems, and the power of different actors is very diverging. Therefore coordination and predictability, as well as fair burden sharing is important. The UN food system summit in 2021 organised by the Secretary General has been an attempt to bring the various issues under one roof, but fell short of creating overarching and stable structures. A coordinated global agriculture and food system governance should focus on two dimensions: resilience and sustainability, both in a broad sense.

The multiple crises provide a window of opportunity to tackle longstanding barriers of overarching changes beyond just reactive adjustments. G7 is a relevant acting group by high market shares in agricultural imports and exports by contributing to other international frames and by their convening power. However, allies have to be involved in a partnership approach, in particular the G20 and the global (UN) institutions.

We propose four concrete steps for such a partnership approach: 1) reaction to the Russia's War on Ukraine and effects on food security in short and longer term, 2) balancing and integrating food security and sustainability, 3) initiating an observatory on new due diligence measures, and 4) striving towards better integrated global governance of agriculture and the food system.

# Proposals

Practical policy recommendations presented in this section are mainly addressed to G7 members but could also inspire discussions in other international fora.

## **1. Reacting to geopolitical risks: Immediate and long term measures to safeguard food security in light of Russia's War on Ukraine**

As the G7 Agricultural Ministers already noted on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, both short- and long-term solutions are needed to react to potential food deficits, particularly in vulnerable countries now and in the current year and to be prepared for larger effects in the medium term.

In the short run, several proposed acute *direct measures* should be strengthened by the G7:

- An actual and immediate commitment to increasing both, food and fertilizer aid for affected countries and coordination of this assistance among the G7 countries.
- Undertaking a rapid assessment of options for additional food supply by supporting production and consumption adjustments in G7 countries, e.g. where suitable, support channelling of feed and biofuel feedstocks to human consumption.
- *Ensure open and possibly protected transport routes with priority for humanitarian and food transport and support shipping lines to safeguard delivery e.g. by supporting insurance schemes.*
- Considering negative effects on food security for vulnerable countries when deciding on further sanctions and encourage private companies to do the same, avoiding to cause serious harm to third party countries.
- Stronger options to avoid export restrictions on food e.g. by clearly condemning deviations within and outside the group.

*In the longer run*, the G7 should focus on the following measures to better prepare for geopolitical challenges:

- Establishing a joint task force combining security, transport and food expertise to better address interlinkages-
- Explicitly integrating security-linked risks in the existing Agricultural Information Market System (AMIS), e.g. by integrating dominant chokepoints for shipping routes and by extending or by extending existing vulnerability assessment frameworks (such as FAO and WFP or FEWSNET).
- Inviting vulnerable countries to identify their specific vulnerability e.g. to geo-political challenge in order to be able to consider their specific needs.
- Supporting regional coordination across vulnerable countries e.g. by strengthening joint stock systems like started ones in West Africa (ECIWAS Commission 2015).
- Assessing acute appropriateness of international instruments for support to low income and especially vulnerable countries in place (in particular IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Facility and Exogenous Shocks Facility<sup>4</sup>).

## 2. Balancing and integrating food security and sustainability

The need to react to the recent war in the Ukraine and the resulting food crisis initiated a renewed policy debate on re-evaluating the objectives of sustainability and self-sufficiency in essential goods like food and means how to address these, including international trade policy. To avoid mistakes like falling back into protectionisms which “beggar the neighbours” and create vulnerabilities to internal shocks or undermining sustainability while solely focussing on productivity, an open debate and accompanying academic work on trade-offs is needed. The G7 can play a key role in helping to strike a balance between food security and sustainability.

The G7 should *generally support* a better balance by

- Offering an open, interdisciplinary option for debate in the G7 fora (e.g. T7) on a continuous basis.
- Identifying relevant trade-offs between different policy goals like supply security and ecological sustainability.
- Offering a partnership discourse to address how different types of countries are facing different vulnerabilities.
- Re-thinking trade-offs in (food, feed, biofuel and other bio-based material) industries with major aim to “do not harm but support food security” in a risk-aware framework, since feedstocks compete with human consumption but also constitute a buffer in times of crisis.
- Debating and creating public and policy awareness about the need for region-specific strategies for sustainable land use, e.g. sustainable intensification particularly in those countries with very low levels of inputs and thus high marginal rates of return to investments (e.g. most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa), against extensification strategies where limits of sustainability have been exceeded (e.g. several parts of Europe).

*Specific measures* the G7 should take include:

- Considering flexibility mechanisms to be able to react on unforeseen crises like the Russian invasion or natural disasters without the need to completely overhaul existing policies (e.g. by changing set aside rules as part of domestic agricultural policy in specific situations), i.e. contingency planning.
- Re-evaluating food subsidies’ criteria so far focussed on market effects (e.g. by OECD and WTO).
- Continuing WTO reforms to bind export restrictions to clear criteria and time limitation, including consideration of mandatory consultation requirements and binding ad hoc arbitration procedures.
- Rationalising trade remedy measures (e.g. anti-dumping and countervailing duties) in place on critical inputs for farmers such as fertilizers and basic food items.
- Seeking better coordination between food security, climate change and biodiversity measures (e.g. biofuels subsidies, forestry conservation policies, soil carbon). This should also create renewed attention to landscape approaches as key planning tools for land use.

To promote these proposals, different countries’ representatives should be invited to the G7. The above-mentioned issues could be supported by institutions focusing on agricultural research e.g. like CGIAR, IFPRI or OECD.

## 3. Initiating a joint observatory on new due diligence measures

New due diligence legislations are potentially very powerful tools that create new options and political drive for more ecological and social sustainability in agricultural supply chains, but they also entail the risk of

generating unintended consequences, particularly for smallholders in poor countries. These unintended negative effects deserve particular attention and should be monitored from the very beginning.

The G7 should focus on

- determining the status of existing due diligence-approaches and how they impact their agricultural value chains, also in conjunction with existing laws.
- jointly with partner countries and actors potentially affected by G7 countries initiatives, establishing an observatory of the risk of unintended consequences in the context of due diligence approaches, potentially with a focus on selected sectors.
- mandating an appropriate organisation to cover unintended effects and continuously observe them, complemented by a joint research programme with affected partner countries.
- committing mechanisms to overcome certain identified risks, e.g. by offering transition phases, capacity support, complaint mechanisms or compensation. In principal, some initiatives provide for such support, however often at a very general level (e.g. the EU COM proposal on deforestation, Art. 32 on review (EU Commission 2021) and the COM proposal on due diligence in Art. 7 on unintended effects (EU Commission 2022)).
- engaging with countries in the Global South to link DDL regulations with regional and national policy instruments, for example on the promotion of inclusive business, to mitigate negative effects and leverage the opportunities that sustainable farm to fork GVCs offer in terms of poverty alleviation.

Representatives from delivering countries and especially small farmers may be invited to G7 meetings to identify first relevant elements to be considered.

As the German and the European initiatives are new and anyhow envisage respective review mechanisms European G7 states may take the lead.

#### **4. Starting a process to improve harmonised global governance for agriculture and food systems**

The previous specific proposals indicate the need for inter-agency actions. In order to create more coordination, harmonisation and balanced decisions about contentious issues, a more coordinated global governance is necessary. Existing bodies, including FAO and CFS are not able to fulfil that difficult task because their mandates, capacities and operational mechanisms, are immanently limited to specific tasks. The UN Food system summit in 2021 started the pathway towards an improved global governance approach for food systems and agriculture, which should be built on in the future. As agriculture and food is linked with diverging interests and sensibilities while the highest vulnerabilities are encountered in the Global South, a trustful partnership with countries of the Global South is of utmost importance.

The G7 should improve global governance by

- Opening an international debate about appropriate ways to continue strengthening global governance of agriculture and food systems.
- Cooperate across various G7 strings (agriculture, development, security, finance) and with existing relevant bodies like at FAO, CFS, WFP, CGIAR, WTO, World Bank and IMF, for instance through a joint task force - Hereby feasible ways of enhancing cooperation without fundamentally challenging existing bodies and (partial) responsibilities should be identified.
- Inviting G20 and other countries early on to join the reflections in an honest partnership spirit.



# Implementations

The G7 members are key players for collective actions on food security in general and trade-related supply chain issues in that context.

Building on commitments made in previous G7 Presidencies, in 2021, the G7 Trade Ministers committed to developing trade policy approaches in support of sustainable supply chains for forest and agricultural commodities through the WTO, the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) dialogue and the work of the International Tropical Timber Organization. In 2021, the G7 also launched the G7 Sustainable Supply Chain Initiative, i.e. the commitment of 22 leading food and agriculture companies headquartered in G7 countries to take action to improve their environmental and social impact of their supply chains and business operations. In 2021, the G7 leaders' Nature Compact recognised they need to do more to safeguard forests and identified due diligence requirements as a tool to ensure supply chains do not fuel deforestation. In 2019 the Business for Inclusive Growth alliance was launched under French Presidency.

Looking ahead, the G7 can play an important role in promoting a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of resilience towards different types of shocks (Sanez 2015). This is key to address the multiple risks the world is facing and equip for future shocks which are expected to be increasingly relevant (Smaller 2022). Such an approach would build on previous G7/G8 Summits already strengthening resilience and sustainability. In 2009, the G8 Summit in Aquila defined the „L'Aquila Food Security Initiative (FSI)“ jointly with countries from the global south and supported open markets for food availability (G8 2009). Moreover, the German G7 in 2015 specified a commitment for rules for responsible supply chains and for food security (G7 2015).

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Reuters (2022): Brazil farmers brace for potential fertilizer pinch due to Ukraine crisis, <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-fertilizers-brazil-idUSKBN2KT34E>

<sup>2</sup> ILO, „Child labour in agriculture”: <https://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>, accessed 16.3.2022

<sup>3</sup> G20 Argentina 2018, G20 Inclusive Business Framework and Call to Action on Inclusive Business: <https://www.inclusivebusiness.net/IB-Universe/G20/G20-and-IB>

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), „IMF lending”: <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/IMF-Lending>, accessed 16.3.2022

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## About the Authors

**Mehmet Sait Akman** - The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV)



Mehmet Sait Akman is Director of G20 Studies Centre at TEPAV (The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey). He is adjunct associate professor of trade policy at TOBB University of Economics and Technology, and Middle East Technical University (METU), Ankara. He was formerly (2010-2015) an instructor of Regional Trade Policy Courses of the WTO, delivering training to trade bureaucrats from the CEECAC (Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Caucasus) region. He is trade policy advisor to TOBB (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey). Akman served as the co-chair of T20 Italy-Trade, Investment and Growth Task Force (2021); and co-chair of the same Task Force during T20 Saudi Arabia (2020). Akman is a member of the steering committee in TIRN (Trade and Investment Research Network).

**Fabrizio Botti** – Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)



Fabrizio Botti is Senior Fellow at Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Intesa Sanpaolo Fellow. He is also Assistant Professor in Economics at “Guglielmo Marconi” University. Botti is core member of “Minerva - Laboratory on Gender Diversity and Gender Inequality” at “Sapienza” University of Rome. He is member of the Editorial Committee of *The International Spectator* and referee of international journals. He has been member of different research projects and collaborates with Universities, Government bodies, European and international institutions. He is author of several publications in the following fields of research: development and international economics; poverty, social and financial exclusion.

**Clara Brandi** - German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)



PD Dr. Clara Brandi is Head of the Research Programme “Transformations of Economic and Social Systems” at the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and lecturer at the University of Duisburg-Essen. Clara holds a PhD from the European University Institute, a Master’s degree from the University of Oxford and a Master’s degree in economics from the University of Freiburg.

**Michael Brüntrup** - German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE)



Dr Michael Brüntrup studied agricultural sciences at the Technical University of Munich/Weihenstephan and earned his doctorate at the University of Stuttgart-Hohenheim. After several years as a freelance expert, he is working at the DIE since 2003. His fields of expertise include agricultural development, food security and rural development as well as drought and land degradation. His geographical focus is sub-Saharan Africa.

**Markus Dietrich** – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Since 2017 Markus Dietrich is Director Policy at the Inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN), a global initiative funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. He is also a social entrepreneur who co-founded Hilltribe Organics in Thailand, which engages hill tribe communities in organic farming. He holds a degree in Business Studies from Bayes Business School and a master degree in International Community Economic Development from Southern New Hampshire University.

**Ilaria Espa** – Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI)



Espe is Senior Assistant Professor of International Economic Law at Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) in Lugano, Senior Research Fellow at the World Trade Institute (WTI) in Bern and Adjunct Professor at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. She is furthermore Lead Counsel of the Natural Resources Programme of the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law (CISDL) since 2021.

**Bettina Rudloff**, German Institute for International and Security Affairs/ Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)



Bettina Rudloff is an agricultural engineer and holds a PhD in agricultural economics. She started her research work on trade, agriculture and development at the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA), Maastricht, the Netherlands. During that time, she led mid-term vocational training programs of the EU Commission for developing countries' WTO negotiators. After a subsequent Assistant Professorship at the Institute for Food and Resource Economics/University of Bonn, she became Senior Associate at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. Here she works on EU trade and investment rules at all levels of regulatory regimes and analyses the scope for tariff and regulatory rules to support sustainability.

**Stormy-Annika Mildner** – Aspen Institute Germany



Dr. Stormy-Annika Mildner (M.Sc.) became Director of the Aspen Institute Germany in Berlin in January 2021. As an adjunct professor, she teaches political economy at the Hertie School. From 2014 to 2020, she served as head of the department "External Economic Policy" at the Federation of German Industries (BDI), where she was responsible for international trade and investment issues. As Sherpa, she spearheaded the German Business7 Presidency (2015) and the German Business20 Presidency (2016-2017). Prior to joining BDI, she was Member of the Board of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), worked as a lecturer at the John F. Kennedy Institute of the Free University of Berlin, and headed the program "Globalization and the World Economy" at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). She completed research fellowships at the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies and the Transatlantic Academy of the German Marshall Fund in Washington. She earned a Master of Science in international political economy from the London School of Economics and a PhD in economics from Freie Universität Berlin. During her doctoral studies, she conducted a one-year fellowship at the Yale Center for International and Area Studies (YCIAS) at Yale University.



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