Security as a Global Public Good (GPG)¹

Susana Herrero Olarte

Pesquisadora do Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Empresariales, Universidad de las Américas (UDLA), Ecuador
(olartesusana@hotmail.com)

Abstract

The need to end hunger continues to be a pressing issue. Because of the devastating direct and indirect impacts of food shortages, 850 million people worldwide suffer from malnutrition. Among the factors that influence food supplies for humanity, those tied to the extraordinary process of globalization have become increasingly important. It is therefore necessary to decide whether food security should be addressed from a global perspective or still be considered a national issue.

Keywords

globalization; economic integration; food security; global public goods.

Resumo

A erradicação da fome continua a ser uma questão premente atualmente. Por causa dos impactos, diretos e indiretos, da escassez de alimentos, 850 milhões de pessoas em todo o mundo sofrem de desnutrição. Entre os fatores que influenciam o abastecimento de alimentos para a humanidade, tornaram-se cada vez mais importantes aqueles ligados ao processo extraordinário de globalização. Por isso, é necessário decidir se a segurança alimentar deve ser abordada de uma perspectiva global ou ainda ser considerada uma questão nacional.

Palavras-chave

globalização; integração econômica; segurança alimentar; bem público mundial;
Globalization is defined as the system that allows and generates multiple relations among the countries and the social groups that form part of the world order. It makes it possible for an action that occurs in one place in the world to affect and hold repercussions in countries that are physically far away and that have dissimilar cultures. The relationships are evident in two ways: intensity and scope. They refer to the breadth and depth of interconnections and interdependence among States and the cultures in contact, but also to the physical links created. These can be studied from geographical and spatial standpoints (PETRELLA, 1996).

Even though prior to the sixteenth century most of the territories that we now know as “States” had already been in contact, it was not until then that all of the continents became connected. Afterwards, the number of relationships among countries and cultures gradually increased, especially as of the Industrial Revolution, in the eighteenth century, when it became possible to have larger production, for which more raw materials, more labor and more customers were needed. Therefore, relationships among countries and cultures were increasingly necessary (MARKS, 2007). These relationships grew exponentially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to progress made in transportation and communications as a result of scientific innovations and also due to defense issues and the start of the free circulation of goods, services and capital (MILKEN INSTITUTE, 2000).

From the beginning, globalization has influenced a large variety of aspects of day-to-day life around the world. The Lisbon Group, led by Petrella, analyzed them as parts of a whole:

- Economic globalization, which refers to globalization of the markets for goods and services, as well of financial markets. One of its main exponents is the New Economy, defined as the integration of local and national economies in a world market economy (MANDEL, 1996), where consumer society is of a global nature and multinational organizations and a worldwide financial system play key roles. For example, someone in the Dominican Republic can use U.S. currency to invest in China.

- The globalization of ways of life and consumption models make increasingly more common elements suitable or acceptable regardless of the country where they originated or the person that is evaluating them. Examples of the globalization of tastes is the massive acceptance and consumption of Coca-Cola and social media phenomena such as Facebook, which was launched in 2003 and before the end of the decade was being used by almost 500 million people worldwide (SARABIA, 2010).

- Cultural globalization, which means that increasingly fewer values are accepted by more people as significant or representative of art. This merging of knowledge and has perspectives basically has one leader, which is the U.S. culture (SWERDLOW, 1999). One example of that is the recognition of U.S. cities because of their presence in mass media, especially the movie industry, which is dominated by the United States.

- The globalization of the world’s political unification with global actors that represent almost all countries. The clearest example is the United Nations, created in 1945, when the victors of World War II (the United States, France, England, China and Russia) decided to create an organization aimed at regulating issues involving countries around the world so that the horrors of a world
war could not occur again. All of the countries in the world are members, except for the Vatican, the Order of Malta, Palestine, the Republic of China-Taiwan (whose seat was transferred to the Republic of China in 1971) and Western Sahara (which is officially a non-autonomous territory of Spain) (UN, 2012).

- The globalization of technology, of research and development and of the corresponding knowledge and know-how, which translates into more political and ideological information, but with a smaller collectivity of ideas because there is increasing access to more information media and greater difficulty in discerning between reliable and unreliable (e.g., biased) data and doing in-depth evaluations of the data received (DOLLAR, WOLFE and BAUMOL, 1998).

- The globalization of regulatory agencies and of governance to govern the world globally. An example of this would be the international tribunals of justice, which hear and judge crimes against humanity (INTER-AMERICAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS, 2012).

Given that technology is expected to continue developing, the globalization process is expected to intensify and expand in all of the areas mentioned above and therefore will its effects, both positive and negative. These positive or negative externalities can be evidence that we have found ourselves facing a Global Public Good (GPG), i.e., a public good that takes on a worldwide dimension within the ever stronger globalization process.

The impact of the globalization of public goods has been studied since the 1960s (HARDIN, 1968), and as of the 1970s analyses began of instruments and tools that could contribute effectively to GPGs (RUSSETT and SULLIVAN, 1971). During the 1980s other authors appeared, and Kindleberger (1986) found practical examples of GPGs. The 1990s influenced the study of the relationship between GPGs and States (Arthur Stein, 1990), and recognition of the GPG label grew out of the UNDP (KAUL et al. 1999). Later on, efforts continued to delve into greater depth about GPG supplies; in that context the work of García-Verdugo Sales, J., and Martí, J.M., (2004) deserves special mention.

GPGs are those public goods that generate externalities that affect a number of sufficiently representative countries so as to consider them a global issue. No population group can be discriminated against in terms of access to them, not even the group of those still unborn. As for their supply, they must or should be dealt with from an international standpoint, regarded by the States as elements of worldwide repercussions, and claimed as such by civil society.

All of the key concepts of this definition are examined in greater detail below.

- To the extent that GPGs are first of all public goods, they are identified as a function of a market decision, so the law of supply and demand does not ensure their ideal availability to society (HORTALÀ, 2008). Public goods can be recognized on the basis of two characteristics: non-rivalry and non-exclusivity. Non-rivalry supposes that the consumption of a good by one person does not mean that other people cannot use it, as for example, in the case of an airport. Non-exclusivity means that any output, once produced, can be used or enjoyed by anyone, regardless of whether a person has contributed to its production. One classic example of this is a radio broadcast.
It is not necessary for these two characteristics to be met absolutely. In other words, in some cases they could be met to a greater or lesser extent. However, this would mean considering such public goods “impure.” Furthermore, public goods are capable of generating externalities. In other words, they can entail negative side effects because the failure to produce them can affect an entire population, but they can offer positive impacts if they are provided to the larger social group. For example, if healthcare is not provided by the State, epidemics can more easily occur, and this would be a negative externality. If the State provides education with sufficient quantity and quality, the capacity for generating population development will be greater as a whole in the medium term, and this would be a positive externality.

• Generally speaking, a reference to the positive or negative externalities of a public good is a reference to its effects on a local, regional or national social group, as in the foregoing examples related directly to the effects of the lack of the provision of health care and education with impacts at the national level. The fundamental difference between public goods and GPGs is that the latter must generate effects in a sufficient number of States, in order to consider them to have a global impact. In the case of airspace regulations, almost all States around the world have benefitted, thus generating a worldwide impact.

• GPGs must also be supplied to the entire population with no distinctions, nor any limitations on their use by current or future generations (GARCÍA-VERDUGO SALES and MARTÍN, 2004). In the case of seas, for instance, all population groups have access, regardless of their economic, social or cultural condition; and access by the children and grandchildren of those who are currently enjoying them cannot be limited either.

- GPG supply or regulation comes from, or should occur at, an international level since it is not possible to address these issues solely at a national level (KAUL et al. 1999). Thus, it is necessary for public officials or governments –whether local, regional or national– to study GPGs and contribute to their regulations from a global standpoint (Martens, J. and Hain, R., 2001). Furthermore, if there is sufficient suitable information, civil society must request that they actually be provided as GPGs (MARTENS and HAIN, 2008).

GPGs can be classified in different ways, but herein they will be considered as a function of their origin or the type of production (DENEULIN, 2006):

- Natural GPGs are the goods that occur independently of the will or action of human beings. Some classic examples are seas or forests.
- Artificial (man-made) GPGs are the goods that result from human efforts, e.g., scientific advances or moral principles.
- Global policy GPGs are those that result from political globalization, such as the provisions for dealing with world epidemics, ensuring financial stability, or protecting human rights.

The human rights detailed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and expanded in International Human Rights Treaties address fundamental issues of economic, social, civil and political rights (U.N., 2012). The UDHR was a revolutionary document that marked a before-and-after in the conception and appreciation of human beings as
The right to food is acknowledged in Article 25 of the UDHR, which provides that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food…” (U.N., 1948:4-5). Afterwards, the right to food continued to be recognized in multiple agreements and treaties, and even in a declaration of its own, the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition, whose Article 1 provides that all human beings have the right to food (U.N., 1975:5).

An analysis of the recent evolution of the number of undernourished people in the world indicates that in the 2005-2007 period, the percentage of the population living in conditions of malnutrition reached 17%, i.e., almost 70 million more people when compared to the figure for the 1995-97 period. Similarly, in 2008, 963 million people lived in conditions of undernutrition, i.e., 20% more than in 1990, and 925 million people were undernourished in 2010 (FAO, 2012). This shows that the right to food was not being effectively exercised by 16% of the world’s population. The figure below indicates the recent evolution of the undernutrition described herein.

As for evolution during the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the figure indicates that a step backwards occurred in the world regions’ efforts to eradicate malnutrition: in the Near East and Northern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. It is especially worthwhile to note the increase in the absolute number of undernourished people in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the highest percentage increase with respect to total population, which occurred in Africa (FAO, 2012).

Since food supplies have been a challenge throughout recorded history, it is worthwhile to question whether food as a human right should be a subject of global consideration and, therefore, a GPG. In practice, two areas influence humans’ ability to exercise their right to food when food is considered a GPG. These are international legislation and guidelines, and international cooperation.

The greatest progress has been achieved in
terms of establishing common goals in the area of malnutrition. These grew out of the first and second World Food Summits and the September 2000 United Nations Millennium Declaration (FAO, 2002). These proposed, respectively, to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger to 400 million by 2015, and to reduce the percentage of people suffering from hunger by half between 2000 and 2015 (U.N., 1996). However, in no case are concrete actions proposed to achieve the goals, beyond general recommendations and good practices.

In international cooperation, multiple international actors try to manage the right to food at a global level, by working with populations that are unable to exercise that right. In the public sector the role of international organizations should be noted, whether they are tied to financial methodologies or not. These supranational organizations encompass the action of a group of States, national governments and the corresponding development agencies, and regional or local administrations. In the private sector, it is worthwhile to note the roles of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and of private enterprises, through actions related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR is defined by the World Labor Organization (WLO) as “the set of actions that enterprises take into consideration for their activities in order to have positive repercussions on society and affirm the principles and values that govern them, both in their own internal processes and methods and in their relationship with other actors” (WLO, 2007).

The instruments and tools used by cooperation are multiple and increasingly elaborate. They include projects, programs, technical assistance, budget support, humanitarian aid actions, loans, and external debt relief or condoning.

- Projects. These are fundamental elements in development cooperation, and the instruments traditionally used by almost all the actors involved. Projects and programs are the tools for the most typical sectoral and/or multi-sectoral international cooperation efforts. They involve four stages: identification, formulation, management and evaluation, the outcomes for which provide feedback for the future.

- Loans: Used by financial entities, these are granted at a low or zero interest rate and with a repayment period agreed on by both parties, and they can be used to implement any of the other instruments.

- Programs with a sectoral focus and budget support. These are used to increase the budget of a ministry chosen jointly by the donor and the beneficiary countries.

- Technical cooperation. This is cooperation centering on the exchange of technical and management know-how, for the purpose of increasing the capacities of individuals and institutions from the southern hemisphere to promote their own development. It encompasses a broad range of activities: advising, scholarship programs, institutional support, support to policy-making, training, education, etc. Its importance with respect to international cooperation as a whole is difficult to estimate, since many of these activities often tend to be included in the implementation of aid projects or programs.

- Humanitarian action. This comprises a diverse set of actions to aid victims of disasters caused by natural disasters or armed conflicts. These actions are aimed at alleviating suffering, guaranteeing subsistence, protecting basic rights and defending dignity, as well as sometimes at curbing the process.
of socioeconomic de-structuring of a community or preparing it for natural disasters. Such aid can be provided by national or international actors. International support is of a subsidiary nature with respect to a sovereign State’s responsibility to assist its own population, and in principle occurs with the citizens’ approval and at their request.

- Microcredit programs. These involve small loans to low-income people for whom it is difficult to have access to commercial banking. The loans offer funding for self-employment projects that can generate income and enable the economic autonomy of beneficiaries and their families.

- Operations to provide relief, convert and condone foreign debt. These refer to reducing debt or transforming it into development actions (projects, budget support, etc.).

Even though the right to food is one of the top priorities in the allocation of cooperation resources (FAO, 2011c), it has still not managed to play a fundamental role in helping a significant number of people to surmount undernutrition and be able to exercise their right to food.

Because neither international legislation nor international development cooperation has been able to enable the world population to exercise its right to food, it is necessary to study more tools that can understand food security as a GPG and strive to ensure appropriate and effective supplies.

Abbreviations

GPGs: Global Public Goods
UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Bibliographic reference


