Impact of Agricultural Policies on Food Security in the Arab Region

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1. Introduction

Several obstacles and constraints stand in the way of ensuring food security (the ability of members of society at all times to receive adequate food required for their activity and health) and achieving food justice for all in the Arab region. Countries of the Middle East and North Africa are in a critical position related to food insecurity, with little progress in this area, according to FAO (FAO 2014).

The situation was worsened by the rise in the proportion of people in the region suffering from malnutrition from 6.6% in 1990 to 7.7% in 2014, despite declining worldwide. Food insecurity in the Arab region is in fact a result of several factors, particularly limited land and water resources under the impact of climate change, low productivity, demographic growth, urbanization, unemployment, poverty, war, instability, and excessive reliance on food imports. However, at least some of these factors could be referred back to the contribution of economic and agricultural policies to food insecurity, having witnessed the impact of the 2007-2008 and 2011-2012 food crises and the global financial crisis of 2008 on the economic and social situation in many Arab countries and the outbreak of Arab revolutions in 2011.

This paper aims to highlight highlight the contribution of agricultural policies adopted by Arab countries since the 1950s to the deterioration of food security and exacerbation of food dependency on the global capital market, focusing on the negative impact of agricultural structural adjustment and liberalization of agricultural trade policy. The first chapter will review some of the data that highlight food insecurity and the development of food dependency. The second chapter will present the key features of agricultural policies (ie, agricultural measures, legislation, and laws adopted by the state in order to achieve specific objectives contained in agricultural plans) that characterized the Arab region between the 1950s and the end of the 1970s. These policies were based on the adoption of the neoliberal model, betting on trade, and the broad integration in the global capital market to ensure food security ( Chapters III and IV). The fifth and final chapter will focus on the dangers entailed in neoliberal agricultural policies by reviewing the effects of the global food crisis on the Arab region, while trying to anticipate the adoption of food sovereignty as an alternative to guaranteeing the right to food for all citizens of the Arab region.

2. Magnitude and Characteristics of Food Security in the Arab Region

Food insecurity (ie, the shortage or deficit in average food per capita determined by global health organizations) is reflected in several indicators. First, the Arab region faces a food crisis where the number of people suffering from hunger rose from 16.5 million in 1990-1992 to 33 million in 2015.

Second, seven out of the ten top countries worldwide receiving humanitarian aid are in the Arab region, with eight Arab countries receiving a total of 9.5 billion dollars in 2016 according IRIN News (IRIN 2016). This could be attributed to the spread of wars in the region and resulting displacement and disruption of agricultural production, which in turn leads to a significant deterioration in food supply levels. The third indicator is that the Arab region is one of the most food-insecure due to its significant food deficit. It can be measured by the food gap (the difference between domestic production and imports), which reached $33.8 billion in 2015, while the average gap between 2001 and 2015 was about $3.8 billion. The gap in the cereal group accounted for 71.2% of the total food gap in 2015, with wheat ranking first in terms of importance in the cereal list, representing about 44.0% of the grain gap and about 31.4% of the total value of the food gap (Figure 1, Arab Monetary Fund, Consolidated Arab Economic Report 2017). In this regard, it is important to note that Arab countries are among the largest importers of wheat globally (See Table 1).

Figure 1: Evolution of the total value of the food gap in the Arab region (Billion USD)

Table 1: Top 30 global wheat exporters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2010 net cereal imports (US$) per capita per annum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>150.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>135.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>127.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>125.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>123.89</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>122.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>121.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>113.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seychelles</td>
<td>111.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>110.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>105.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>94.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
<td>94.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>91.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Polynesia</td>
<td>86.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>84.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>82.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>81.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde</td>
<td>76.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>75.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia</td>
<td>75.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>72.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>72.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Kitts and Nevis</td>
<td>72.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>69.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>69.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>67.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>66.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>62.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAOSTAT

On the other hand, despite the relative improvement in domestic food production, which rose by 4.3% annually during the period 1994-2014, it was not enough to abate the worsening of the food trade deficit (the difference between exports and imports) in the Arab region. Imports grew at an unprecedented rate during the first decade of the current century, in connection with the global food crisis 2006-2007 and 2011, compared to a modest growth rate in exports (Figure 2).

This food dependency entails the exacerbation of «food security risks» (the term refers to the extent of the country’s financial potential to sustain food security) in the Arab region. The food security index ranged between 9.8% and 5.9% during the decade, but this indicator does not reflect the varying economic and financial conditions within the Arab region, where rent-earning Arab countries are side by side with less developed countries. The calculation of this indicator at the level of Arab groups according to average income is higher in low-income countries, ranging between 26.9% and 19.0% compared to 3.5% and 5.8% for high-income countries, which indicates a worsening security risk in the less developed Arab countries. The number of undernourished people in the Arab region also increased, particularly in low-income countries (Salem Tahfiz Al-Na’aji 2013). Self-sufficiency index declined in 2015 to no more than 45.6% (Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, Food Security Situation 2015).

Finally, it should be noted that there is a relationship between wars and conflicts that negatively impact food security in Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, the West Bank, and Gaza.

Table 2: Food insecurity in war and conflict countries
Two basic considerations govern the nature of agricultural policies adopted by many Arab countries between the 1950s and the 1980s, namely the geopolitical factor, the nature of the political structure of the state, and the character of the social forces controlling it. The first factor is the risk of dependence on the outside to meet the food needs of society in the context of global conflicts and fluctuations. Arab countries had been prompted several times to seek self-sufficiency through local production of basic food commodities due to the interruption in supplies from the outbreak of the first and second world wars, to the United States’ decision in supplies from the outbreak of the first and second world wars, to the United States’ decision to stop supplying Arab countries with basic foodstuffs as a reaction to the OPEC oil export embargo on the West in the early 1970s, to its use as a weapon to put pressure on wheat-importing countries, for example. This option led to the adoption of agricultural policies in which the state intervenes to stimulate domestic production to meet growing demand due to population growth. As for the second factor, Arab countries were divided into two economic categories: “socialist” and “liberal,” reflected in the content of agricultural policies they applied. However, this policy divergence will have limited results in the area of self-sufficiency.

1. Agricultural policies of a «socialist» nature

Arab countries that went through political revolutions (Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Algeria) adopted a “socialist” approach that soon became a form of authoritarian state capitalism. These reforms included the distribution of large monopoles controlled by a few landlords to poor farmers to provide for the livelihood of the peasants. Price control policies were also implemented (adopting a protectionist trade policy to encourage domestic production, supporting production inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, feed, fuel, etc.) and priority was given to major irrigation projects, especially dams. The Egyptian state promoted agricultural cooperatives in the countryside, nationalized trade in cotton, and promoted a cooperative market for agricultural crops. It controlled production decisions, crop composition, product pricing, the incentives system, and the consequent policies of direct and indirect support for production, as well as cooperative marketing decisions for products and compulsory supply quotas that farmers had to supply at low prices. This meant that the state took control over the various stages of agriculture, from production to consumption to export to marketing, distribution, and manufacturing.

These “agrarian reforms”, however, were limited to land tenure distribution and did not include the reorganization of agricultural operations to achieve productive efficiency and maximize food production, thus minimizing the risk of food insecurity in the Arab region, except in the Egyptian experiment, which adopted an approach of gathering parcels in the framework of agricultural cycles, which helped overcome the problems of tenure fragmentation in the agricultural sector (Saleem Tawfiq Al-Naji, 2013). It came as no surprise, thus, when these “socialist” experiments failed to achieve social and economic progress, leaving the agricultural sector far from the conditions of economic efficiency and intensification of production, mainly due to the administrative problems faced by state farms and agricultural cooperatives and the lack of trained and specialist organizers, in addition to the bureaucratic procedures. Another reason for the decline in agricultural production was the low government pricing of agricultural crops, which was biased towards urban consumers and focused on maintaining their purchasing power at the expense of farmers. These problems resulted in the failure of adopted agricultural policies to bridge the gap between demand for food and domestic production. The four models of agricultural reforms show that demand is much higher than the increase in production.

2. Agricultural policies of a “liberal” nature

Agricultural policies adopted by liberal or semi-liberal regimes tend to provide simple guidelines towards restructuring the existing infrastructure in the right direction. Liberal agricultural reforms consist of a range of government interventions aimed at gradual and convincing agricultural reform, including the provision of tax and financial incentives to the private sector in the hope of the emergence of a type of local agricultural capitalism. These policies have been particularly applied in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia. A system of private unrestricted investment has been adopted in the form of broad directives, from which productive farms can implement what they want and what they can. In the second half of the 1970s, Saudi authorities adopted a generous policy to support agricultural crops with grants and subsidies. Morocco, on the other hand, avoided drastic changes to agricultural structures, where land reform was limited to land reclaimed from official colonization, without including the land of private colonists. At the same time, notables and the affluent close to the palace benefited from numerous incentives and facilities, in the aim of forming a local agricultural bourgeoisie. In Tunisia, agrarian reform was characterized by boldness through the policy of “Cooperative Units for Agricultural Production”, which involves the integration of small properties into mandatory production units ranging from 500 to 1,000 ha. This policy, however, did not produce the desired results for a number of reasons: strong opposition from large farmers, inadequate public investment, lack of technical expertise, and surplus agricultural labor, resulting in unemployment and limited family returns. The termination of this experiment resulted in the significant impoverishment of small farmers and the destruction of the small agriculture structure in Tunisia.

Ultimately, liberal agricultural policies adopted in these Arab countries did not succeed in achieving a significant improvement in the agricultural sector. Agricultural production and profitability recorded little or no progress, if not a decline. This is due to the fact that the absence of a single factor of production (e.g., equipment, efficient labor, or fertilizer), at a particular magnitude or time, adversely impacts the effectiveness of other factors. Moreover, what applies to technical factors also applies to all actions and programs included in agricultural policies.

To conclude this chapter, it should be noted that all reform attempts adopted by various Arab countries, regardless of their ideological and political orientation, failed to build an agricultural sector capable of meeting society’s demands. Growth in demand for most agricultural commodities, especially basic goods, exceeded growth in production to a large degree. In 1984, the self-sufficiency ratio in Arab countries reached 60%, the highest level was recorded in Sudan, while it fell to between 75% and 95% in Tunisia, Morocco, and Somalia, and reached the lowest levels in Jordan and some GCC countries, where it did not exceed 10 to 20 percent.
4. Structural Adjustment Stage

Transition to the agricultural export model went through two main stages: structural adjustment (early 1980s to the mid-1990s) and trade liberalization (mid-1990s to 2007-2008). This chapter is devoted to the first phase. The second phase on agricultural trade liberalization will be developed in Chapter IV.

Neoliberal criticism of state intervention in the agricultural sector considers that it leads to price distortions and poor resource allocation (e.g., customs) leading to a rise in the prices of agricultural products at the local level, thus diverting resources such as land, labor, and water to the agricultural sector at the expense of more efficient and dynamic export sectors. Thus, resources should be allocated according to competitive advantages, which means directing a number of Arab countries (especially on the Mediterranean) to focus on fruit and vegetable exports and the import of grains. International financial institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) have generally pushed third world countries to switch to export activities to earn the hard currency necessary to import food. Based on this analysis, structural adjustment policies resulted in dismantling the forms of support and price protection and the agricultural sector in general, «to allow rural markets for land prices, labor, loans, agricultural products, and agricultural production requirements more freedom (and) to exploit (productive) resources» (Mona Rahma, 2000). In particular, «structural agricultural adjustment programs» have been shown to reduce public investment, increase subsidies on basic inputs and consumables, and privatize or weaken public agricultural institutions, such as those providing training and technical support for those providing training and technical support for agriculture based on local agricultural breeds, agriculture based on local commodities such as wheat, butter, sugar, and others (see Ahmed Bahaa El-Din Shaaban, 10 December 2016). Neoliberal policies, including the liberalization of external agricultural trade, also influenced the structural of agricultural crops. Responding to higher profitability, fruit and vegetable production expanded at the expense of cotton, wheat, and rice. This was a negative development considering the economic importance of cotton and wheat and their background and frontal relations with other economic activities, making them an essential pillar in the fight against poverty and achieving food security at the family level (FAO, 2001).

The decline accelerated during the era of President Hosni Mubarak. In 1992, the Egyptian parliament ratified a law to «reform the rental relationship between landlord and tenant.» The law provided for an increase in rent value from 7 times the tax applicable to agricultural land to 22 times during the five-year transition period, after which the «law of supply and demand» will be free to determine the value of the rent. Law No.96 of 1992 had a decisive impact on the dismantling of Egyptian farmers’ gains through land reform laws adopted in the Nasser era, particularly «rent security» and the definition of «tenant and participant» as «holder of land» on equal footing with landowners. This had provided them with several rights related to tenure, such as «voting in the association», access to seeds and fertilizers at reduced prices, and borrowing from the Credit Bank, the Development Bank, and the Agricultural Credit Bank.

The law led to the displacement of 904,000 tenants, despite the fact that they were planting 23.7% of cultivated land in Egypt. On the other hand, support for agricultural fertilizers was removed, as well as the liberalization of agricultural seed and pesticide markets and the privatization of agricultural land belonging to the government.

The indiscriminate application of structural adjustment policies resulted in «destroying the pillars of Egyptian excellence, such as long-staple cotton, which had a global reputation, and the neoliberal policies of neglecting the duty of protecting Egyptian agricultural breeds, agriculture based on local seeds, and local fertilizers. Last but not least, these policies not only failed to reduce the food gap, but also led to its exacerbation.» Egypt became one of the largest importers globally of vital food commodities such as wheat, butter, sugar, and others (see Ahmed Bahaa El-Din Shaaban, 10 December 2016). Neoliberal policies, including the liberalization of external agricultural trade, also influenced the structure of agricultural crops. Responding to higher profitability, fruit and vegetable production expanded at the expense of cotton, wheat, and rice. This was a negative development considering the economic importance of cotton and wheat and their background and frontal relations with other economic activities, making them an essential pillar in the fight against poverty and achieving food security at the family level (FAO, 2001).

5. Trade Liberalization Policies

Trade policy generally includes all measures establishing the conditions for cross-border movement of goods, services, and capital, generally through export, import, or subsidy taxes, or legislation relating to the movement of capital at home and abroad. Agricultural trade policy is part of the macro policies with direct impact on the agricultural sector, through its use of various tools, such as tariffs (a tax levied on an imported commodity) or a percentage of the CIF price), aid, loans, restrictions on quantities, government spending, and taxes.

There is a clear divergence in trade policies adopted by Arab countries, with a general trend towards trade liberalization in the region (Ahmed Farouk Ghoneime, 2010). This trend is due to the developments of the global trading system of the 1990s and the impact of the Uruguay Round and membership of the WTO. It was also influenced by the accession of a number of Arab countries to regional free trade agreements. However, a number of Arab countries have not yet become members of the WTO: Syria, Algeria, Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Comoros, Somalia, and Djibouti. It should also be noted that liberalization of external agricultural trade is complementary to the structural adjustment measures that led to the liberalization of agricultural markets, albeit to varying degrees from one country to another. The implementation of GATT and WTO rules led to the partial liberalization of global trade, which in turn reflects on the conditions of Arab agricultural markets.

The gradual liberalization of agricultural trade policy in the Arab region went through two tracks, which will be reviewed in succession: the multilateral track (ie, within the framework of the WTO) and the regional track (with a focus on trade relations with the EU).
1. Multilateral Track

The questions concerns Arab countries’ commitments within the WTO, especially with regard to agricultural trade liberalization. The Agreement on Agriculture was adopted in 1994 (agreed to enter into force in 1995). It aimed at addressing imbalances in the structure of international trade in agricultural products and making agricultural policies more market-oriented by a set of disciplines designed to support the capacity of Member States to access markets, especially in terms of eliminating barriers to imports, working to abolish domestic support for agriculture, and working to abolish export subsidies. The agreement also defined the transactions and timeframe for activating its requirements by both developed and developing countries to reduce tariffs, levels of domestic support, and export subsidies. In this context, a number of Arab countries have renounced quantitative protectionism and reduced customs rights on a number of agricultural products.

For example, Lebanon, a country in the advanced stages of WTO accession, is one of the most open countries in the region, where customs rights range between zero and 5% for 84% of tariffs, with a maximum of 75%. The only quantitative protection it retains is for potato seeds. Since its accession to the WTO in 2000, Jordan has also fixed agricultural tariffs such as for tomatoes, olive oil, and cucumber to 30%, with the highest ceiling going to citrus, grapes, garlic, and figs at 50% during particular months of the year (Sustained Project, 2012).

In terms of market access requirements, Egypt committed itself to linking all tariffs on agricultural products with a commitment to gradually reduce these rates. Thus, the unweighted average of bound rates in 1998 was about 48%, lower than the average for the base period (62%). The maximum tariff was reduced to 50% stabilization in 1991. In terms of domestic support, in 1999, for the first time, Egypt reported on support measures in 1995–1998 with regards to expenditures on the Green Fund and special and differential treatment. With regard to export subsidies, Egypt did not report any export subsidies in the table of obligations reported to the WTO. On the other hand, Egypt lifted the ban imposed on exports, which was previously applied to some agricultural products such as tanned and raw leather. The quota system applied to the export of wool, wool waste, cotton residues, and tanned leather was also eliminated (Information on Egypt and Morocco, FAO, 2001).

In the area of market access, Morocco linked all tariffs on agricultural products to the Uruguay Round and set tariff equivalents for all agricultural products subject to border measures, with a commitment to reduce them by 2.5% per year. For example, the basic tax on wheat will fall from 190% in 1995 to 144%, the level of the final tariff bound in 2004. As for domestic support, Morocco began gradually reducing its support at the start of 2004 and the late 1980s as part of the implementation of structural adjustment programs. However, it limited the AMS as part of its WTO commitments and committed to a 13% reduction between 1995 and 2004. In contrast, in the Uruguay Round, Morocco did not announce support for agricultural exports during the base period and therefore had no experience with respect to reduction commitments in this area.

2. Regional Track: Agricultural trade within the framework of relations with the EU

EU–Arab relations went through two significant junctions, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative of the Barcelona Process (1995) (the Arab countries concerned were Morocco, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon...) and the proposal submitted by the EU to the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean following the Arab Barcelona Process, with the adoption of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTAs) (Mohammed Saeed Al Saadi, 2014). Although the Barcelona Process aimed to build a “wide region of free exchange for prosperity and security” encompassing the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, it was limited to processed products and excluded agriculture as a “sensitive” sector. This “exception” was found on the importance of the agricultural sector in southern Mediterranean countries and some Euro-Mediterranean countries and the negative economic and social repercussions of its liberalization. Thus, the EU and the Arab States exchanged limited exemptions (in whole or in part) on agricultural products, processed agricultural products, and within specific agricultural calendars. A quick review of Euro-Arab partnership agreements shows that they provided partial or total exemptions for agricultural products, which included full or partial exemption from customs duties imposed on those goods when imported into European markets, but in many cases with quantitative quotas or subject to reference levels in terms of price and quantity. However, the adoption of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004 opened the door for negotiations between the countries of the North and the South of the Mediterranean to the gradual liberalization of agricultural trade (see Abis A. and Echaniz P.C., 2009), with the possible exception of the sale of “sensitive” agricultural products and the exception of the principle of asymmetry in implementation, by enabling Arab countries to a longer calendar in this field compared with European countries. The goal of this mutual, gradual, and framed liberalization is to push partner countries to specialize in producing and exporting agricultural products in which they have competitive advantages. This will enable European countries to develop grain, diary, and meat crops for export to the Arab Mediterranean countries in return for importing fresh fruits and vegetables from these countries.

It should be noted that trade preferences granted to partner countries (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan) are reflected in the reduction or elimination of tariffs for specific quotas of products or for all exports. The signed agreements also include the need to adhere to quality standards applicable within the European common market, especially with regard to sanitary and phytosanitary measures. Thus, the agricultural agreement between Jordan and the EU provides for the total liberalization of imports from Jordan, with the exception of a range of agricultural products (especially tomatoes, cucumber, citrus, cut flowers, potatoes, and olive oil), which are subject to quota or preferential entry prices in specific periods in the year. In contrast, most tariffs on agricultural products and processed agricultural products imported from EU countries have been gradually reduced, depending on the degree of product sensitivity.

As for Egypt, the EU–Egypt Association Agreement signed in 2011 provides for the expansion of the list of Egyptian agricultural commodities that can be exported to the EU to more than 100 commodities in exchange for 25 commodities in accordance with the 1977 Agreement, divided into four groups (EU–Egypt Partnership Agreement 2018):

- Commodities with specific quotas and export seasons (exemption from quotas)
- Commodity with quantitative quotas and no specific export seasons (customs exemption within quotas)
- Commodities with export seasons and no quantity quotas (exemption from customs duties within export seasons)
- Commodities without quantity quotas or export seasons.

In return, the Egyptian side committed to reducing or eliminating customs on imports of some agricultural commodities from the EU, such as meat and dairy products. On the other hand, the agreement provided for partial and limited liberalization of manufactured agricultural goods exported from Egypt to the EU. As for Egyptian imports of processed agricultural goods, the agreement stipulates arrangements applied to EU exports whose liberalization is based on three different lists.

Morocco, one of the EU’s most important partners and a preferred partner since 2008, has been nominated to deepen political relations with the European side, integrate into the domestic market by bringing together legislative structures and promoting sectoral cooperation and the humanitarian aspect of partnerships (EU and Morocco, 2018). The 2012 Agricultural Agreement provides for the gradual and orderly liberalization of European exports to the Moroccan market, with a transitional period of up to 10 years. The liberalization is based on three types of protection:

- The first type concerns liberalization over 10 years related to productive animals and fertilizers.
- The second type, which takes between 5 and 10 years, involves the production of processed milk and chocolate.
- The third type is liberalization according to specific quotas (cereals, milk, olive oil).

The implementation of this liberalization will enable the elimination of tariffs on ¾ of the EU’s agricultural and fishing product lines exported to Morocco.

In return, according to the agreement, Morocco has benefited from a relative and limited improvement in its agricultural exports to the EU market. Thus, Moroccan agricultural products can enter the European market without any tariffs, but with important exceptions related to tomatoes (the most important Moroccan agricultural export), garlic, clementines,
strawberries, cucumber, and zucchini (EU-Morocco Agricultural Agreement, 2012). It should be noted that according to the agreement, 55% of Morocco’s agricultural exports to the EU were liberalized.

Last but not least, after the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the EU proposed to Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan to move to an advanced stage of integration in the European domestic market through the conclusion of DCFTAs. The basic leverage of trade liberalization in these agreements is the achievement of a kind of subsidiarity at the level of regulations and legislation through the progressive absorption by the Arab partner countries of the ‘collective gains’ of the EU, that is, the total legislation, standards, and regulations of EU laws. In the agricultural sector, DCFTAs seek greater liberalization of agricultural trade, including the trade of manufactured agricultural goods and fishing products, taking into account the special situation of ‘sensitive’ products. In addition, negotiations are expected to include the achievement of legislative and regulatory harmonization between the EU and Arab countries of European sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

3. Limited agricultural trade liberalization between the EU and Arab countries and its risks to Arab food security:

It is clear from the above that several constraints restrict the ability of Arab agricultural exports to enter the EU market, due to the strict protectionism of European farmers on the northern side of the Mediterranean (ESCWA, 2005). Except for Lebanon, the coverage remains very limited and restricted in some cases, both in terms of the coverage of agricultural goods eligible for preferential treatment or the agricultural seasons in which they are allowed to enter European markets. In addition, tariff reductions granted under the partnership agreements are applied to the differential or value charges, leaving fixed fees and taxes unchanged. Also reducing the preferential margin is the EU’s use of the so-called entry price and predetermined reference quantities to reduce competition by limiting minimum import prices and quantities at the European borders, thus ensuring support to European farmers and not crowding their agricultural products in local markets, especially for fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition to the above constraints, the EU’s strictness in technical specifications, obstacles to agricultural exports, and other non-tariff barriers are evident, particularly those related to the environment, the use of pesticides, and market traceability requirements for genetically modified products.

4. Results and Risks

Some available data and research show that structural adjustment policies and agricultural trade liberalization have negatively impacted Arab food security. For example, the Arab food deficit (i.e., the difference between Arab exports and imports) rose from an average of $12.02 billion during the period 1985-1993 to an average of $13.79 billion for the period 2001-2003, an increase of 14% between the two periods. Most of the food commodities in the Arab region recorded an increase in trade deficit between the two periods. The percentage of increase was about 21% for grains, 30% for potatoes, 65% for pulses, 71% for fruits, and 34% for meat (AOAD, 2006).

There are undoubtedly many factors behind the worsening agricultural trade deficit during the period of transition to neoliberal policies by Arab countries. This included increased demand for food due to population growth, rising levels of incomes of some segments of society, migration of rural populations to cities, corresponding low levels of production and traditional production, exclusion of research and development, and the absence of mechanization and modern techniques from production processes. However, the adoption of agricultural policies relying on structural adjustment and trade liberalization has played a role in exacerbating dependence on external sources to secure the right to food. This was not achieved by improving agricultural export capacities, as promised by the promoters of these policies, to allow for enhancing the possibilities of covering community needs of food commodities. On the contrary, this trend led to a significant increase in imports covered by other revenues, such as tourism, remittances, foreign capital flow, or borrowing from international organizations, such as in the economies of the less developed Arab countries (Salem Tawfiq Hanafi, 2013). The increase in agricultural imports led to the exposure of a range of agricultural crops to external competition, resulting in a reduction in areas used for production. On the other hand, these developments led to increased production of sugar beet, tomato, orange, and tangerine crops.

A recent study on the problem of food security in Arab countries pointed to the negative impact of the demand for food from the global market to meet society’s food security, agricultural, and national sovereignty requirements. Based on a standard study of the most important factors governing the function of wheat production as well as agricultural production in a number of Arab countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia), the following results were obtained:

- The existence of a constantly exacerbating food gap due to weak domestic production, as well as the consumption of certain commodities, such as wheat, as a result of the changing consumption patterns of the majority of the population.
- High population growth rates have had a negative impact in most Arab countries.
- All the «modeling» results confirmed that the currently cultivated areas are insufficient and that their increase could contribute to ensuring food security in most Arab countries.
- The major obstacle to achieving food security in these countries seems to be intrinsically linked to dependency on the outside, particularly the volume of imports of basic consumer goods such as wheat, which is still imported at high levels (Harakati Fatih, 2018).

The biggest danger that will inevitably result from the adoption of neoliberal reforms by a number of Arab countries, especially agricultural trade liberalization, is the threat of food security through the elimination of small farms and family farming. The liberalization of agricultural trade, albeit gradually in the Euro-Arab agreements, threatens millions of small and medium-sized farmers who produce grain mainly for self-consumption and for sale in the local market. Their exposure to European imports, which are more competitive and subsidized by the government and will benefit from the elimination of tariffs, will lead to loss and migration to cities. Many will suffer from poverty and marginalization, endangering their food security. Finally, growing dependence on the global commercial market increases the vulnerability of Arab agricultural economies to fluctuations in the global prices of food commodities and their dependence on decisions of exporting agricultural countries. This is discussed in the last chapter of this paper.
6. From the Global Food Crisis to Arab Food Sovereignty

The global food crisis of 2008 and 2011 had a negative impact on food security in the Arab region and is considered one of the main reasons behind the eruption of Arab revolutions in 2011.

This chapter will present the factors that dominated the emergence of this crisis and its impact on the Arab countries before briefly addressing the possible alternatives to ensure Arab food sovereignty.

1. The Main Causes of the Global Food Crisis

The world witnessed unprecedented increases in the prices of main foodstuffs, especially cereals, whose prices during the first three months of 2008 reached a 50-year high. The average increase in wheat prices between 2006 and 2008 was 172%. Rice prices rose by about 123% in the same period. These increases, according to the World Bank, have left or pushed 105 million people into poverty in low-income countries (World Bank, 2013).

After 2008, global food prices jumped twofold, the first of which occurred in early 2011, when the World Food Price Index rose significantly by 30% between mid-2008- and mid-2010- and reached its 2008 apex again in February 2011. The second jump occurred in mid-2012, when global food prices resumed their increase. The World Bank’s Food Price Index rose by 14% from January to August 2012, with global corn prices rising to the highest level in July 2012 and surpassing the 2008 and 2011 peaks, jumping by 45% in one month (World Bank, 2013). The 2011 jump in food prices adversely impacted 40 and 44 million people in middle- and low-income countries. In addition, the continuous rise in food prices imparted a heavy strain on the balance of payments in food-importing Global South and Arab countries.

It should be noted that price increases and volatility are likely to continue in the foreseeable and distant future. High food prices are a result of several interrelated and diverse factors. These causes combined exacerbated the problem into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis and are represented as follows

(Attia Hindi, 2009):

- The decline in the production of major commodities in a number of producing countries, due to bad weather, and low global stocks.
- Many countries are exposed to natural disasters or drought as a result of climate change.
- Improved income levels in China and India resulted in increased consumption of plant foods and the increase in feedstock used for animal production.
- The major rise in global oil prices, leading to increased fixed and variable costs, in addition to high transport costs. The rise in the price of oil in particular led to higher prices of other types of energy as well, resulting in an increase in the cost of fertilizers, pesticides, and production costs in general.
- Lack of investment in the agricultural sector, especially after its restructuring in developed countries.
- Population growth, especially in poor countries and their increased food needs.
- Reduction of subsidies on some materials by countries that were providing significant support and trade-distorting support.
- The use of agricultural products on which humans depend for their daily sustenance for the extraction of biofuels or as feed for livestock, which negatively impacted the availability of food commodities and increased their prices.
- Growth of large production companies and the «oligopoly» controlling food prices.
- Speculation in global markets where the globalization of the capitalist economy, the rapid development of communication technology, and the increased use of the Internet have facilitated the entry of speculators into international agricultural commodity exchanges. This contributed to increasing the number of speculators in global stock exchanges, thus increasing demand and raising prices.

2. Impact of the Food Crisis on Arab Food Security

Between 2007 and 2008, the Arab region saw a steady rise in the prices of food commodities, in comparison to previous years. The increase during that period averaged between 24.3% for cereals, 17.3% for vegetable oils, 6.8% for tubers, 15.1% for legumes, 2.8% for sugar, 15.8% for fish, 13.1% for milk, 11.8% for red meat, and 15.8% for white meat (LAS and AOAD, 2009).

The rise in food commodity prices in 2008 was due to a global increase, considering that Arab countries are net importers of food, in addition to factors specific to the situation in the region. They include the decrease in quantities produced from food crops due to the inappropriate conditions in the 2009-2007 season in some Arab countries. The increases were also due to the high costs of inputs for agricultural production, especially imports, and high transportation costs.

To address the unprecedented rise in world food prices in the second half of 2007 and the first half of 2008, some Arab countries adopted the following series of policies and actions (LAS and AOAD, 2009):

- Adopting a policy of relative self-sufficiency instead of relying on the foreign trade policy adopted in the 1990s and earlier by some Arab countries, to ensure food security in main food commodities, especially grains.
- Allocating additional financial resources for agricultural sector development.
- Supporting and strengthening strategic stocks of main food commodities.
- Direct investment by some Arab countries in the agricultural sector of other countries with agricultural production potentials, within and outside the Arab world, to ensure that agricultural food commodities (such as wheat, rice, and soybeans) are available in Arab countries at reasonable prices and thus securing access to them.
- Some Arab governments resorted to increasing public sector salaries and urged the private sector to provide direct financial assistance to the poorest.
- Exempting a number of basic foodstuffs from customs duties and taxes, and providing exemptions or customs reductions on agricultural production inputs, to support local production and agro-industries and enable them to compete and produce high quality goods at reasonable costs.
- Some Arab countries have placed restrictions on exports of major food commodities and green fodder.

Some Arab countries have abandoned the privatization of some agricultural projects. Encouraging the establishment of consumer cooperatives and the establishment of companies whose mission is to purchase, store, and sell basic foodstuffs from the source directly to citizens at low prices and with a small profit margin.

3. Some Proposals for Arab Food Sovereignty

The adoption of neoliberal agricultural policies in a number of Arab countries since the 1980s has led to the spread of intensive industrial agriculture (increasing the number of crops grown in the same area per year or growing more than one crop in the same area and at the same time in parallel), encouraging export-oriented production, the dominance of multinational corporations in global value chains, and the development of a global diet based on animal proteins instead of plant proteins. This trend resulted in aggravating food dependency and the marginalization of family agriculture. The spread of this neoliberal model of production is impossible in the Arab world due to the lack of resources from land and water and also due to its social and rural costs. Therefore, an alternative agricultural and food system based on food sovereignty must be an essential entry point to ensure food security and the right to food for all.

In 1996, La Via Campesina defined food sovereignty as «the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food through environmentally sound and sustainable methods, and their right to determine the conditions for this production.»

Food sovereignty includes:

- Priority for local agriculture to feed the people and the access of farmers and non-owners of land to water, land, seeds and credit, thus the need for agrarian reform to fight against genetically modified organisms to allow for free access to seeds and water conservation...
- The right of farmers to produce food and the right of consumers to determine the quality of what they want to consume, who produces it, and how it is produced.
• The right of states to protect themselves from low-cost agricultural and food imports.
• The need to link agricultural prices to production costs: so that countries have the right to impose taxes on low-priced imports, to commit to sustainable farmers products, and to control production in the domestic market to avoid surpluses.
• People’s participation in agricultural policy choices.
• Recognition of the rights of farmers who play a major role in agricultural and food production.

The political nature of food sovereignty must be emphasized as a project of participatory local democracy in food and agriculture decision-making (Attac Morocco, 2017).

Prioritizing food sovereignty to ensure the right to food addresses two basic issues. First, it responds to the need to provide policy space and margin for maneuver to adopt agricultural policies that respond first and foremost to the needs of the citizen rather than the dictates of international institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO), which are calling for the liberalization of agricultural trade and specialization by comparative advantage. Second, it reduces dependence on the outside and focuses on agriculture directed to the domestic and regional markets. The real gamble, however, revolves around procedures by which the concept of food sovereignty is realized in agricultural policy. In addition, it must be institutionalized through constitutions, the establishment of related institutions, and the development of the concept through agricultural policy and programmes.

Including food sovereignty in constitutions, however, is not sufficient, as the Egyptian example shows, as it was not accompanied by a change in agricultural policy and the developmental model, which is still typified by the dominance of neoliberal ideology.

On the other hand, the concept of food sovereignty poses the question of which actors are supposed to realize it on the ground, especially as food sovereignty focuses on the direct participation of producers in policy-making and programming. Therefore, this new approach can not be successful without positive interaction between the State, civil society, and social movements, in addition to the State’s adoption of a clear development orientation and genuine decentralization that enables solidarity between producers’ association and local elected institutions and authorities (Clark P., 2013). In this regard, the State should play a pivotal role in formulating a clear and ambitious agricultural policy to support small producers and family and environmental agriculture. It should strengthen popular and solidarity economies, particularly in the financial, technical, marketing, land, water, seeds, forestry, and fishing fields. It also requires the adoption of a trade policy that protects this agriculture from uneven competition for basic agricultural and food commodities, especially commodities supported by advanced capitalist countries. This requires the framing of agricultural trade and coordination at the international level to stabilize agricultural prices in order to avoid a significant and sudden rise in prices and competition against the stability of global agricultural exchanges, which entails a profound reform of the multilateral trading system (Bouspard M. et al., 2007).

At the level of civil society and social movements, local and Arab networks must be established to fight for food sovereignty locally, nationally, and regionally. Encouraging signs in this regard include the Palestinian Via Campesina Movement, under the banner of the global movement (Ahmad Melhem, Al-Monitor, 17-10-2017). This movement seeks to benefit from the vision of the global movement in supporting the establishment of sovereignty over food, land, resources, and water to present and adopt the issues of Palestinian farmers and their violated rights by Israel, such as the inability to control their land and water resources. The Palestinian farmers’ movement also intends to protest local authorities and the government to amend laws to suit farmers’ needs. The movement is also planning to build a movement of Arab farmers.

Also noteworthy is that two organizations from the Maghreb (the National Federation of the Peasantry from Morocco and the Struggle of the Land from Tunisia) joined the global movement Via Campesina. The above highlights the importance of developing an agricultural integration centered on ensuring Arab food security by adopting a food sovereignty approach as an essential entry point for every effort in this field.

Conclusion

This study focused on the impact of agricultural policies adopted by Arab countries on their food security. It attempted to show how these policies have contributed to Arab food insecurity since the 1950s. During the period 1950-1980, socialist-oriented countries failed to achieve food security due to the dominance of bureaucratic procedures in the management of state farms and agricultural cooperatives, as well as crop pricing policies that were unfair to farmers. On the other hand, liberal-oriented countries were unable to achieve food security due to the lack of private sector initiatives in the agricultural field and the marginalization of family agriculture, resulting in the emergence of an inconsistent duality in the agricultural sector.

In the early 1980s, due to the debt crisis in several Arab economies and IFI interventions, agricultural policies entered the stage of structural adjustment and trade liberalization. The policy was to dismantle the system of state intervention in the agricultural sector as a constraint on the freedom of market mechanisms that would achieve the highest possible efficiency in the exploitation of resources and thus maximize export-oriented agricultural production. Governments were prompted to liberalize agricultural trade and ensure food security through the importation of basic agricultural and food commodities from global markets. This was built on the premise that agricultural exports will provide the necessary financial resources to cover the cost of these imports. Agricultural trade liberalization was carried out through two main tracks: the multilateral track and the regional track through EU-Arab «partnerships».

The adoption of these neoliberal policies has exacerbated the food dependency of the outside world through the significant increase in agricultural and food imports covered by tourism revenues and remittances of expatriates, and, to a lesser extent, by foreign capital inflows or borrowing. A variety of agricultural crops are exposed to external competition, resulting in a reduction in the areas allocated to them and the threat of family farming, which produces the most food products in the consumption pattern of the majority of citizens, namely wheat and cereals. The dangers of Arab food dependency have become evident in the wake of the global food crisis, which highlighted the vulnerability of Arab economies and food security to the fluctuation of food commodity prices in the global market. This dependence has led to a continuous rise in food prices in the Arab world, prompting Arab governments to adopt a series of policies and measures to curb these negative impacts on food security.

The generalization of the export-oriented neoliberal model in the Arab region is impossible due to weak natural resources in land and water and the tremendous social and environmental costs. Therefore, food sovereignty as an alternative is capable of ensuring the food security of all citizens if conditions for its achievement are met, especially in focusing on the developmental role of the state, the emergence of a strong social movement, and a profound reform of the global trading system to frame agricultural trade and coordinate the stability of prices of basic food and agricultural commodities.
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