



Precarious Lives: Food, Work and Care After the Global Food Crisis

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and Naomi Hossain

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Bangladesh

Kalyanpur Notun Bazaar, Dhaka

Kalyanpur Notun Bazaar is a slum area in Dhaka. Most people in Kalyanpur are migrants from rural areas who have suffered from climate-related land erosion. They are small traders, rickshaw drivers, waste recyclers, general daily-wage workers, or workers in garment factories.

Koyra, Khulna District

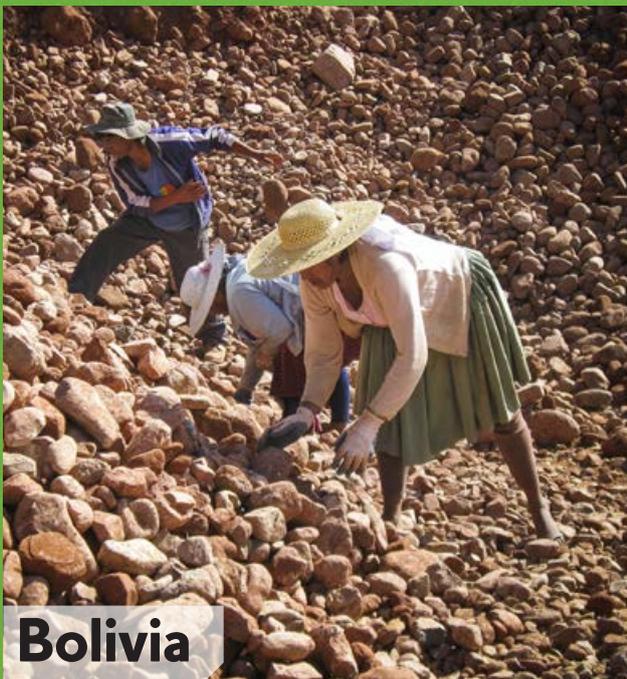
Koyra, in the southern district of Khulna, was hit by Cyclone Aila in 2009. Agricultural lands in this region were flooded by the tidal wave and many labourers turned to fishing in the Sundarban forest, even though attacks from tigers and pirates were genuine threats. The area did not recover its pre-disaster land and livelihood



patterns; instead, shrimp cultivation gained increasing importance, as did out-migration.

Dhamurhat, Naogaon District

Dhamurhat, in Naogaon District, on the north-west border with West Bengal (India), is located in one of the poorest parts of the country. Agriculture is the main livelihood, with land ownership concentrated in a few hands. Some residents work in brick production, others migrate for seasonal work outside the district. Some make a living from cross-border smuggling.



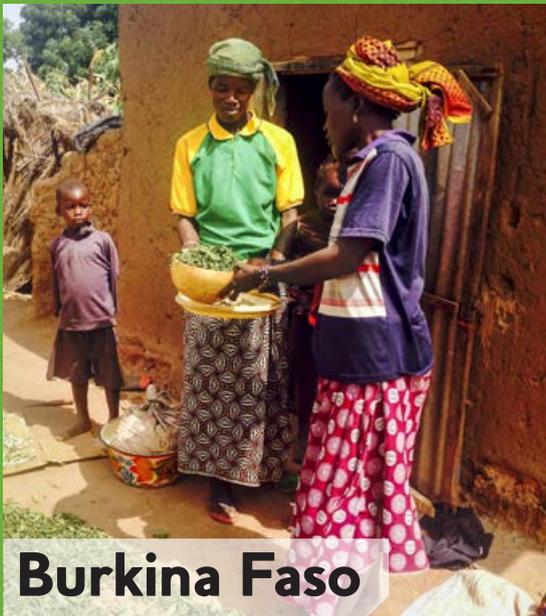
Bolivia

Kami, Cochabamba Valley, is a former mining town 160km from Cochabamba. The expansion of the urban periphery is very noticeable in Kami, where new developments abound. Many in Kami are involved in the construction sector as site workers, welders or quarry workers.



Pirhuas

Pirhuas is a village in the Cochabamba Valley, 2,500m above sea level. Reverse migration and new infrastructure have transformed the area in the past 15 years. Most people are farmers, including some successful dairy producers.



Burkina Faso

Kaya, Sanmatenga province

Situated 100km north-east of the capital, Ouagadougou, in the north-central region of the country, Kaya is the seventh largest town in Burkina Faso, with about 55,000 inhabitants. It is known as the last town before the Sahara Desert. The residents are mostly involved in agriculture and raising livestock, along with small businesses and crafts.



Nessemtenaga, Sanmatenga

Located approximately 14km away from Kaya, Nessemtenaga in Bousouma municipality is an agricultural community of more than 5,000 people. Many of the young men from Nessemtenaga have gone to look for gold in one of the many non-industrial mines in the country, leaving farming behind. The gold rush has brought about noticeable social changes. The population is now predominantly female (55 per cent) and young (45 per cent are under 14). The village market, which is held every three days, brings in traders from surrounding towns and villages.



Kolfe sub-city, in the western part of Addis Ababa, is a mixed urban neighbourhood, with white-collar professionals living alongside shopkeepers, grain dealers, small traders and vendors.

The local administration has been providing credit and training to support poor people working in various sectors, including carpentry, metalwork, construction, tailoring, agriculture and food processing. Many people rely on remittances from abroad.

Consumers' Associations provide subsidised food, including meat, for local residents.

Many women from Kolfe who have returned from the Gulf countries have set up small food stalls, selling samosas or French fries.



Ethiopia

Adami Tullu, Oromia

While some 95 per cent of people in the *kebele* (village) at Adami Tullu in Oromia region are farmers, only 30 per cent have access to irrigation. The expansion of the irrigation system has brought considerable change to the *kebele*, in this dry area that lies on the main road 170km south of Addis Ababa. Producers who have irrigation are prospering and are considered model farmers. They grow onions and tomatoes which they sell from roadside stalls. Given that there has been no new land distribution since the 1980s, younger people share land with their parents or inherit smaller pieces of agricultural land. There are no alternative jobs for young people, despite rising levels of education.



Guatemala

The municipality of **Santo Tomás Chichicastenango** is a large indigenous Mayan K'iche' mountain town, part of the tourist circuit across the Guatemalan highlands. Chichicastenango lies 145km north-west of Guatemala City, and most people are involved in the town's market and tourism-related industries, or in unskilled agricultural wage labour.

Chugüexá Primero, in the rural and mountainous western region of Guatemala, is a settlement of just over 1,000 people. The community comprises a close-knit group of K'iche' speakers. While the inhabitants grow maize and beans for their own consumption, it is not enough to last the whole year. For the past 30 years, men have mainly worked as tailors.

In addition to their domestic work, many of the women in Chugüexá Primero weave, take in laundry, and prepare food for sale on market days.



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People bought broken eggs when they couldn't afford whole ones, Dhaka.

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Foreword

Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility was a real-time investigation of the experiences of people on low and uncertain incomes as they made dramatic adjustments to their place in the global economy in the wake of the food and financial crises that began in 2007. We accompanied people in 23 sites in ten countries on these journeys of economic change, to make sense of the constrained agency with which they responded across diverse contexts. Specifically, we heard and saw what it meant when people's best efforts at work and provisioning were delinked from the prospect of a decent living.

This grounded perspective connected economic development to human wellbeing, and granted valuable insights into what global economic changes meant for people's everyday lives. These included learning about labour, and in particular the growing precariousness in the types of work and returns to work; about the changing need for social protection, as people and societies rely more on markets that sometimes fail and seldom care; and about diets and nutrition – perpetual concerns for people on low incomes, but concerns that have risen up the international development policy agenda recently as governments come to recognise the public policy benefits of well-nourished populations. It is not coincidental that this recognition is coming at just the moment when many people are finding that good nourishment is out of reach through their own efforts in the market.

The core finding was that sudden and sustained rises in the price of basic daily needs introduced change in patterns of everyday life via two universal mechanisms: (1) an immediate and sustained pressure to earn more cash to meet the rising costs of relatively inelastic needs, and (2) similar magnitudes of pressure to extract more value from whatever was consumed. Core components of these mechanisms were found to be common across a wide range of social and economic settings, even though their precise forms varied. Aspects of life that had not previously been mainly lived or governed through markets became more so, in a process of rapid commoditisation of provisioning and the work involved in enabling societies to reproduce themselves. People came to exchange a greater share of their work efforts for cash and to exchange a greater share of that cash for basic provisioning.

The balance between subsistence and paid work – between the market economy of commodity and labour markets on the one hand, and the moral economy of social protection, income redistribution, and regulation, charity and community aid on the other – was thrown off-kilter. The sudden rise in food prices meant that many more people suddenly sought higher cash incomes because this was the obvious pathway, the only one where the signposts were clearly marked. There was little sense in making demands on their state to subsidise those higher costs, because even when governments had claimed responsibility for protecting people against food crises, there was rarely much comprehensive action. And so people pushed out into markets for work that they had not undertaken before.

The accelerated process of commoditisation that occurred in the years following 2007 marked a change in the relative value of labour compared to food. People were visibly working harder to stay fed. Close to a billion people were estimated to be hungry or undernourished worldwide around the time of the 2008 food crisis (FAO 2008b). From what people told us and what we observed, the period after the food crisis was a time of great struggle to keep families fed; the strain on social reproduction, in other words, was intense.

Even by working much harder, and even when wages started to rise, people could not feed their families well. So they tried to maximise the value they could extract from whatever they consumed.

Much of what people did at the time of the price spikes was familiar crisis-coping behaviour: substituting less costly items, cutting out more expensive items and replacing them with filling foods, sacrificing safety, taste and familiarity for volume and price. Then many people moved towards more processed, packaged and purchased foods of different types. Why would people start to rely more on buying processed foods when times were hard? The answer lies in understanding the value of food as a complex not only of price, calories and other nutrients, but also of other variables. These variables include the important factor of time (typically discounted by policymakers because they have no grasp of

People were visibly working harder to stay fed. Many began to rely more on purchased foods.

the importance or magnitude of the unpaid care work of feeding). They also include availability, the desirability of customary food cultures *versus* the draw of novelty, the addictive nature (particularly for young people) of the high fat-sugar-salt content of many industrialised foods, and status – food being among the most important elements of people’s cultural and social identities, as well as significant aspects of our psychology.

And so people facing changing relative prices for basic foods and experiencing great flux in their work lives often started buying foods

as they moved around for work. The ‘mobile eating’ phenomenon appeared most common among men in growing economies, rural and urban – some because they had no family home to go to for

meals, others because they could eat better out than at home, others still found community and camaraderie in the public restaurants and snack bars that formed part of their working day. In most sites, women were doing more paid work than in the past, and felt pressed to speed up the work of feeding the family; the growing availability of convenience foods, in particular ready-made sauces and quick-cook staples, were a source of anxious expediency. Meanwhile, children and young people were early and enthusiastic adopters of all manner of processed foods – cheap, tasty, fun, trendy, and typically habit-forming.

Women doing more paid work felt pressed to speed up the work of feeding the family.

▼ Locally grown vegetables were the main ingredients in everyday meals in Kaya, but flavouring was now more likely to be stock cubes than meat.

Entering the market is not a temporary situation. The changing relative price of food shifted the equation between work and provisioning in the short term, but even after the price spikes flattened out, food prices stayed high. The strategies people adopted were distinctive as comparatively compressed processes of change in the relationship between people and markets. Some of these groups were already highly marketised – particularly urban people and people in the more developed agrarian economies of middle-income countries such as Vietnam, Bolivia and Indonesia. But many more were less involved in markets for everyday matters, and several of the groups we are talking about here have been hurtled – or have thrust themselves – into provisioning via the market at such a rapid pace that human relations, ideas about the way the world works, and everyday emotions seem to have struggled to catch up.

This seemed to be particularly true in some of the communities that had been strongly subsistence-oriented and in which integration into markets was not central to the patterns of everyday life prior to the food crisis. There, the urgent push to earn cash in whatever way the market made possible felt new and disturbing; similarly, the changes people felt pushed to make in terms of what they eat were different, sometimes unwelcome changes to the daily matter of diet. Anxieties about what they were eating, as well as the work they were having to do to afford that food, were common. In rural communities in the more insulated local economies, these changes amounted to (and were experienced as) new ways of organising life.

We do not think that the food crisis or the period of high and more volatile food prices that followed caused all these changes. But we do think, and believe we show here, that these events and changing relative prices acted as accelerants and catalysts, pushing more people faster down pathways that were already available, and which quickly became familiar and well-trodden routes to development and marketised, modern life. The crises of basic subsistence mutated into increased precariousness of labour, squeezing out care and changing food habits; yet the costs of resilience to food price volatility have, so far, gone uncounted. This report is a reminder of the particular risks that globalisation poses to the relationship between labour and food, and raises questions about our choices as to how to respond. It calls for a broad and confident approach to social protection that protects labour against exploitation and high risk, and protects subsistence, so that bad food, dangerous and demeaning occupations, and strained care are no longer necessary elements of resilience in the face of global economic development.





1 Introduction

Life was never quite the same for many millions of people on low and precarious incomes after the food crisis of 2008–11. In food policy circles, the sense of crisis died down when the spike in international prices flattened after 2012; the threat of destabilising food riots – embarrassing to political elites – had receded. But there was no quick return to the *status quo ante*: global prices remained stickily high (FAO 2011; Naylor and Falcon 2010; Dawe *et al.* 2015; Moore 2014). Prices in many national retail markets dropped slightly from their peak or otherwise plateaued or continued to climb. Food prices stopped making headlines, and even for people who were already on low incomes, the sense of shock turned into a sense of squeeze (Hossain, King and Kelbert 2013). People for whom securing food had already absorbed a large share of their resources and energies before the food crisis came under intense pressure to alter their relationship to food and thus to the economy – to spend more time earning more money to cover basic provisioning, and to extract more value from whatever they consumed.

This report documents how people across a variety of contexts have responded *en masse* to these common pressures, changing the work they do and the food they eat. The actions they took depended on how they were already living, the price hikes they faced, their resources and capacities, and the wider opportunities and constraints of their context. The multitude of individual responses consolidated new norms and influenced institutions and politics. Just as the price changes turned out to be longer-term adjustments rather than short sharp shocks, the changes in work and food signalled the transformation of economies and societies. Although these collective and institutional adjustments are still working themselves out, the implications for each society, economy and polity are potentially vast. Powerful shifts towards commoditisation at the nexus of food, care and the informal economy – already underway in most countries – appear to have been given a significant boost by rising food prices.

▲ Paying more for food, education, clothes and rent generated a need to earn more cash and squeeze more value, Chugüexá Primero.

The changes in work and food signalled the transformation of economies.

The social, economic and political adjustments made by people in developing countries in the wake of the global food crisis are the focus of this report. The analysis combines perspectives and insights from the sociology of globalisation, the economics of food price changes and wage adjustments, resilience thinking from complex systems analysis, agri-food systems and food regime analysis, the feminist economics of unpaid work, and the social history of subsistence crises. Drawing on several years of multi-scale, multi-sited, qualitative, integrated and comparative research and analysis, the report examines the mechanisms of adjustment to the globalisation of food. It finds that these operated in the period following the food crisis through an immediate and sustained pressure on people on low incomes to: (a) increase cash incomes and therefore engage in the market economy on whatever terms it offered, and (b) extract more value from consumption under conditions where both supply and demand were shifting fast, also in part due to changing relative prices. In sum, the mechanisms of adjustment after the global food crisis concerned the value relations between the labour and food necessary for individuals and societies to continue to reproduce themselves (Araghi 2003).

Background and objectives

Why is it important to understand how people adjust to higher food prices? Global food prices have been more stable since 2012 than in the previous five years (FAO 2014). While nutrition remains a major policy preoccupation (Haddad *et al.* 2015), and climate change and conflict continue to interact with food insecurity (Carty and Magrath 2013), these problems pre- and post-date the global food crisis. In any case, world poverty levels appear to have been dropping since the crisis (Ravallion and Chen 2012; Ferreira *et al.* 2015). To some extent, this may be precisely

▼ Food for a traditional wedding, Kaya.



because food prices are high, as in the long run this has helped push up agricultural and other unskilled wages – typically the wages of the poorest (Ivanic and Martin 2014; Headey 2014; de Hoyos and Medvedev 2011).

It is particularly noticeable that across Asia, rural wages have been rising relatively fast (Wiggins and Keats 2014). Debates about where the Lewis turning point has been reached (i.e. where ‘surplus’ rural labour has been absorbed) in Asian countries are generating considerable excitement about development progress (Jacoby 2016; Cheng *et al.* 2016; Zhang *et al.* 2013; Zhang, Yang and Wang 2011). Agrarian production processes have become more integrated in and moved further along global value chains (Reardon *et al.* 2014).

One way of summarising this change might be to say that the global food crisis was itself a necessary adjustment to previous agricultural policies that had kept food prices lower than market forces would have permitted (Swinnen 2011; Guariso, Squicciarini and Swinnen 2014). The long-term effects of the price rises (if not of the spikes) may be somewhere between benign and positive from the perspective of globalising economic development. If these assessments are a true reflection of people’s lives – and there is a substantial ‘if’ surrounding the global poverty estimates¹ – it suggests that on average, people are ‘better off’ than they were before the food price rises. So what is interesting about how people have adjusted to the ‘new normal’ of higher food prices?

Comparatively little is known about the mechanisms of change between the two points in time and the meaning of that change. This is despite there being: (a) much information about how people were affected by food price shocks in the short run (see, for instance, Green *et al.* 2013); and (b) a growing body of evidence that higher food prices have driven reductions in poverty in the longer term (see above). What did people actually do to raise income-consumption levels? How did people move from short-term coping to longer-term adaptation? What did it mean for their wages to ‘adjust’? How did a short-term crisis turn into an opportunity in the longer term, for whom, and under what conditions? And how do people interpret their adjustments to higher food prices, and the implications of those adjustments?

Taking resilience to task

Answering these questions may help us understand the nature and quality of resilience and people’s adaptive capacity to global shocks and long-term stressors. Under the strains of recent crises, the idea of resilience has become a crucial part of the development vocabulary,

borrowing a concept from ecological systems to celebrate human ingenuity and resourcefulness. An alternative is that resilience is a desirable goal for development because it devolves onto those hardest hit: ‘crucified on the cross, carved up by the double-shift are “the poor”, now granted responsibility and capability for buffering the disruptions of the global economy’ (Reid 2013: 360).

Regardless of whether or not resilience is a good idea, is it, in fact, what we are witnessing? Here, understanding how people adjusted to high food prices would help to explain the paradox of why global poverty figures improved at a time when net buyers of food – most people on low incomes – faced great hardship in the form of rising prices (Ravallion and Chen 2015). Recent estimates of rapid poverty reduction imply an impressive degree of resilience among people who were living in poverty before their costs of living rose so fast and so high (Cruz *et al.* 2015). But they reveal little about the ‘negative-value’ – any social, psychological, emotional, environmental or other consequences of actions taken to raise income-consumption levels – generated in the struggle for subsistence in a globalising system (Moore 2014). Drawing attention to those ‘externalities’ – in unpaid care work, social relations, the environment – challenges the main implication of the poverty figures that increased income-consumption is equivalent to improved human wellbeing (McGregor, Camfield and Woodcock 2009; Sumner and Mallett 2013). The research affords a closer examination of the scales at which resilience is expected to operate and its relations to agency and structure (Duit *et al.* 2010; Béné *et al.* 2012; Reid 2013; Heltberg, Hossain, Reva and Turk 2012).

Examining these adjustments from the perspective of those making them also allows us to get inside the micro-mechanisms of change in the world food system, helping us to examine and evaluate the implications of adaptive strategies and their wider institutional effects for the relationship between people and food. This lets us make sense of how the relations of value connecting labour and the resources needed for social reproduction are changing in time- and location-specific ways. It is not enough to know that people have more income or that they consume more now; we need to understand how changes in the ways people work or eat affect their capacity to do so in the future – whether these strengthen or weaken their command over the resources they need (including their own labour and time) or their rights to food, as members of families, societies or nations. How do these adjustments alter their relationships to food or to the food system? Do they help them secure food and other essentials? Or (despite apparent

higher income-consumption levels) are people being left more precariously positioned in relation to how their labour is able to generate the basics needed for a good life?

This report addresses these and related themes by focusing on the adjustments people made after the food crisis. It concludes that it would be a stretch to aggregate these as evidence of resilience if, by that, we mean ‘the capacity of a social-ecological system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks’ (Leach 2008: 3). While there may be no return to the *status quo ante* precisely, to be meaningful, resilience must mean more than people still standing after the event. It implies that people are likely to still be standing after the next event, too, and that their foothold in the new or returned-to equilibrium situation is firm rather than fragile (Davoudi *et al.* 2012; Béné *et al.* 2012; Ericksen, Bohle and Stewart 2010). In relation to social-ecological systems, resilience also suggests the emergence of protective political-institutional regimes, such that the resilient stand arm-in-arm with others, collectively organised for cooperation and mutual support, in defence of shared values and ways of life (for instance, see Young *et al.* 2006; Duit *et al.* 2010). Our focus is on whether these institutions have been influenced by the adjustments people have made to everyday life.

Precariousness and the patterns of everyday life

Rather than resilience, the moment in history to which we refer – a time just after the ‘perfect storm’ (Beddington 2009) of food, fuel and financial crises – suggests a heightened degree of precariousness in the domains of work and food. Not all aspects of this precariousness are new; not all are solely the consequence of rising costs of living, nor are they uniformly negative in their implications for human and relational wellbeing.

This report identifies continuities and multiple causal connections in prevailing work-life conditions, as well as the positive dimensions of change in the wake of the food crisis. But in counterpoint to what appears to be unwarranted aid industry optimism about recovery and progress, it also highlights heightened precariousness as directly connected to higher (and to a lesser extent, more volatile) food prices. Indeed, many of these new elements of precariousness have been causally connected to food price rises and volatilities by the people whose everyday lives we report here: the

How did these adjustments alter people’s relationships to food or to the food system?



▲ Global food crises affected consumers, producers and everyone in between, Dadu.

interpretations offered are closely informed by their framings and concerns. (For a discussion of the importance of people’s own framings of resilience, see Leach 2008.) This new precariousness includes more dependence on:

- unreliable cash incomes and casualised, risky occupations – key characteristics of the ‘preariat’ (Standing 2011);
- increasingly integrated markets for finance, inputs, distribution networks and sales, particularly in the production of food;²
- purchased and processed (often industrial) foods and/or food perceived to be unsafe (‘foods from nowhere’ (McMichael 2009b; Le Heron and Lewis 2009));
- more tenuous social networks and relations, featuring higher levels of mobility and social normative change – the ‘visible foot’ that pushes the ex-peasantry (Araghi 2009).

The economic psychology of the price–precariousness nexus features lasting fear of food price rises, inflation and job losses, breeding a sense of uncertainty and of worsening conditions of life, whatever material improvements may occur. It is not surprising that people at risk of poverty dislike inflation more than richer people and associate it with increasing inequality, as high inflation tends to leave poorer people worse off (Easterly and Fischer 2001; Gandelman and Hernández-Murillo 2009); this is why collective memories of periods of high inflation tend to linger (Ehrmann and Tzamourani 2012).

Together, these factors amount to a new precariousness that is not only characteristic of economic life but also of social relations and

identities associated with that new mode of economy (Jørgensen 2015). It also points to collective and political implications for the moral and political economy, through its indication of a popular basis for mass grievances relating to higher and less reliable food costs, and therefore to the prospects for social mobilisation around matters of core subsistence (Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011).

Food price changes did not cause this shift towards greater precariousness in any simple sense. Many of the important drivers are longer-term processes deriving from distinctly different sources, as part of the same global system. But while the differences among peoples and places generated varying degrees of resilience (Pritchard 2014), a common thread of precariousness in the relationship between people and food unites the experiences of the aftermath of the food crisis. These experiences suggest that higher food prices have been pivotal in establishing new relations of value across the global system (McMichael 2009b; Moore 2014).

The common sense of an increased precariousness is consistent with the idea that the food crisis marked the emergence of a new phase in current economic regimes towards a heightened degree of globalisation in market principles and practices, enfolding more and more people more quickly into a more industrialised and financialized world food system (McMichael 2009b; McMichael 2009a; Araghi 2009; Phillips 2016). For a large proportion of the world’s population, command over basic food resources has been sharply commoditised. People now depend significantly more on the twin uncertainties of what cash they can earn in the current labour market and what that can buy in the current food market.

A social history of economic adjustment

One reason why this research is important is that it provides a social history perspective on these larger debates about the relationship between food prices, globalisation, poverty and development, grounding them in place and time. It attempts to make sense of these changes as they unfold and as people develop a clearer understanding of them. It addresses the concerns of a wide swathe of people, the ‘masses’ or the popular classes, who struggled to secure a reasonable level of subsistence in this period of adjustment. It has observed that the powerful drivers of change were sweeping the majority of people in more precarious directions. By no means were all groups equally swept along, but being left behind may have been worse from a survival and subsistence standpoint, while being at the crest of the wave had many advantages. This report tries to offer a sense of what this adjustment felt like from the multitude of standpoints of people

Higher food prices have been pivotal in establishing new relations of value.

in different places, united mainly in what their precarious position in the global economy meant for their security over the basics of life.

The findings are not intended to prove a general point about how people adapt to food crises in some ahistorical permanent present, but to document and analyse a specific set of world-historical events. And so the report is concretely historical in its scope, focusing on the particular actions (working and eating) of particular groups of people (in 23 communities in ten low- and lower-middle-income countries) at a particular moment in time (2012–15). This is an actor-oriented document of social history, which puts people’s strategies for adjustment at the core of the analysis. The study makes a sustained effort to explore the implications of change in a complex globalised system, taking account of the effects of price movements, growth at home and abroad, climate change, changing food markets and social protection systems (Duit *et al.* 2010).

How this report is organised

Section 1 sets out the problem the study aims to address, discussing how the global food crisis acted as a shock that accelerated the process of integration under the global food regime for many people in developing countries. It discusses the key empirical and conceptual debates the research engages with, and gives an account of the methodology used. Section 2 sets out the global and national price and wage trends (or ‘situation mechanisms’) within which the post-crisis adjustments took place. Section 3 narrows in on individual, household and community responses, presenting analysis of changes people reported in how they work and in what they eat (or ‘behaviour formation mechanisms’). Section 4

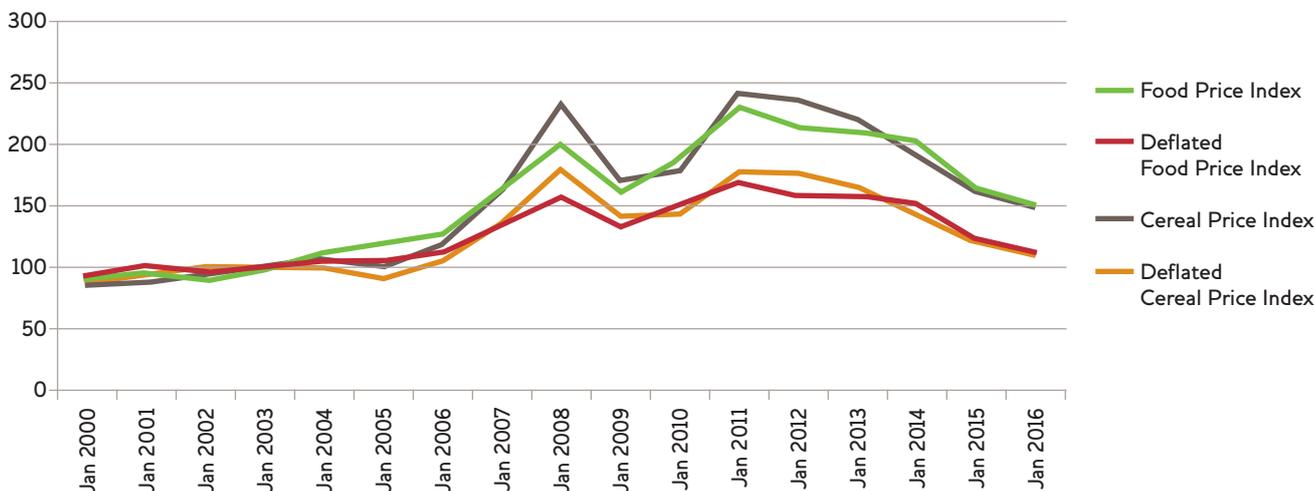
widens the scope again, to examine the aggregate effects of these individual mechanisms of adjustment. This includes examining what appear to be ideational shifts in norms, as well as aspirations for social mobility, and political cultural principles about the roles of state and society in relation to the governance of food and subsistence crises. Section 5 concludes with reflections on the implications of the research findings.

The context: the global food crisis and its aftermath

This section sets out the context of the global food crisis and some of the debates it generated; it then describes the research undertaken to study how everyday lives changed in the wake of the food crisis.

The ‘global food crisis’ usually refers to the food price spike of 2008, when the international price of basic foodstuffs peaked at unprecedented levels. This spike was transmitted to a significant degree to national and local prices, and was associated with a wave of ‘food riots’ in low-income countries. World food prices spiked dramatically in 2008 and again in 2011 (see Figure 1), more than doubling in nominal terms compared to prices earlier in the decade. Since 2012, world prices have been on a downward trend and real prices are now only about 10 per cent above pre-crisis levels in 2002–04 (nominal prices are about 50 per cent higher). Higher food production levels, reductions in stock-holdings by some governments, significantly lower oil prices and the appreciation of the US dollar have all contributed to this trend (World Bank 2015).

Figure 1 Food and cereal price indices, nominal and real 2000–2016 (2002–2004=100)



Source: Adapted from FAO Food Price Index: www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/ (accessed 17 February 2016). Note: Index based on average of five commodity group price indices: cereals, vegetable oils, dairy, meat and sugar. Real price data based on nominal data deflated by World Bank Manufactures Unit Value Index.

The rising prices had a considerable lead time; agricultural commodity prices had been climbing from the mid-2000s and corn prices had already risen sharply when the ‘tortilla riots’ erupted in Mexico in early 2007 (BBC News 2007). The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) food price index increased by 53 per cent in the first three months of 2008 alone, but it had already risen by 24 per cent in 2007 (FAO 2008a), while domestic prices for staples (rice, maize and wheat) were up by over a quarter compared to 2007 (United Nations 2011).

By 2008, the extent of the price hikes start to sound implausible, to say nothing of impossible to cope with – a doubling of wheat prices in the five years to 2008, followed by a trebling of rice prices in a matter of months (Headey 2011). News headlines screamed ‘Global Food Crisis’,

Explanations fall broadly into two camps: the market adjustment argument and the global regimes argument.

raising widespread concerns about rising populations and growing scarcity to a degree not witnessed since the oil price spike-induced world food crisis of the early 1970s saw soaring food prices and famines in Africa and Asia. But even

compared to the early 1970s, the 2008 food crisis was marked by an unprecedented degree of contagion. Nearly all the major food and feed commodities saw sharp price rises, and nearly all were expected to remain high; at the same time, while international market prices never transmit perfectly, a high proportion of the dramatic price increases in smaller countries and net importers were transmitted to national and local prices (Figure 1) (FAO 2008a; United Nations 2011; Baltzer 2013).³

It was undoubtedly experienced as a crisis by the many people who were already spending half or more of their earnings on food. Millions struggled to maintain basic consumption levels – cutting down and cutting out, replacing nutritionally richer foods with filling staples, borrowing food or cash, in some instances selling assets, migrating or breaking up families, and taking on more work where they could, including risky or undesirable jobs.⁴ By one World Bank estimate, as many as 105 million more people in the low-income population of 2.3 billion worldwide might have moved (temporarily) into poverty; this would have amounted to a ‘loss of almost seven years of poverty reduction’ (Ivanic and Martin 2008: 415).

The episode was also experienced as a crisis by policy and political elites worldwide. It challenged the notion of shared progress, and in particular faith that cheap food could continue to underpin economic development as it had for at least the

previous quarter century (Rosin, Campbell and Stock 2012). Around half the price rises were eventually attributed to the effects of government interventions, which encouraged speculation, hoarding or other inflationary effects (Pinstrup-Andersen 2014). In some cases, subsidies benefited politically powerful large-scale farmers, millers or traders more so than low-income consumers; this appears to have been the case in Kenya and Zambia in the early part of the food crisis (Chapoto 2014; Musembi and Scott-Villiers 2015; Nzuma 2014).

In popular discourse, unusual rises of this magnitude may suggest deliberate market manipulation – efforts to create artificial shortages, for instance; however, the idea that global market price movements were driving changes in local market prices was not widely believed. Whether or not people believed markets were being deliberately manipulated, relentlessly rising staple prices triggered a wave of so-called ‘food riots’, as (mainly) urban populations experiencing rapid increases in the cost of living protested against failures to stabilise prices and, in some cases, official efforts to withdraw consumer subsidies (Schneider 2008; Bohstedt 2014; Patel and McMichael 2009; Hossain *et al.* 2014; Berazneva and Lee 2013).

In terms of high and volatile prices, the 2008 food crisis also had a long tail. Food prices dropped steeply in 2009, when the global financial crisis took the heat out of commodity markets. The problem of very high and volatile food prices continued, however, with first a Russian drought then a US drought driving up wheat prices again in early 2011 and 2012. It was estimated that as many as 44 million people may have been pushed into poverty (Ivanic, Martin and Zaman 2011). However, by 2011, the attention of global and national policy elites had moved on to concerns relating to the popular political backlash against austerity, as governments in the developed world (particularly Europe) attempted to adjust to the debts they had incurred from the global financial crisis. More subsistence protests (as opposed to ‘food riots’) followed, in the Middle East, Latin America and elsewhere (Bar-Yam, Lagi and Bar-Yam 2015; Lagi, Bertrand and Bar-Yam 2011). From 2010, there followed an even larger wave of popular protests in middle- and high-income countries, which included the Occupy movement and other struggles over economic justice. These new kinds of ‘unruly politics’ had a particular charge because of declining real wages and reductions in welfare provision at a time of rapid rises in living costs and banker bailouts (Ortiz *et al.* 2013; Barnett 2011; Khanna 2012).

There are many competing explanations of the causes of the 2008–12 food price crises or

volatilities, most with compelling supporting evidence. These explanations fall broadly into two camps: the market adjustment argument and the global regimes argument. Although some still hold out against the idea that financial speculation fuelled commodity price rises, it seems reasonable to suggest that financialization of the staple commodity trade is one of several immediate causes of the food price crisis (see Ghosh, Heintz and Pollin 2011; Ghosh 2010). A major trigger in 2008 was incentives for biofuel production; in addition, weather and harvest conditions in producer regions had a short-term impact, as did domestic (often protectionist) policy responses in larger countries, once the crisis was already in train (Baltzer 2013; Demeke, Pangrazio and Maetz 2009).

Views on the weight of longer-term or more structural conditions underlying the crisis are more varied. These include: changing patterns of food demand among growing middle-income country populations; the effects of climate change on production patterns and outputs; 'peak energy' pushing use of food for fuel; lengthening and more interconnected commodity chains increasingly concentrated among a small number of vast suppliers; and declining public investment in smallholder agriculture (see, for instance, McMichael 2009b; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). One prominent view is that the crisis was the inevitable expression of contradictions in the world food system, or food regime:

Rising costs, related to peak oil and fuel crop substitutes, combine with monopoly pricing by agribusiness to inflate food prices, globally transmitted under the liberalized terms of finance, trade and food security arrangements associated with neoliberal policies.

(McMichael 2009b: 282)

In the period after the food crisis, domestic prices were generally considerably higher than before the crisis, but not as high as international prices, and not necessarily because of higher international prices in any direct way (Dawe *et al.* 2015). A fairly standard view on the higher food prices in the aftermath of the global food crisis emphasises the role of market forces working as they should, arguing that the crisis was an overdue market correction that 'overshot' its equilibrium price, later dropping back down to the 'right price' (Headey 2011; Swinnen 2011). The virtues of functioning markets able to correct themselves in this way are clear: in the long run (one to five years), 'higher food prices typically reduce poverty', or in more specific historical context, estimates 'suggest that higher food prices from the mid-2000s onward have reduced global poverty by somewhere between 87 to 127 million people' (Headey 2014: 1). Jacoby notes that '[c]onsistent



▲ Breakfast for six, Banjar.

with the WTO [World Trade Organization]'s Doha agenda, my results imply that lowering barriers to trade in agricultural goods on the part of developed countries, if only by improving the lot of the rural poor in India, can make a significant dent in global poverty' (Jacoby 2016: 173).

Three points are worth noting about the connection between higher prices and global poverty reduction: (1) the adjustments are time-lagged; (2) they mainly 'benefit' the very poorest while the less poor and the moderate urban poor do not appear to gain; and (3) they are never explicitly explained – economic theory is allowed to do much of the explanatory work. Headey notes that the adjustments 'do not happen instantaneously' (2014: 1), and that the poverty-reducing impacts are chiefly confined to the very poorest, those who were living under the (old) US\$1.25 poverty line. The more moderately poor (living under US\$2 a day) do not benefit from higher prices, partly because they are more often urban, and so would not see higher agricultural wages (Headey 2014). He notes that the causal connection between 'higher food prices' and 'global poverty reduction' is explained by the fact that higher food prices produce 'substantial factor price adjustments... particularly wage adjustments', at least in the long run.

The more moderately poor (living on between US\$1.25 and US\$2 a day) do not benefit from higher prices.

Ivanic and Martin's simulations indicate that the higher the price shock, the higher the poverty reduction rate is likely to be (in the long run), based on assumptions about 'wages responding' and farmers adjusting production levels in response to the price changes (Ivanic and Martin 2014). The mechanisms through which wages or production levels might adjust for people faced with low endowments of skills, assets, or access

to credit, networks or other resources, are assumed. Wage-price elasticity is assumed to be the important factor, but the factors that might make wages more or less responsive to changes in agricultural products or consumer prices are not explored (see, for instance, Jacoby 2016). These analyses demonstrate great faith that the invisible hand will do the heavy lifting of wages for all.

An entirely different view of the significance of higher prices – one unleavened by good news on global poverty reduction – comes from the food regime school, the ideological polar opposite to research at the World Bank and CGIAR institutions briefly discussed above. Food regime theory takes a historical view of how

Rising tensions signal an underlying source of instability in the global food regime.

food systems are organised and regulated to meet the needs of the world capitalist economy. A key explanation of the global food crisis is that it was the outcome of a series of contradictions and tensions, including around

how the current corporate food regime has industrialised and financialized global food trade, leading to heavy energy reliance, speculative bubbles, and conversion of food commodities to biofuels. This school notes that the relationship between people and food had, since the previous food crisis of the 1970s, been marked by low food prices, and processes of ‘depeasantisation’ as smallholder food farmers were dispossessed by global market forces and industrial food production, which they could not compete with. After the food crisis of 2008, ‘agflation’ altered the relationship between people and food irrevocably. La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement for food sovereignty, took the position that the crisis was proof that having destroyed peasant agriculture through low prices, corporate interests were now gearing up to reap fat profits from captive markets: ‘in effect confirming the “inefficiency” of the small farmer in the corporate world market, the TNCs [transnational corporations] move on to capture profits through price inflation, at the expense of the waged consumer’ (McMichael 2009b: 282).

The high prices after the food crisis marked the end of cheap food subsidising waged workers and thereby export manufacturing, and shifted towards ‘combining the corporate food regime’s (subsidised) price assault on small farmers (predominantly women) with a (monopolized) price assault on vulnerable consumers of wage-foods’ (McMichael 2009b: 282). A further feature of the current phase of the food regime is the discovery of ‘the nutrition crisis’, as impoverished diets based increasingly on industrialised food are found to be lacking in nutrients. The solution

to this is (frequently subsidised) fortifications and additives, usually through the private sector:

Because of associations with the field of medicine, although industrial chemistry is more appropriate, nutrition science continues to offer a moral economy cloak missing from the ‘free trade of food’, which is meeting stiff resistance from a broad church of national governments, social movements and food consumers. For this reason, nutrition value relations are likely to underpin global food system dynamics into the future. (Dixon 2009: 331)

These rising tensions – and in particular the growing likelihood that labour will be unable to reproduce itself well (i.e. it is precarious rather than resilient) – signal an underlying source of instability in the global food regime. This may be exploited or deepened by progressive or radical social mobilisation agendas to do with food sovereignty, food and climate justice, peasants’ rights, or the right to food, among others (Friedmann 2009; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011).

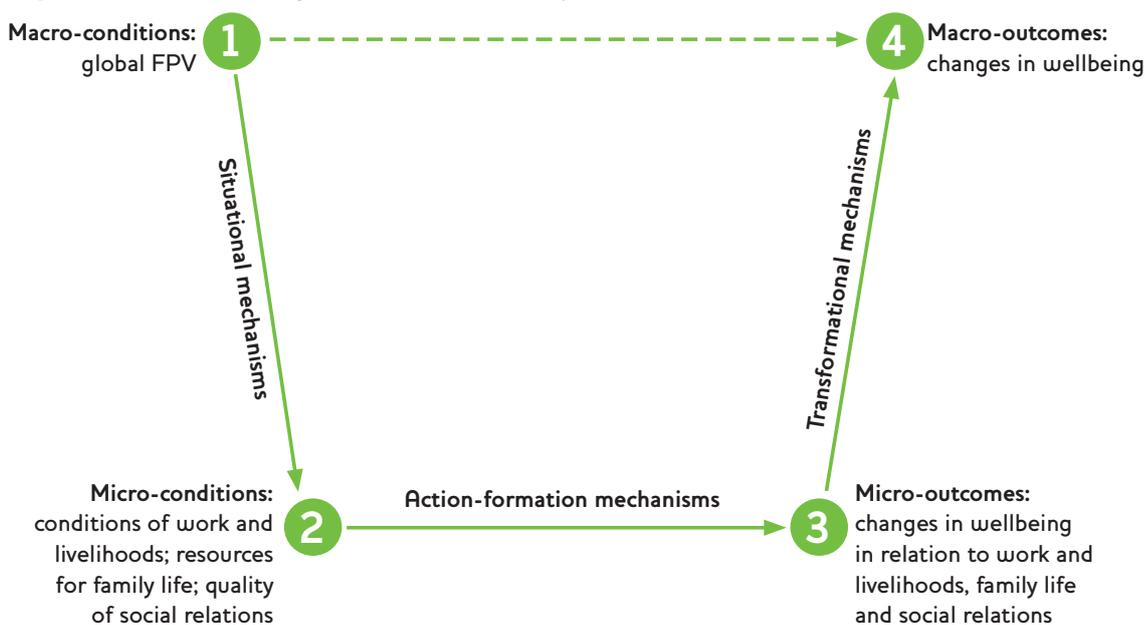
Both of these polar opposite perspectives on the significance of higher prices after the food crisis point to the need to ‘read’ the real adjustments people make. This is both to examine the mechanisms of change and to evaluate their implications, including in relation to the prospects for social mobilisation around justice in the world food system.

Research rationale and design

The research was designed to explore how high and unpredictable food prices (or food price volatility) affect wellbeing among people living on low or precarious incomes. To do this we studied: (1) how rapid and unexpected food price changes – most commonly sudden and sustained rises – affected the day-to-day work of keeping families fed and cared for in selected communities in low- and middle-income countries between 2012 and 2015; and (2) the formal and informal resources and strategies that enabled people to cope with or adapt to these changes, and so shaped their resilience to them (or capacity to manage without long-term damage).

The project aimed to arrive at a clear and strong understanding of the mechanisms through which people’s wellbeing was affected by food price volatility. We wanted to ensure these could apply across clearly defined contexts. To make this possible, the research design was for a relatively large and diverse data collection exercise, combining qualitative and quantitative, longitudinal, in-depth topical and multi-site data collection activities. The core involved repeat rounds of

Figure 2 Research components and the analytical framework



Source: Adapted from Hossain (2015).

qualitative research in 23 communities across ten countries, led by experienced researchers in each country. This was supported by analysis of quantitative data and attempts at qualitative–quantitative integrated analysis. This plural approach aimed to build explanations of change that were both mid-range theoretically and empirically strong enough to apply to a range of contexts and variables, and not merely describe the locations in which the qualitative work was based.

We adopted a ‘mechanism-based approach’ drawing on the theoretical and methodological lessons of analytical sociology and middle range theory as a practical approach to explaining these complex social matters (for details see Hossain 2015). By ‘mechanism-based’ explanations we mean reaching below the macro-movements of food prices to clarify in a careful, step-by-step way, how those movements changed the conditions of local and individual wellbeing (Figure 2). This approach had us drill down from the high-order global conditions of food price volatility (the main ‘situational mechanisms’) into the highly localised individual and contextual responses it stimulated (the ‘action–formation mechanisms’). We could then build our understanding of the causes of

change back up into a general understanding of how food price volatility was affecting wellbeing, through an understanding of how these mechanisms interacted with and changed each other (‘transformational mechanisms’).

The ten countries were chosen based on: national levels of undernourishment (according to FAO figures); where there were research teams in situ; and where Oxfam offices asked to be involved to improve their understanding of food price volatility impacts (Table 1).

In each country, one urban or peri-urban location was selected and at least one rural food-producing area. Eight sites had been part of ongoing crisis impact monitoring research since 2009 and in those, exposure to the global economy was also a selection factor. The sites contained a mix of middle-income, low-income and extremely poor people.

Each community case study collected data on the background and context, where possible from documentary sources. Ten or more household

In each country, one urban or peri-urban location was selected and at least one rural food-producing area.

Table 1 Study countries by income and nutrition status

	Low-income countries	Lower-middle-income-countries
‘Severe’ undernourishment	Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Kenya	Guatemala and Zambia
‘Moderate’ undernourishment	Bangladesh	Bolivia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam

case studies were conducted at each site, built up through interviews with different household members over three to six years. Focus groups were conducted with different occupational and/or relevant social groups in each community, and key informant interviews were conducted with local administrative officials, non-government organisations (NGOs), religious or community leaders, local business people, and politicians; data on prices were collected at local markets. The community case studies were developed to fit local contexts, capacities and traditions of the researchers involved. All, however, addressed the same research questions, and while the forms in which data were collected varied, a great deal of the data generated can be subjected to direct comparative analysis across the sites. Interviews with more than 400 household members and key informants were undertaken, in addition to around 100 focus group discussions and further local data collection activities. Each year, around 1,500 people participated in the research.⁵

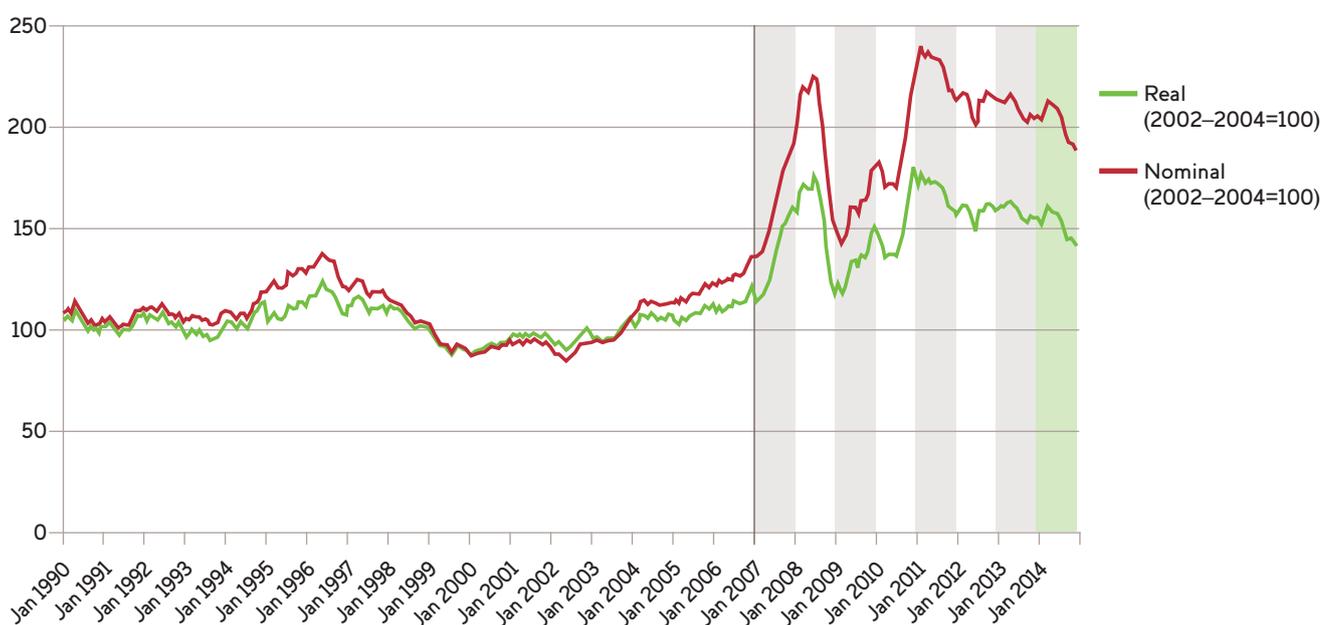
The overall methodology helps us make sense of the changes in people’s lives arising from global events and processes, not only at an individual level but also at more aggregated scales, and in ways that uncover how interactions between processes of change yield uncharted developments that affected how people lived. Because we start with individuals, we begin with subjective feeling – that is, how it felt to be living at this time when the world was adjusting to a major shock in its food and financial system. We can situate that feeling not only in time but also in space: we can say something about how it felt to be an elderly resident of Cochabamba,

or a young woman in Nairobi, or a rice farmer in Vietnam at a time when food prices spiked or plummeted, or were unpredictable. It is from these subjective assessments and experiential findings that we start to build a larger picture of people in a myriad of settings being affected by – and in turn affecting – the processes of global economic adjustment. What is innovative here is that we build those individual changes up into a picture of global change that specifies not only what and how much, but also how and why people changed their behaviour.

The longitudinal method generated data on how the relationship between people and the food they ate changed over a three- to six-year period. Not all the changes in the ways people were eating by 2014 were a direct reflection of changing food prices, or even the associated conditions of producer uncertainty or the squeeze on consumption. However, it was possible to detect at least three broad mechanisms through which higher and more volatile food prices set the stage for changes in how people related to food, care and work. First, absent other changes in the way people produced or consumed, global food price spikes or ‘situational mechanisms’ did transmit to a greater or lesser degree to local prices, leaving people on low or even average incomes at risk of hunger, even though the three years since the 2011 global food price peak were years of relative stability and moderate declines in staple prices (Figure 3).

By the end of the study period, world and local food prices were still historically high in nominal terms and real terms, and the rising cost of staples impacted on the cost of the basic food basket.

Figure 3 World food prices 1990–2014



Source: Adapted from FAO Food Price Index, www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/ (accessed 15 March 2016).

Figure 4 Cumulative impact of main staple food prices on cost of food basket 2013–2015

	2013 Q2	2013 Q3	2013 Q4	2014 Q1	2014 Q2	2014 Q3	2014 Q4	2015 Q1	2015 Q2	2015 Q3	2015 Q4
Bangladesh	5	9	13	13	25	22	17	7	-4	-8	-11
Burkina Faso	9	0	2	2	3	-3	2	-3	-3	0	0
Bolivia	8	17	20	18	41	24	9	2	-4	-3	-12
Ethiopia	16	15	25	20	38	38	39	32	19	20	16
Guatemala	17	17	17	11	24	26	29		24	24	22
Indonesia	20	18	17	16	24	20	21	24	23	22	22
Kenya	21	17	16	14	22	18	26	16	4	24	15
Pakistan	13	17	17	19	39	30	26	11	9	5	-5
Vietnam					-4	11	-6	-9	-5	-13	-12
Zambia	13	19	14	16	35	34	17	33	34	28	32

Source: Based on the WFP Market Monitor www.wfp.org/content/market-monitor (accessed 15 March 2016).

The World Food Programme (WFP) Market Monitor compares the cost of a basic food basket in any given quarter to the average of the same quarter in the previous five years. It provides a quantitative picture of what people told us: that those who were already spending significant proportions of their income or work effort on basic food consumption had to grow or earn substantially more, or else significantly change what and how they ate in order to feed themselves. Figure 4 shows that increases in the price of a basic food basket continued to be severe even after the fall in global prices in eight out of ten of our focus countries, with absolute increases in prices probably more significant than increases in price volatility.

The WFP Market Monitor of January 2016 shows that the cost of the food basket has continued to increase significantly in five of the study countries: Guatemala (+22 per cent), Zambia (+32 per cent), Ethiopia (+16 per cent), Kenya (+15 per cent) and Indonesia (+22 per cent). It remained stable in Burkina Faso, and reduced in four countries: Bolivia (-12 per cent), Bangladesh (-11 per cent), Pakistan (-5 per cent) and Vietnam (-12 per cent). This led us to ask what people in those countries did to stay fed, unpacking ‘work’ – the second broad mechanism through which people attempted to maintain levels and standards of provisioning. Here, we focused on how people understood their changing conditions of work to be related to food price rises and volatilities. We avoided assuming that all changes in conditions of work were connected to cost-of-living rises, and noted other important factors that were influencing those changes, such as new economic opportunities and constraints, official regulations and policies, and changing sociocultural norms. However, we were drawing directly on people’s

explanations of how they had been coping with or adapting to changing costs of living. In other words, people interpreted their current strategies around work as at least partly to do with the effects of food price volatility, including consumer and producer input price rises.

Finally, we looked at the transformational mechanisms and the net effects on social norms, institutions and practices of aggregate changes in social and economic behaviour, including how they interacted with each other. We focused on how changing patterns of work contributed to the development of new markets for packaged food and eating out and new cultures of eating. Taken together, these processes of change amounted to a significantly higher level of commoditisation in the relationship between people and food than in the recent past (i.e. prior to the food price spikes of 2008 and 2010–11). This influenced understandings of the moral economy and the right to food, shaping the basis for popular subsistence politics in this era of adjustment to globalisation.

▼ A local counsellor and a women’s leader were key informants in Nessesmentga.





2 Food prices and wages

▲ Grain makes up a large part of the diet of people on low incomes, Karachi.

Global price movements

The global price shocks of 2008 and 2011 interrupted a long period in which, for the most part, cereal prices had declined: for example, maize prices were 85 per cent lower in real terms in 2000 than they had been in 1950 (Deverell and Yu 2011). Price shocks during this period included that of 1972/73, when a combination of weather-induced lower production, the quadrupling of oil prices, and reactive export restrictions by the US and other governments contributed to a 'world food crisis' (FAO 2009). Since then, cereal prices had been falling in real terms, ushering in an era of 'cheap food' and complacency about world food security. This was manifested in (among other policy orientations) neglect of developing country agriculture (World Bank 2007; Timmer 2010) and a reduction in cereal stocks. In the context of 'cheap food', the 2008 price spike

Maize prices were 85 per cent lower in real terms in 2000 than they had been in 1950.

was a shock in many respects, and raised questions about whether this constituted a more fundamental change in the operation of food commodity markets.

Cereal prices of the main exporting countries reflected the average trends. Figure 5 shows trends in export prices of rice, yellow maize and wheat from major exporting countries for the period January 2000 to January 2016. Wheat and maize price trends clearly reflected the aggregate movement in the cereal price index. Rice price trends partially differed, reflecting the impact of domestic rice price policies in Thailand (in 2011, the Thai government introduced a rice price subsidy for farmers, which it expected to recoup through higher world prices). However, in 2012, the Indian government lifted a previous ban on rice exports, causing the world price to fall sharply, at a high cost (financial and, ultimately, political) to the Thai government. Nonetheless the underlying trend in rice prices has also been downwards, at least since late 2012.

Were these international trends mirrored in domestic food prices? If they were, it could be concluded that the food price crisis was over by 2012/13, and the shocks imposed at the time may have had relatively short-term consequences. However, a more detailed examination of national food price changes and other adjustments (e.g. in wages) indicates that the situation was more complex and diverse.

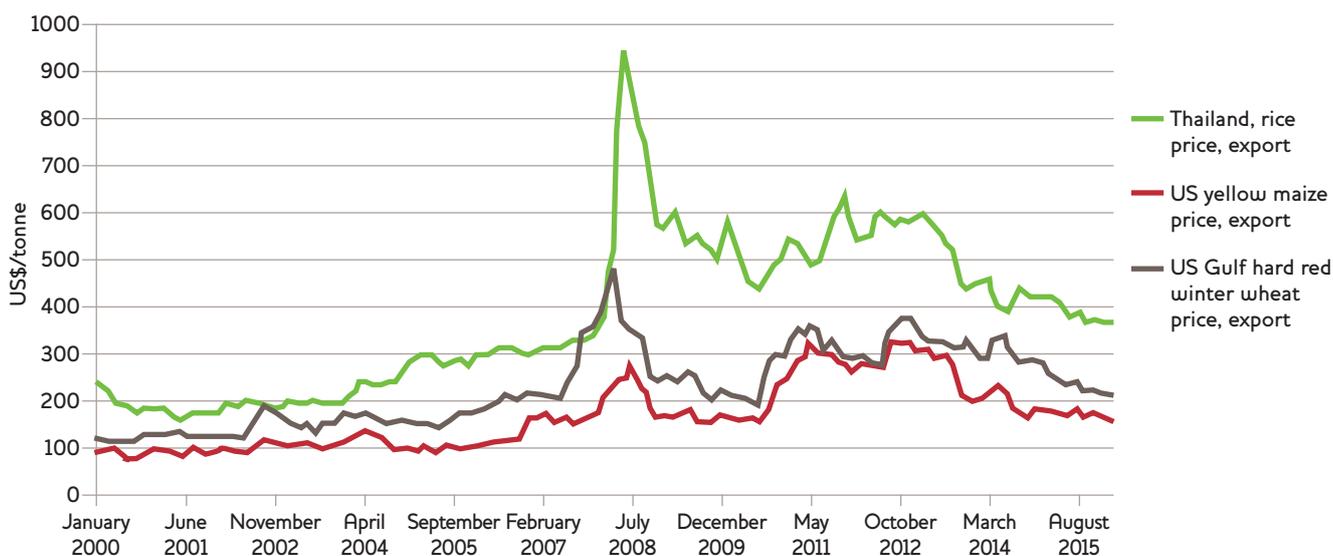
National prices and wages

This section gives an overview of the trends in national prices and wages. (Section 6 discusses in more detail the trends in domestic food prices for major staple crops, food and welfare policies and, where available, wage trends, in each of the countries studied.) Note that the countries were selected to provide a contrast between regions and levels of economic development and food security, and exposure to the global economy

rather than for a strict comparative typology; all have relatively serious problems of food insecurity characterised by moderate-to-severe prevalence of undernourishment in the population as a whole, ranging from 9 per cent in Vietnam to almost half of the Zambian population (see Figure 6). The countries can also be grouped by region because, with the exception of Guatemala, all those with ‘severe’ undernourishment problems were in sub-Saharan Africa. Guatemala and Zambia stood out as countries in which economic development and basic food security did not move together – both are middle-income countries yet have the hunger problems of much poorer countries. Bangladesh was the only low-income country in the group to have relatively less bad nutrition figures, and it acquired middle-income status during the research period.

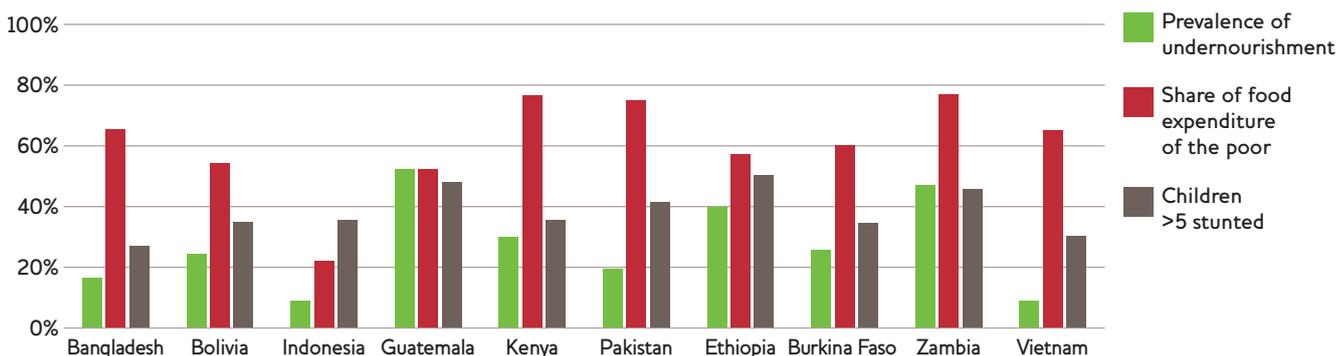
To make sense of different price movements and their effects at national level, it is useful to use Baltzer’s (2013) classification of a country’s

Figure 5 World market cereal prices, January 2000 – January 2016



Source: Adapted from FAO Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS), www.fao.org/giews/pricetool/ (accessed 17 February 2016).

Figure 6 Food and nutrition security in ten countries in 2012



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO Food Security Indicator Data.

exposure to the food crises, based on relative exposure to international prices and the potential impact of food price policies (Figure 7). None of these low-income or lower-middle-income countries were large, self-reliant food exporters with influence over regional or global market prices. Applying Baltzer's schema to the ten countries, none also counted as 'free traders' – countries well integrated into global cereal markets and using few food price policies to

Food prices in most of the countries continued to rise after global prices fell.

influence prices. One (Vietnam) was an 'exporting stabiliser' – a net exporter of cereals (particularly rice) with strong food price policies. Six countries fell into the category of importers: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya

and Pakistan. The remaining countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia) all fell into the isolated category, all three having 'severe' levels of undernourishment.

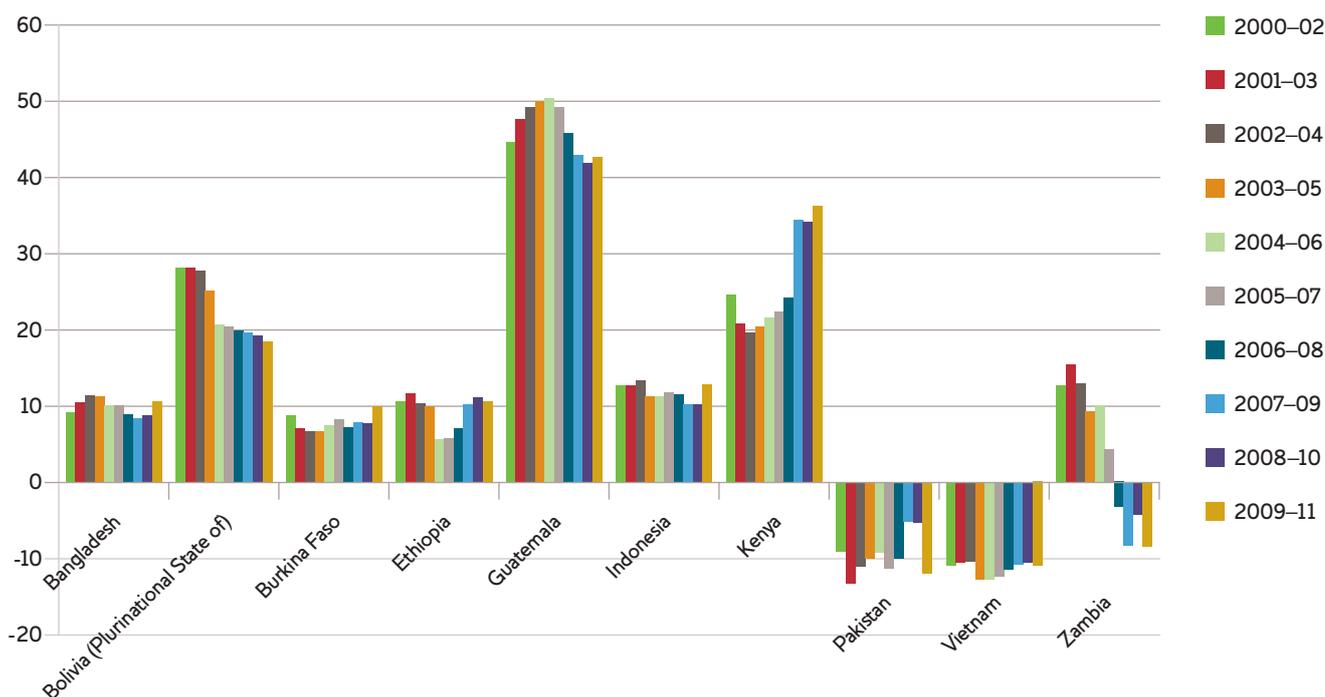
All ten countries experienced the food price shock in 2008 and most also experienced a similar or even more severe price shock in 2011. To that extent, all countries were clearly influenced by the global price shock, even if the transmission channels were indirect or muted. However, the steady decline in world cereal prices that took place after late 2012 was not mirrored in any uniform way in the ten countries, although there were some declines. Figure 8 shows trends in average annual prices (indexed, 2007=100) of

major cereals in eight of the ten countries, using the average 2007 (pre-crisis) price as a base. If volatility had to some extent decreased, domestic prices tended to settle at a new 'equilibrium', which in most countries was considerably higher than the prices that prevailed before the 2008 crisis. In terms of the impact on low-income households, absolute increases in prices were probably of more significance than increases in price volatility.

A range of factors influenced trends in prices of basic staples over this period. International price shocks were clearly transmitted to domestic prices in 2008 and, to some degree, in 2011; but in many countries, domestic and regional production conditions, and domestic food price and related policies (e.g. exchange rates) appear to have been at least as important as international prices in determining the prices that poor consumers actually faced (Dawe *et al.* 2015 draw similar conclusions). Many of the ten countries also faced frequent production shocks, probably linked to climate change, which resulted in prices increasing even when international prices were falling. By 2015/16, the food price crisis for many of the poor had not gone away.

Market power may also have resulted in 'price transmission asymmetries' (Meyer and von Cramon-Taubadel 2004) where domestic prices rose due to some exogenous factor (e.g. an increase in world prices) but did not adjust downwards to the same extent when the

Figure 7 Cereal import dependency ratios in the ten countries



Source: Authors' own, based on FAO Food Security Indicator data.

exogenous factor was no longer having an impact. The examples cited earlier of private ‘hoarding’ behaviour by traders in Zambia and ‘tacit agreements’ between wheat processors in Bolivia provide some evidence of these asymmetries.

There were variations in the effectiveness of policies used to try to ensure access to food and in the extent to which different governments systematically resorted to such policies. As noted by Timmer (2010), price shocks are to some extent short-term events that require short-term measures, and domestic price stabilisation may be a legitimate instrument for governments, whereas safety net approaches may be costly and not necessarily efficient. Most of the ten countries introduced price stabilisation policies during the 2008 crisis, including food subsidies, release of stocks from food security reserves, and direct price controls. Countries such as Ethiopia and Burkina Faso instituted community-level ‘fair price shops’ to distribute subsidised food to poor urban households (Woldehanna and Tafere 2015; Kibora 2015).

Most of the ten countries relied on, or introduced, a variety of safety net measures, but these ranged in scale and scope from the comprehensive ‘Raskin’ programme in Indonesia to more piecemeal interventions in Kenya and Guatemala. Countries such as Bolivia and Vietnam, with a stronger commitment to more interventionist policies, could not prevent domestic food prices from rising during the 2008 crisis, but were relatively more successful

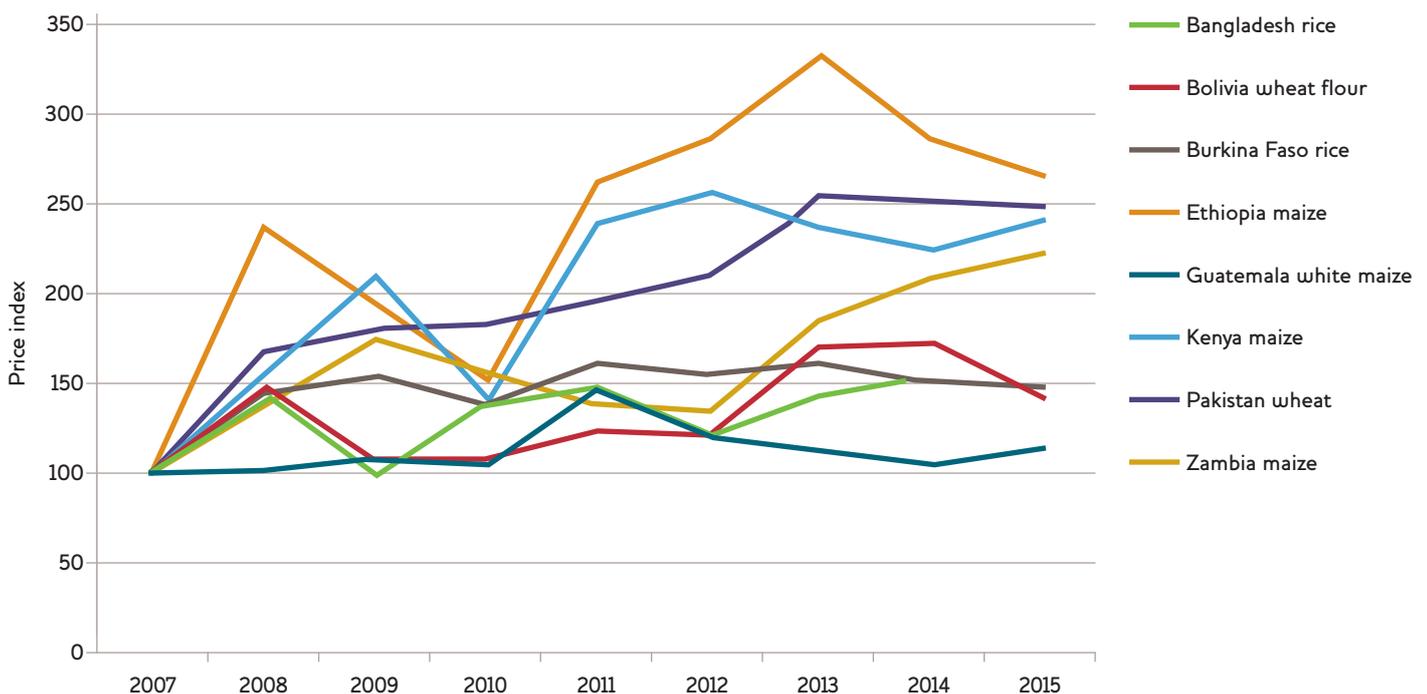


at limiting subsequent price rises. Kenya and Guatemala used fewer policy levers and, with limited safety net systems in place, saw more substantial price increases over the time period.

Whatever the mix of policies and their effectiveness, the fact that food prices in most of the countries continued to rise after global prices fell suggests that longer-term forces were also present and contributed to possibly irreversible changes in the living conditions of poor households. In broad terms, as discussed elsewhere in this report, there was a trend towards increased commodification of the relations governing food consumption – i.e. increased reliance on market purchases of food,

▲ In Kabwata, one way to adjust to food price rises was to shift to lower-quality mealie meal.

Figure 8 Average annual cereal prices (2007=100)



Note: FAO GIEWS price tool was not available for Vietnam or Indonesia prior to 2008. Source: Authors’ own, based on www.fao.org/giews.

increased consumption of processed rather than home-cooked foods, and a growth in food supply chains that resulted in increased margins between producer prices and retail prices. This process occurred at an uneven pace, with varying impacts on people's wellbeing.

One of the factors determining the extent and speed of this process was the growth of employment and wages. Many Asian countries experienced rapid economic growth, particularly in the non-farm sector, often contributing to tightening of labour markets and an increase in wages. In Bangladesh, for example (see Box 1), increased non-farm economic growth appears to have contributed to labour shortages in agriculture and therefore to increased

agricultural labour wages, as well as higher wages in non-farm sectors. Such wage increases enabled some households to cope with higher food prices; however, wage increases may have also *contributed* to higher food prices, both by adding to costs of production and through increased demand. Similar mechanisms were likely to have been at play in other Asian countries, with the exception of Pakistan, where rural wages declined (Wiggins and Keats 2014). The country also had a particularly poor record in terms of gender inequality in wage rates and earnings.

There is less evidence of such a rapid increase in employment and wages in the sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries in this

Box 1 Agricultural change in coastal Bangladesh

One example of increasing rural wages and diversification is Bangladesh. Koyra is a rice-producing village in Khulna province, whose farmers gradually extended the agrarian frontier into the Sundarban mangroves during the twentieth century. In 2009, Cyclone Aila flooded the paddy fields with salt water. Farmers, unable to plant their salinated land, shifted into a range of other activities: shrimp cultivation, jungle-fishing, migrating to urban areas to pull rickshaws or work in factories or to other rural areas for seasonal agricultural labour. Men took to illegal fishing in the forest, braving tigers and pirates to do so. Women started to work outside the home in larger numbers, which was relatively new in this culturally conservative region.

Rice production declined dramatically, pushing the price up and it stayed high. Local people felt that the world had never noticed them before, but the cyclone drew public attention to the region. Non-government organisations (NGOs) came in with recovery programmes, bringing cash and temporary employment.

The year after the cyclone recovery programmes finished (2013) was tough, rice prices remained high and people struggled to eat well. A 30-year-old housewife told us that:

If our local rice production were possible then every household could at least manage their basic food. If not, then we have to buy from other areas. That is why the price is increasing day by day. Another reason is transportation and labour cost. For this, Mohajans (wholesalers) claim high prices.

By 2014, rice yields had recovered; the good rains had largely washed the salt away, and more people cultivated rice again. But the agrarian economy had changed. With many of the villagers now involved in market-based activities, people in Koyra explained how they had shifted from basic rice-sufficiency to major dependence on imports. Some of the lands under shrimp cultivation would never be returned to paddy because of soil depletion or pollution.

The 'blue revolution' played a substantial role in this coastal

area, connecting people to global export markets for frozen fish (Ahmed, Allison and Muir 2010; Deb 1998). New credit channels opened with the entry of NGOs. Many of those who had migrated leased their land out to landless farmers with access to credit, and spent their own time earning wages elsewhere. Agricultural wage labourers worked increasingly on a group contract basis, with improved productivity and earnings, albeit only for the harvest season. Improved communications, both roads and mobile telephones, helped people to get about.

These changes in Khulna were reflected in the wider rural economy, and were credited with contributing to relatively robust poverty reduction in recent years (Sen and Ali 2015). But, by 2014, the cost of rice – and the cost of living – was significantly higher than it was before 2008. For the residents of Koyra, the diversity of options for making a livelihood expanded, reducing the degree of their dependence on rice cropping, but without reducing the precariousness of their sources of income.

study, so wage increases of a type that would fully offset exogenous increases in food prices were less likely. The effects of higher food prices were often more adverse. Nonetheless, commoditisation of food consumption was also taking place in tandem with urbanisation in these regions.

How did global and national price and wage movements shape what was happening to prices at the local level? Just as global conditions transmitted variously to the national context, so too, did local price and wage conditions vary. This depended on numerous factors: the degree of integration into international and national food and labour markets; patterns of economic diversification, growth and change; changing food habits and sources; climatic conditions (including the extent of recovery from events such as drought in Ethiopia, Kenya and Burkina Faso, floods in Pakistan, and a cyclone in Bangladesh); and policy developments that shaped local prices, production and labour market participation.

However, it was only really in Vietnam that there was a sustained and significant decline in the national price of staples in the three years from 2012, reflected in the prices people were paying locally. Elsewhere, and for most staples, prices were either stable at the higher level or displayed mixed trends, with people adjusting between staple sources. People also noted that higher-value food items such as meat, fish and tofu (in many contexts), vegetables and fruit, and fresh spices, oil and sugar also fluctuated but were generally more costly depending on what was happening regionally or with fuel prices.

The prices that people considered important also varied depending on what they were buying at the time. Some people reported that they made choices about the staples in their shopping basket depending on what was available and affordable. For instance, in Burkina Faso, people talked about the prices of rice and maize as important factors, explaining that they grew more millet or sorghum than they bought (although those were their traditional staples). In western Oromia in Ethiopia, people ate maize more than *teff* (a fine grain), whereas in Kolfe sub-city in Addis Ababa, people said they were preparing their own *teff injera* (flatbread) but in general using *teff* less, and buying more wheat flour (sold at lower cost by the Consumers' Association) to mix in to make the *injera* go further. The prices people were paying also depended on where they bought food; even in the same research site, people who could travel to markets could get better prices than those who were less mobile. Where there was a range

of varieties available it was possible to switch, and make savings from relative price changes.

To understand how people experienced the price changes, it is useful to know how they understood the reasons behind the changes. Commenting on the fact that staple prices had been relatively stable in the 2012–15 period, farmers and food vendors in rural Burkina Faso credited government actions to stabilise prices through building grain reserves and subsidising food grains. In Ethiopia, 'model farmers' explained price rises as due to growing population and drought. In rural Chikwanda, in Zambia's Northern Province, people blamed higher maize prices on fertiliser subsidy cuts. Although people mentioned exports causing domestic shortages as being among the causes of higher prices, there was generally a stronger tendency to believe that domestic factors (mainly population growth and local harvests) and public policy were the main drivers, while speculative activity was frequently understood as the source of spikes. The global market was understood to be a factor, as was climate change in some areas, particularly Bolivia and Guatemala, where public discourse appeared to be more focused on these issues. But people may have overestimated the power of their governments to act to protect them against external price shocks specifically, and not have appreciated how membership of the global system itself produced inflationary pressures (Hossain *et al.* 2014). People's views about the causes of price rises influence how the 'moral economy' (or popular beliefs about the responsibilities of public authorities to protect against subsistence crises) was articulated, and therefore the politics of mass food security, as we discuss in more detail in the next section (see also Hossain and Kalita 2014).

People who could travel to markets could get better prices.

▼ Buying pork in Nghe An, Vietnam.



KENYA

Making a precarious living in Nairobi



Cooking ingredients were bought every day in small quantities, for want of ready cash and a place to store



The nation's maize meal, Kenya

Mrs M was 28 when we first started the research, and had lived in Mukuru (which means 'dumping site' in Kiswahili) for more than 20 years. Mukuru is the second biggest informal settlement in Nairobi, home to between 500,000 and 700,000 people. Most people living there had jobs in the nearby industrial area, as security guards or domestic workers, while others were artisans, blacksmiths or mechanics. Some local residents were landlords, and petty trading was widespread. Mukuru was divided into smaller areas, known as villages, and Mrs M lived in Kisii village close to the river. Water and sanitation conditions in Kisii were inadequate, and the infamous 'flying toilets' (plastic bags full of urine and faeces) were a health hazard. She lived with her husband and their daughter, born in 2007. They also looked after their siblings and a nephew, making a total of seven teenagers and young adults dependent on the couple.

In the first year of this study, Mrs M recalled a time when food was cheap and affordable, and the economy was stable. In 2002, the cost of living began to rise noticeably in Kenya, when the new regime embraced the free market and Kenya's economy started to grow. The price of maize, the staple food, depended mainly on the local harvest, although to meet a growing shortfall the country also relied on imports from Tanzania, Uganda and beyond. While acknowledging that local prices responded to changes in world prices, Mrs M believed that prices were mainly affected by government policies that protected larger producers and retailers by maintaining high prices. Mrs M was among those who saw the 2013 VAT Act as one of the reasons why food prices were high.

After the second spike in the price of maize meal and other essentials in late 2011, Mrs M's husband – an artist who had previously led a youth group making crafts for the tourist trade – turned to scavenging for plastics and metals to sell to recycling plants. The couple would wake very early and, leaving their daughter asleep in the house, go and collect plastics together. Then Mrs M would walk over to the rock where the housewives from the estates came to pick domestic helpers for daily house chores. In particularly tough times, Mrs M would also spend some afternoons working in a hair salon for small commissions. During the time of our research, she managed to finish secondary school, and got a job as a community health worker and mobiliser, working for different organisations. She did short-term jobs, including distributing condoms

for a sex workers outreach programme, distributing food to orphaned children and HIV-positive people, and volunteering to assess referral cases for the Red Cross. From time to time, she was also paid to attend political demonstrations or take part in research. Her average daily income from health work was 200 Kenyan Shillings (KSh) (US\$1.99).

In 2013, Mrs M's husband benefited from the government's *Kazi kwa Vijana* programme. In Mukuru, unemployed young people were paid KSh250 per day to clean up pathways and cut grass along the road. While the programme only offered employment for three months per person, many, including Mrs M's husband, managed to be employed throughout the year by assuming different identities and borrowing identity cards from friends. Mrs M explained that the wage was too low for him to be able to support his mother back at home.

Summing up her way of making a living, Mrs M drew a parallel between people taking on several jobs (what she called 'multi-tasking') and one of the local churches, which rented its building during weekdays – effectively becoming a video rental shop during the week and a place of worship at weekends. Through 2013 and 2014 her wage remained the same, at KSh200 per day, but food and other prices continued to rise. Food spending of around KSh350 per day could buy maize porridge with some kale, tomato and onion, as well as bread and tea with some milk and sugar. In 2011, they had been able to afford more variety,

including rice, spaghetti and chapatti, a quarter kilo of meat or some dried fish. By 2014, *githeri* (a maize bean mix) or *ugali* (maize porridge) were the only cheap and readily available options. As a health worker, Mrs M knows their diet is inadequate, but there is nothing more she can do.



As an informal settlement, residents of Mukuru have no rights to decent sanitation

INDONESIA

Rubber tapping in Kalimantan

REAL LIVES

When we met 34-year-old Mr HK, a married man with two children, in Banjar in South Kalimantan, Indonesia, in 2012, he had been working for a year as a rubber tapper in a government-owned plantation. Most people in Banjar had some connection to rubber: Indonesia is the world's second largest natural rubber exporter. Banjar is one of the country's major rubber-producing areas, and most of the population here relied on it, as owners, landless tappers, sap transporters or middlemen. Mining and quarrying were gaining importance, with a new road set to open to provide access to the mine. Mr HK had himself worked as a guard for a coalmine corporation before he became a rubber tapper, until that job ended when the company closed due to new government regulations.

After peaking in 2007, the price of natural rubber dropped to a low of US\$1.2/kg during the financial crisis. Demand shot up again, reaching new heights with upwards of US\$5.75/kg at the start of 2011, but bad weather conditions and the Japanese earthquake of March 2011 lowered demand from the Japanese car industry for the year. Mr HK said that at the rubber price peak, his monthly earnings were 2.5–3 million Indonesian Rupiahs (IDR) (US\$187–225). In 2011, during the rainy season, his earnings fell to IDR2.25 million per month. In 2012, when the dry season was longer than usual and the price of rubber plummeted again, Mr HK's wife, AK, started working on the plantation with him, for up to four hours every day, in addition to looking after the home and their two children. Together, they



The price of rubber fell consistently in Banjar



Banjar is a major rubber-producing area

only earned IDR1.05 million per month – half what Mr HK had earned in the previous year. Mr HK said: 'For the standard price of rubber nowadays, we cannot do anything. We can only hope.' He started to rear ducks.

Speaking to Mr HK in 2013, it seemed their situation was worse. While the previous year he and his wife could earn IDR150,000 for two days incising rubber, now in two days they only received IDR80,000, amounting to just IDR1.2 million per month. The decline in production, another long dry season, and 'mischief tricks' by rubber middlemen were all to blame. He said rubber prices were going up and down while prices for essentials in the local market only went up. AK now worked the same number of hours as her husband. They sold some of the ducks for quick money: the enterprise had become less lucrative, the price of duck feed doubling within a year.

In 2014, the price of rubber continued to fall, apparently because of a decrease in the quality of the rubber. Several local coal industry firms shut down. AK stopped working at the plantation, and took responsibility for the duck rearing. Mr HK sold one of his two motorcycles for IDR1.5 million. Local men were responding to the decline in the rubber price by leaving for Central Kalimantan, for farm work, carpentry or gold digging. Many in Banjar pointed to the increased irregularity of the weather, which was affecting the quality and quantity of production. In 2014, Mr HK considered himself to have finished with rubber tapping.

The mining company built a new road, Banjar





3 Adjusting to higher food prices

▲ Selling *enjera*, the traditional staple in highland Ethiopia, in Kolfe.

One of the advantages of the longitudinal approach is the ability to observe how people adjusted to new economic conditions over time and how individual histories interacted with local, national and global economic conditions. Over the three years (and, in some cases, six years) that we researched these communities, people faced periods of crisis as subsistence costs first rose quickly and excessively, then subsided, and then shot up again. The sense of crisis began to recede in 2012, even though individuals and families continued to face periods of hardship. This does not mean that people were no longer squeezed, but that they were adjusting to the situation.

The process of adjustment broadly featured a growing dependence on wage and cash incomes, along with rising wages, and a change in the way of life for many people. Few people felt that the

new wages were keeping pace with the rising cost of living. This was difficult to judge in any objective way, because people had changed how they worked and ate to accommodate what they experienced as a shortfall or pressure on household budgets. There was no widespread sense that even people whose wages had risen were materially better off. Simple measures of income and consumption did not capture the reported decline in wellbeing that accompanied the struggle to earn enough to eat well and care for families. The adjustments to higher prices involved two main mechanisms across the 23 different urban and rural sites: finding ways to earn more cash, and squeezing what they ate and how they cared for the household. The following sections will explore the process of adjustment, giving examples from different sites.

Earning more

Earning a wage

Agrarian communities saw rapid and significant economic diversification and growth as they adjusted to higher prices. By contrast, city folk appeared to be pursuing much the same livelihoods they were doing before the food crisis, but now they had to simply do more of them. There was also considerable fluidity in the relations between urban migrants and rural homes. In several cases, urban migrants received food from their rural families to tide them over tough patches or returned to the country for periods of agricultural work.

In many rural and urban areas, wage rates (nominal incomes) responded to higher prices and had risen by the end of our period of study (2014/15). However, the rise in wage rates was less positive than it appeared, since people did not always find work every day. Many reported that their work had become more intermittent and less predictable. A common refrain was variations on 'we work [only] to eat'. Most working people at the lower end of the income scale felt that even when their wages had risen, they barely covered subsistence costs, and wage rises did not allow workers to keep pace with rises in the cost of living. In many households, there was a constant search for new income opportunities. If people earned more, many did so with much less security and considerably more effort than in the past. Incomes for the urban poor from informal sector self-employment (on which the majority subsisted) were also even more precarious than in the past.

Wages adjusted with something of a lag, if at all, and often with a struggle (Wiggins and Keats 2014). An adjustment was only possible if workers took on multiple jobs in different locations and sectors; few people were able to manage on only one income source. So while rates of pay increased, the mode of work also changed. Conditions for workers joining industries linked into global value chains were characterised by increased efforts to extract more from workers' time and labour, increasing speed and improving quality (Phillips 2011, 2016). Export sector workers in the manufacturing zone in Bekasi, near Jakarta in Indonesia, reported that the trends had been towards more 'flexible' contracts and output-based payment systems, and that while overall pressure to raise output was high, job security had declined. In Dhaka, in Bangladesh, garments export workers earned a higher minimum wage but said they were under more pressure to raise output and meet rising orders, including through more disciplined production processes and more overtime. Many knitwear factories employed

workers seasonally. The work was better paid, but more effort went into getting and keeping the available jobs.

Over the study period and in all sites, seasonal and temporary migration increased. Ethiopian women migrated to the Gulf to find work in growing numbers. Vietnamese men migrated to Laos for seasonal work. Guatemalans said more people were migrating north, including many who had gone to Canada for (legal) strawberry picking, and returned with useful earnings. By contrast, many of those who had gone illegally to the United States either never returned or returned without earnings. Some died on the dangerous journey north. As the tourist industry recovered in Malindi, on the Kenyan coast, people from the coastal hinterlands moved to the town and looked for work in the restaurants and hotels; some young women were said to be making a living doing sex work.

Few people were able to manage on only one income source.

The changing business of small-scale farming

In most of the rural sites in the study, agricultural wage labour rates rose. This was particularly marked in places where new technology was introduced and where there was high seasonal demand during harvests. Nevertheless, this did not mean wider appreciation of agriculture as a livelihood option: for young people in particular, the volatilities in producer prices over the past decade confirmed that smallholder farming was not only inherently difficult and costly in terms of the inputs needed to earn a profit, but also highly



◀ Dinner for two: rice, pork and vegetables in Hanoi.



▲ Government-backed irrigation schemes are helping transform farming in Oromia.

unreliable when it came to income, and badly timed when it came to provisioning (Leavy and Hossain 2014).

Landowners and larger-scale farmers complained of not being able to get labourers, and about having to bid up wages and offer meals to secure workers at the crucial time. In Bangladesh, a new form of wage labour emerged with (higher) fixed rate contracts involving groups of labourers. This new approach raised productivity, as workers did an exhausting season of harvesting before returning to other work, such as transporting or factory work, once the season was over. New farm technology was noted: in Dadu in Sindh province, in Pakistan; in north-eastern Naogaon and Khulna in southern Bangladesh; and in Cianjur in the rice-producing heart of Java in Indonesia (where harvesting was done using more machinery than in the recent past); in western Oromia, in Ethiopia; and in coastal Kenya, where irrigation was the important new factor.

However, this also meant that opportunities for agricultural labour were often for shorter time periods, and had to be supplemented with other work. Men (and, in the South Asian settings, a

growing number of women) were supplementing harvest labour with own-account farming, whether on leased or share-cropped land, and in particular with a complex and highly flexible pattern of seasonal and temporary migrations. In western Oromia, migrant workers' wages and food demands were helping grow the new local restaurant trade, while labourers in Khulna, Bangladesh, were also spending their cash in cooked-food outlets in Koyra market.

Wages had not risen everywhere and for all sectors though: in rural Chikwanda, Zambia, maize producers had had more bad years, and so

casual work was in much demand. Some local farmers were said to have taken advantage of labourers' plight, pushing wages down. But the more typical picture was one of robust growth in wage rates of as much as 50 per cent year-on-year, for particular sectors and seasons.

Agricultural production for the market and on- and off-farm food processing activities saw higher incomes and new opportunities. In three sites – drought-prone Lango Baya in Coastal Province in Kenya, western Oromia in Ethiopia, and Chikwanda in Zambia's Northern Province – irrigated vegetable production for expanding local towns offered opportunities for farmers who could find the capital to get started. But there were bad years as well as good, including floods and bumper crops that felled prices. In Zambia, the poultry business expanded particularly fast in 2013 and 2014, and people who had always been maize farmers said they would move into poultry production if they could get the capital to do so.

In the Cochabamba Valley in Bolivia, a farmer and head of the local dairy coop noted that apart from milk for sale, no other agriculture was worth the effort. One vegetable-packing plant embodied this rapid turnover in workers: in 2012, the young women workers we interviewed were mostly from indigenous communities; they had moved and taken up jobs because agriculture in their home communities no longer earned them a living. One teenager had come to stay with her aunts, saying that back in her home village they 'only produce potatoes', whereas her aim was to raise pigs. The next year, a new cohort of workers had come, all local girls in between school and other jobs, working as a stopgap until something better presented itself. They were mainly 'working to eat', they said. By the third year, another new cohort of young women had arrived. This time, the interview had to take place off premises, as the new manager was putting pressure on workers to be more productive and manage their time better. But he was also, they noted, raising wages (reported as static over 2012–14) and giving them contracts.

Precarious self-employment
More people took up more kinds of entrepreneurial work in the aftermath of the food price spikes. Women did more trading in vegetables and other agricultural produce in Burkina Faso, Kenya and Zambia. In rural Chugüexá Primero in the highlands in Guatemala, women started to raise poultry and other small livestock, to supplement their incomes as market traders and tailors. Some husbands there denied this was happening, feeling that their status as breadwinners was under threat. In Cianjur and in

Bekasi, both in Indonesia, women supplemented family incomes with small businesses selling cooked food. But demand and input prices were too unreliable for these to last long. People's accounts of their efforts to turn informal sector enterprises into lucrative businesses told a common story of a pioneer start-up that did well, only to be copied by others, whereupon profits dipped. Some informal enterprises with low or no set-up costs saw large numbers of entrants. Charcoal burning was one example in Kenya and Zambia, but the authorities had closed them down. In Burkina Faso, after the international price of gold rose rapidly between 2007 and 2012 and food prices also went up, gold mining became an important alternative to subsistence farming for adventurous young men (see Box 2).

Credit, connections and mobility

The world people described was a closely connected and mobile place. In many countries – notably Indonesia, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Guatemala – international labour migration had long been a routine part of the calculus about job prospects, into which assumptions about grave danger and exploitation were built. At home, too, the world became more connected and mobile; in rural areas that were until recently quite remote, motorcycle transport grew fast, and mobile telephones were an important household asset (as well as a consumer item).

However, if the world sounded freer and more interesting, it was also a place of greater debt. Most people borrowed, lent and pooled risk in

Box 2 The gold rush in Burkina Faso

In an economy dominated by subsistence farming, Burkina Faso's 'gold rush' brought with it something of a moral panic about the fate of young people drawn to it.

Gold mining started in Burkina Faso in 1980 and grew slowly at first: in 2006, 200,000 people were reportedly working in 200 non-industrial mines, but by 2011, this figure had risen to 700,000 (Werthmann 2009). By 2013, gold comprised 71 per cent of exports and 16 per cent of fiscal revenues. It was also evident that far more gold was mined outside the formal economy (Redifer *et al.* 2014; Africa Research Bulletin 2011, 2015).

The international price of gold rose rapidly between 2007 and 2012, at the same time as world food prices went up and the cost of many staples rose in Burkina Faso, where drought had also squeezed subsistence food production. Gold mining became an important alternative to subsistence farming for adventurous young men. The sector was lucrative, dangerous and precarious: mercury-poisoning was a key hazard (Tomcic *et al.* 2011) and incomes fluctuated with the international price of gold.

In Nessesmentenga, the agricultural community in the north-central Sanmatenga province, 40-year-old widow Mme Z described the social changes wrought by gold: 'The young think they can succeed in the gold mining... The reason is that young people are awake now, they have acquired more knowledge and they are hungry for the money more than their parents.'

Previous food crises had encouraged some households to send sons to the mines (Roncoli, Ingram and Kirshen 2001). The rapid growth in their participation in artisanal mining reflected successive waves of subsistence shocks through the 2000s and the underlying pressures on the agro-food system. Many families said they were relying on remittances from sons in the mines during the recent hard times. Werthmann (2009) found that women were mostly involved in providing 'gendered' services such as cooking and sex, to miners. Women who went to the mines were suspected of transactional sex, among other things. More recently, whereas gold-panning work had been considered the domain of men, women were

also increasingly taking it up (see also Doka, Madougou and Diouf 2014; Werthmann 2009). Young married women in Nessesmentenga in 2012 reported that they would go to work in the mines, not as a first line of coping, but if small trade and expenditure-conserving strategies like gathering wild foods were not enough.

The gold rush brought with it a sense of a wider cultural shift. Mr ST, a 61-year-old tax collector from the town of Kaya, thought people flocked to the mines because of the easy money. Men were leaving in search of work because food shortages made it harder to feed families – in some instances only to be followed by the women. People spoke about farming as difficult and unreliable, whereas gold ensured not only cash incomes, but the excitement and novel consumer pleasures of the mines. The lure of the precious metal was associated with a growing 'addiction' to money and spending among younger people (Werthmann 2008). But the censure of people who chose cash incomes over traditional food farming noted by Luning (2008) in Sanmatenga early in the 2000s had become muted by 2012–14.



A Cooking oil repackaged into small quantities in old bottles, Kaya.

recognisably similar ways and for similar reasons – because that is what one does when faced by a sudden and sustained rise in the cost of living. People got into debt during the adjustments they made after the food crisis. First, credit was fairly essential to any investments that were likely to pay off, whether cash crop production or paying migration brokers. Credit could be from governments, NGOs, the agro-food industry, market intermediaries, unions and local groups; people were quick to note when one channel of credit was drying up, and when others had opened up. Second, people also depended a great deal on credit to help ‘smooth’ consumption.

Many low-income borrowers found they were stuck in webs of debt.

This took a wide range of forms, from shop credit to local credit and savings groups, moneylender or microfinance loans. Customary risk-pooling groups sometimes paid out for funeral or medical costs, and others provided a food basket or small cash payments out of members’ regular dues. Consumption-smoothing credit essentially bought people time to ride out or adjust to shocks. Third, some groups got caught in webs of debt tying them into further loans, as well as the search for regular cash incomes to service them, which often involved dead-end, dangerous or back-breaking work. Poor harvests, broken technology and failed migrations all led to crises of loan repayment. Rising consumer prices were to some extent absorbed by easier credit, but it was clearly no long-term solution. From the way people spoke

about it, debt often brought with it a heavy sense of bondage.

For similar reasons that banks failed in Europe and North America, microfinance institutions (MFIs) that had been tapping into international finance markets were particularly vulnerable to the financial crisis (Constantinou and Ashta 2011; Daher and Le Saout 2015; Wagner 2012; Di Bella 2011; Wagner and Winkler 2013). But problems with bad micro-loans were exacerbated by the 2008 food price crisis, reflecting borrowers’ position at the base of the pyramid. Many low-income borrowers found they were stuck in webs of debt even as their need for consumption loans became more urgent. There has been little analysis of the effects of the food crisis on microfinance, but a survey of 45 major MFIs in 2008 found that for more than half, the food spikes were increasing the proportion of portfolio-at-risk and adversely affecting loan portfolio, while one-third reported that default rates were up (Duflos and Gähwiler 2008). One lesson from the recent microfinance crisis has been the need for better inflation prediction, as high inflation changes assumptions about the future, and has the potential to affect repayment rates (Daher and Le Saout 2015; Gonzalez 2011; Lyman *et al.* 2011).

Credit featured a great deal in both Ethiopian communities involved in this study. In Kolfe sub-city in Addis Ababa, state credit for agricultural inputs dried up, which some people viewed as partly responsible for rising food costs as it drove up farmers’ costs, and made it difficult for them to

sell crops at favourable prices. But there were other new sources of credit in the area. Mr E, a 37-year-old farmer and head of a credit and savings association set up in 2011 with the help of a local NGO, was optimistic, but reported mixed success for local farmers. Some had done very well, particularly by leasing land to cultivate. Others had been unable to maintain the working capital for the irrigation pumps they had borrowed money for in order to purchase; others had been forced to sell livestock. Climate change and drought, Mr E explained, made farming more unreliable. He also noted that when food prices were high and farmers could produce more, they did well; but when prices were high and they could not respond, they suffered disproportionately.

Technology, transport and telecommunications influenced how people changed the work they did. People had more invested in making a living – servicing debts and living on new income streams. They depended on getting around and being in contact at higher velocity. People needed to travel for work, and to get there as cheaply and quickly as possible, to save time for other work. In Dadu, in rural Sindh province, Pakistan, young men complained that the cost of travelling to seek work was sometimes prohibitive.

Transport became a growing employer in its own right in rural areas – the growing number of *boda boda* or motorcycle taxis in rural Kenya and Ethiopia was widely commented on. In Indonesia, the motorcycle taxi or *ojek* was an acknowledged additional occupation for young men with limited skills; it was cheap and speedy, and often financed with easy credit. In one of our research visits to

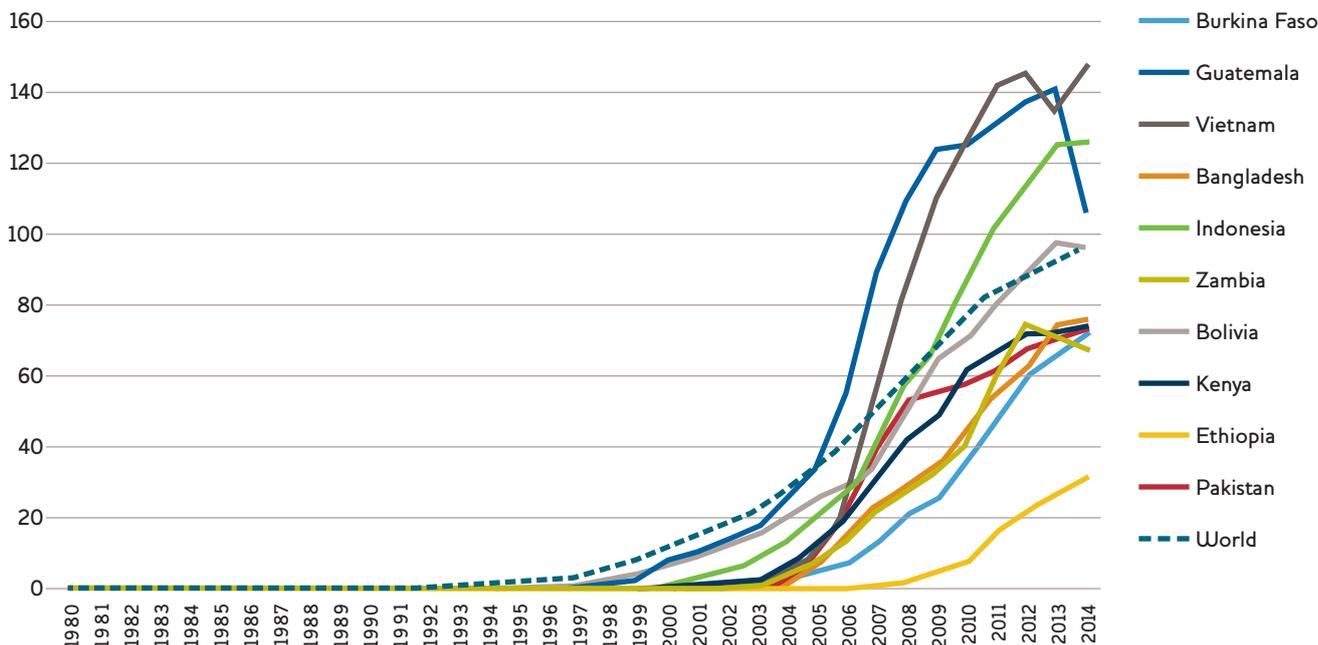


a single mother in the depressed rubber area of Banjar, in Kalimantan, our respondent mounted her bike in a bid to leave before she recognised the research team. She was behind on her repayments for the motorcycle, she explained, but she also needed the bike for work (partly to pay the instalments). The growing importance of mobility for basic subsistence may help to explain why fuel subsidies were so politically sensitive, and why fuel riots were also common – fuel had become an essential element in people’s subsistence strategies.

New communications technology had also become essential. Younger people frequently mentioned needing mobile phones to hear about work, and households that reported not having a mobile phone often said it was because they had sold their phone, or could not afford one. Cellular subscriptions have risen particularly fast in the past decade in the ten countries (see Figure 9).

▲ Mobile phones were essential for young people in search of work, Lango Baya.

Figure 9 Cellular subscriptions (per 100 of the population) 1980–2015



Source: Adapted from World Development Indicators (accessed 26 March 2016).



▲ Tempting processed and packaged food and other household items, Cochabamba.

The mobile phone, cell phone or hand phone made it possible to receive and share information about work. In Vietnam, agricultural labourers were advised of work over the phone, and farmers used it to check on market prices. In Nairobi, casual work offers were passed over the phone, and in Addis Ababa, people spoke of their phones as vital. In 2012, in Gulshan-e-Iqbal town in Karachi, 50-year-old professional AY explained how important the phone had become, in particular for the emerging lower middle class:

There used to be a time when there used to be only 2–3 landline connections in my neighbourhood... I installed a separate phone connection for only the people in my neighbourhood over which, too, there was a queue of people waiting. This was some around 8–9 years ago. Only 4–6 households out of 500 had phone connections. Now everyone has a mobile phone.

Squeezing more

Changing food cultures

During the study, talk of novel, strange and foreign foods, visible signs that packaged and processed foods were providing newly viable alternatives to customary items, and growing fears about the health and nutrition effects of ‘bad’ and convenience foods prompted us to ask people how their food cultures were changing, why, and to what effect.

People spoke of ‘traditional’ foods in decline.

The changes people identified were consistent with a rapid global nutrition transition away from cereal and plant-based foods towards fattier, more sugary, and in general more ‘Western’-style diets, in line with the ‘stuffed and starved’ phenomenon associated with food globalisation and industrialisation (Patel 2007). We view these profound changes as ‘transformation mechanisms’, through which individual

consumption behaviours interacted with new modes of food production, supply and marketing to create food cultures with new norms and ideals. These emerging food cultures were significantly influenced not only by price but also by the changes in work practices through which people attempted to maintain their levels and standards of food.

We found that the role of food as essential nourishment competed with the functions played by its newer, marketed forms in offering choice and sensation, saving time, effort and cost, and creating status and identity. It seems counter-intuitive that people should have been buying more of their food just at the time when prices had risen, but this reflected the longer and more complex production and consumption changes set in train by marketisation policy, and to which food price rises contributed. People approached the problem of what to eat increasingly from the point of view of consumers seeking value, and that value had many new dimensions. Even among people who sometimes faced the prospect of hunger, considerations of convenience, novelty, taste, safety, nutritional value, status and identity influenced what they ate. But this does not mean people played a powerful role in food markets by acting as agents that chose on the basis of free will; markets, large corporations and governments powerfully constrained choices via supply, relative prices, aggressive marketing, and food system tariffs and regulations.

In all countries and most sites in this study, people spoke of ‘traditional’ foods in decline, due to changes in availability, cost and preparation time. Of staple consumption, there was a move from relative diversity in grains (sorghum, millet, *teff*, quinoa) towards the major monoculture crops of maize, rice or wheat. Regional diversities in staple foods were also said to be declining. In Bolivia, children preferred wheat bread to *phiry* (a dish made with toasted flour). In Burkina Faso, people ate less *bikalgo*, a fermented condiment made from hibiscus seed. In Guatemala, people preferred *hilachas*, *revolcado* (traditional tomato/tomatillo-based beef stew dishes) and beef and calves’ broth, but instead bought cheaper and more widely available *tacos*, *gringas* and burgers. In Ethiopia, young people in Addis Ababa said people were replacing *injera* (fermented bread made from *teff* flour) with *dabo*, or wheat flour bread. By contrast, others from the south of the country were replacing their traditional foods such as *chuko*, barley preserved with butter, and *torosho*, leavened corn bread, with *injera*, traditionally the food of the Amhara people and Addis Ababa.

Changes in the reliance on *injera* might reflect the extreme volatilities in the price of *teff*. Similarly, we heard in the early years of this research that

Bolivian youth were rejecting *quinoa* in favour of processed imports, while adult women worried that it was less available than in the past. It may be significant that *teff* had been touted as ‘the next superfood’, after quinoa, as another protein- and nutrient-rich grain that could satisfy the demanding palates and plates of affluent, diet-conscious Westerners (Provost and Jobson 2014). In cities with more developed food markets and consumer tastes, a second stage of change was a growing preference for more highly processed and packaged staples. For instance, in Bangladeshi and Indonesian communities, children were rejecting rice in favour of noodles or fried foods.

Women from farming households in rural western Oromia in Ethiopia noted that *chechebsa* (a flatbread fried in clarified butter and the spice mix *berbere*), porridge and yogurt had been replaced with *shiro wat* (a pea stew, increasingly made with pre-packaged ingredients), biscuits and packed juices. Dairy, particularly butter, was being replaced in traditional dishes with processed vegetable oil of dubious quality. Older people connected changing food habits with changes in their local economy and society. In Bolivia, a retired miner in his seventies described how his family’s diet had changed according to what was available in the local market and their work patterns: traditional boiled maize (*mote*) and *api* (a maize-based drink) were being replaced with chocolate and coffee, while quinoa had all but disappeared, becoming ‘very expensive’ in the past two years.

Despite nostalgia about ‘the way we used to eat’, cuisines have seldom been fixed in time or place. Strong drivers of change in food cultures have long marked economic development and global market integration (for example, see Goody 1997; Mwangi *et al.* 2001; Raschke and Cheema 2008; McCann 2001). Imperial and colonial rulers changed food systems (see, for instance, Fraser and Rimas 2010), as did major conflicts (Collingham 2012) and food crises. Wheat was introduced into the staunchly rice-eating regions of Bengal as famine relief (Robson 1976), and institutionalised through US food aid (Ahmed, Haggblade and Chowdhury 2000; Atwood *et al.* 2000). Some attempts to change food cultures and create new markets have been deliberately introduced after food crises, as with genetically modified grains to drought-stricken southern Africa during the 2002 food crisis (Zerbe 2004; see also Clapp 2012). But as food historian Rachel Laudan (2001: 38) points out, local foods were historically ‘the lot of the poor’, while the rich ate a more varied and palatable diet drawing on foods from elsewhere.

Given local preferences and a biologically founded suspicion of foreign fare, it is interesting how easily new influences and products appear to have been

absorbed. The influence of the post-war wave of global food system integration showed in the varieties of staples (maize, wheat, rice). But earlier waves of internationalisation were also apparent – for instance, in the popularity of *samosa* (pastry with savoury fillings, probably originating in Central Asia) in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan and Zambia. *Aji-no-moto*[®] (a Japanese ‘umami seasoning’ of monosodium glutamate) was mentioned in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and across Indonesia. Ingredients in customary meals might have been cooked from imported onions or newly introduced cabbages, or oils or fish sauces produced far from home. Everyday eating was already a fairly cosmopolitan matter. Many people were ambivalent about these changes because customary cuisines were seen to be healthy and nutritious (when affordable and available). In a focus group discussion about young people in Lusaka, Zambia, one view was that fast food was the food of the rich, such that people were getting sick from eating burgers, pizzas and the like: ‘Foods like chips and pizza are causing funny diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure. We say these are rich people’s diseases as poor people don’t get such diseases because they can’t afford such type of food.’

‘Foods like chips and pizza are causing funny diseases like diabetes and high blood pressure.’

Class, gender and generation

Unsurprisingly, disposable income was a key factor in what kinds of food people bought. Some purchased food was cheaper, in money and time, than home cooking. But quality was often very low, as retailers struggled to make profits. In Kami, an urban neighbourhood of Cochabamba, Bolivia, a schoolteacher argued, ‘It’s people with less money who are eating these... sausages, because in some cases, incredible though it may seem, they’re cheaper than meat on the bone.’

▼ Milk producers, Pirhuas.



In a focus group discussion with retired miners in Bolivia in 2014, one man explained that:

Buying food in the street is no longer a matter of class. The difference is that people with more money eat in the sit-down restaurants and those who don't have much money eat at those places where you crouch down on the ground... Both rich and poor eat in the street. The difference is that the food safety officer goes and checks up on the good restaurants. Here, in contrast, the food safety officer is just for decoration, you never see her working.

Many migrant workers and day labourers were relying on cheap, high-calorie street food. Men in Kabwata in Lusaka ate fritters, as they were cheaper than bread and more filling; in the Mukuru informal settlement in Nairobi, it was cheaper for people on their way to work to buy *mandazi*, deep-fried doughnuts, than bread. For those living hand-to-mouth and who lacked the equipment to cook or the means for fuel, street food made sense.

Relative price changes greatly influenced whether people ate out and what they bought. In Vietnam, poorer people were increasingly finding that they could do better at home than patronising street stalls and low-cost restaurants. But buying processed food was also a sign of status and wealth in many places. In urban Guatemala, having a 'mega' (three-litre bottle of soda) on your table showed that you were eating well ('as in the TV advertisements', one respondent explained). Eating chicken was 'prestigious' in Kabwata, Zambia. And traditional foods were sometimes looked down on, as in Kami, in Bolivia, where 'if a child takes boiled or toasted grains to school people might say he's eating Indian food or that he's an Indian'.

When people talked about eating out, they were mainly referring to men eating away from home. Male agricultural wage workers, non-farm labourers and market traders in rural areas, urban

transport workers, security guards, factory workers, traders and farmers selling produce, construction workers and others were typically away from home, doing strenuous labour, with cash in their pockets and access to a growing range and number of restaurants and eateries. Many young men in urban areas had no kitchen facilities, and the cost and effort of cooking single meals far outweighed the ease of buying a simple dish of the local staple. In Mukuru, Nairobi, for example, *githeri* – a mix of maize kernels and kidney beans that takes a long time to cook, now often with flavour enhancers from a packet – was always popular, but sales in recent years had rocketed. One *githeri* vendor was said to have increased her sales fivefold in the past year to serve the increasing numbers of people demanding a quick meal, with some cash in their pockets and no one at home to cook.

In many rural sites, new outlets had sprung up to serve hungry working men. Farmers who went to market in Nessesemtenga, in Burkina Faso, might eat rice once they got there, or roasted and grilled meats when they went to town, after having eaten the traditional staple *Tô* (pounded millet or sorghum in a vegetable sauce) for their morning meal at home. In the rural Ethiopian community in western Oromia, rising agricultural wages attracted a growing number of agricultural workers to new restaurants that appeared in the village during the study period. Business was brisk and the restaurants already served the kinds of food once only found in towns.

One reason more men than women ate out, we heard, was that women had less time to cook for them than in the past. Most notable among the changes in women's consumption patterns was a growing tendency to buy ready-made sauces or additives such as stock cubes. These were not staple foods, but they replaced traditional spices and condiments, mimicking the flavour of meat and other expensive ingredients. This shift was noticeable in Indonesia and increasingly in Burkina Faso, Kenya and Guatemala. Other quick fixes include partly prepared meals, particularly poultry and meat, and quick-cook or instant noodles. Getting foods from outside was, in some cases, a social necessity, as explained by Mrs A in Dhaka:

When a guest comes to your house, you cannot let him/her go without entertaining him/her with some food first. But it is not always possible to cook because sometimes there are no ingredients to cook with. In such cases, buying foods from these shops can save your face.

Cost was crucial to women on low incomes, and home preparation, although time-consuming, was often the cheapest way to feed the family. Women consumed less and ate out less than men, either on the street or in restaurants, and

▼ Selling mushrooms and flowers in the traditional market at Chichicastenango.





◀ A wide variety of packaged snacks were popular with children in Cianjur.

generally demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding of the economics of meal preparation. This highlighted the fact that cooking – a form of unpaid care – requires not only time and effort, but also knowledge and strategy.

The most profound changes were observed among young people. Children and young people in all settings were said to be eating more snacks and replacing usual meals with fast foods – often highly processed and packaged products with concentrations of fat, sugars and additives marketed specifically to the young. While often mass-produced by large domestic or multinational corporations, in many places local producers also did a good trade in local delicacies. Not all of these foods were unhealthy, but they represented a loss of control for parents. Parents worried that they did not know what children were eating, and about food safety and the longer-term nutrition implications. In several places, we were told how children tended to eat at odd times and the habit of eating together was being lost. Adult men thought that this meant fewer opportunities to teach children social norms and discipline. In a focus group of rural Burkinabe in their sixties, in the final year of the research, one man explained:

In the past, people used to say that someone who eats outside cannot take good care of his family. At that period, parents could punish children when they were mistaken, but today they cannot do it anymore. If they do so, the children will go out of the house and eat these outside foods.

Unsurprisingly, snacking at school is a major feature of children's food habits. During breaks and after school, vendors appear to have a captive market. In Indonesia and Bangladesh, parents complained of having to provide pocket money so their children could keep up with their friends and buy snacks

for the playground. In some cases, these amounts were non-negligible proportions of a family's daily spending. The big global brands as well as more local brands of drinks, chocolates and sweets, chips and fried preparations were widely popular with children. Television advertising and marketing targeted at children were powerful factors, which parents recognised they had limited influence over. In communities like these, in which processed and purchased foods were relatively new, advertising to children was powerful. In many of these settings, giving children snacks was understandably seen as a sign of indulgence and affection.

Changing production and social reproduction

The choices people made were as much influenced by need as by opportunities and challenges arising from rapid urbanisation and the globalisation of the food system (Clapp 2009, 2014; van der Ploeg 2010). Many of the changes in local food cultures, such as new markets in cooked food or loss of access to old staples, can be dated to the time of the food price spikes. Changes in the way many people (especially young people) began to work and eat after the food crisis are indicative of transformed modes of wellbeing and of ill-being. Waged life is precarious; it squeezes the time available for care, but offers possibilities. Growing towns are good places to sell produce if local farmers can compete with foreign and supermarket foods. Packaged foods may be dangerous to health, but they are tasty and time-saving. The people we talked to were profoundly ambivalent about these new modalities of life, reflecting and reinforcing their sense of what is right and what is good – that is, the right thing to do and the right way to be treated in relation to food and the work required to get it. We turn to this question in the next section.

ZAMBIA

Agricultural ‘piecework’ in Chikwanda

In Chikwanda, northern Zambia, casual agricultural labour or ‘piecework’ is the fallback for very poor rural people. One 20-year-old study participant, MN, already a mother of one and guardian for her two sisters, subsisted on a mix of piecework and charity, and was, she said, willing to ‘do anything’ to bring in the money needed to look after her child and sisters. MN had inherited some land from her father, but in 2012 she had not farmed in two years, as she had been unable to afford the fertiliser.

I never wanted to be do piecework, it's just that life is difficult. I can't farm because of lack of fertiliser and seed... I still can't afford these things. I work in gardens – for example, weeding or plucking tomatoes, then I'm paid either cash or given some vegetables. When it's farming season I work in the fields cultivating, planting, weeding and harvesting. Sometimes I'm paid cash and at times I'm given maize.

MN was the only income-earner in her house: her sisters were still at school. In 2012, she made 5–10 Zambian Kwacha (ZMW) (US\$0.51–1.01) if paid by the day, but she preferred to work for food, mainly maize and vegetables. Wages varied widely; for example, pay for weeding half a lima (1/4 hectare) ranged from ZMW15–30. ‘When you try to negotiate’, MN said, those that pay less say that’s all they have and so it’s up to you to take it



Dried foods, Mpika market



Tomato prices rose repeatedly, Kabwata market

or leave it and if you don't take it someone else will. So when you are desperate, you take it.’

MN pinned her hopes on farming: ‘If I have everything I need for farming, things will change and we will live better.’ But in 2013, conditions had not improved: she had tried to get fertiliser but was told the scheme was full and to come back next year. Her piecework was sometimes earning ZMW20 per day, but the family was eating less, surviving entirely on one or at most two meals of *nshima* maize meal and cassava or vegetables, sometimes beans if there was enough money or if a neighbour gave them some. The community was helpful, she said, and although she never got any official assistance, she could rely on neighbours when there was nothing to eat. But even then, the children and MN were often ill, because (she thought) of their generally poor diet. She said, ‘Despite the hardships I make sure that everyone has at least eaten something.’



Daga dried fish was a cheaper alternative to *kapenta*, but people in Chikwanda said it caused serious health problems

REAL LIVES

VIETNAM

Hedging against rice price fluctuations in An Giang province

REAL LIVES

Volatile rice prices were a problem for rice farmers in major producing areas. The recent uncertainty appeared to be driving a series of changes in how farmers managed their integration into rice markets, including how they use credit and technology, relations with intermediaries, and expectations of protective policies. Mr HCD, a 45-year-old rice farmer and local official in his commune in An Giang province, started growing rice in 2009 to take advantage of the rising rice price, and made a substantial profit in 2011. But the price plunged in 2012 and his earnings halved. He borrowed money to build a dyke and to invest in an electric irrigation pump, replacing his old diesel pump. In 2014, fertiliser and pesticide prices were lower, and the cost of labour was stable at 100,000 Vietnamese Dong (VND) (US\$4.45) per day, VND200,000 if spraying pesticide. He explained that he mainly hired seasonal migrant labourers from the Khmer minority group.

In 2012, Mr HCD sold the winter-spring crop from his 12 hectares to rice traders and the summer crop to a seed company, earning VND10 million (US\$450) for each hectare over the year. He observed that the following year (2013-14) the rice price would decline further, because of 'branding

issues and market demand'. He had not chosen to shift towards Japanese paddy because he knew the crop to be vulnerable and the grains expensive to process and transport. In the past few years he had stopped selling to traders, who gave good prices in good years but very low prices in bad, and started selling to seed companies through a crop contract system.

There had been no local authority support to poor farmers when the rice price dropped, but under a new rule, Resolution 42, rice farmers were to receive VND250,000 per hectare (US\$11) and the commune was preparing guidelines for farmers to register their land. In his view, farmers with less than 10 hectares could only just break even; they needed more land to make a decent living.



Harvesting machine, An Giang



TV advertising can influence children's tastes, An Giang



Material achievements of an older couple, An Giang



4 Aggregate effects

▲ People worried that fritters in Kabwata market may be unsafe because the oil is black.

Transformational mechanisms

Of course I've noticed, the price of everything has risen. The price goes up gradually, and one day you realise your income does not allow you to buy everything you bought [before]... The price of food, toiletries, detergents, clothes, lights, everything goes up.

(Mr SG, 42-year-old production manager in a nursery, Pirhuas, Bolivia, 2013)

As each person in our study reacted to food prices and made adjustments within their

household, family, community, city or village and region, their responses aggregated into larger effects. Between 2007 and 2014, almost every one of the households we studied had had to squeeze more value out of what they consumed and seek new sources of income

to make up a cash deficit in their household. These two mechanisms – to squeeze more and

to earn more – proved crucial to the changes that emerged for people on low incomes. This was the case in each polity and economy, with different particularities, yet with an unsettling sense of inevitability and similarity. Across all our study sites, we saw how the price spikes created pressure to adapt and how the adaptations were channelled by options presented by the market and governments. In this section, we consider the aggregate effects, drawing on what people told us and on the literature that analyses the nature of contemporary commoditisation and precariousness.

The wider conditions that gave shape to people's adaptations included private sector configurations, prices, policies, political processes and technologies (for basic country-by-country detail, see Section 6). Many of the market policies (regulations, subsidies, tariffs) had been in the making over long periods of time, making way for a commodity system characterised by trading blocs, large-scale subsidised agriculture, urban-based employment, state social welfare systems,

Most people were already on a trajectory that involved paying for an increasing range of essentials.

and progress measured in dollar terms (Araghi 2009). Likewise, social policies in many countries had embraced commoditised services, including in education (Ashley *et al.* 2014), health (Bennett, McPake and Mills 1997; Twagirumukiza *et al.* 2010), utilities (Prasad 2007) and welfare (Devereux and Lund 2010). Most people were already on a trajectory that involved paying for an increasing range of essentials including food, water, shelter, sanitation, health and education when the price hikes kicked in. Mr HH, a 40-year-old farmer in western Oromia, Ethiopia, spoke for many rural dwellers in 2012 when he said:

The farmer is forced to sell his food crops since the money is needed for different purposes during that time [after the harvest]. School materials, clothes, social contributions, taxes, payment for inputs and so on have to be paid.

The price hikes appear to have accelerated and consolidated the marketisation of social reproduction. If all that had happened when food prices doubled was that people had cut down on food quantity and quality and cut out more expensive foods, we would have expected work and food to return to 'normal' after the crisis subsided. But initial moves to cut down were compounded by less reversible decisions to find ways of earning more. In 2013, speaking about the changes she had seen in Mukuru, Kenya, Mrs RK, a 39-year-old water seller, explained: 'Life is no longer the same as ten or even five years ago... Our economy is no longer agricultural; people have shifted into transport, fishing and real estate.'

Decisions for new kinds of work propelled many people into a new relationship with the labour economy. As we have seen, they took on more casual work in the informal sector or increased their hours in low-paid jobs, migrated to new places to find work, or tried out new ways of adding cash value to existing production, distribution or service chains. They took loans to start up small businesses, seeking credit from official and unofficial sources, becoming increasingly bound into webs of cash-based debt. Mrs M, a 35-year-old rubber tapper and mother of five in Indonesia, observed in 2014:

We call it 'dig a hole and cover the other hole'. We cover our daily needs for things such as cigarettes, sugar, cooking oil by borrowing from kiosk. Usually the loan is up to Rp20,000, and we pay it directly to the kiosk, and then borrow again for daily needs.

People spoke of new levels of stress. According to Mr OI, a 56-year-old farmer and tax collector in Nessesmentenga, Burkina Faso, in 2014: 'Household members are less and less happy because of the

high cost of life. They fear the future. They do not know what is going to happen next.'

Similarly, in a focus group discussion in Dadu, Pakistan, in 2014, one man expressed his anxiety as a breadwinner:

One has to arrange for feeding ten people, and together with rising prices and the lack of employment opportunities, things have become difficult... Even though one is trying to hide these issues but they start suffocating the person from the inside.

The profound adjustments people made to work, food and care were constrained by processes of social and economic change already long in the making. The locus and quality of social welfare had already changed, land and housing markets had already been deregulated, and the small producer could already feel the competition with subsidised transnational corporations and highly capitalised local businesses.

Araghi (2009) calls these conditions 'the visible foot' of the market in the sense that they are uncaring forces that tend to promote inequality and stress; this is in contrast with Adam Smith's 'invisible hand', whereby millions of individual actions in the market produce social good. Araghi notes that contemporary capital did little to prevent the exponential growth of a new arena of informality, which included both de-formalisation for workers in the industrialised global North, and expanding entry for millions to unregulated labour markets in the global South. This new arena of informality is characterised by 'slavish conditions of employment (involving forced under-consumption and under-reproduction strategies) without visible enslavement...' (*ibid*: 60). It is built on an unquenchable hunger for paid work from a growing informal working class, estimated in 2006 to number more than a billion people (Davis 2006).

'Our economy is no longer agricultural; people have shifted into transport, fishing and real estate.'

▼ Investing in a motorbike was a common way for young men to get a foothold in the market, Bekasi.



Precariousness

The aftermath of the food price spikes coincided with an increased rate of migration towards paid work, in particular into rapidly growing, intensely populated informal settlements in cities and towns in the countries studied. This move to

The price hikes accelerated the arrival of masses of new cheap labour into the informal economy.

the market left many people in a precarious position. The education they could afford was low quality, the jobs they could access were informal and insecure, they were uninsured, their social care was uncompensated and stressed, and their networks of support

depended on mobility and money. A group of men in Dhaka, in a focus group discussion in 2012, agreed with one observation that:

Since there are few work opportunities in the rural areas, people are migrating into the city in search of better livelihoods... These people had borrowed money while they were staying in the rural areas, and they come to the city in order to earn money to be able to repay their debts.

New urban residents without powerful connections were confronted with numerous barriers to accessing the resources needed to participate in the market on equitable terms. As explained earlier, wages did respond, but for those at the base of the economic pyramid, wages did not quite keep pace with prices, nor keep up with pressures to spend on a growing set of necessities in changing economies. In 2014, Mrs JB, a 41-year-old domestic worker who also rents out houses in Dhaka, explained:

Most of the garment factories have started retrenching, which resulted in the unemployment of a lot... Nowadays, people are truly working hard to survive; most of the people now are involved in side professions beside the main one to generate more income.

▼ Urban growth offered opportunities for casual labour on construction sites, Dadu.



The work that poor people found was precarious in a different way from the precariousness of the agricultural livelihoods that many were leaving behind, forming a relatively new pattern of contingent and often high-risk work with unstable pay and low margins. The word ‘precarity’ signifies not only insecure work but also a new state of insecure existence for the people who suffer it (Arnold and Bongiovi 2013: 298–300; Standing 2011). Widespread precariousness came about in part because of changes in how work was contracted within global value chains – notably a shift from contracted employment to sub-contracted and agency labour (Phillips 2011, 2016; Phillips *et al.* 2014). Unfettered economic growth has also been promoted in many policy circles as the answer to reducing poverty and securing national development. Thus even local value chains were able to follow suit in approaches to contracting labour. This has resulted in a process that has been labelled ‘adverse incorporation’, whereby people may be employed or earning, but on very poor terms (Hickey and du Toit 2007). The price hikes accelerated the arrival of masses of new cheap labour into the informal economy, helping consolidate a new labour regime: each person was competing with thousands, even millions, of others for access to work, accepting low remuneration and often high costs to their personal health and time. In the final year of research, pointing to the increased precariousness of work in Dhaka, Mr SH, a 50-year-old rickshaw puller, recounted how:

Earlier we used to spend a lot of leisure period but now it isn't possible. Now I run away as quick as I can if I get any news of even any simple work, because if I don't go there then other person will have the money by getting the work done. Now there is no paucity of working people at Dhaka city and people like me can do any odd job.

This mass of need anchored the informal economy as a huge source of economic growth, both in terms of cheap production and mass consumption, but it also depressed other areas of the economy. The multitude of initiatives people undertook to find paid work had the effect of reducing or squeezing *unpaid work*. Many adult householders, especially women, spent less time at home cooking or caring for family members. We might expect that these pressures on care would be compensated, after a while, with increased income from the new forms of paid work, allowing for more care to be paid for, and more care to be supplied – and this did turn out to be the case for many. But people’s ability to pay for care was as variable and precarious as their own employment. Thus many continued to squeeze care – reducing the time they spent on it and the

quality of care they were providing. Children were supposed to find their care at school (their parents hoped), the elderly had to get back to work, and cooking had to be done in less time.

Working harder and in more geographically dispersed work environments, people who were typically in a hurry and on the move changed their diets, opting for faster, easier and in some ways tastier (but often less nourishing) foods. These individual changes consolidated at aggregate levels into new food cultures and new cultures of care. As Mrs H, a 37-year-old tailor and mother of three, told the researchers:

After coming back from work the body gives in and you don't feel like working, you feel like lying down and closing your eyes but you can't because of your responsibilities... Because of my job I cannot take a look if they [my children] are eating properly or not. Because of my work I cannot take care of my son like I used to.

Commoditisation of food

The adjustments people made in response to the food crisis constituted mechanisms of accelerated economic and social change, expanding informality at a rapid rate and commoditising diets and social arrangements. New (usually insecure) work, cramped places to live, less time, new foods, less time to care for family members, and new things to pay for – all these engendered material and cultural transformations.

When food prices eventually stabilised between 2012 and 2014 – in most countries at a higher level – adjustments to eating, care and work did not go back to the *status quo ante*, even though people might have originally seen the changes they made as temporary measures. It was through these mechanisms that the price hikes heralded a profound shift in the valuation of social reproduction on the one hand and labour on the other. On the labour side, the food price crisis accelerated a transition towards precariousness; unlike past social transitions (for instance, nineteenth century industrial transformations in Europe), the lurch into the market was almost universally *informal* – stressful, unregulated and un-unionised or, depending on your point of view and individual experience, exciting, innovative and politically meaningful. On the consumption side, people shifted towards foods, ways of caring and cooking, and other essentials of social reproduction that were supplied through the market, often in commoditised, non-localised forms that were of poorer quality for those with limited means. The liberating aspects of commoditisation were legion, but the impacts for people on the lowest and most precarious



incomes were not always positive, precisely because of their subordinate position in the economic system:

▲ Restaurant at Mpika market serving traditional food to busy market buyers and sellers.

Commoditisation occurs to the extent that each household is severed from direct reciprocal ties, both horizontal and vertical, for renewal of means of production and of subsistence, and comes to depend increasingly on commodity relations for reproduction. The process of commoditisation ultimately implies the individual status of each household. It becomes an enterprise, whose relations to outsiders progressively take the forms of buying, selling, and competition.

(Friedmann 1980: 162–3)

A commodity is a product, good or service offered for sale that is not specialised by where it comes from or who made it (for example, maize, fish, iron, vitamin C, water). As such, a commodity may come from anywhere and go anywhere it is wanted, all other things being equal. *Commoditisation* is the process by which individuals, families and larger units of human organisation turn to the market for supplying goods essential to social reproduction.

Many continued to squeeze care.

Commoditisation changes people's relations with one another and how they value the essential goods of life. When basic items for consumption – once derived from local non-market sources (food from local farms or family connections, land from communities, houses from local builders and communal forests) – become commodities, their production, distribution and sale begin to be distanced from the consumer's influence. In relation to food, people are required to make more or less conscious choices between food from somewhere (traceable, creating local relationships and often costing more money)



▲ Parents and teachers made efforts to educate their children in healthy eating, Banjar.

or ‘food from nowhere’ (untraceable, creating obscure relationships and often costing less money) (Bové and Dufour 2001; McMichael 2009b). In 2014, Ibu Y, a 34-year-old mother of four, who ran a small kiosk in Bekasi, Indonesia, selling eggs, oil, soaps and other necessities, explained:

When cooking ourselves we knew what ingredients should be used; when buying snacks we did not know what they had been cooked with, what food colouring had been used, or whether they had used food preservative.

The commoditisation of people’s relationships to food, while apparently emancipating their choice of what to eat and how to cook, also circumscribed their choices.

Advances in taste and convenience seemed to be offset by losses in nourishment.

Despite the wide array of packaged and commercially processed foods that could be bought, people were aware that the ingredients tended to be high in calories and salt and

often low in micronutrients, while the diversity of staples had declined (Hossain, King, Kelbert, Scott-Villiers and Chisholm 2015). A similar process was reported with regard to protein-rich foods (cheap factory-farmed chicken, in particular) and oils (commercial vegetable oil preparations

replacing traditional pressed oils from nuts and seeds). Seasonal and regional dishes, knowledge about food production and processing, customary recipes and cooking practices (and with them cultural meaning) were all being lost (Olivet López 2015). Advances in taste and convenience seemed to be offset by losses in nourishment, both physical and cultural.

Resistance to adopting new foods was widespread, but not always obvious. It was most commonly found in the ways people bent the new food regime to their own local preferences and sense of what was right. The new moral economies among most people in most of the world were not only about ‘food security’, as it was termed in international circles, but about having control over what they ate. This was particularly the case in Latin America, where many people across the urban and rural sites studied talked about the need to preserve local foods. For example, in a school in Kami, Bolivia, teachers organised a food fair to promote traditional dishes. They explained that they hoped to emulate an initiative in La Paz where stallholders and street vendors around a particular school are asked to sell fruits once a week.

The effect on social reproduction

Commoditisation also changes how labour is valued, shifting value from the labour itself (its energy, generosity, skilfulness or productivity) to the amount of monetary consumption that it can command. With commoditisation, money easily becomes the measure of value of material things or services, and consumption of purchased items becomes increasingly important in defining identity and status (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). The result after the move to the market was new pressures on human relations – locally, in terms of who had most money, and globally, in terms of the way labour was valued almost exclusively in financial terms.

In several of the research sites, householders explained work in terms of the money it raised. Mr CL, a 22-year-old man who sold mobile phones and phone accessories in Lusaka, talked about people’s increased dependency on money: ‘I value money. Money speaks in a language everyone understands. To get an education, to be in good health, to eat well and to live in a good home, you need money.’ Furthermore, people indicated that unpaid work had come to be less valuable in their own eyes and in the social imaginary more broadly. In none of the ten countries was unpaid care a measured item of national production, and many of the national rubrics of progress were expressed in

monetary terms, such as gross national income. Unpaid work – such as subsistence farming, caring for children, the sick and the elderly, or environmental services – had been devalued unless they were paid for. It appeared to confirm Marx’s analysis that reproductive work must have a low or negative monetary value in relation to production, since profits are derived from the difference between the cost of keeping a worker and his or her dependants alive (social reproduction) and the cost of the products that she or he makes (Araghi 2003). Since the era of unpaid social reproduction seems to be coming to an end, it may be that the only way it will remain low cost is if it is devalued.

Political subjectivity and rights

Although adaptation took place within a narrow band of possibility defined by global market forces and national policies and histories, people’s embrace of informal work, commoditised food, paid care and risky migration seemed to confirm the desirability and good sense of the transformation. In part, this was because people had little option, but the shift also offered appreciable compensations, as we have seen above (also see Hossain, King, Kelbert, Scott-Villiers and Chisholm 2015). Not only was the new work and social environment exciting in many ways, and not only were new levels of access to markets offering labour-saving options for food and other essentials, but there was an element of possibility in people’s move to the market. The hope of money offered a hope of power – as illustrated in this quote in 2014 from Mrs JB, a domestic worker and landlady in Dhaka: ‘Those who have money hold power in the slum. Those who do not have money can hardly lead a life.’

Right to work

The data indicated that people facing hunger or livelihood stress turned to the market because such a turn fitted with their notions of what it meant to fulfil their self-image as providers. They felt responsible for creating a future for themselves and their families. Finding not just food, but *work* was key to most people’s sense of moral obligation in tackling the problem of a good life. People hoped their governments would intervene in making work available, though few of them imagined that governments might take action to make labour conditions fairer, safer or better remunerated. In 2013, a district leader in Addis Ababa argued: ‘I think hungry people have both the right and duty to get food. Hungry people have the right to get food through their participation in job opportunities.’

The market offered the possibility of emancipation – in particular to young people – affording a degree

of liberation from dependence on patronage or on eroded rural assets whose earning potential was in decline. It offered the prospect of being a provider for oneself and one’s family, worthy of being provided for in the contemporary politics of provision (Bohstedt 2014). While the value of such a shift was questioned by older people in many communities, it was a move that fitted squarely within global norms that gave primacy to economic growth for status and power, and which had ushered in a ‘corporate food regime’ by which food ‘from nowhere’ was (and still is) valorised in a process that has included dispossession of small farmers, fisherfolk and pastoralists (McMichael 2009a: 147). We found young people leaving small-scale agriculture in droves (Leavy and Hossain 2014; also see White 2012), some to new work in the towns, others to small local industries including in food sectors such as poultry-raising. Remaining part of production and consumption systems that were neither market- nor profit-oriented was widely painted by people on low incomes as an unimpressive life choice. This was in no small part the result of the devaluation of such ways of life by governments, educational curricula, media and middle-class discourses (see, for example, a study on education and pastoralists, Scott-Villiers *et al.* 2016).

While our data show that, by and large, the people we were talking to did not regret the moves they had made in this process of adjustment, few found their lives easier as a result. The stresses of a high cost of living, risky work and an uncertain future remained acute by the end of the study. People’s ability to claim support from kin, neighbours, the village, the mosque or temple was reduced. However, a widespread belief in the locus of responsibility lying as much, *if not more*, with the individual, parent or householder, than with the social system of which she or he was a part, meant that people largely accepted that the market offered what it offered and they had to survive within it. For example, Mrs P left Naogaon in 2011 to work in the garment sector in Dhaka. During a visit in 2012 to see her family, she explained:

I do not like the environment of Dhaka city because it’s unhygienic and it’s hard to find a good place to live. But I don’t have any other choice, because the income that my family can generate in Dhaka is not possible in my village.

Nonetheless, workers and consumers in our 23 sites also did not generally accept the market as separate from the state; there was an understanding of a moral economy in relation to market behaviour and food prices, rights of

People largely accepted that the market offered what it offered and they had to survive within it.

tenure of land and shelter, wages and, to some extent, decent work conditions. Over the study period, there was a marked reconfiguration of the tenets of the moral economy (particularly in urban areas) from old patronage to new bureaucratic moral relationships. People made claims on governments – often via formal and not always reliable civil society organisations – rather than on local elites to make provisions against hunger and to hold the market to account. These claims were made clear in protests like the Unga revolution in Kenya, the right to food movement in India and bread riots in Mozambique (Hossain *et al.* 2014).

Direct claims on merchants and employers were also common, but they were made with implicit or explicit calls on the state to make good the right to a living wage or reasonably priced food. Formal sector workers mobilised for pensions in Bolivia and Kenya and for wage rises in Bangladesh and Indonesia. Female garment workers in Bangladesh were particularly vociferous and effective in their claims. Agricultural workers in Bangladesh found new approaches to collective bargaining with employers, while dairy farmers in Bolivia created more powerful cooperatives. With few exceptions, people in all our 23 study sites believed that it was the responsibility of the state to curb local speculation, tackle regulatory failures and expand the generosity, quality and responsiveness of social protection (Hossain *et al.* 2013). Mrs MC, a 48-year-old weaver and single mother in Chichicastenango, Guatemala, simply argued: ‘There should be job opportunities so we are able to eat.’

Right to food

Government therefore has the responsibility to make food available and affordable, even if it means buying food from other countries.

(Mr HC, 54-year-old community leader, Lango Baya, Kenya, 2013)

Very few countries had unequivocally declared the right of citizens, or those under their protection, not to be hungry, even though a number had made significant and systematic advances in social protection (including welfare and subsidy) during the study period. Most communities in our study had some kind of programme or scheme affording occasional protection against hunger, but they were criticised as discriminatory, discretionary, demeaning, unreliable and divisive (King *et al.* 2014). Between 2009 and 2014, we noted a visible increase in such schemes. Despite the scale of these changes, the provision was neither systematic nor did it amount to inalienable rights. Vernacular rights still remained important therefore, even as they appeared to decline with the rise of commoditisation.

Householders on low and precarious incomes expressed a general sense of insecurity in relation to hunger, despite a general picture of rising wages, falling global commodity prices and increased government efforts to provide welfare for vulnerable groups.

While people in many study sites were aware that the global food and energy markets had effects on local prices, very few saw the global arena as a site of protest or control, and few had any connection with a supra-national social movement. Rightly or wrongly, it was the national state that needed to be embarrassed, cajoled or threatened into action on access to food and work. Many farmers and local grain merchants – for example, farmers in Zambia living near the border with Tanzania – were well aware of differentials in prices of grains, and processes by which cheaper processed foods were flooding local markets. They saw it as the responsibility of their own government to reduce taxes, protect local producers or promote free trade. They were aware of both the inherent dilemmas in these demands and the degree of state mismanagement of these international arrangements.

While the price of oil or the behaviour of multinational agri-businesses were also understood as factors in determining the costs of food, fertiliser and transport, very few people were able to come up with a way in which they could hold anyone accountable, except through the protections afforded by their own



▲ Governments are expected to protect citizens from extreme hunger, by providing relief and controlling markets.

government. Affecting the morality of global processes seemed beyond the imagination of the ordinary person at risk of hunger, except through the mediation of governments, which citizens felt bore the responsibility for effective negotiation of their rights within a global regime. Among our respondents there was remarkably little reference to any possibility that powerful religious bodies or civil society might exert an influence that would make a difference at a global scale.

In discussions about the meaning of the right to food – often after expressing incredulity that it might be a legal reality, which it is, for example, in Kenya – most people explained that the responsibility for providing adequate and good-quality food lay with the householder and parent, but where that provision came under stress, there were obligations from authorities and elites. In most versions, elites should have been assuring that the system made access to earned income and food possible for all of those over whom they held sway, just as at all times a parent or adult should be doing the same for a child. In every different culture and polity, the forms taken by these beliefs and expectations were different. Where there was a legal right and a degree of systematic government response, as in India, the common sense right had a dimension of citizenship. Where there was no law, but there was systematic welfare provision by the state, as in Bangladesh, the belief was in providence and the concomitant moral responsibility accepted by government. In many places, especially where price volatility had been strongest, people were resigned about state performance – the state claimed responsibility, failed to take it and yet could not be held accountable (Jahan, Mamun-ur and Wahab 2015).

Popular conceptions of food rights tended to reflect people’s lived experiences of hunger risks. Being in the market gave people a sense of gaining standing as citizens and voters – an improvement on their standing as subsistence farmers or housewives. But in general, people felt they had gained little or no influence over authorities and elites during times of crisis. During a focus group discussion with men in Karachi, Mr ZA, a 24-year-old day labourer, argued that:

People can do nothing. People can do nothing to the government; even if there is a population of 16 crore [160 million] over here. These things are in the hands of the government, not in the hands of the people. The government has weapons and arsenals.

Most people’s conception of a food right had remained more of a morally based economic and political hope than a belief that the law was on their side. The moral economy is an



▲ Demonstration in Nairobi protesting the price of maize meal, July 2011.

idea popularised by EP Thompson in a history of popular protest against rising food prices and aggressive market behaviours in eighteenth century Britain. It suggests that ordinary people hold an unspoken agreement on what is tolerable when it comes to the behaviour of the rich in relation to the poor in the functioning of the economy (Thompson 1971). At times of fundamental economic transition on a global scale – as in the eighteenth century and, arguably, during our study period – the moral economy comes into view. When the behaviour of elites or richer members of society fails to conform to the expectations of people who are hungry or at risk of hunger, the politics of provision are provoked into reaction and there will be widespread complaints and protests (Bohstedt 2014; Scott 1977; Edelman 2005; Hossain and Kalita 2014).

Ordinary people hold an unspoken agreement on what is tolerable.

Though many popular conceptions of a moral economy may be based on apparently antiquated ideas of feudal patrons preventing extreme hardship among their peasants or of prices of staple foods being held steady by paternal governments, breaches within marketised democracies can still fuel popular uprisings, shifts in political alignment or widespread subaltern resistance. Conversely, if the unspoken agreement between those at risk and those who are understood to have powers of provision is not breached, it is possible for the food system to change substantially with only occasional outbreaks of resistance and nostalgia. From 2007 to 2014, although people suffered high stress and often quite significant hunger, which sometimes led to riots, there was also a great deal of acceptance, because people felt that much of the responsibility lay with them and the market’s invisible hand. It seems that in accepting the global market as the prime site of achieving food and other rights, people no longer hold the state to account for delivering a moral economy.

GUATEMALA

Food prices, debt and international labour migration

Mr GM, a 33-year-old official on a Community Councils of Urban and Rural Development (COCODE) committee in Chugüexá Primero, in the mountainous west of Guatemala, explained how rising food prices led him to try to migrate to the United States. Interviewed in 2013, he noted that:

Prices of everything are going up; people cannot buy anything anymore... The ones working as labourers earn 40.00 Quetzals (Q) (US\$5) daily. Imagine, for a whole week of work it is only Q200 (US\$25). It is not enough money to buy anything. Here in the community many of us buy corn and beans every week.

People were looking for new ways to make a living and many were going to the USA. Mr GM had himself tried twice in what was plainly an act of desperation, but was caught both times:

What many people do is that they leave to go far away to see how they can take care and provide for their families. They look for another job, they change their job. I left but I spent Q25,000 (US\$3,125). Those Q25,000 were not mine; they were a loan and I had to pay interest for them.

After his second failed attempt to enter the USA, he was jailed for four months before being

Selling in the market at Chichicastenango



The road entering Chichicastenango



deported back to Guatemala. When he phoned his wife to tell her the bad news, he found she was in hospital. He reflected, sadly:

When a person goes to the United States it is not because they have the money in their pockets, we are always in debt and anything could happen. We leave... because we are preoccupied and need to make money, not because we want to go there. Imagine if we had around Q40,000 (US\$5,000) – with that money we could open a store; but because we want to have a better life, we go and get in debt.



Cleaning the house in Chichicastenango

REAL LIVES

BANGLADESH

Garment work in Dhaka

REAL LIVES

Mr R was 34 when we first met him in 2012. He lived with his wife and his daughter, born in 2002, in Kalyanpur Notun Bazaar, a slum area in Dhaka. Most of the residents in Kalyanpur were small traders, rickshaw drivers, waste recyclers, general daily-wage workers, or workers in garment factories. People had access to basic water and electricity through informal arrangements, including arrangements with politicians in the ruling party. Most people in Kalyanpur were ‘from the broken river’ – migrants from rural areas who had suffered from climate-related land erosion. Both Mr R and his wife went to school until class five.

Mr R contracted tuberculosis a few years before the study. When we first met him, one of his children was living with his grandparents in their home village because Mr R and his wife were unable to provide for him. When we first met Mr R, he had recently started work, supplying items to garment shops, while his wife worked in a garment factory. Bouts of bad health meant he could no longer get jobs in factories, where the working hours were longer and more physically demanding. In 2012, Mr R’s monthly salary was 4,000 Bangladesh Taka (BDT), while his wife earned BDT4,500. ‘My wife also earns around BDT1,500 by doing overtime each month. Therefore, altogether both of our income comes to around BDT10,000 each month (US\$128).’

In April 2013, more than 1,110 workers died and several thousands were injured in the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka. The collapse put the spotlight on the poor working conditions and high risk attached to working in the garments industry.



Businesses in Kalyanpur



When the power goes off in Kalyanpur

Bangladesh is the world’s second largest exporter of garments, after China, and the textile export industry accounts for 80 per cent of the country’s export income

(ILO 2016). Low-cost labour in Bangladesh helps to keep the costs of production low. In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, there was unrest in the capital throughout 2013. In November, six months after the collapse, the minimum wage almost doubled, from BDT2,972 to BDT5,319 per month (Labowitz and Baumann-Pauly 2014).

Unsurprisingly, in 2013 many of the study’s participants in Dhaka, including Mr R, mentioned the worrying situation of the garments industry. The minimum wage increase meant that Mr R’s salary rose from BDT4,000 to BDT7,000, and his wife’s salary increased from BDT4,500 to 4,700, with BDT1,500 for overtime remaining constant.

The present condition of the industry is still not good. Garment fires happen regularly. The politics, meetings and processions are happening all across the industry. It would be better if the government fixed the pay scale of the garment workers. Though the salary is increasing, it’s nothing. The way expenditure is rising, salary is not rising in the same way.



Going to the factory: garment workers in Bangladesh



5 Conclusions and implications

▲ Women held strong views on the aspects of life and livelihood that needed to be protected, Dhaka.

Another ‘Great Transformation’

What does the analysis presented here tell us that is new? Its value, and the original contribution it makes, is that it offers a ground-level analysis of the risks and transformations involved in the process of adjustment to economic globalisation, studied through snapshots of everyday life around the world as people responded to global food price inflation. Contradicting the view that rapid recent reductions in income poverty signal development success, this study suggests that higher costs of living have been offset by more precarious means of work – whether people are employed or self-employed – and by fast changes in eating habits. In other words, the costs of resilience to food crisis have gone uncoun- ted.

Beyond reference to rising rural wages, the catalytic influence of the food crisis on social and economic change has largely gone unnoticed. It is not only the poorest people and rural communities that are vulnerable to price spikes or food shortages; the recent food crisis brought lasting changes to the relationship between the work people do and the food they eat, particularly among the ‘nearly poor’ – those who are just a job or a crisis away from steep descent into great hardship. This group of people may not go hungry often, but meeting basic living costs occupies much of their daily life and their responses to food price shocks have been changing society as well as markets. This report is a reminder of the particular risks that globalisation poses to the relationship between labour and food, and raises questions about our choices as to how to respond.

We can see this recent period of adjustment to the global food crisis as a latter-day Great Transformation – a period of particularly rapid and disruptive social and economic change when more domains of human life and effort are being drawn into markets, adjusting to new patterns of work, life and diet. In Polanyi’s classic account of the late nineteenth-century transformation, the rapid entry into labour and food markets was a process of commoditisation that left people exposed to all manner of shocks (Polanyi 1957).

The drive to manage this new social risk triggered a second movement, a push for social protection. The arrangements that arose in response – through political decisions, class alliances, philanthropy and the rise of labour unions – involved a mix of paternalist social insurance, hard-fought worker protections, and financial market regulations. The relationship between the free market and social protection was not one of complementarity, but of opposition and tension; a tension which, according to Polanyi, exploded into the cataclysms of the 1930s when wild currency fluctuations contributed to the mass unemployment of the Great Depression. The failure of democratic politics to confront this unprecedented turbulence underpinned the rise of fascism.

Although Polanyi’s story ends in the 1930s, his ideas about the Double Movement were revisited during the recent global economic crisis (Fraser 2012, 2013; Sandbrook 2011; Kuttner 2014). Adjustments after the crisis mark a moment of particularly concentrated transformation, a new point in the Great Transformation at which more human effort is directed into market-means of securing basic subsistence. Can we read a compressed ‘Double Movement’ in contemporary signs that social protection is a rising concern in developing countries (McCord 2010)? It is perhaps too early to detect patterns of change, and too easy to credit them to the fears provoked by the global food price rises. Indeed, what still



▲ Bolivia saw a rapid decline in hunger between 2009 and 2014 with initiatives such as EMAPA, a state-run food agency guaranteeing access to affordable enriched food.

passes for social protection in many of the places reported here is a typical residualist patchwork of provision, at times distributed as patronage, at other times to those in greatest need. This leaves a gap between the shared need for broad protection against crises of basic subsistence, and the extreme poverty-targeted social assistance schemes mandated and favoured by international aid (Lavers and Hickey 2015).

Social protection reconceptualised for a time of food crisis

Insights into how crises of basic subsistence mutate into increased precariousness of labour, squeezing out of care, and changing food habits indicate a need for a different conception of social protection – one that balances protecting labour against exploitation and high risk, and protecting subsistence, so that dangerous and demeaning occupations are unnecessary. A broader conception of social protection would recognise that for very large sections of populations in many countries – not only the poorest targeted by social safety nets but also those who are vulnerable because they live close to the ‘poverty line’ – a sudden food price hike or crop failure may be catastrophic.

A sudden food price hike or crop failure may be catastrophic.

It should be clear from this research that social protection can only be meaningful in more volatile times if people and society as a whole are protected against the downsides of globalisation. This is the central logic of food security as a national policy priority; particularly since the 2008 food crisis, many countries have increased investment in national grain reserves and storage facilities, agricultural production, market development and price regulatory frameworks (as well as creating conditions for land-grabbing and industrialised production of low-quality food). The centrality of global and related price shocks to people’s wellbeing means that insulation against food price shocks must provide a tough first outer layer of protection.

When people who are doing their best just to get by have no protection against inflation, they have to find work that pays better – often work that is dangerous or insecure, or even illegal. Here, social protection needs to provide a second line of defence, ensuring that at the very least, the coping strategies commonly used to manage a crisis – selling more labour, borrowing, migrating – are managed so that jobs and loans are safe and fair, and that desperation does not lead to

exploitation. The global nature of the failure, to date, to address the common roots of such problems is clear: witness the ‘microcredit crisis’ centred on over-lending, and the Mediterranean and Asian migrant crises – both failures to protect people against bad or desperate decisions.

Protecting labour and livelihoods provides a second layer of insulation against shocks, among other advantages.

Social protection also entails protection of ‘the social’.

Social protection also entails protection of ‘the social’ – the parts of life not reducible to, yet greatly influenced by, market

prices and values. There are growing reasons to argue that the wider social benefits of the informal sector can be harnessed in a ‘hybrid economy’ model of social protection that tackles the needs of informal workers in a meaningful way (Chen 2016; Ferguson 2015). In relation to food security specifically, this means supporting the vital unpaid work of nourishing families by making women’s paid work both possible and productive through adequate pay and conditions bolstered by quality public services. This means (at a minimum) clean water and sanitation, well-regulated food and fuel markets, and effective health and care services, and more direct support and help at times of price rises, shortages or disasters.

Support is particularly vital at moments when regular subsistence is most at threat. This has implications for how we understand the economic ‘empowerment’ of women and young people if reallocation of their labour changes the food choices people make. A nutritionally sensitive approach to social protection would take into account the trade-offs between paid and unpaid work, reflecting an understanding of how the social processes of nourishment may be affected by crises, price changes and new patterns of work. There is, for example, a clear case for provision of school meals on grounds that they reallocate part of the domestic work of feeding

children onto programme or school authorities – a benefit parents particularly value in lean times.

This vision of social protection as resting on a balance between work and food, or between the economic and the social spheres of life, is fuller and more replenishing than a vision based on a safety net (Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas 2010). It suggests a more robust framework for building resilience against crises than simply reliance on the market (Heltberg, Hossain, Reva and Turk 2012; Heltberg, Hossain and Reva 2012). This is partly because protecting ‘the social’ encompasses protecting social values around food, and the social arrangements of nourishment. As the food sovereignty movement and other food justice campaigns have demonstrated, the fast changes in and growing complexity of the food systems on which many people increasingly rely imply a loss of control, or sovereignty, over the food they eat and the environment they live in.

Many income-generating programmes speak to this longstanding concern for rural livelihoods to encourage small-scale local production and consumption, with attention to quality and nutrition. But these efforts face the onrush of agricultural industrialisation and the growth of marketing and sales by big food interests, national and multinational. As we have seen, new markets for industrialised and processed foods are interacting with new work patterns to induce changes in food habits and nutrition. To guard against a global epidemic of unbalanced nutrition and obesity, governments will need to pay attention to the mechanisms by which rapid changes in market-driven diets have emerged and are still evolving.

There is a clear case for action to protect children from the advertising and marketing strategies that encourage poor eating habits from the earliest years. An emphasis on food quality also implies stronger regulation and implementation of food safety regimes: concerns about food safety are of immense importance to many people, and create deep anxieties about the short- and longer-term implications of eating bad food. We have seen how concerns about food safety can also push people towards branded products that may be of dubious or no nutritional value, in the belief that heavily marketed and advertised goods may be safer. People also express a desire to protect and promote positive aspects of traditional cuisines, to protect intangible cultural heritage, and to preserve the food knowledge and cultures that have evolved over centuries. However, local and indigenous food knowledge may be quickly and easily lost with the advance of industrialised food systems, in the push for better-value food.

▼ ‘Life is becoming more difficult – prices often go up, but they rarely come down’, Mukuru.





Struggles to protect the social: food sovereignty, fair prices and basic incomes

History suggests that any success in extending the scope and mandate of social protection will depend on active efforts to build and make the case for scaling up. It will involve a vigorous debate about which groups of people are vulnerable, and how, and about how to optimise resources. The debate will need to be informed by evidence to help understand the effects of such global developments.

Extending the scope and mandate of social protection will also depend fundamentally on political energies. But we know that the nature of precarious work leaves little scope for trade unionism, the form of worker organisation that dominated in early twentieth-century Europe. Precariousness disperses and conceals workers' concerns; their key common characteristics – occasional, temporary, mobile – mean they lack the voice and capacity of established worker groups to make claims against poor conditions or unjust regulations. So where are these claims being made? And how?

Claims for protection against a volatile global system have notably been made through a range of popular political struggles, including unruly episodes and actual food riots, which dramatised political themes of 'fair prices' for food and labour during the global food crisis period. Similar ideas influence organised labour's struggles over wages and conditions, and they strongly suggest a moral economic justification for intervention in food and labour markets (Hossain *et al.* 2014). The food sovereignty movement, for example, emphasises local control

of farming in connection with the land and people, against the financialisation and industrialisation of food, pushing back against commoditisation and emphasising collective action and solidarity around matters of agriculture and food systems.

In a leading example of how informal workers are organised and are articulating claims against a global audience, the WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) network brings together women worker organisations to advocate for the wider benefits of informal enterprises. They organise themselves and share the lessons of doing so, offering ample insights into how a broader social protection agenda might incorporate self-organised groups with a strong view of 'the social' aspects of life and livelihood that need to be protected against markets and their crises and failures.

In this conception of protecting 'the social' in a time of food insecurity, Right to Food activism and advocacy has much ground to cover to make a strong case for a broader, food crisis-proofed version of social protection. Many countries now have provisions to protect people against major food crises, but fewer have strong support for a right to good food in the wider sense we are using here, even though nutrition is widely recognised as a priority. Commitments to protect vulnerable people from food price rises by establishing it as a point of state law or principle are also rare, even if, in practice, some states strive to achieve this.

Our research found that people had much to say about what the right to food meant – what it is reasonable to claim and argue for, from

▲ Candy floss seller in Dadu.

The food sovereignty movement emphasises local control of farming.



▲ Women who go out to work still have to care for the family and the house, Dhaka.

whom, and how – but few knew about its status under international human rights law (Hossain, te Lintelo and Kelbert 2015). There is a grand opportunity here to start a global conversation about what a good food system means – what is a fair, sustainable and nourishing way of feeding the world, and why is it worth struggling for. Right to Food struggles can do much to unearth the parts of food systems that need protecting from the downsides of global markets, offering concrete examples of how a meaningful right to food may be realised and what it would contribute in terms of social good.

Since the financial crisis there has been rising interest in the idea of a universal basic income, a system by which all members of a society are provided with income by the state (Ferguson 2015; Standing 2002). Could this radical big idea help balance the relationship between fairly rewarded work (whether formal or informal) and control over the food that people produce, procure, prepare and eat? Critics have pointed to its potential to create laziness, while advocates highlight its potential to liberate innovation. Our doubts are somewhat different in nature; we do not believe that all elements of social protection can be bought, since our research shows that – at least in the domain of food – they cannot. And people depending on the basic income would not gain more power to influence the continuity of income support, nor be able to use it to demand fair conditions for their labour or to take control of the food they eat. It seems unlikely that the total commoditisation of the means of everyday life will protect the moral economy. Nonetheless, the idea does offer something beyond the residualist patchwork of safety nets, suggesting as it does a notion of redistributive justice (Ferguson 2015; Fraser 1997).

What we need to know

All of the above challenges imply the need for different or new data and evidence, because they rest on a really robust understanding of

the relationship between labour and food. Most responses to food crises take place beneath the radar of governments and the international community, in the space where people change how they work and what they eat. Our research is not the first to show this, nor will it be the last.

As things stand, international statistical systems are designed to measure the price of everything and the value of nothing. *Life in a Time of Food Price Volatility* was designed to ‘blow up’ localised and individualised findings using nationally representative data. This proved difficult because most of the changes that people reported as important in their lives – other than prices – were not measured by national statistics. We know that people are shifting into the informal economy, but there is little hard data to support this. People work longer hours in more precarious occupations, but they are precisely the people that are not represented in official statistics. More women enter the workforce, but as they are mostly engaged in informal work, their activities are poorly captured. There is less time for capable adults to care for children and elderly people, including producing, procuring and preparing nourishing food. But as unpaid care work is rarely measured in any serious way, we cannot estimate the extent of the decline and/or the squeeze on everyday life, or its likely effects – years down the line – on nutritional outcomes.

Until data are available to join up these dots in a meaningful way, policymakers may not know how to address these issues. Our research adds support to the argument that better data are needed on three foundational domains of human development: unpaid care work, human wellbeing and informal labour. Without data and evidence on these issues, we cannot adequately measure how development – with all the crises that often accompany it – is changing people’s lives. This research strongly indicates, as others have also done, that these crises merit a thorough and timely reconceptualisation of the ‘protection of the social’ so that all people can work and eat well, even in times of price volatility.



6 National food prices and wages

To make sense of different price movements and their effects at national level, it is useful to use Baltzer's (2013) classification of a country's exposure to the food crisis, based on relative exposure to international prices and the potential impact of food price policies (Figure 7). None of the low-income or lower-middle-income countries in Figure 7 were large, self-reliant food exporters with influence over regional or global market prices. Applying Baltzer's schema to those ten countries, none also counted as 'free traders' – countries well integrated into global cereal markets and using few food price policies to influence prices. One (Vietnam) was an 'exporting stabiliser', a net exporter of cereals (particularly rice) with strong food price policies. Six countries fell into the category of importers: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya and Pakistan. The remaining countries – Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and

Zambia – all fell into the 'isolated' category, and all three had 'severe' levels of undernourishment within the population.

The 'exporting stabiliser': Vietnam

Exporting stabilisers should be able to insulate domestic prices from international price shocks. China and India did so with export controls, but despite being a major rice exporter with significant state involvement in the export market, Vietnam did not. Export restrictions (not an outright ban) were imposed in 2008, but did not dampen domestic prices (Baltzer 2013), partly due to 'panicked hoarding behaviour' of millions of rice market actors, inducing a spike in prices in response to the initial price shock (Timmer 2010).

▲ The Luong An Tra commune in An Giang province, located in the Mekong Delta, is the biggest rice producer in Vietnam. At the time of this study, agriculture accounted for nearly 80 per cent of the economy of the commune. When the price of rice fell many farmers made a loss. Households with less land and capital accumulated debt.

However, prices came down rapidly when market psychology changed, initially because of sales of surplus rice stock by the Japanese government.

Around 50 per cent of the change in international rice prices was transmitted through to domestic rice prices in Vietnam (Robles 2011). Trends in the wholesale price of rice over the period 2008–15 reflect the twin spikes, but after 2011 prices declined and were relatively stable (see Figure 10). Zezza *et al.* (2008) note that the relatively egalitarian distribution of land in Vietnam means that most rice-producing households gain from increased prices. The impact on low-income net consumers (marginal farmers, landless, low-income urban workers) also depends on trends in wages, as to some extent wage increases offset the impact of higher retail prices (see Table 2). Average monthly earnings of employees trebled between 2007 and 2013. Female wage rates were 90 per cent of male rates in 2013.

Average wages in the agricultural and natural resources sector also show growth (Wiggins and Keats 2014); real wages in the state agricultural sector increased on average 113 per cent over the period 2005–12 (although the rate of increase was less in later years), while average real incomes of rural wage workers increased by 34 per cent over the period 2007–12. These increases in real wages appear to be partly driven by rapid growth in the manufacturing sector, and by increases in agricultural productivity; increases in real rural wages in other countries in Asia (most notably China) also reflect the

decline in the absolute number of rural workers due to out-migration, but this is not yet true of Vietnam.

The ‘importers’: Bangladesh, Bolivia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Kenya and Pakistan

Six of the ten countries – Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan in Asia, Bolivia and Guatemala in Latin America and Kenya in Africa – were classed as ‘importers’.⁶ These countries consistently depended on imports of the main staple crops and so were exposed to international price volatility. In these countries, domestic prices would be expected to track international prices quite closely.

In fact, the evidence is mixed, and while all of these countries experienced the 2008 price shock (and most experienced the 2011 shock), differences in policy, production and consumption factors influenced the relationship between the national and the global market. For example, Bangladesh was able to attenuate the 2008 impact to some extent through a combination of pre-shock imports from India and a bumper harvest; conversely, the 2011 shock in Kenya was worse than signalled by international prices, because the country depended largely on imports from Tanzania and Uganda and prices were affected by the severe drought in the region in 2011–12. It is also notable that there were additional sharp price increases in some of the

Figure 10 Rice, wholesale price, January 2008 – December 2015, An Giang



Source: Adapted from FAO GIEWS (accessed 2 March 2016).

Table 2 Mean nominal monthly earnings of employees, Vietnam, 2007 and 2009–2013 (Vietnamese Dong)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total	1,399,000		2,106,100	2,519,000	3,105,000	3,757,000	4,120,470
Male	1,464,000		2,247,400	2,668,000	3,277,000	3,923,000	4,286,660
Female	1,280,000		1,893,500	2,297,000	2,848,000	3,515,000	3,884,040

Source: Vietnam Labour Force Survey (downloaded from ILOSTAT, accessed 18 January 2016).

importing countries after 2011 – for example, Bangladesh in 2013–14, Bolivia in 2013, Kenya in 2015, Pakistan in 2014 – and that in many of these countries, retail prices were still rising at the end of the study period, despite the decline of international prices. This is particularly evident in Guatemala and Indonesia.

Bangladesh

At the time of the study, Bangladesh was the world’s fourth largest rice-eating nation and the price of rice had long been a matter of great policy and political significance (Raihan 2013). In 2012, rice accounted for 40 per cent of consumption among the poorest fifth of the country’s population (World Bank 2013). Impressive agricultural growth had all but closed the food deficit before the global food crisis, but the country’s exposure to natural disasters meant that the domestic rice shortfall had been known to reach as high as 10 per cent (Hossain 2010). The country experienced major cyclones in 2007 and 2009, which affected production.

Figure 11 shows that prices rose fairly steadily from the early years of the decade, rising sharply at the start of the first price spike in 2007–08 and again in 2011 and 2013–14. However, the price spike in 2008 was less severe than the spike in the ‘world’ (i.e. Thai) rice price, probably due to imports from India and a bumper rice harvest in 2008 (Baltzer 2013). Given the harvest, Bangladesh could have taken advantage of higher world prices and exported its surplus, but lacked the quality assurance to do so. Prices reduced during 2015, but from a longer-term perspective

retail rice prices appear to have adjusted to a new and higher level (generally between BDT30–35/kg, or US\$380–450/tonne).⁷

Wages in Bangladesh increased substantially between 2005 and 2015, and real wages also increased over most of that time. Agricultural wages increased due to increased productivity, the growth of the non-farm rural economy, and the growth of labour-intensive manufacturing, particularly the garments industry (Wiggins and Keats 2014). Zhang *et al.* (2013) suggest that Bangladesh reached the ‘Lewis turning point’, where ‘surplus’ rural labour is absorbed and rural wages start to rise. Significant international migration from rural areas further tightened the labour market.

Poverty levels fell markedly, from 49 per cent in 2000 to 32 per cent in 2010, but rural poverty rates remained high and many households were vulnerable to shocks. Balagtas *et al.* (2014) calculated that rural poverty, which had fallen from 48 per cent in 2000 to 44 per cent in 2004, rose again to 56 per cent in 2008 as a result of the food price crisis. Agricultural wage rates rose considerably after 2008, but there was a considerable gender gap: the nominal daily wage rate for a sample of male agricultural labourers in July 2015 was BDT304 per day, compared to only BDT226 for female labourers (WFP 2015d). Zhang *et al.* also calculated that urban real wages, if deflated by a Cost of Basic Needs Index (representative of the consumption profiles of poor households), fell between 2005 and 2010. This partially reflected the increase in rice prices.

Figure 11 Wholesale coarse rice prices, July 1998 – January 2016, Dhaka



Source: Author’s own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 17 February 2016).

Pakistan

After the initial food price shock in 2008, the price of both staples (wheat and rice) declined, but from 2009 prices moved upwards until early-mid 2014, after which there was again a downward trend until this was reversed in late 2015. At that time, wheat flour prices remained (in nominal terms) well above the 2008 peak, but rice prices had dropped below that peak (see Figure 12). Pakistan produced most of its own wheat and rice requirements, generally exporting over half of the rice it grew. Movements in domestic prices were therefore more influenced by domestic supply and demand factors, and therefore also by oil prices, as well as by government intervention such as the minimum support price for wheat producers to encourage production and support farm incomes (WFP 2015d). During this volatile period, the floods of 2010 engulfed one-fifth of Pakistan’s land mass, destroying an estimated US\$500 million of wheat crops.

Wheat was by far the most important cereal, providing about 75 per cent of all calorific energy. Net food consumers on low incomes were likely to suffer from high wheat prices if wages remained static. In fact, Wiggins and Keats (2014) showed that real agricultural wage rates in Pakistan actually fell by about 12–13 per cent over the period 2005–12, in contrast to most other Asian countries, with women agricultural labourers paid only 50 per cent of

what men were paid. Relatively low rates of economic growth and high rates of population growth, in conjunction with stagnant agricultural productivity, appear to have contributed to the fall in real wages, while the gender wage disparity reflects the subordinate status of poor rural women.

WFP data for urban wage labourers indicate relatively little change in the terms of trade between urban wage rates and the retail price of wheat flour over the period.⁸ In November 2011, one day’s wage purchased 12.7kg of wheat flour; this fell to 11.3kg in November 2013 and rose to 13.65kg in November 2015. In overall terms, there were few signs of sustained livelihood improvement among either the rural or urban poor in Pakistan. The prevalence of undernourishment appears to have remained unchanged at 22 per cent (about 40 million people), and under-five stunting rates were very high (45 per cent) and even increased (Haddad *et al.* 2015).

Analysis of successive Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) by Gazdar (n.d.) largely supports the view that there had been little sustained improvement in livelihoods over the period. Based on a recommended daily minimum energy requirement of 2,150 kcal per adult equivalent, the proportion of the HIES sample below this minimum was 48 per cent in 2007–08, and 51 per cent in 2011–12. The urban population showed higher prevalence rates of

Figure 12 Retail prices of wheat flour (January 2004 – January 2016) and rice (January 2006 – January 2016), Karachi



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 17 February 2016).

Note: Price data not available for wheat flour, June–December 2005, included by extrapolation.

inadequate energy intake: 62 per cent of the urban sample was below the recommended minimum in 2011–12, compared to 45 per cent of the rural sample. Slightly over half of all energy intake was derived from cereals, and 80 per cent of the total value of food consumption was purchased from the market; among the rural poor, this figure was 83 per cent. These data again indicate the vulnerability of poor households to price increases of basic food staples.

Bolivia

Bolivia was more or less self-sufficient in maize and rice, but imported the majority (often over 67 per cent) of its wheat requirements (Maletta and Balbi 2014). Wheat, particularly in the form of bread and pasta, has become a major basic consumption item. The general trends in wheat prices displayed a high degree of conformity with each other (although there was a widening margin between wholesale local and imported prices from early 2014) (see Figure 13). However, as noted by Maletta and Balbi (2014), bread and pasta prices approximately doubled in price during 2007–08, and then stayed at that level, despite subsequent declines in the price of wheat flour. Figure 13 also shows the very substantial gap between retail and wholesale wheat flour prices at all times.

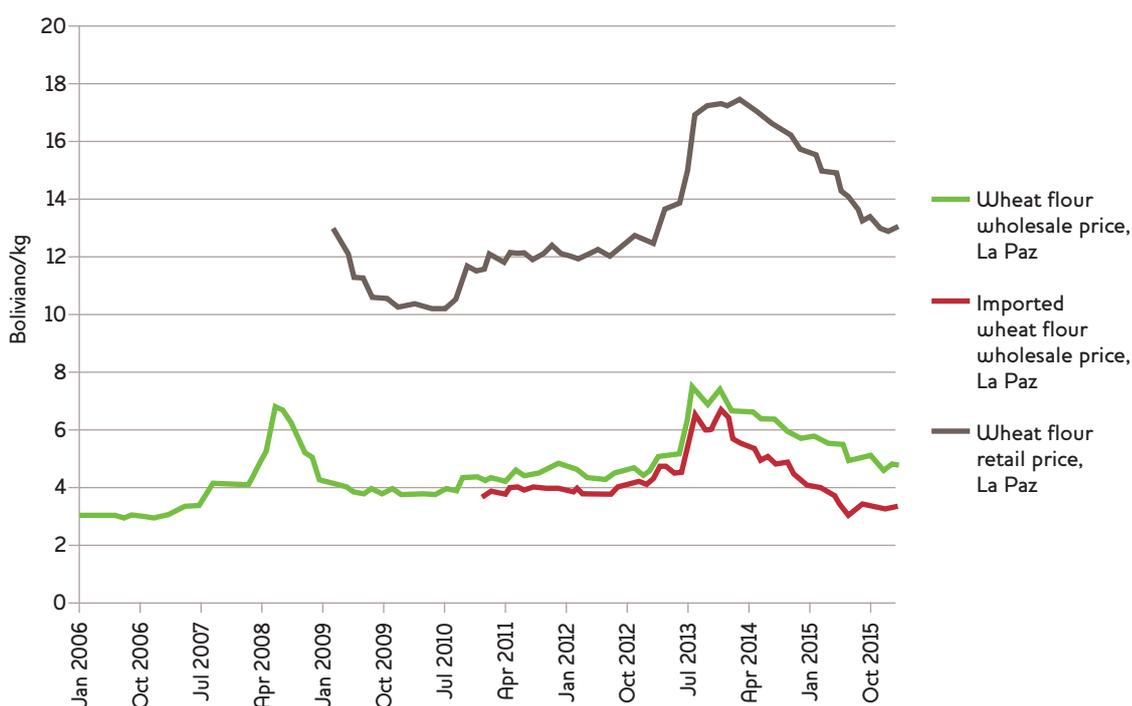
At the onset of the food price crisis in 2008, the Bolivian government attempted to moderate the increase in food prices with reduced import tariffs

and new subsidies on wheat flour, and monetary policy promoting currency appreciation to make imports cheaper. These policy instruments worked in 2008, but (partly because the currency remained stable after 2008) not in 2011. The price stabilisation worked, but at a cost.

If the government wanted to stabilise the price of bread and pasta, it evidently succeeded, but the stabilisation occurred at rather high prices. In practice, by increasing retail prices in 2008 to this new level, bakers and noodle-makers have provided themselves with a price cushion thick enough to withstand subsequent fluctuations in the price of flour (and other inputs) while at the same time widening their profit margin – all at the expense of consumers (Maletta and Balbi 2014: 45). Maletta and Balbi attribute this price trend to a ‘tacit agreement’ between the processing industry to maintain consumer prices at higher levels. This tendency towards higher bread and pasta prices was probably exacerbated by the sharp increase in wheat flour prices in 2013, when prices returned to the peak levels of 2008. This appears to have been mostly due to poor production conditions and tight supplies in the region.

Data on wage rates are not readily available, but macro data on poverty and food security indicate steady improvements throughout the time period, notwithstanding the significant price increases. The national poverty rate fell from

Figure 13 Wheat flour prices: (local wholesale, January 2006 – January 2016; imported wholesale December 2010 – January 2016, retail, February 2009 – January 2016), La Paz



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 18 February 2016).

60 per cent in 2007 to 45 per cent in 2011 (World Bank 2016), while the child stunting rate fell from 27 per cent in 2008 to 18 per cent in 2012 (Haddad *et al.* 2015). Prevalence of undernourishment has also declined markedly, from 28 per cent in 2007–09 to 16 per cent in 2014–16 (FAO, Food Security indicators). Considerable public investment and generally pro-poor investments by the state, facilitated by growth in the mining and other sectors, are likely to have contributed to these positive trends.

Bolivia’s economic growth in the years before and after the 2008 crisis was relatively rapid (between 4–6 per cent per annum) (Alcaraz 2015b);

minimum wages and employment grew, and the state actively intervened to attempt to cushion the effects of food price increases – although not with complete success. Nonetheless, poverty and low-wage employment remain widespread.

Guatemala

Guatemala was the most import-dependent of the ten countries⁹ (see Figure 7). The wholesale price of white maize (the main variety consumed in the country) fluctuated but the retail price of tortillas – the main food product made from white maize and a centrepiece of the Guatemalan diet – saw a steady upward trend since the 2000s (Figure 14). Guatemala produced

Figure 14 White maize wholesale price (January 2000 – January 2016), and maize tortilla retail price (January 2001 – November 2015)



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 22 February 2016).

Table 3 Average personal monthly income from work in Guatemala

Year	Minimum wage*			Income earned**		
	Non-agricultural (Quetzal/month)	Agricultural (Quetzal/month)	Maquila and export sector (Quetzal/month)	Total* (Quetzal/month)	Urban (Quetzal/month)	Rural (Quetzal/month)
2006	1,577.38	1,541.49		N/A	N/A	N/A
2007	1,643.69	1,605.98		N/A	N/A	N/A
2008	1,725.21	1,679.58	1,702.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
2009	1,831.67	1,831.67	1,702.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
2010	1,953.33	1,953.33	1,824.06	1,680	2,109	1,133
2011	2,187.54	2,187.54	2,058.27	1,685	2,113	1,223
2012	2,318.33	2,318.33	2,151.04	1,734	2,154	1,258
2013 (Q1)	2,421.75	2,421.75	2,246.25	1,917	2,274	1,499

Source: Alcaraz (2015a).

most of the white maize consumed in the country but imported some quantities, mostly from neighbouring countries, particularly during production shortfalls. Figure 14 shows a clear spike in wholesale prices in 2011 followed by a decline back towards the price levels attained in the first 2007–08 crisis; within-year fluctuations appear to reflect seasonal variations in food availability linked to harvests.

However, the retail price of maize tortillas rose steadily, with an acceleration of the rate of increase during 2011; lower wholesale prices were not reflected in the retail price. This increase has continued in subsequent years. Analyses by Iannotti and Robles (2011), Iannotti *et al.* (2012) and by Alcaraz (2015a, 2015b) provide detail on the impact of increasing food prices. Iannotti and Robles (cited in Alcaraz) simulated the impact of the 2007–08 price increases on food consumption and calorie intake; they found that the poorest 40 per cent of the population, particularly in urban areas, took the greatest hit, cutting calorie and micro-nutrient intake when prices increased.

Alcaraz provides national-level data which suggest that income levels have not fully adjusted to price increases. The national poverty rate was 56 per cent in 2000, it fell to 51 per cent in 2006 but rose again to 53.7 per cent in 2011; the urban poverty rate rose consistently, reaching 35 per cent by 2011. The minimum wage was raised every year over this time period, but actual wages appear to be below the advertised minimum (see Table 3). From 2008–14, the minimum wage increased by about 50 per cent, but the price of maize tortillas almost doubled.

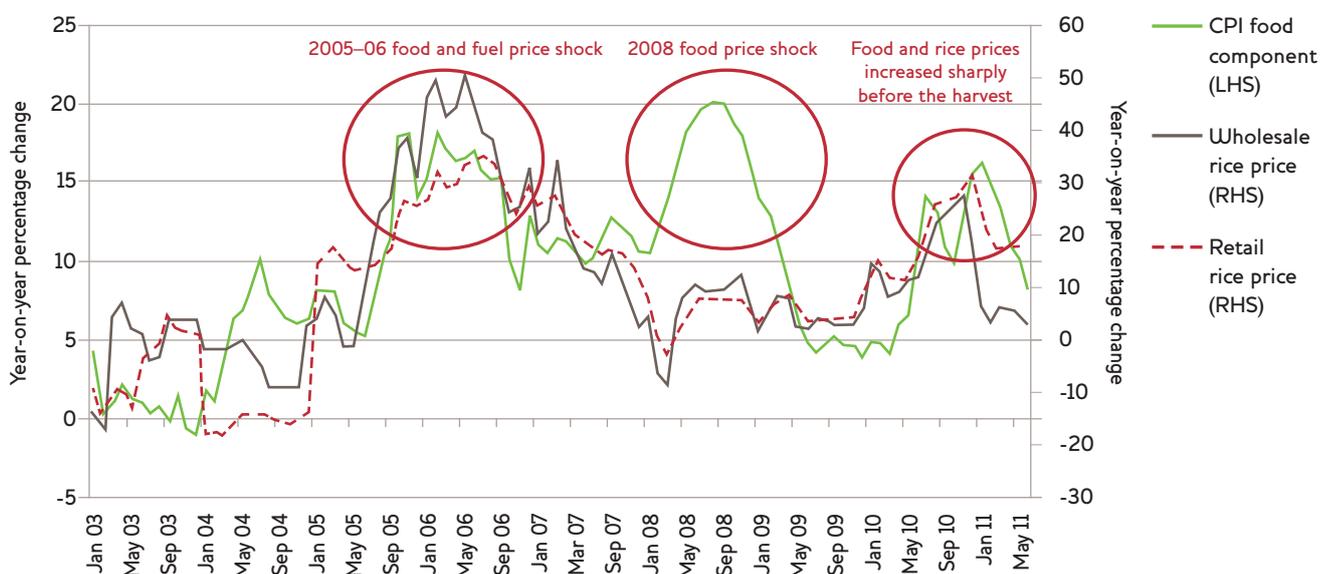
Economic growth rates fell significantly during the crisis, and subsequent natural disasters further contributed to contraction, resulting in increased unemployment and lower household income. Furthermore, Guatemala is highly import-dependent in terms of major food staples (Figure 7) but the government did not approve direct interventions to stabilise prices, instead developing time-limited conditional cash transfer programmes (Alcaraz 2015a).

Indonesia

Indonesia experienced three price spikes in less than a decade: the first, in 2005–06, was triggered by a government decision to reduce fuel subsidies, resulting in increased fuel and food costs; the second, in 2008, coincided with the global food price crisis; the third, in 2011, again conformed to global patterns (see Figure 15). In addition to this volatility, the underlying trend in food prices was upwards. Retail prices of the main staple, rice, more than doubled in nominal terms between early 2008 and early 2016. All of Indonesia’s wheat was imported, but retail prices rose from mid-2012 onwards and do not reflect declining international prices over the period.

Indonesia has active food security policies addressing both availability and access issues, and introduced a Food Law in 2012 based on the principles of food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty (Government of Indonesia and WFP 2015). Rice production increased by an average 3.2 per cent per annum between 2004 and 2013 and maize production increased by 6 per cent per annum over the same period. Indonesia was self-sufficient in rice production and produced a surplus of 8 million tonnes in 2013 (Government

Figure 15 Indonesia food price trends, 2003–2011



Source: BPS and SMERU Research Institute (2014)

Source: Adapted from Government of Indonesia and World Food Programme (2015).

of Indonesia and WFP 2015). There is growing urban demand for wheat and wheat products, which can only be met by imports; in 2013, Indonesia imported about 6.7 million tonnes.

Rising wage rates have partially mitigated the impact of food price rises. Wiggins and Keats (2014) reported that real rural wages increased from the mid-2000s, and although they fell as a result of the 2008 food price rise, in 2009 they were still about 50 per cent higher than earlier in the decade. Growth in the manufacturing and construction sectors, resulting in higher demand for non-farm labour as well as investments in education and rural infrastructure, appears to explain growth in rural wages.

Poverty rates declined (to about 11 per cent in 2014) but almost 28 million people are still below the national poverty line and significant problems of food and nutrition security remain. The Gini coefficient of income inequality increased from 0.36 in 2007 to 0.41 in 2013. Child stunting rates were persistently high, at 37 per cent in 2013. More than half of Indonesians were employed in the informal sector,¹⁰ where wage and overall employment conditions were poor and productivity low. Households that primarily depended on crop production as their main source of income were increasingly vulnerable (Government of Indonesia and WFP 2015).

The Indonesian government developed a number of policy measures to address poverty and lack of

access to food, the best-known being the Raskin programme, which provided subsidised rice to low-income households. In 2013, 15.5 million households were eligible for the programme (Government of Indonesia and WFP 2015). It was restricted to providing rice and did not directly lead to improved dietary diversity or quality, which continue to be major problems, as reflected in high child stunting rates.

Kenya

Maize prices fluctuated significantly over the study period: the price shock in 2011 was substantially greater than that in 2008, and was linked to the major drought that occurred in the region during 2011–12. Prices fell subsequently – particularly from late 2014 to early 2015 – as a result of the Kenyan government importing large quantities of maize from neighbouring Tanzania and Uganda; prices then rose again through most of 2015. For most of the post-2011 period, maize prices were (in nominal terms) at or above the peak 2008 price, and are at least double pre-2008 levels. Bean prices have shown significant fluctuations over the period, primarily related to domestic production conditions (see Figure 17).

Kenya has considerable agro-ecological diversity, and levels of food insecurity vary substantially across the country. In late 2015, it was estimated that some 1.1 million people were acutely food insecure and in need of immediate food assistance, particularly in pastoralist and

Figure 16 Retail price of rice (February 2008 – January 2016) and wheat flour (September 2010 – January 2016)



Source: Authors' own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 23 February 2016).

agro-pastoralist north-eastern areas, which had experienced rainfall deficits in three consecutive seasons (Kenya Food Security Steering Group 2015). The majority of pastoralist households across north-west and north-east Kenya were categorised as being in ‘stress’¹¹ in mid-2015 and likely to remain in that situation in 2016. WFP sample surveys in late 2015 found that 39 per cent of sample households were food insecure, and 43–49 per cent could not afford a minimum healthy food basket (WFP 2015a). Low-income urban households directly bore the brunt of high food prices. In 2011, Schofield *et al.* (2013) found food insecurity rates in Nairobi’s informal settlements at 60–70 per cent in Korogocho, compared to 30–40 per cent in Viwandani. More than 70 per cent of households had engaged in at least one negative coping strategy to make ends meet, including ‘removing a child from school, reducing food intake, stealing, sending family members away or begging’.

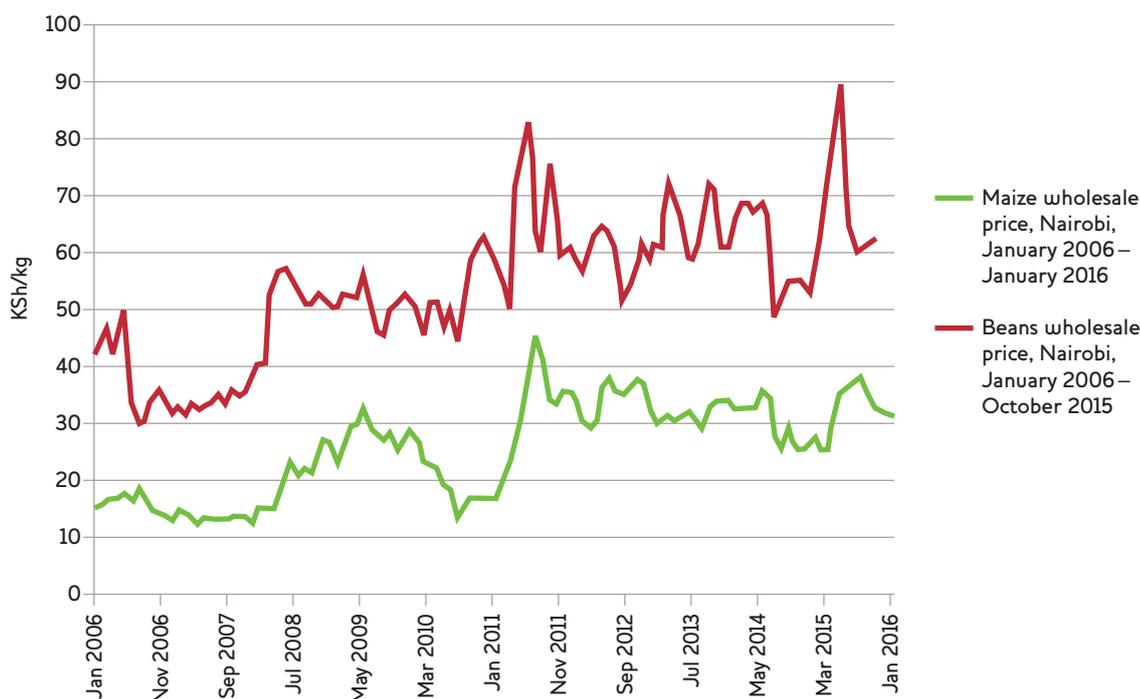
In 2010, Kenya voted for constitutional reform, including a bill of rights. For the first time Kenyans were entitled, among other economic and social rights, to progressive realisation of a right to be ‘free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality’ (Article 43 (1)(c)). Government policy responses to food insecurity took a number of forms, including direct food assistance, piecemeal and narrowly targeted social protection programmes, maize imports from neighbouring countries to enhance

supply and mitigate price rises and, in the longer term, investing in agriculture to increase domestic production. After the 2011 price spike, the government introduced a short-term three-month subsidy for maize meal to support urban consumers. However, the bulk of the cheap maize was soon bought up by entrepreneurs, repackaged and sold on at high prices.

In 2013 there was a political battle following the proposed revision of the Value Added Tax (VAT) Act to apply the full rate of VAT (16 per cent) on products (including basic processed food commodities) that had previously been either zero-rated or exempted. The proposal sparked noisy protests from citizens and civil society, until in June 2013 it was agreed that essential food items, some medical supplies, and agricultural inputs such as fertiliser, maize seed and pest control products would remain exempt (Musembi and Scott-Villiers 2015).

The various measures may have been partially successful, but high levels of chronic food insecurity remained at the end of the period. Other factors need to be taken into account in assessing the long-term prospects for food security among poor households in Kenya (Musembi and Scott-Villiers 2015). They include seasonal variations in food availability and access, a continued low wage environment, and the strong influence on food availability and prices of well-resourced private maize traders.

Figure 17 Wholesale price of maize (January 2006 – January 2016) and beans (January 2006 – October 2015), Nairobi



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 25 February 2016).

The ‘isolated’: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia

Three of the study countries were categorised as ‘isolated’ in relation to cereal import dependency. They were poorly integrated into global cereal markets and, to a large extent, self-sufficient in their main staple, which implies that domestic prices should have been primarily determined by local supply and demand factors. In reality, though, the ‘isolated’ countries were also strongly affected by the shocks in international prices.

Burkina Faso

At the time of the study, cereal consumption in Burkina Faso was dominated by coarse grains (particularly millet), most of which were produced domestically or in the region; but rice consumption was also important, half or more of which was generally imported (FAO 2015a). The price of imported rice almost doubled during the 2008 food price crisis, reflecting international trends (see Figure 18). Kibora (2015) notes that the rapid food price rises in 2008 resulted in food riots in many of Burkina’s towns and cities; the state responded (both in 2008 and in 2011) by introducing price controls on rice and some other basic food items (FAO 2014).

These price controls are partially reflected in the rice price trends shown in Figure 18. Post-2008

prices declined from the 2008 peak, but not to the extent that reductions in international prices might have suggested: Thai rice prices in early 2016 were almost 60 per cent below their 2008 peak, but rice prices in Burkina were about 22 per cent less. The muted transmission of price changes may partly reflect the effect of high transport costs, since most of Burkina’s rice imports came from Asia. It is also notable that millet prices rose substantially over much of the period, at similar magnitudes to prices of internationally traded cereals, despite Burkina being practically self-sufficient in millet production. For instance, FAO data show that imports of millet in 2013 were estimated at 256 tonnes, whereas imports of rice were estimated at 439,080 tonnes in the same year (FAOSTAT 2016).

In 2008 there may have been cross-substitution between cereal products – i.e. as rice prices rose, consumer demand may have switched more towards millet, resulting in higher millet prices. In 2012, millet prices rose even further. This has been attributed to drought, civil unrest and locust damage (International Food Policy Research Institute 2013), but other factors – including stockpiling by traders and the impact of increased demand in Nigeria – may also have played a role (IRIN News 2012). However, millet prices fell quite significantly in 2013 and have remained well below their 2011–12 peak.

Figure 18 Millet and imported rice wholesale prices, January 2006 – January 2016, Ouagadougou



Source: Authors’ own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 18 February 2016).

Poverty data for Burkina Faso indicate that more people were living in poverty after the 2008 price spike than before it, although the headcount ratio was marginally reduced. There were 8.4 million people in PPP\$¹² poverty in 2009, compared to 7.2 million in 2003; using the national poverty line, the respective figures were 7 million and 6 million (World Bank 2016). Food security and nutritional indicators showed small improvements over the time period.

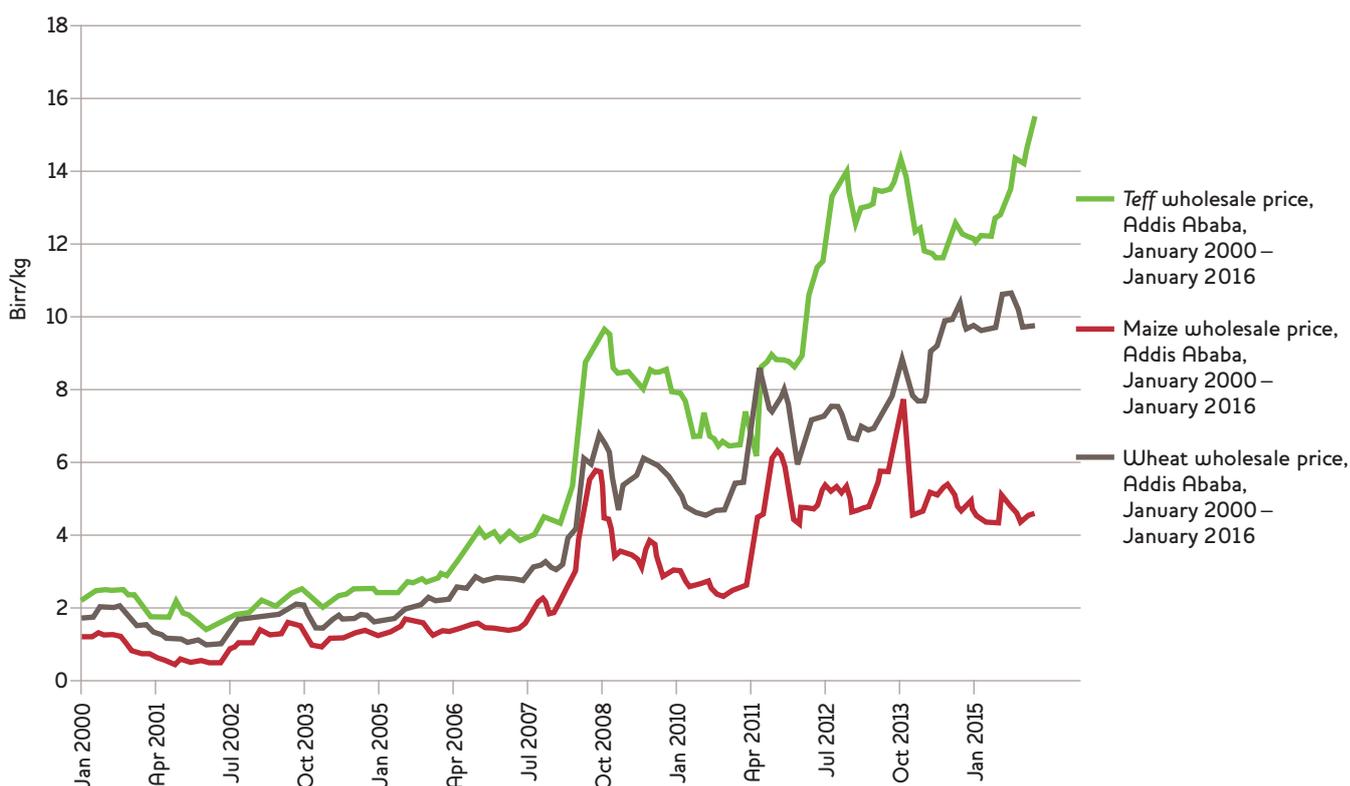
Ethiopia

Staple prices spiked in 2008 and 2011, following the pattern of international prices, but *teff* and wheat prices mostly continued to rise thereafter, as did maize prices until early 2014 (Figure 19). Although commercial imports of wheat and maize were limited and *teff* was exclusively produced in Ethiopia, domestic price increases in 2008 were at least as large as the increase in international prices (Baltzer 2013). Admassie (2013) states that domestic food price increases started in 2004 due to domestic factors: improved purchasing power in rural areas, expansionary monetary policy, relatively slow expansion of marketed supply, and localised drought. The spike in food prices in 2008 was, according to Admassie, linked to rapidly increasing global energy prices, which led to foreign exchange shortages.

The Ethiopian government responded by rationing foreign currency and tightening money supply and credit availability. However, in late 2010, the currency was devalued by 20 per cent and this, among other factors, caused prices to start to rise again. The drought of 2011–12 exacerbated this renewed trend towards higher food prices. The current (2015–16) drought, linked to El Niño, could be expected to lead to further significant cereal price increases. So far, only the price of *teff* is continuing to rise; however, the price of wheat remains substantially above 2011–12 levels. Maize prices are about 25 per cent below the three-year average, which may reflect government investments in boosting productivity (Abate *et al.* 2015).¹³

Headey *et al.* (2012) analysed the degree of responsiveness of urban wages of casual labourers (who were likely to be among the urban poor) to price increases, and found that, at least in the short run, wages did not significantly adjust to price increases (both food and non-food). In 2007–08, the food purchasing power of wages fell by about 20 per cent, and overall by about 10 per cent. The adverse welfare impact was greater in 2010–11 due to more rapid non-food price inflation. These findings suggest the importance of appropriate urban-based food security interventions in periods of food price crisis (Headey *et al.* 2012).

Figure 19 Wholesale prices of *teff*, maize, wheat, January 2000 – January 2016, Addis Ababa



Source: Authors' own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 19 February 2016).

Zambia

Retail prices of maize, the Zambian staple, fluctuated over the period, rising rapidly in 2008 but not in 2011, unlike elsewhere. However, prices in Zambia also spiked in 2005–06, 2014, and again between late 2015 and early 2016 (Figure 20). These trends suggest that domestic or regional factors may have influenced price movements more than international price fluctuations (see also Baltzer 2013).

However, high global prices may have indirectly influenced prices in 2008, when perceived shortages of maize led the government to ban maize exports, encouraging private hoarding by traders (Baltzer 2013). In 2013–14, maize prices again increased substantially; this was precipitated by a reduced harvest in 2013, allied to the removal of maize and fuel subsidies and a reduction in fertiliser subsidies during 2013 (Hossain, King, Kelbert, Scott-Villiers and Chisholm 2015). Although the government banned exports in December 2013, prices did not come down until the harvest was brought in, in May 2014. Drought conditions during the 2014–15 season resulted in a reduced maize harvest in 2015 as well as reduced food availability in the southern Africa region (WFP 2015c), and contributed to the further price increases. These various explanations of price increases indicate that maize prices were strongly influenced by domestic (and, to some extent, regional) factors – both production conditions and government policy.

As Figure 20 shows, in recent years Zambia has switched from being a net cereal importer

to being a net exporter: most of these exports of white maize go to neighbouring countries. Drought conditions in late 2015 to early 2016 in southern Africa caused major production shortfalls, particularly in South Africa. This resulted in increased demand for imports, and caused the price of maize to increase significantly (WFP 2015c). Zambia therefore increased its exports to neighbouring countries, despite reductions in its own production in 2015. This appeared to be contributing to the increase in domestic maize prices since mid-2015.

In aggregate terms, poverty rates in Zambia increased over the period (in PPP\$ terms, from 60.5 per cent in 2006 to 64.4 per cent in 2010 (World Bank 2016). Prevalence of undernourishment stood at about 48 per cent, somewhat reduced from the peak of 53 per cent between 2007 and 2010. Child stunting rates were high, at 40 per cent, but down from a peak of 58 per cent in 1999 (FAO Food Security statistics). Analysis by Alcaraz (2015a), comparing data from the Living Conditions Monitoring Surveys conducted in 2006 and 2010, found that households increased the share of total expenditure spent on food in 2010 (i.e. after the 2008 food crisis) and spent more on cheaper, less-refined maize flour. In rural areas, there was a general trend towards reduced consumption of protein-rich foods in favour of cheaper sources of calories. In urban areas, richer households were able to maintain consumption of protein-rich foods by substituting cheaper sources of calories, but poorer urban households had low intake of protein-rich foods in both years.

Figure 20 White maize retail price (January 2004 – January 2016) and breakfast maize meal retail price (January 2006 – January 2016), Zambia



Source: Authors' own, based on FAO GIEWS data (accessed 2 March 2016).

Notes

¹ There is enough controversy about the validity of global poverty measures, and indeed their intrinsic value as indicators of human wellbeing, to question the big picture story of rapidly declining world poverty. Most importantly for the purposes of this report, the global poverty estimates appear unable to account for changing food prices: the latest purchasing power parity (PPP) estimates counter-intuitively suggest that consumer prices are down in several big developing countries that have experienced rapid wage rises (Ravallion and Chen 2015); in some cases, the PPP estimates and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) estimates were at odds. On the global poverty estimates, see Ravallion and Chen 2012, and Ferreira *et al.* 2015; also Cruz *et al.* 2015. Critical views of the uses of PPP estimates in attempting comparative global poverty estimates, despite their improvements in the 2011 round, include Deaton 2010, Deaton and Aten 2014, and Edward and Sumner 2015.

² The extent of integration in food commodity supply chains has been amply documented. Burch and Lawrence (2009), for instance, provide striking examples of the extent of the concentration of control over finance, fertiliser, land and machinery in agriculture supply chains in the immediate run-up to the global food crisis.

³ For a thorough analysis of the food crisis that takes into account its political and global dimensions, see Pinstrup-Andersen (2014).

⁴ On the impacts and coping strategies, see, for instance Del Ninno, Dorosh, and Smith 2003; Heltberg, Hossain, Reva and Turk 2012; Horn 2011; D'Souza and Jolliffe 2010; Wiggins and Keats 2014; FAO 2009, 2011; Hossain 2009; Hossain and Green 2011; Hossain, Fillaili and Lubaale 2010; Martin *et al.* 2009; Sulaiman, Parveen and Das 2009.

⁵ The qualitative data were transcribed or written up and translated (from 15 languages) in each country. Data management was coordinated across the countries, with common metadata labels issued to all the teams and the lead country researchers responsible for ensuring that data were transcribed, translated, and labelled correctly. For the synthesis, the translated qualitative data were stored and coded in the data analysis software, NVivo 10s. Given the high costs of collecting, transcribing, translating, storing, and coding qualitative data, the emphasis has been on small amounts of high-quality data and on maximising such alternative secondary sources that exist.

⁶ The classification of a country as an 'importer' is potentially misleading. As Figure 7 shows, Pakistan is actually a net exporter of cereals; but Pakistan exports rice, which is less important in terms of local consumption, and imports wheat. Even though wheat imports comprise a small proportion of domestic wheat consumption, they create the potential conditions for international price transmission to domestic prices.

⁷ At the February 2016 exchange rate: Taka 1 = US\$0.013.

⁸ Based on data collected in five major cities: Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar and Quetta.

⁹ The signing and implementation of the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement during the 2000s has also facilitated an increase in imports of food and other commodities. Alcaraz (2015a) cites Thow and Hawkes (2009) who state that food imports from the US to Guatemala grew by 144 per cent between 1990 and 2005, particularly chicken meat, corn, processed cheese, apples, and French fries.

¹⁰ The International Labour Organization (ILO 2014) reports that in early 2014 about 53.6 per cent of those employed were in the informal economy, while the Government of Indonesia and WFP (2015) report a figure of 60 per cent for early 2013.

¹¹ The second stage of the IPC Classification, i.e. they can meet basic food needs, but not non-food essential expenditures without resorting to irreversible coping mechanisms (Kenya Food Security Steering Group 2015).

¹² A poverty line measured in PPP\$ represents the international poverty line (currently \$1.90/person/day) used to measure global extreme poverty; the poverty line is converted into local currencies through PPP exchange rates with the aim of ensuring that the poverty line has the same purchasing power in every country (Ferreira *et al.* 2015).

¹³ These are wholesale prices: the annual retail food inflation rate in January 2016 was running at 12.4 per cent, and the index of food prices was 146.6 compared to a base in December 2011 of 100 (FDRE Central Statistical Agency 2016).

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Indonesia

Banjar, South Kalimantan

Banjar is a major rubber-producing area in the province of South Kalimantan. Most of the population relies on rubber – as landowners, landless rubber tappers, sap transporters and middlemen.

Recently, many have started to move away from the rubber industry. Mining and quarrying are gaining importance.

Bekasi

Bekasi, which is located 16km from the capital city, Jakarta, is one of the biggest industrial areas in West Java. Its export-oriented economy tends to be greatly affected by global financial fluctuations.

The majority of residents are migrant workers, living there temporarily while working in the local factories, mostly as contract workers. The poverty rate in Bekasi



is low, at 5.9 per cent in 2011 – almost half the national average of 11.7 per cent.

Cianjur

Located 120km from Jakarta and 65km from West Java's provincial capital, Bandung, Cianjur is an important rice supplier to the cities. Three-quarters of the inhabitants earn their living from agriculture, mostly as farm labourers who do not have their own farmland. Many have left to work in the Middle East, sending remittances back home. Cash inflows have helped the village to develop new infrastructure.

The local rice variety can only be harvested twice a year. Most farmers now use a 'modern' variety, which can produce three harvests a year. To do so, they use large amounts of chemicals to overcome pest attacks.



Kenya

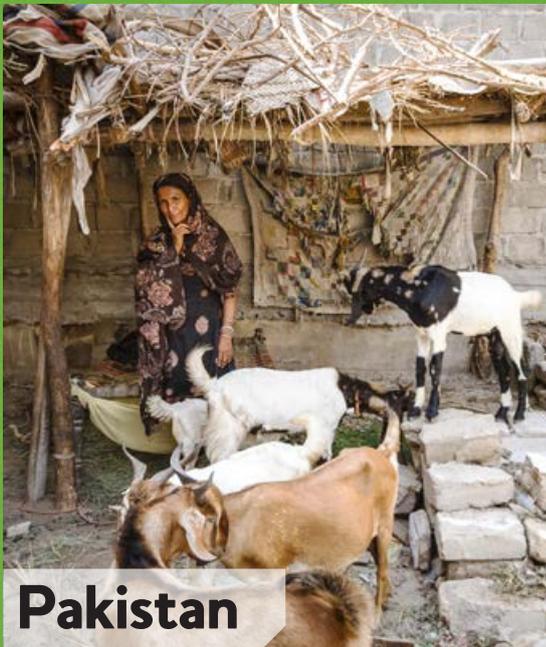
Mukuru is the second biggest informal settlement in Nairobi, with an estimated population of between 500,000 and 700,000 residents. The majority of those in work have jobs in the nearby industrial area, as security guards or domestic workers, while others are artisans or mechanics. Some local residents are landlords, and petty trading is widespread.

Many people choose to eat *githeri*, a mix of maize kernels and kidney beans – a cheap and readily available food.



Lango Baya is approximately 50km from the coastal town of Malindi in the east of Kenya. Its 16,000 residents depend mainly on rain-fed farming. Over the past few years, irrigation projects have helped to improve the livelihoods of those with land near the river, whose vegetable and maize crops have generated good incomes.

'*Jipanga*', in Kiswahili, is the term used to describe how women 'organise themselves and their time so that they can be able to do all'.



Pakistan

Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Karachi

Gulshan-e-Iqbal is a low-income area in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city. Most of the residents are internal migrants, self-employed or working as daily-wage labourers. Strikes or trouble in the city, which particularly affect daily-wage workers, are the biggest sources of shock to households.

In this conservative neighbourhood we saw women entering the labour force for the first time, often to work as maids or beauticians.

Dadu District

Located at the tail end of canals on the right bank of the Indus River, villages in Dadu District in Sindh province were greatly affected by the floods of 2010, when thousands of people had to leave their homes. Today, many households have returned and some benefit from cash transfers through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and from compensation for flood damage.

Many of the women in the villages in Dadu District sew quilts for extremely low pay – typically PKR200–300 (US\$2.14–3.21) for a quilt stitched over a month, while in 2014, men earned between Rs300 and 400 as day labourers.



Vietnam

In **Hanoi**, the research was conducted in **Phu Dien commune** (a peri-urban area, located 10km from Hanoi) and **Quynh Mai ward** (an urban area). Most of the population of Quynh Mai – which has a higher poverty rate than other wards in Hanoi – work in textile and garment factories. In Phu Dien, despite agriculture being a major source of livelihood, land is gradually being built over.

The Luong An Tra commune in **An Giang province** is located in the Mekong Delta and is the biggest rice producer in Vietnam. Agriculture accounts for nearly 80 per cent of the economy of the commune. The decrease in the price of rice in recent years has meant that farmers often produce at a loss. Consequently, many households with less land and capital accumulate debt.

Nghi Van commune in **Nghe An province** is another significant rice-producing commune. Similarly to Luong An Tra, about 80 per cent of the population earn a living from agricultural production. Other occupations include handicrafts, construction and small-scale business. Many young people migrate to the cities to seek work in factories, while others emigrate to the Republic of Korea, Laos or Malaysia, under labour export programmes.



Zambia

Kabwata is a residential area in the south-east of Lusaka. While some people in Kabwata rely on income from formal employment and trade, the majority of households are involved in informal employment ranging from petty trade (food and non-food) to welding, carpentry, crafts and tourism. Almost half the households are headed by women.

Between 2014 and 2016, global slides in commodity prices, including for copper, led to fluctuations in the value of the kwacha, the Zambian national currency. Traders used the price changes to stock up on mealie meal, creating artificial shortages of the national staple, maize. A number of policy interventions have attempted to resolve the ongoing issue.

Chikwanda in the Northern Province is in the agricultural and gardening belt of Mpika District. Most people grow maize, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, cassava, beans and soya beans. A few are engaged in farm labour, making handicrafts or collecting and processing minor forest products.

Mpika is a fast-growing town close to Chikwanda village. Many of the farmers from Chikwanda go to Mpika market to sell their produce.



This report is the result of four years of collaboration between Oxfam GB, the Institute of Development Studies and qualitative and quantitative researchers in ten countries. It builds on a prior IDS-Oxfam study into the effects of the global food crisis on the lives of people on low and uncertain incomes, which ran between 2009 and 2011 in four countries. The longitudinal study synthesised here was carried out between 2012 and 2015 and involved annual visits to communities in rural, urban and peri-urban sites, along with commissioned reviews of national-level prices and policies over the period. With the help of the research partners and of Oxfam offices around the world, the findings have already begun to be disseminated and discussed with communities, government representatives and members of civil society at multiple levels. The research was funded by the UK Department for International Development, Irish Aid and Oxfam.

