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FOOD SECURITY POLICY IN LAO PDR:

An Analysis of Policy Narratives in Use

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Food Policy

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[all photos by J.Armstrong]

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Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis, except those elements specifically declared, is all my own work carried out and finished at City, University of London.

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Abstract

Food security has long been a component of the global development project. Over time, extensive definitions and conceptual frameworks for food security have emerged. This thesis explores food security policy discourse in middle-income, non-crisis contexts in the Global South. Taking as its research site the Southeast Asian state of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the thesis explores how food security is defined as a policy problem, and what solutions are proposed.

Using an interpretive analytical approach, the research analyzes authored policy documents and constructed policy texts drawn from interviews conducted between 2011-2013 with 25 international experts to identify narratives emerging from the praxis of formal policy documents, institutional mandates and policy-in-practice. The role of international expertise in shaping the national level discourse is explored in detail.

Four policy narratives are identified: food security as modernization/economic growth, the smallholder narrative, the nutrition narrative, and food security as development. Particular attention is paid to the totemic status of rice in the discourse. For each narrative, a matrix of problem statements, proposed solutions, key indicators, and supporting institutions is presented. A metanarrative analysis of how these narratives intersect suggests that one of the characteristics of food security conceptually is its inclusiveness, giving it a remit across a range of sectors.

This research presents food security as a valence issue, which, by virtue of its expansiveness, provides a platform on which multiple, divergent policy agenda coexist. Despite recognition among experts of serious shortcomings in both the conceptual framework and applied use in policy, this fluidity ensures that food security remains in consistent use, as both a component of national policy and as an artefact of global development discourse at the national level.

Because of its continued focus on undernutrition in rural areas, the omission of issues such as overnutrition, urban food systems, and environmental degradation from the discourse, narratives in food security policy are presented as hewing to pre-existing problem statements and solutions. This renders food security an incomplete fit within the policy context of rapidly developing nations in 21st Century Southeast Asia.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ACO	Agricultural Census Office
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AEPF	Asia-Europe People's Forum
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AFIS	ASEAN Food Insecurity Strategy
AMAF	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry
APTERR	ASEAN +3 Emergency Rice Reserve
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian States
BMI	Body Mass Index
CAP	Consolidated Agricultural Policy
CDC	Centres for Disease Control
CFS	Committee for Food Security
CFSVA	Consolidated Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CU5	Children Under Five
DES	Daily Energy Supply
DfID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FAORAP	Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Asia-Pacific
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
GoL	Government of Lao People's Democratic Republic
GoV	Government of Vietnam
HFIAS	Household Food Insecurity Access Scale
FIES	Food Insecurity Experience Scale
ICC	International Criminal Court
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Financial Institution
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IPC	Integrated Phase Classification

IRRI	International Rice Research Institute
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
IYCF	Infant and Young Child Feeding
LANGOCA	Lao PDR-Australia NGO Cooperation Agreement
LANN	Linking Agriculture, Nutrition and Natural Resources
LDC	Least Developed Country
LEAP	Laos Extension for Agriculture Project
LIWG	Land Issues Working Group
LPRP	Lao People's Revolutionary Party
LSB	Lao Statistics Bureau
LURAS	Lao Uplands Rural Advisory Services
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Japan)
MDER	Minimum Daily Energy Requirements
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoH	Ministry of Health
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NCD	Non-communicable Diseases
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NNC	National Nutrition Committee
NNS/NPoA	National Nutrition Strategy/Nutrition Plan of Action
NPA	Non Profit Association
NSEDP	National Socio-Economic Development Plan
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Products
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.
PDR	People's Democratic Republic
PoU	Prevalence of Undernourishment
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PR China	People's Republic of China
RBA	Rome Based Agencies
REACH	Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition
REC	Regional Economic Community
RTM	Roundtable Meetings
SCN	Standing Committee on Nutrition
SDC	Swiss Development Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SE Asia	Southeast Asia
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
SOFI	State of food Insecurity (FAO Report)
SPA	Strategic Plan of Action
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
TABI	The Agrobodiversity Initiative
ToT	Training of Trainers
UN	United Nations

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollar
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WFS	World Food Summit
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Foreword

In early 2013, as a consultant for the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), I met with an assessment team hired by the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and FAO to collect data on food insecurity at the household level across the country. We were in a guest house in Attapeu, the southernmost province of Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)[1]. Situated in an oxbow of the Mekong, Attapeu is a hot, dusty place, not really on the road to anywhere.

The team had recently been in the extreme north of the country, and we were talking over how their fieldwork was going. The team leader said "Well, sometimes it's hard to know what to do with the data. We asked a household in the north if they thought they were food secure or not, and they said 'oh yes, we have enough rice for six months.' We asked the same question yesterday to a family here in the south and they said, 'oh no, we are not food secure- we only have enough rice for six months.' What should we do with these two data?"

The question posed was a simple one, but has remained for me a useful synopsis of what we talk about when we talk about food security: does a six month supply of rice represent security or shortfall? Does it matter where you are, and why should that matter? Is food security the same everywhere, and if so, how is that possible? When we talk about food security, do we know what we're talking about?

This research is an attempt to answer questions which have preoccupied me for many years in many places. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, I worked for World Food Programme (WFP) in Rwanda, distributing food to internally displaced people fleeing lethal force; in Serbia, among vestigial refugee populations left adrift in school dormitories and derelict hotels after the Balkan wars ended, and in Malawi, shepherding international politicians, development VIPs and press around an unfolding, slow-onset, disaster involving millions of people across southern Africa.

Years later, working for a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Mongolia, I worked to support small-scale farmers (pushed from traditional pastoralism into subsistence agriculture by the decimation of their herds. Thereafter, in Lao PDR, a country so verdant and biodiverse that an estimated 50 food items are hunted, fished and gleaned from the wild (Foppes et al 2011), people were eating an enormous variety of

[1] The Lao People's Democratic Republic is the official name of the country, also known in English and French as Laos. The official language and citizens of the country are known as Lao. It should be noted that Lao PDR is a multiethnic place, and being a Lao *citizen* does not necessarily indicate that a person is *ethnically* Lao- this will be explored in greater detail in the chapters that follow. I will use this schema throughout this paper, except when referring to the pre-1975 period, when Laos was the official name of the country.

foods but were not getting enough overall. The near complete absence of acute malnutrition was striking, and yet chronic malnutrition (or stunting) was upwards of 40 percent. Writing this in Zambia, a 25-kilo sack of maize meal (enough to make enough *nshima* to feed a family of four for a month) costs the same as a two pizza meal deal from a Pizza Hut in Lusaka.

All of this has something to do with food security. But taken together, what does it all mean? If all of this is connected, what is the connective tissue that holds all of these people and places, overlapping and jumbled as they may be, together? How does food security in one place relate to food security in another? What is the validity of so deeply relative a term? How is any of this being translated into global benchmarks, against which countries' progress is evaluated? Who are the arbiters of food security, and what do they know?

In 2007, from Mongolia, I started a Masters in food policy at the City University Centre for Food Policy. In the course of that study, my gaze shifted from developing countries where I lived and worked, to the rich-world realities of the EU and the UK. In this rich-world, food security was future-focused, presented in the context of global issues such as peak oil, population growth, the nutrition transition, climate change, water and land scarcity, and social justice (Chatham House 2009). In this broader framework, food *policy*, rather than food security, was the center of research, exploring questions around governance, supply chains, health and nutrition, the environment, behavior and culture, social justice and poverty (Lang et al 2009 p8).

When I began work on my doctoral research, my immediate thought was to explore food security, but was challenged on this from the start. In 2009, Lang described it as a 'Rorschach blot', interpretable more or less at will, applied to support any policy equation (Lang 2009). Why study something, the argument went, which has already been the subject of decades of academic and development sector research, the term itself hopelessly overdetermined, made flaccid through selective understanding and multiple definitions.

Reviewing of the history and etymology of food security, I found the term itself was presented as self-evident, heavy with implication, yet vaguely or impractically defined. At the global level, tremendous efforts had been and were continuing to be made over decades of endeavor to come up with the best possible definition. The trouble was, there was no end to it- food security appeared so mutable, so malleable, as to allow for everything and disregard nothing. I recalled the parable of the blind men and the elephant, and discovered that even in that, I was not the first to do this (Millman 1990).

Conducting preliminary interviews with experts from disciplines related to food security, it became clear that this mutability was well known- some found it to be source of considerable frustration, others viewed it as a means to an end, useful for bringing their own agenda to bear. Irrespective of the theoretical underwiring of food security, a great deal of time and effort was spent working out how to 'apply' it and then measure it; whatever both of those terms meant.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the inclusive capaciousness of the term, in the applied policy contexts of developing world nations in the Global South I was familiar with, alternative theoretical approaches to policymaking around food were near unknown- insofar as food featured on the policy agenda at all, it was under the auspices of 'food security'. Policy discourse in developing nations in the Global South was created in and by the vocabulary, definitions and conceptual frameworks of food security.

Thus, in order to understand the policy space afforded to food, it would be necessary to reenter the debate about food security. What was paradoxical (or at least perversely interesting) about Southeast Asia, where I lived and worked, was that although the language of food security had not been discarded, their rate of progress outstripped the conceptual approach: countries like Thailand and Vietnam had malnourished populations, but they were also vibrant economies integrated via trade, commerce and development with the Rich World. Urban populations in Bangkok were as likely to be eating food sourced from global markets (and from global brands) as they were to be eating traditional Thai meals. In or around 2011, Vietnam became the world's biggest global rice exporting nation, exporting in excess of six million tonnes. And it was this regional context that begged the question: how did food security merit policy attention in globally integrated, rapidly developing nations in Southeast Asia?

Embedded in the policy discourse of a small, rapidly developing Southeast Asian nation, this research is an attempt to understand what we talk about when we talk about food security. It explores how food security is determined to be a problem (or not), what solutions are identified, who participates or is excluded from this process, and how expertise is used in defining and refining policy discourse.

Chapter 1: Food Security Policy in Lao PDR

This chapter introduces the overall research context and structure of the thesis. It presents a short introduction to Lao PDR (which is elaborated in greater detail in Chapter 4), and articulates why food security policy in Lao PDR is worthy of research interest, highlighting key developments in the course of the research period. It provides an overview of the food security policy context in Lao PDR, drawn from key policy documents drawn up by government and development sector partners. International institutional architecture in Lao PDR and the region related to food security will be identified with an overview of their mandates and interests, setting up the research focus on the role of expertise and international institutions in defining the discourse. Finally, the research questions and overall structure of the thesis will be outlined.

Background

Between 2007-2009, a spate of interlocking financial, energy, agricultural and climate-related events resulted in global financial, food and fuel crisis. As major global economies teetered, developing nations faced food riots as the price of basic staples and petrol spiraled to historic highs. This narrative of crisis elided the possibility that these events were anticipated, and were the most recent iteration of a longer continuum of systems failure. In the food sphere, Lang referred to a 'cycle' of crisis, which he called the 'creeping normality', the results of food systems constructed without regard for sustainable limits (Lang 2010). While global policy discourse scrambled to belatedly acknowledge that food systems were causing a range of negative externalities across the planet, the crisis narrative was confirmed by the apparent increase of hunger and malnutrition in developing countries which drew the headlines, underlining the need for highest possible global policy attention (FAO 2012a).

In the wake of the crisis, global reviews of food security reiterated that global progress on malnutrition, sustainable diets and livelihoods had been stagnant or even retrograde for a decade or more. If, taken at its most intuitive definition, 'food security' is attained when a population regularly has enough to eat, many nations across the planet had never reached this threshold. Despite the technological capability to produce and deliver enough to feed the world, the number of undernourished people in the world was rising, not falling (DfID 2009). Moreover, these undernourished populations were now conjoined with overweight and obese populations, through a phenomenon known as the 'Nutrition Transition.' (Popkin 2002).

The 2007-2009 crisis was the one of a series of events which reconfirmed the importance of maintaining food security on the global development agenda, a placement which has held since the founding of the United Nations in 1943 (Shaw 2007 p.3). Food security is the scaffolding on which conceptions of poverty are built, with basic poverty lines (that is, minimum thresholds below which people cannot subsist, expressed in monetary equivalents) derived from a minimum food basket for a household's minimum food requirements. Within global-level initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), food security has been at or near the top of the list alongside poverty, as a top-level priority for all countries to strive towards.

As a policy focus, food security maintains simultaneous definitional coexistence in different national and regional contexts. In rich-world usage, it has been modulated to incorporate issues of human and ecological health, social justice, and the role of the private sector (Seed 2011 p31). It has been used as a rallying cry to relocalize food systems at the community level (Bellows and Hamm 2003). In developing world contexts, despite increasingly complex datasets, modeling and conceptual frameworks (IPC 2015), the focus has remained steadfastly concentrated on deprivation and undernutrition, predominantly in rural contexts.

Yet as Lang et al (2009 p4) have noted, in a global context of food systems integrated across continents and populations, bifurcating conceptions into diametrically opposed rich-world/developing world, Global South/Global North categories is limiting and incomplete. Some 68 percent of the world's food insecure population lives in lower-middle income and middle-income countries, and that in such places, food insecurity is not linked to income, food availability, or even food consumption (FAO and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2014). Precisely because it does not fit the mold of nations prone to the extremities of widescale chronic and acute food shortages, famines and poverty, Lao PDR and Southeast Asia provide useful sites in which to test the validity of the food security conceptual model. How then does food security speak to Southeast Asia, and how does Southeast Asia respond?

This research will illustrate the paradoxical coexistence of both food security and food insecurity, as defined by government on one hand and global development discourse on the other, within one such developing nation in the Global South. Starting from a very low economic base, Lao PDR is one of the fastest growing economies in one of the most economically robust regions of the world. Per capita income has never been higher. It is increasingly integrated in the regional and global economy, an important source of hydroelectric power and natural resources across SE Asia, positioning itself as 'the Battery of Asia' or 'the Battery of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian States)' (MPI 2011a). Conversely, it is a

repressive one-party state which tolerates no opposition or dissent. It has built its economic growth on unrestricted, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. It has ignored regional concerns, even from its most important regional allies, and pushed ahead with building dams on the mainstem of the Mekong River, threatening both site-specific and systemic ecological disaster.

Food security policy discourse in Lao PDR is the embodiment of these policy contradictions, in which definitive progress is presented alongside stagnant, intractable challenges. It illustrates how local context influences globally defined normative approaches to food security. Based on insights from international experts from global development institutions at the regional and national level, this research explores the throughflow of policy discourse between global and national policy on food security.



Figure 1.1: Mainland Southeast Asia, showing proposed transport infrastructure developments (www.adb.org)

The Lao People's Democratic Republic, one of the smallest and poorest nations in Southeast Asia, is often described as being at a 'crossroads'. Citations of this crossroads are evoked by the most respected observers of the country (Stuart-Fox 2011, Evans 2002), in journal articles (Linter 2008), by advocacy

groups (Delforge 2001) and in the title of one of the few books of contemporary political analysis, Pholsena and Banomyong's *Laos: From Buffer State to Crossroads?* (2006). The United Nations' Country Analysis Report (2012) has as its opening statement, 'This Country Analysis report argues that the country is at a cross-road'[*sic*].

Implicit in this metaphor is the potentiality and the many options available to the country. Lao PDR is politically stable, lightly populated, culturally fecund, abundant in natural resources, with a growth rate of 6 percent or higher for a decade or more. Peacefully situated in a well-integrated and rapidly developing region of the world, Lao PDR is generally free of external entanglements, with good working relations with all of its neighbours and global powers such as the European Union (EU), Peoples' Republic of China (PR China), Japan and the United States of America. Although many of its people lead lives of very limited means and considerable hardship, even at the height of the Indochina war, Laos never experienced levels of poverty and human suffering of the scope or profundity found in south Asia or sub-Saharan Africa (Rigg 2005). As a consequence of this happy combination of factors, the policy options available to the government and nation are virtually limitless.

Lao PDR is the only landlocked nation in ASEAN, with a surface area of 237,000 square kilometres and a population of 6.5 million people, giving it the lowest population density in the region. It is one of the poorest nations in Southeast Asia, ranked 139th in the world according to the UN's Human Development Index (UNDP 2013). This low-income status is offset by the rapidity of growth Lao PDR has experienced over the past five years. Since 1992, the proportion of the population living in poverty had declined from 46 percent in 1992 to 23 percent in 2012, and life expectancy has risen to 68 years (World Bank 2015b). Geographically, the country ranges from the hot, fertile, well-populated Mekong valley to the sparse settlements of remote northern highlands, with mountains ranging from 1500-2500 metres (World Bank 2006b).

Between 2010-2015, Lao PDR maintained growth rates of 7.5 percent or higher, building on extensive investments in infrastructure, extractive industries and the energy sector (especially hydroelectric power generation)(World Bank 2015a). Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), led by PR China, Vietnam and Thailand, exceeded 1.16 billion US Dollars (USD) in 2011 (Phommahaxay 2013), with Lao PDR joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2013[2]. Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) increased over the past

[2] Challenges to inward investment remain extensive. In 2017 Forbes magazine rated Lao PDR 140th of 153 countries surveyed in its Best Countries for Business list, with Lao PDR scoring at or near the bottom on trade freedom, technology, red tape, investor protection, corruption, and personal freedom (Forbes 2017)

decade, topping 700 million USD per annum in 2012, but has declined as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to under ten percent (GoL and UN 2013 p168). More than 40 percent of ODA is spent in the health and rural development/agriculture sectors, and some 24 percent was oriented towards attainment of MDG 1 (Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger) (GoL and UN 2013 p169).

Figure 1.2: Basic Data on Lao PDR (All data Government of Lao PDR and UN 2013)

Population
Population: 6.5 million
Population Growth rate: 2.1 percent
Population <25 years of age: 59 percent

Agriculture and Rural Development
Population living in rural areas: 71 percent
Farming households: 77 percent
Subsistence vs. market-oriented farm households: 70/30 percent

Economy:
Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita: 1,130 USD (2011)
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth: 8 percent p/a (2012)
Poverty:
Population below the national poverty line: 27.6 percent
Population below international poverty line (1 USD per person per day): 37.4 percent

Nutrition and Public Health:
Population with food intake below minimum daily energy requirements: 22 percent
Stunting (Children under five (CU5)): 44 percent
Underweight (Children under five): 27 percent
Iron deficiency anaemia (IDA): 41 percent (CU5), 63 percent (CU2)

Ethnicity:
Ethnic Composition: 49 official ethnic groups, of which:
48 percent are Lao Loum, 52 percent other ethnic groups
Linguistic Groups as a proportion of the total population:
- Lao-Tai (68 percent)
- Mon-Khmer (22 percent)
- Hmong-Lu Mien (7 percent) and Sino-Tibetan (3 percent)

Lao PDR is tremendously ethnically diverse, with 47 different ethnic groups, spread across four main language groups[3]. Ethnicity has bearing not only on language, but on livelihoods, spiritual belief, customs and culture. With ethnic Lao constituting 52 percent of the total population, the evolution of Lao PDR as a nation is closely linked with the use of Lao as a national language. The process of state modernization, nationbuilding and the commercialization of agriculture is not ethnically neutral, and has direct social and economic implications for upland rural ethnic minorities (Jerndal and Rigg 1998 p14).

Despite policy shifts promoting increased production and commercialization of agriculture, the country remains predominantly rural (more than 70 percent of the population live in rural areas) and engaged in smallholder agriculture. The 2011 agriculture census counted 783,000 farm households in the country, with an average farm size of 2.1 hectares (Agricultural Census Office 2012). The census noted a major shift in the production of cash crops, including maize, rubber, cassava and sugar cane, with more than 30 percent of farmers now engaged in market-based agriculture, rather than food crops. As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, Lao PDR is distinguished from its neighbours by the relative abundance of wild foods, hunted and foraged from the rivers, mountains and forests of the country. Despite the fact that 70 percent of the Lao population is rural, and 65 percent is self-employed, 47 percent of rural incomes in Lao PDR are derived from off-farm income (MPI and UNDP 2009), suggesting that agriculture is a source of food for own consumption first, and a source of income second.

Starting Assumptions and Framing of Food Security in Lao PDR

In order to present research findings which explore the framing, articulation and narratives surrounding food security, it is necessary to the present the starting assumptions and framing of food security in Lao PDR as it pertained at the outset of the research process. This is notably the case with the chosen methodological approach, which foregrounds the researcher as interpreter (Fischer 2003). Throughout the text, care has been taken to indicate how food security is interpreted and by whom in different contexts, as there term is used widely and variously in different policy discourses. This characteristic will be further considered in greater detail in the Discussion section.

Based on preliminary analysis and background interviews conducted in 2009-2010 (described in Chapter 3),a number of salient details regarding food security in Lao PDR came to the researcher's attention. First,

[3] The terms are contested, but broadly speaking, Lao-Loum peoples speak Tai languages, Lao-Theung people live at higher elevations and speak Austro Asiatic (Mon-Khmer) languages, and the highest settlements on mountain tops are Lao-Soung, speaking Hmong-Mien or Sino-Tibetan languages (Stuart Fox 2004 p40)

with the publication of the WFP Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (CFSVA) in late 2009 (described below), food security was an issue of new and emerging political importance, giving it a political prominence not heretofore seen in Lao PDR. With this, it was anticipated that the 1996 World Food Summit definition of food security, and the four components of availability, access, utilization, and stability (see chapter 2) would be both widely understood and accepted by food security stakeholders in Lao policy contexts. It was further assumed that given scope of the CFSVA's findings, that a clear sense of urgency would translated into a coherent collective approach to addressing food security shared by government and international development institutions alike.

Second, given the rapidity of Lao PDR's economic growth and national development, it seemed plausible to anticipate that progress in addressing food security was feasible, and within reach: unlike other countries with similar levels of food insecurity, Lao PDR was economically robust, well integrated in a thriving region of the world, abundant in natural resources, and free from conflict. At the national level therefore, the prospect of Lao PDR recording substantial gains in improving food security seemed both possible and likely. This was further buttressed by Lao PDR's geographic, social, economic and cultural ties with its neighbours Thailand and Vietnam, both of whom had recorded dramatic successes in addressing food security and malnutrition.

Finally, in the wake of the 2007-2009 global crisis, the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASEAN), was newly seized of food security, declaring food security a regional priority, establishing a regional emergency rice reserve, and actively engaging with development institutions on food security for the first time. The possibility of an emergent interpretation of food security specific to the Southeast regional context, brokered by a regional (as opposed to a global) institution, which would define food security by and for Southeast Asia was seen by key informants and the researcher as a real possibility. While this would be informed by and supported by existing global standard definitions, it would be grounded in the political, economic and social demands of ASEAN member states, and would therefore allow for the evolution of a trans-boundary regional governance-led approach which would be of wider interest and importance to global food security discourse.

While the validity of these assumptions and overall framing was interrogated throughout the research process, these assumptions would be returned to and tested throughout the research process; in sum, that there was a collective understanding of food security as a concept among key stakeholders in the Lao PDR government and development institutions, that the scope of the issue in Lao PDR was well understood and that solutions were clear, and that progress was both possible and desirable. At the

regional and sub-regional level, important precedents existed based on the experience of Thailand and Vietnam, and further momentum was coalescing under the auspices of ASEAN's leadership.

Food Security in Lao PDR as a Policy Problem:

In mid-2009, the UN World Food Programme in Lao PDR released its Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) (WFP 2007)[4]. This report was the first nationwide survey of food security ever conducted in the country, and remains a watershed because it was the first report that effectively 'discovered' widespread malnutrition in Lao PDR. Based on fieldwork conducted in 2006 and printed in 2007, public dissemination was delayed for over two years, as the implications of the findings awaited government clearance. Those findings included:

- Chronic malnutrition in rural Lao PDR is alarmingly high. Every second child in the rural areas is chronically malnourished, affecting not only their physical development but also their cognitive capacity.
- The steady economic growth that Lao PDR has experienced over the past 15 years, has not translated into improved nutritional status of the rural Lao population. Chronic malnutrition is as high today as it was ten years ago.
- The Sino-Tibetan ethnic groups are the most disadvantaged and food insecure followed by the Hmong-Mien and the Austro-Asiatic. Most of these groups live in the Northern Highlands and in the Central and Southern Highlands.
- Managed access to wild meat and aquatic resources (animal protein) is critical for ensuring food security for vulnerable groups. Consumption of domesticated animals can currently not compensate for a potential loss of access to and availability of wildlife.

(adapted from WFP 2007, p 9-10)

In its analysis, the CFSVA report presented government policy on village resettlement, ethnicity, commercial agriculture, trade, land and water access, as well as education, gender (especially as it pertained to non-*Lao Loum* women) as either causal or contributing factors to food insecurity and malnutrition. Equally importantly, it quantified the scale of food insecurity in the country: 45 percent of children under five were stunted, and only one third of the rural population could be considered food secure (WFP 2007 p10, 104).

This report broke new ground in presenting food security in Lao PDR in a number of ways. First, the scale of the problem was much higher than had been previously understood: 'every second child stunted' was an eye-catching claim, which suggested an issue of national importance. Secondly, it presented food

[4] Vulnerability is a term with multiple definitions and variable usage across development contexts (Dilley and Bourdreau 2001), but which broadly applies to a person, household or community's exposure to shocks (covariant or idiosyncratic), and the ability to withstand the impact of such shocks.

insecurity as widespread and ubiquitous, faced by two thirds of households across the country, with even more exposed to food insecurity at times of poor harvests or natural disasters. Third, it suggested there was a direct correlation between ethnicity and malnutrition, calling the two 'inextricably linked' (p97).

Most importantly, the CFSVA suggested that government policy was a factor in food insecurity[5]: that national self-sufficiency in rice did not correspond to availability or access everywhere in the country; that village resettlement and declining access to common resources such as rivers and forests was causing food insecurity; that commercial cash crop agriculture was problematic, and finally, that government policy attention to food security was fragmented, inadequate and siloed, unduly focused on rice availability (WFP 2007 p28). It proposed that food security be 'explicitly addressed', with food security 'at centre stage', illustrating its recommendation with the diagram below:

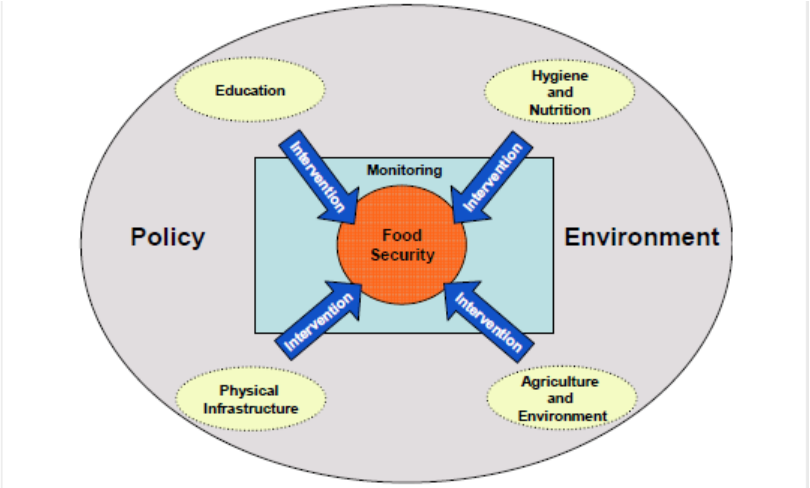


Figure 1.3: WFP framework to improve food and nutrition security in Lao PDR (WFP 2007)

It was these latter conclusions which delayed distribution of the report. This report established a blueprint which subsequent food security policy discourse has largely cleaved to: food security is not simply a function of age-old traditional rural smallholder livelihoods and vulnerabilities, but rather, was rather rooted in government policy action in the present. It confirmed that progress was not being made, and had not been for more than a decade: if the current policy mix was maintained, then further progress would be unlikely.

[5] While this was a new narrative in the context of food security, it was consistent with a body of academic research emerging in the early 2000 around the idea of 'policy-induced poverty' in Lao PDR, which emphasized the extensive impacts of resource extraction, the elimination of swidden agriculture and village resettlement/relocation policy on rural populations, including Baird and Shoemaker (2005), Evrard and Goudineau (2004). A short list of key works in this field are included in Barney (2012).

A second report, officially released in early 2010, went further than the CFSVA. In a Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) Working Paper, food security was posited as a direct function of Lao PDR's development strategy.

> Policy is pumping up the economy with investment in resources through dams, mines and plantations. The promise of this big push for development is jobs, incomes and revenues to end poverty. It is a worthy and ambitious effort threatened by its scale and weak administration. The allure of windfall riches masks the high toll on the environment. Developments are tearing at the environment breaking down the foundations of food production and livelihoods.
>
> Opportunities are passed up for sustainably increasing food production for domestic and foreign markets. Chronic food insecurity is therefore unlikely to decline and may indeed intensify.

(Fullbrook 2010 p12)

In this analysis, in its rush to integrate economically with the region and the world, Lao PDR was sacrificing natural capital for economic growth, embracing industrial agriculture, biofuels and the risk of the resource curse, just as global food security discourse was acknowledging the fragility of the interconnected global systems underpinning food and energy security (Fullbrook p 102). It proposed a wholescale reimagining of Lao PDR's development, putting environmental concerns and livelihoods at the centre of the development project, calling for a moratorium on large dams, mining and industrial agriculture (p.109). Consistent with the CFSVA, the SDC working paper emphasizes that food security is a result of policy, not circumstance.

> Food insecurity in Laos is not caused by the environment, ecology or means of production. It is a consequence of the prevailing paradigms and policies, borne of the age of abundance, that lack the breadth and depth to appreciate and value cross-cutting perspectives, implications and consequences. In the past this was perhaps less of a problem because of the safety net of surplus food implicit in the age of abundance.
>
> (Fullbrook 2010 p94)

Within a few months of each other, these two publications pushed food security to the centre of development discourse in Lao PDR, suggesting:

- Food insecurity and malnutrition were widespread, and more prevalent than previously thought
- Policy actions taken by government were direct and indirect causes of food insecurity.
- The lack of progress on food security, specifically malnutrition, was itself a stimulus to action.
- Lao PDR was more globally integrated that it realized, and hence more exposed to global trends.
- Food security was the result of a bundle of polices across a wide range of sectors, going well beyond agriculture and nutrition per se.

Three years on, in 2013 the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO released a Risk and Vulnerability Survey, again assessing the state of food security and nutrition security. Although more limited in scope and detail in scope than the CFSVA, the findings of this report reconfirmed the rates of chronic malnutrition reported in the CFSVA. This once again emphasized that whatever efforts were being made, they were not working. Reporting data across income quintiles, one of the most striking data in the RVS survey was that rates of stunting in the highest income quintile -among the children in the most well-off households- was 30 percent (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and FAO 2013 p79).

This reconfirmed the assertion in the CFSVA that economic growth and nutritional outcomes had been decoupled, suggesting that stunting was so detached from income, that even in rich households, one in three children were not being fed appropriately. Even in households with acceptable consumption at the *household* level, children within the households were being poorly fed (MAF and FAO 2013 p95). Finally, the RVS report found the strongest correlation not between stunting and any food-related factors, but between access to sanitation and women's education (MAF and FAO 2013 p89-94): households with access to a toilet or where the mother had completed some form of education were far less likely to have stunted children.

This situated food security policy in a new and important light. As the data decoupling income and food security *and* diet and food security indicate, food security in Lao PDR may not be about food at all, but rather a question of education, sanitation and public health. Food security, in this reading, is no longer food related, but is rather a multi sectoral issue *par excellence*, insofar as in order to address food security, sanitation, and education (and the role of women) must be addressed. While this makes it less clear what policy actions should be taken, it underscores the polymorphic nature of food security.

The RVS concludes, as indeed do all three documents, by calling for 'an interdisciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach' to addressing food and nutrition security. Such an approach would require 'stakeholders including Government, development partners and the donor community consider ways in which to renew collective commitments to address stunting.' (MAF and FAO 2013 p98) The SDC report calls for 'a holistic approach to development (Fullbrook 2009 p105), and WFP recommends a 'multi-sector approach', emphasizing that 'stand-alone interventions within these sectors will have a limited effect unless the overall policy environment is favourable to food security. It is not sufficient to focus on poverty reduction. Food insecurity and malnutrition need to be explicitly addressed.' (WFP 2007 p131)

These recurrent characterizations across the three reports of food security as a matter of 'governance', will be discussed further in the chapters that follow. In practice, these recommendations exposed how little was actually known about ongoing food security initiatives: a 2016 review of evidence-gaps on food security interventions in the north of Lao PDR found that data are so critically lacking, 'that the true impact on food security of a large number of projects will never be known. We have, as a result, less guidance regarding what works when addressing the problem of stubbornly persistent high rates of food insecurity.' (Leroux et al 2016).

These three documents present an indicative snapshot of the content of food security policy documents produced between 2009-2015, drawn from a more substantive body of publications. Annex I contains an annotated bibliography of 26 reports developed in whole or in part by international institutions on key components of food security policy (including availability, access, utilization and stability) in Lao PDR including: major statistical exercises (including agricultural census and social indicator surveys), agriculture and nutrition surveys, policy reviews, study findings, mapping exercises and other documents.

Without exception, the documents contained in Annex I (and those outlined above) are produced not by the Lao PDR government alone, but in collaboration with, or directly by, international development institutions[6]. In almost all cases, these documents were produced in English, and may or may not be have been translated into Lao.

Key Policies for Food Security in Lao PDR

The political report to the 9th Party Congress (2010-2015) introduced '(a) the need for a new policy direction, leading to increased industrialization and modernization; (b) priority to expansion of agro-processing; and (c) the development of integrated agricultural production and agroforestry management to ensure food security, preservation and rehabilitation of forests, with the allocation of forest areas to enable villagers to earn a living from forests.' The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific described this as 'a highly forward-looking policy directive.' (Wickramasinghe et al 2015)

Within this overall policy guidance, three key policy documents form the foundation of food security policy in Lao PDR. First, the 7th National Socio-economic Development Plan (2010-2015) (NSEDP) presented the

[6] 'Country ownership' is a standard hallmark of the conditionality embedded in development institutions (Buiter 2010 p223). However, ownership in this context refers to a wide gamut of possibilities and collaborative approaches, and should not be taken to indicate definitive government endorsement of the contents, in Lao PDR or elsewhere.

macro-level policy agenda for both for the overall development of the nation and its development partners alike. With food security included as part of the MDGs as MDG1, and with the attainment of MDGs stated as one of the top two targets of 7th NSEDP, the 7th NSEDP forms the overall policy framework within which all sector-specific actions are taken. Second, the Agricultural Development Strategy to 2020 is the blueprint for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's contribution to the 7th NSEDP, outlining the agricultural sector's contribution to both economic growth and poverty alleviation. Third, the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action sets out the strategies to reduce malnutrition, mainstreaming nutrition into the NSEDP and thus, achieve MDGs Target 1C. These policies are explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Institutional Architecture around Food Security in Lao PDR:

No single Lao Government ministry or department is uniquely responsible for food security. This is consistent with the international development discourse on food security, which posits food security as a multisectoral, multidimensional issue (Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2013 p. 8).

At the sectoral level, food security policymaking in Lao PDR includes multiple policy sectors simultaneously, including agriculture, environment, public health, nutrition, trade, and rural development[7], with an expansive set of institutions engaged in different aspects of policy. As an issue on the national agenda, this involves government ministries and research institutes. As key priority for international development support to Lao PDR, food security involves donor governments, IFIs, UN specialized agencies, NGOs and Consultative Group (CGIAR) research bodies. In applied terms, international development assistance to Lao PDR on food security policy includes: direct financing of government, policy and technical advisory services, knowledge management and research, management support, and programme/project implementation. In addition, a number of multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms exist, at both national and global level, which function as important venues for the discussion of policy trajectories and outcomes.

[7] 'Rural development' is a broadly interpreted term, which can refer to any and all development which takes place in rural areas. Specific topics contained within this rubric may include: land access and tenure, rural infrastructure, commercial agriculture, access to credit and financial services, public health and nutrition, education, water/sanitation, stallholder-based farming systems (including livestock and aquatic life), access to NTFPs for consumption and income generation, land tenure, conversation and biodiversity protection.

This section will outline key institutions engaged on food security in Lao PDR, mapping out the institutions in place. In selecting which institutions to include, consideration was given to mandate, technical expertise, budget, programming and leadership[8].

Within government, two key ministries are most directly engaged in setting food security policy, with a third responsible for oversight of international development cooperation. With agriculture contributing 42 percent to GDP (MAF 2010 p2), the **Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry** (MAF) has long played a central role in food security policy. The Ministry's Department of Planning is responsible for coordinating international development assistance to the sector, with additional liaison at technical level between external partners and the departments of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and others depending on the nature of the programming. MAF also has oversight of the National Agriculture & Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), and the National Agriculture & Forestry Extension Service (NAFES), which coordinates the work of District Agriculture and Forestry Extension Offices. In the person of the Vice-Minister, MAF chairs (with IFAD and Agence Française de Développement (AFD)) the Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development, which meets three times a year. Other key government institutions of relevance to MAF include the National Land Management Authority and the Water Resource and Environment Agency.

With nutrition traditionally falling under the remit of public health, the **Ministry of Health** (MoH), supported by the Department of Hygiene and Health Promotion and the National Institute of Public Health, have jurisdiction over national nutrition policy, including development of the 2010-2015 National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action. The MoH is engaged in sector specific efforts in nutrition-relevant interventions such as deworming, micronutrients, infant and young child feeding (IYCF), maternal and child health. The Ministry of Health chairs the Sector Working Group on Health, co-chaired by the Embassy of Japan and the World Health Organization (WHO). MoH also chairs the National Nutrition Forum introduced at the end of 2015 (MPI 2016).

Finally, as the government body responsible for coordinating international development cooperation, the Office of International Cooperation of the **Ministry of Planning and Investment**, provides overall national level coordination of Lao PDR's engagement with donor governments, international institutions (including

[8] With the focus of research on food security policy, this sub-section does not cover NGO projects implemented at the provincial, district or village level. The NGO coordination network lists 45 food security projects implemented by 24 NGOs, and a further 30 nutrition projects underway in 2015 (INGO Network 2015). These are omitted from this section.

the UN and International Financial Institutions (IFIs)), and participation in processes such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. It monitors all 'foreign funding, total commitment amounts, funding plans and disbursements, location, MDG alignment, sector, type of assistance, individual contributions from other organizations, implementing agencies, and key information for each activity' (GoL and UN 2013 p165). The MPI coordinates the annual Roundtable Meetings (RTM) between the Lao government, donor governments and development partners. MPI also develops the five-year National Socio-economic Development Plans. Finally, the MPI also oversees the function of the Lao Statistics Bureau, which has a role in all major quantitative data exercises in country (such as census exercises and the Expenditure and Consumption Surveys), and the National Economics Research Institute.

As part of the Cabinet, these ministries report to the Prime Minster of Lao PDR. Other ministries with potential interest or mandates on issues related to food security include Natural Resource and the Environment, Industry and Commerce, and Labour and Social Welfare. However, Ministry-level engagement from these ministries on food security has been *ad hoc* to date.

Donor Representations:

A wide range of external national governments have development offices in Vientiane, the capital of Lao PDR, supporting the government's development policy agenda across multiple sectors. This section limits its focus to those donors which have emphasized food security and nutrition specifically and directly with their bilateral, multilateral, financial and technical assistance, and includes funding and technical support delivered directly to government, to the UN, NGOs, local civil society organizations and others[9].

Not included in this section are those donors, notably Japan and the Republic of Korea, which no longer provide development assistance, but have shifted to a bilateral concessional loan basis (although both countries can and do provide additional support via the UN and NGO sectors). Party-to-party aid, from the communist parties of China and Vietnam to the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) (Sayalath and Creak 2017), is explicitly linked to political rather than social outcomes, and is excluded from this overview.

[9] All budget figures included in the sections that follow are derived from institutions' own stated figures and should be considered indicative only. Budget cycles vary across different donors and agencies, as does geographical coverage. For example, SDC considers the Mekong region as a whole, and does not provide Lao-specific budget figures. Any and all budget amounts should therefore be understood as broad estimates only.

Also absent is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). For historical reasons, USAID has maintained a very limited development portfolio in Lao PDR, although it is engaged in regional efforts such as the Lower Mekong Initiative. Following the landmark visit of President Obama in 2016, this stance has changed, but USAID's portfolio in Lao PDR is dwarfed by other donor commitments.

The European Union is the single largest international donor to Lao PDR, with a total portfolio valued at over 440 million euros in 2015, and a further commitment of 500 million Euros over five years announced in December 2015 (Vientiane Times 2015). Development assistance provided directly from EU budgets is managed by the European Commission delegation, with additional funds and programs allocated by EU member states directly, notable France and Germany.

EU development cooperation with Lao PDR is framed within the larger policy context of EU-Lao trade and diplomatic agreements. Per its website, EU development cooperation with Lao PDR 'is gradually shifting away from traditional project support to a more long-term approach focusing on dialogue on policy reforms, sectoral approaches, budget support, concentration of activities, promotion of ownership by the government, strategic dialogue with EU Member States and co-ordination with other donors'. (EU 2016) The website highlights the important role the EU sees for international NGOs in Lao PDR in addressing food security. By virtue of the scope of the EU's development assistance in Lao PDR, the Charge d'Affaires of the EU Delegation has a uniquely prominent role as a *de facto* senior diplomat on development matters, alongside the UN Resident Coordinator.

The development arm of the Swiss government, the **Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)** has a regional framework supporting sustainable development across the Mekong region, including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, with a total operating budget in 2015 of 95.5 million USD. Agriculture and food security are one of three key sectors for the SDC in those countries. The SDC has been at the forefront of innovative approaches to food security in Lao PDR and has also commissioned a wide range of important research on food security related issues via its Working Paper series and on standalone reviews such as *Dynamics of Food Security in the Uplands of Laos: A summary of 10 years of research* (Bartlett 2012). With its Agrobiodiversity Initiative (TABI), which SDC began in 2009, traditional smallholder systems, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), biodiversity and conservation were explicitly linked to food security in rural areas. TABI also promotes participatory approaches to land management (especially of common resources), including spatial imaging and participatory land use planning, and national policies

which guarantee protection of 'agrobiodiversity'. This initiative has an estimated budget 2009-2016 of 10.8 million USD and is co-managed by SDC and MAF (TABI 2016).

SDC has also provided support for related programming such as Linking Agriculture, Nutrition and Natural Resources (LANN), an integrated approach at the village level which aims to highlight the linkages between government services in those sectors, and the Laos Extension for Agriculture Project (LEAP), which improved services available from extension workers, making them more responsive to smallholder's needs and demands. Finally, SDC had been instrumental in supporting the work of the Decide project, which has produced state-of-the-art atlases such as 'The Geography of Poverty and Inequality in the Lao PDR' (2009), the Socio-economic Atlas of Lao PDR (2010), and the 'Concessions and Leases in the Lao PDR' (2012) report, the first comprehensive overview of domestic and foreign land investments.

With Southeast Asia in a geographic area of strategic importance to Australia, **Australian Aid (formerly AusAID)** development assistance to Lao PDR has been a longstanding factor in relations between the two countries, dating back to 1965. The first Friendship Bridge over the Mekong between Thailand and Lao PDR opened in 1994 was built with Australian money and technical support. Australia's portfolio in Lao PDR is focused primarily on education, rural development, human resources development and trade. The value of this portfolio is considerable, equivalent to 10 percent of overall development assistance in 2013, with an overall value of 42.2 million USD for 2014-2015. (DFAT 2015). From 2007-2014, Australian assistance on food security was channeled via the Lao-Australian NGO Cooperation Agreement (LANGOCA), whereby villages and districts with high levels of UXO or exposure to natural disasters were supported via agricultural and livelihood assistance.

UN Institutions

United Nations' support to Lao PDR on food security policy is predominantly via the three Rome-based Agencies (RBA) and UNICEF. Of the Rome-based agencies, the **Food and Agriculture Organization** (FAO) is globally mandated to support the attainment of food security, and is responsible for monitoring progress on the MDGs and the World Food Summit goals related to food security at the national and regional level, as well as the Zero Hunger Initiative[10].

[10] With the advent of the SDGs, reporting responsibility for progress towards goals has been recast as a governmental responsibility, but it can be taken as read that the UN will support and fund government reporting on SDGs targets throughout the 2030 Agenda era.

FAO has been present in Lao PDR since 1975, and has included in its portfolio in the country: agricultural census/statistics, biodiversity, conservation, disaster risk reduction management, edible insects, forestry, food security, livestock disease control, pest management, phytosanitary standards, strategic planning (rice policy and fisheries), and trade policy. In food security, through its collaboration with MAF, FAO has played in important role in presenting analysis of quantitative data from the 2010 agricultural census, the Lao Expenditure and Consumption Surveys, and the Risk and Vulnerability Survey mentioned above. Its primary collaborating partner is MAF, and its estimated 2009-2015 budget is 5.6 million USD[11].

Presenting itself as the 'world largest humanitarian agency', the **World Food Programme** has been present in Lao PDR since 1976, providing food aid in emergencies, working to address chronic malnutrition, and building government disaster response capability. In Lao PDR, WFP operates a school feeding programme, supports asset creation (food for assets, cash for assets), disaster risk reduction management, and mother and child health and nutrition. Specific to food security, WFP operates one of the only dedicated food security monitoring services in Lao PDR, in its Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping section. Its' key government partners include the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the Ministry of Education and Sports. The WFP's 2012-2015 budget for Lao PDR amounts to 65.3 million USD.

The third of the Rome Based agencies, **IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development),** provides specialized technical assistance and financing for agriculture in developing countries. Its focus is on rural areas, with its overarching objective being the eradication of poverty in those areas. It has been present in Lao PDR since 1980, promoting, financing and providing technical support to community-level access and management of land and natural resources, smallholder market access, and sustainable integrated farming systems. Between 2011-2016, IFAD implemented three major projects, two of which are explicitly targeted at improving food security, the Southern Lao Food and Nutrition Security and Market Linkages programme, and the *Sooum Son Seun Jai* community-based food security and economic opportunities project (IFAD 2015). IFAD co-chairs the Sector Working Group on Agriculture and Rural Development alongside MAF. Its budget in Laos PDR for 2009-2015 is estimated at 32 million USD.

The fourth specialized UN institution engaged on food security (via its nutrition mandate) in Lao PDR is **UNICEF**, the United Nations' Children's Fund. UNICEF's mandate covers a wide range of issues pertaining

[11] Includes National TCP, Trust Fund, Emergency and TeleFood projects only. Regional, multicountry projects administered by the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific are excluded, as it was impossible to ascertain the national percentage share for the many multicounty projects which Lao PDR is included in. A similar approach has been applied for all institutions included below.

to child survival and children's rights, and has extensive history and expertise on nutrition, developing a conceptual framework for malnutrition in 1990 which is still widely used, and which formed the blueprint for conceptual frameworks for food security thereafter (Committee for world Food Security (CFS) 2012).

Within in Lao PDR, key areas of interest include education, water/sanitation, nutrition, public health, HIV/AIDS, child protection and legal issues. Within the nutrition sector, UNICEF promotes exclusive breastfeeding, micronutrient supplementation, deworming, and treatment of acute malnutrition. The key partner within the nutrition sector is the Ministry of Health. UNICEF's budget for the health and nutrition sector for 2012-2015 is 13.4 million USD.

UN Coordination Mechanisms and Joint approaches to Food and Nutrition Security

In addition to the institutionally specific mandates and responsibilities of the UN organizations listed above, a number of multiagency approaches to food and nutrition security are established in Lao PDR, the most prominent of which is the **Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement.** The SUN Movement is a global initiative developed by the United Nations to promote better, more effective multisectoral efforts on reducing malnutrition. Lao PDR was one of the first countries to join the movement in 2011, a so-called 'early riser'. Formally headed by the National Nutrition Committee and chaired by the Vice Prime Minister, the objectives of the SUN movement are to improve coordination among stakeholder, improve the policy and legal frameworks around nutrition and mobilize resources and track expenditures. The national Nutrition Committee is in turn supported by the Development Partners (DP) Nutrition Group, which includes donors, UN agencies and civil society organizations. The DP Group is 'convened' (that is, coordinated) by UNICEF and the EU, with the EU taking the role of the donor convenor.

Central to the SUN Movement in Lao PDR is the idea of 'convergence' programming under the **Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan** started in 2014 in southern Lao PDR by IFAD, UNICEF, and WFP, and subsequently expanded nationwide in late 2015. Convergence programming entails simultaneous implementation of a range of interventions across agriculture, maternal and child health, school feeding, income generation, water and sanitation in a single location (MoH 2014). A similar multiagency approach is underway in the field of maternal and child nutrition, involving UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP and WHO through the **Integrated Support to Maternal, Neonatal and Child health project,** through which outreach services, school meals, school deworming, antenatal and delivery services and micronutrient supplements are being provided in northern Lao PDR.

The NGO Sector

International NGOs in Lao PDR

With restricted operating space afforded to international NGOs in Lao PDR, there is limited opportunity for NGO participation on policy issues, advocacy or public discussion of contentious issues such as land rights or natural resource exploitation. INGOs in Lao PDR have described their operating position as 'vulnerable', and tend to focus on service delivery in rural contexts, rather than as a contributing voice on national policy issues (Delnoye 2010 p34). Nevertheless, with the *national* NGO sector tightly managed by government, some observers have suggested that international NGOs operate as form of 'proxy civil society' for Lao PDR (Evans 2002 p216). For presentational reasons, NGOs are routinely invited to participate in major national development fora including the RTM (starting in 2012), but are not expected to do more than corroborate statements made by government and donors. There are occasional exceptions to this, such as the MPI's request to the INGO network for recommendations on the formulation of the 7th NSEDP (INGO Network 2010), but they are sporadic and infrequent.

At project level, NGOs are active in food and nutrition security across the country, with NGOs such as **ADRA, CARE, Health Poverty Action, Helvetas, Oxfam, SNV, Village Focus International, World Hunger Hilfe, World Vision,** and **WWF** are engaged in projects aimed at improving food security. In total, a reported 24 NGOs are implementing 45 food security projects with a further 19 NGOs implementing 30 nutrition projects. An INGO Network with approximately 70-member organizations is established in Vientiane, for the purposes of information sharing and collaboration, with six working groups in place, three of which (Heath & Nutrition, Land Issues, Agriculture, Livestock and Forestry) cover issues related to food security. The INGO Network does not develop policy statements which reflect collective positions, nor does it purport to speak on behalf of its membership. In the example given above, the letter submitted by the INGO Network to MPI in 2010 regarding the 7th NSEDP was signed by only seven NGO country directors.

The **Land Issues Working Group (LIWG)** is one of the five NGO Network working groups. It is the only NGO working group with a dedicated coordinator and separate offices in Vientiane. The LIWG was established in 2007 as concerns about the negative externalities of industrialized agriculture, FDI in rural areas, and natural resource exploitation were being a matter of shared concern among NGOs and CSOs in Lao PDR. The LIWG seeks to better engage local communities in land use planning and control, and works to promote awareness, build networks between local and international stakeholders, promote pro-rural

legislation and policymaking and undertake research (LIWG 2015). As of 2015, the LIWG has 80 members across NGOs, donors, CSOs and individuals.

INGOs in the Region

With NGOs within Lao PDR required to operate within national political and bureaucratic systems, regional NGOs based in Thailand have taken up more overtly critical stances towards development and food security in Lao PDR. Most prominent of these are **International Rivers**, an advocacy group which has mobilized opposition to dams across the Mekong mainstem, notable the Xayaburi and Don Sahong projects in Lao PDR. With wild-capture fish a major livelihood and source of food for thousands of households in the Mekong basin, International Rivers has published a series of reports outlining the negative ramifications on food security of these (and other) dams (International Rivers 2009, Peterson and Middleton 2011, Herbertson 2012). The anti-globalization NGO **Focus on the Global South** has documented how GDP-led growth under the aegis of the Lao government's NSEDPs and unregulated FDI have resulted in negative outcomes for poor populations in Lao PDR (Cornford 2006, Arnst and Guttal 2011). Domestic Thai NGOs have also played a role in Lao PDR, lobbying Thai energy companies investing in Lao PDR to apply Thailand's more rigourous environmental and social protection legislation to its foreign ventures.

International Research Institutions

Various development research institutions are present in Lao PDR, conducting research with Lao counterparts such as NAFRI and departments of the University of Lao PDR. CG group research institutions include the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI). In 2012, IRRI coauthored with the World Bank and FAO an important study of the rice sector, which confirmed the need for a shift of policy based on Lao PDR's surplus production (IRRI et al 2012). The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has also had an extensive research presence in Lao PDR, with 17 research projects in progress in 2013-2014, including climate change, forestry management, lowland rice systems, horticulture, livestock disease control, wild capture and aquaculture fisheries (ACIAR 2016).

In addition to all of the above, a number of global development consulting firms and independent consultants are routinely engaged in food security policy discussions, acting in a variety of roles form technical experts to project implementation and management partners. The role of consultants will be explored in further detail in Chapter 6.

Figure 1.4 below summarizes the roles and relationships of the institutions described above, indicating the range and scope of international institutions engaged on food security and nutrition in Lao PDR, consistent with the World Bank's mapping of development partners for nutrition (World Bank 2006a p.114). Government ministries with a role in food security are indicated in blue on the left of the figure and international institutions are presented on the right, with the thick blue arrows indicating financial flows from donors to other institutions, a factor which will be explored in detail in Chapter 6. The grey boxes in the centre of the figure indicate the range of coordinative mechanisms in place, with arrows indicating the institutional participants in each coordinating body. How food security is situated within the overall development framework will be revisited in chapters to come, with research findings indicating that food security is indivisible from the overall global development discourse.

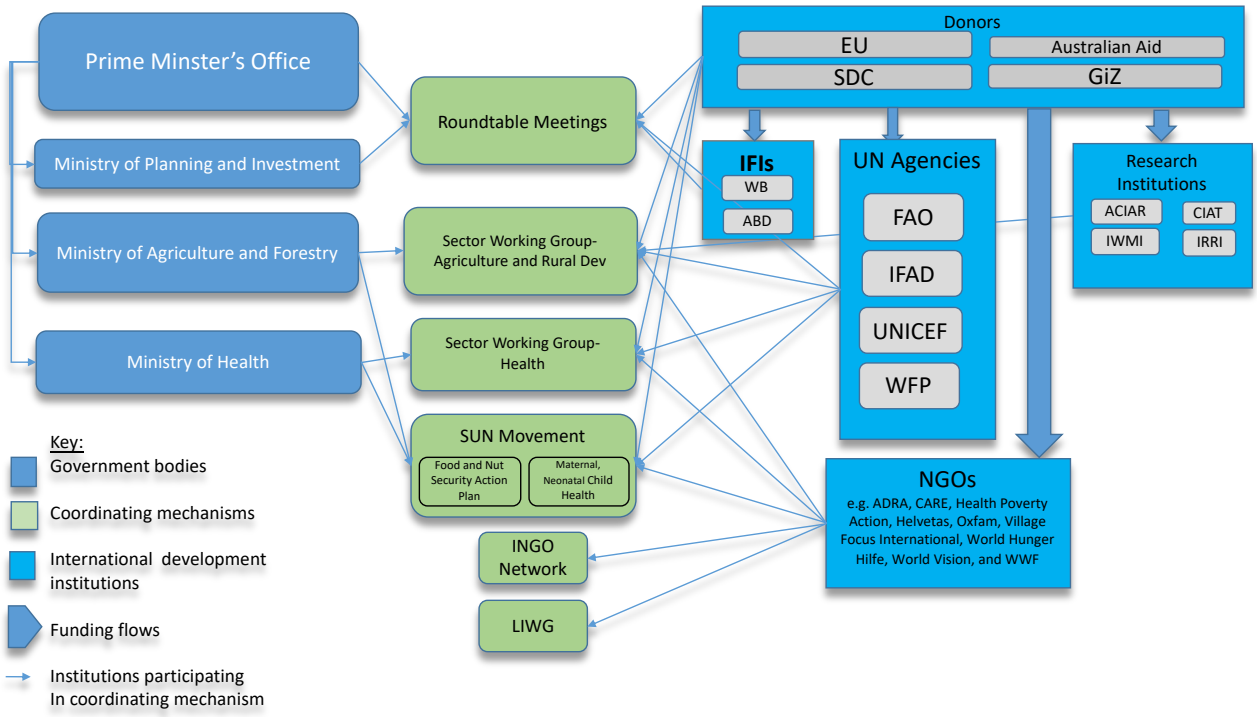


Figure 1.4: Institutional Framework for development sector coordination around food security in Lao PDR

Purpose of the Research

Lao PDR is emblematic of lower-middle income and middle-income countries, in which it is increasingly clear that food insecurity is not solely a function of income, food availability, or even food consumption per se. Despite a strong record of economic growth, this growth has not corresponded to commensurate improvements to the food security profile of the country. According to the 2014 State of Food Insecurity

report (FAO and IFAD 2014), lower-middle income and middle-income countries are where 68 percent of the world's food insecure population resides.

This research presents a policy discourse analysis of food security policy in Lao PDR. In order to fully contextualize the findings of the discourse analysis, the discourse analysis is supplemented by a review of policy-relevant data at the national and regional level, in order to situate the discourse in the 'nationally situated logics of communication' (Schmidt 2011 p17). By doing so, food security discourse in Lao PDR is thus presented in the wider context of the ASEAN region, and is compared to the experience of two of its neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam. This goes to indicate the extent to which food security policy discourse in Lao PDR cleaves to (or deviates from) regional policy trends.

As the section above indicates, the policy architecture (taken to include government and international institutions, policies and evidence-base) around food security in Lao PDR is heavily mediated by international development institutions. Based on insider access available to the researcher, the findings are informed by interviews with senior UN, donor and NGO representatives at the regional and national level.

It seeks to explore the extent to which global normative policy discourses around food security translates into policy actions at the national level: to what extent are international ideas, presented as normative discourse, grafted onto local context, and to what extent does local context dictate the narrative?

In so doing, the validity of food security as a conceptual framework for policy is examined in the context of the stated goal of food security efforts, which is the alleviation (or elimination) of hunger. The research looks at how food security is presented as a problem, what processes is needed to address these problem(s), and what solutions are proposed. These are presented as narratives in policy discourse. The stakeholders, evidence-base and expertise brought to bear on each narrative will be presented and discussed.

This research furthers the state of knowledge in the field by bringing academic rigour to the applied policy context of a developing country in Southeast Asia. Specifically, the research represents a step forward in the study of food security policy discourse as follows:

- This research furthers the use of policy discourse analysis in food security, which has to date focused largely on document analysis in rich-world contexts (Candel et al 2014). It serves to situate food security policy discourse in developing nations within the broader *global* food policy

discourse, with its multisectoral focus on governance, supply chains, health and nutrition, the environment, behavior and culture, social justice and poverty (Lang et al 2009 p8).

- With the political system in Lao PDR characterized by 'non-transparent, top-down decision making and obsessive secrecy' (Stuart-Fox 2008 p9), developing a methodological approach which provides a role for the researcher as interpreter was required, and provides an applied example of how the policy discourse approach can be applied in politically opaque, non-democratic political systems.
- Although focusing on a small nation in a relatively affluent region of the world, the fieldwork and research site allows for an exploration of the role of international expertise provided under the auspices of global development institutions, examining how experts replicate global normative discourse at the national level. As a consequence of this research orientation, while the findings of the research are situationally specific to Lao PDR and mainland Southeast Asia, findings on the role of international experts in shaping the discourse, and the utility of food security as a conceptual framework (chapters 6 and 7) will be relevant in a range of developing countries across the Global South.
- With policy making understood as a negotiated process, subject to constant interpretation by practitioners at every level (Laws and Hajer 2006 p411), the present research expands the evidence-base from authored texts to include those negotiated processes and constructed texts, and to better understand how normative global governance is brought to bear in developing nations such as Lao PDR.
- The choice of research location serves to correct a geographic imbalance in food security policy research. Historically, Southeast Asia has been relatively poorly represented in the food security academic literature (Gill et al 2003). With tight links between practitioner-led hunger alleviation efforts and sites of research, and with a general tendency towards research being conducted in a) emergency or post-emergency contexts b) involving large populations and/or c) severe rates of malnutrition, food security research has focused on Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Paulino and Mellor 1984). What research as has been conducted in SE Asia has been focused on rice, to the exclusion of other factors (Timmer 2010). In turn, within SE Asia itself, Lao PDR has been underrepresented from a policy research perspective (Acharya 2009, Beeson 2009, Rigg 2009), rendering it worthy of interest in the regional context.

Structure of the Thesis and Research Questions.

The present chapter has been an attempt to provide an overview of the regional, national and food security-specific policy context for Lao PDR. This section of this thesis situates the problem, putting the research objectives in context at the research site.

Chapter 2 presents of the historical and evolution of food security as a conceptual framework, with particular reference to food security's foundations in global development discourse, and in applied terms, in the developing nations of the Global South. Major shifts over time in the overall conceptual framework will be discussed. Food security will be positioned in the broader context of the global development project and development theory. Concepts, definitions, and key terms used in developing and applying food security policy are presented.

Chapter 3 presents the research questions, fieldwork and overall design of the research, and introduces the applied methodology: policy discourse analysis. The choice of policy discourse analysis as the selected theoretical approach is discussed, particularly the advantages this holds for policy analysis in non-democratic systems. Discourse analysis in food security, development theory and in Lao PDR will be presented. Modes of identifying the role and characteristics of expertise at the individual and institutional level are discussed.

Chapter 3 then sets out how the research questions were developed, and how the primary and secondary data collection and fieldwork were conducted in support of those questions. With the core of the research focused on understanding how global normative discourse is understood and applied at the national level, the Research Questions are formulated as:

RQ1. How is food security policy mediated in Southeast Asia, specifically in Lao PDR?

RQ2. What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR?

RQ3a. What is the role of international expertise in developing food security policy discourse?

RQ3b. How are the normative roles of international institutions presented and applied in the local/specific context?

RQ4. Do practitioners of food security in Laos find food security a useful and valid policy framework?

The Findings of research are presented in Chapters 4-7. Chapter 4 begins by elaborating on the basic information presented in chapter 1, providing a summary of key aspects of food security policy in Lao PDR, situated in the sub-regional context by comparison with Thailand and Vietnam. Central to this question will be understanding how food security is perceived and understood, and how it is situated as a policy priority: this in turn informs the second research question put forward in Chapter 5. Accordingly, these data will be contextualized by a broader lens which explores the wider regional policy context in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental factors pertinent to food security. From this chapter a clear sense of the food security policy priorities emerges.

Based on the understanding that narratives give a structure to policy in which a problem is defined and a solution proposed, Chapter 5 presents the central research findings, identifying key narratives in food security, narrative structure, the supporting institutions, their orientation in time and space, and the proposed solutions (in terms of both clarity and proximity). Narratives are presented in a matrix with supporting information drawn from both key policy documents and interview data.

In Chapter 6, how expertise on food security is defined at both individual and institutional levels is presented. The specific role of experts in defining (or refining) those narratives identified in RQ2 is put forward. How expertise is defined, how experts define their own roles and their perceptions of their influence is policy discourse is also included. This section will also include research data on the role(s), efficacy and intra-institutional relationships among key institutions present in Lao PDR and the region.

Chapter 7 then turns from the national and regional specific context to the utility of food security in policy discourse. Based on responses to RQ4, data from constructed texts drawn from interviews on the utility and viability of food security as a conceptual framework will be presented, with reference to Lao PDR and SE Asia as applicable. In this chapter, food security is considered at the national, regional and global context, in order to understand the feedback loops between different levels of policy discourse.

In the Discussion section (Chapter 8), analysis of the narrative elements identified in the findings will be presented, exploring how those narratives address the issues identified in the problem statement, and the metanarrative that emerges from the combination of narratives which forms the policy discourse. Specific characteristics of food security policy unique to SE Asia and Lao PDR are considered, and the extent to which these reflect or are informed by global normative approaches to food security. Points of intersection between food security and other policy sectors will be presented. The role of expertise in

shaping the discourse will be analyzed, considering what their real and potential role and influence may be.

Chapter 9 concludes with the researcher's final thoughts on the value of the research, reflections on the research questions and methodology, the limitations of the work, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Food Security: Definitions and Policy

This chapter will introduce the historical and theoretical framework of food security in policy contexts, with particular reference to food security's application in the Global South. Concepts, definitions, and key terms used in formulating conceptual approaches to food security are presented. A concise overview of food security policy in Lao PDR is presented, giving consideration to how global discourse applies in national context. Major shifts over time in the overall definition will be discussed, and food security will be positioned in the context of the global development project and development theory. How and why food security comes to be the responsibility of the state and therefore a policy matter will be presented.

Additional information pertinent to this chapter is found in Annexes II and III, on challenges of food security raised by food sovereignty and the Right to Food, and issues in food security measurement.

A Brief History of Food Security

In policy discourse analysis, how a problem is defined is a key point of analytical entry; how a problem is defined as a problem, and what its key characteristics may be sets the stage for determining possible solutions. This research will explore how policy discourses around food security are created through the use of definitions, terminology, and conceptual frameworks which are often simultaneously applied in practice in technically precise and broadly generalist terms.

As words on the page, the term 'food security' has the apparent virtue of being intuitively easy to grasp, comprised as it is of two words, 'food' and 'security', which are familiar and common. Thus, deducing what such a term might mean should be intuitively straightforward.

This reflexive intuition quickly becomes more complicated as it is studied, with the constituent terms both bearing multiple values and meanings: food is a basic physiological necessity, a foundation of culture and tradition, a tradeable commodity, and a human right (Vivero Pol 2013). The notion of security is also fungible, simultaneously implying the absence of real and perceived threat(s), a defensive and/or offensive stance, a present status and a future positioning- all of which is subject to gradual or abrupt change, with or without warning. When these two fluid terms are combined, what then is meant by the resulting amalgam of 'food security'?

Taken together, these two words generate a hybrid term which is formally defined, broad enough to be subject to multiple interpretations, mixed application and, as a result, has been the subject of decades of debate (CFS 2012). It is perhaps better understood as what Bourdieu describes as pseudoconcept, in that it has both prescriptive and descriptive attributes: it suggests not only what to do, but also what the goal is, including both an end-state and the means to that end (Bourdieu 2010 p236).

Food security is concurrently: a simple definition, an analytical framework, an implementation process and a goal. With adjustments over time to the working understanding of what was meant by 'food security' (or what was needed to achieve it), food security has been on the global agenda since the founding of the United Nations in the late 1940s. While there are older historical precedents, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 speech on the four freedoms- freedom from want (which included freedom from hunger), freedom of speech, freedom of worship and from fear- reiterated at the 1943 UN Conference on food and agriculture (which in turn led to the foundation of the UN FAO in 1945) is generally presented as the genesis of food security discourse (Shaw 2007 p.3). From its beginnings, eliminating hunger and ensuring food security have been held up as universal values, a global concern and an urgent priority, and have therefore been central for the global development project for generations.

With 'freedom from hunger' built into the conceptual bedrock of the United Nations, stewardship of food security has long been entwined with what has come to be known as the international development sector; that is, the network of specialized institutions which oversees the global social and economic development project, specifically in the Global South. The locus is important: development has been described as 'a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon' (Escobar 1995 quoted in Rossi 2004). In the early years of the United Nations, most prominent among these institutions for food security was the FAO, although this was subsequently expanded to include many others, as has been indicated in the Lao PDR context in chapter I. This institutional structuring took it as read that food security and malnutrition was an issue for developing nations, rather than developed ones, that a path towards food security would suggest emulating the progress made in developed nations as a means to an end (Barling et al 2008).

The first definitions of food security were developed with the specialized agencies of the UN in mind, and expanded thereafter to included national governments (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p.31). As global governance institutions and mechanisms have evolved, UN Commissions, specialized agencies of the UN, IFIs, the NGO sector and more recently, civil society organizations have all claimed a role in food security. Food security therefore does not appear *sui generis*, but as a function of the institutional context in which

it exists. Recognition of role of the private sector in food security governance and policy has only latterly and incompletely been included in the discourse. While this paper elides a great deal of the history of the concept to focus on its present application, key events which reflected shifts in the conceptual composition of food security will be highlighted here[12].

Prior to the World Food Conference of 1974, 'freedom from hunger' was presented as an issue of redistribution: greater general availability of food via the redistribution of existing surpluses through technological and trade fixes was the seeming solution to food insecurity and hunger. (Cepete 1984, Shaw 2007 p. 32-36). At the 1974 World Food Conference, this assumption began to dissolve, with the conference proposing to develop both a world food *production* policy, as well as a world food *security* policy, operating in tandem, albeit with a focus on increased production in both cases (Shaw 2007 p. 124). It was at this point that the phrase 'food security' itself came into global policy use (Farsund et al 2015).

The conceptual shift away from productionism was solidified in the early 1980s, with a monograph which is routinely cited as a key milestone in the evolution of approaches to poverty and food security, Sen's *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on entitlement and Deprivation* (1981). Sen posited that major famines had their root cause in poor access to food, not availability- or rather, that hunger was a function of access, rather than supply (what Sen called 'entitlement failure') (Barrett 2002, p. 2218). He demonstrated that weak conceptual understanding of hungry populations' inability to access food had directly contributed to prolonged hunger[13]. Describing what he called 'ownership bundles', Sen suggested that the ability to produce or exchange goods and services is the result of how individuals 'own' (that is, are able to act) within the context of access to land, finances, legal rights, employment, obligations to family and other networks, etc. (Devereux quoted in Pritchard 2014). Sen's work paved the way for recognition that addressing food insecurity need not entail direct agricultural production by insecure populations themselves, but was contingent on a much wider set of endowments (Patel K et al 2015).

[12] A comprehensive history of the evolution of food security from the founding of the FAO and Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, through the 1974 World Food Conference and the World Food Councils can be found in Shaw's *World Food Security* (2007). For a history of food security up to the 1974 World Food Conference, see Cepede (1984). For case studies of wheat in the 1950s and 1960s, the role of FAO and the prevailing thinking on food security at that time, see McLin (1979), McKeon (2009 p.17-18). For historical perspective on productionist approaches to food security in developing countries, see Paulino & Mellor (1984).

[13] In later writing, Drèze and Sen (1989, p. 25) noted in the 1980s there was an overcorrection regarding the importance of food availability, and that entitlements (that is, access to food) were wrongly posited as an 'either/or' proposition vs. availability. It is self-evident that food needs to be available in order for access (and therefore entitlements) to be possible. In this context, Sen's innovation was in demonstrating that food is often available, in gross terms, at times of hunger and/or famine.

This set up a shift in the conceptual framework, suggesting that food security is a function of much more than just food, and that it is access, rather than availability, which is key. As additional dimension to the importance of Sen's work was the observation that famines have never taken place in functioning democracies (Carolan 2012 p. 68) - this in turn suggested that hunger was a function of political systems, and political representation was an important factor in alleviating hunger. This freighted food security with political implications which made it a more complex prescription for non-democratic states- situating food security as a political, not simply a 'technical' discourse, implied that food insecurity required political *and* technological solutions (Carolan 2012 p. 68).

The shift of focus from availability to access modified the discourse from production of food, to sourcing of food, acknowledging the entitlements of individuals and households in accessing food. This marked a conceptual transition in both conceptual and spatial terms, opening the door for consideration of food security not only at the level of the state, but at the level of the individual citizen (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p.29). This also paved the way for important shifts in development theory, including the sustainable livelihoods approach promoted by Chambers and Conway (Erni 2015 p4) and Capability theory (Nussbaum 2011)[14]. Sen remains a highly respected development theorist, with works such as *Development as Freedom* (1999) a key text in development studies. Important feedback loops between food security and development theory continue to the present day.

Over the course of developments outlined above, the definition of food security has changed to fit the prevailing assumptions of the time. Clay (2002) highlights three pre-1996 definitions as illustration of this:

- '[A]vailability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs...to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption…and to offset fluctuations in production and prices' (Proceedings of the 1974 World Food Conference).
- 'Ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need.' (FAO 1983).
- In the World Bank report, *Poverty and Hunger* (1986), this concept of food security is elaborated in terms of: 'access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.'

[all emphasis and ellipsis original]

[14] In their work, Chambers and Conway identified three entrenched approaches in development thinking particularly resistant to change, insisting on the importance of production, employment and income (Erni 2015 p4). Such approaches ignore the socio-political complexities of Sen's entitlement model, in favour of a more directly measurable model based on quantitative indicators such as agricultural production, employment figures, and monetary income measures.

Clay (2002) notes that the 1986 World Bank report adds an important temporal element, delineating chronic and transitory food insecurity, adding a timeframe to the physical elements of availability and access mentioned in previous definitions. This was also the first time that of the quantity and quality of food required being appropriate for an active life was included, as opposed to food intake required for basal metabolic function and survival only (Maxwell S 1996 p.4). Food security was no longer just about staying alive, but was becoming about having a productive life.

By the mid-1990s, the spatial framework for food security was shifting from global levels to household and individual level, from a food-specific focus to a more inclusive focus on livelihoods, and from objective to subjective measurement (Maxwell S 1996). Definitions and interpretations of the term proliferated, with Smith et al (1992) cataloguing approximately 200 mentions of food security from both academic and grey literature[15]. The need for clarity on this subject was becoming increasingly necessary.

The World Food Summit, 1996

In 1996, the World Food Summit (WFS) in Rome developed a single definition for food security which was agreed to by 190 nations. Despite subsequent adjustments, it remains the most well-known, commonly used definition, and as such, is a logical starting point from which to explore the concept.

The definition of food security put forward in the Rome Declaration states

> Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (Rome Declaration 1996)

This formulation sets up a number of key aspects of food security, and is a synthesis of previous iterations as noted above. 'All people, at all times' indicates that it pertains to all humanity, here and now and evermore into the future. This indicates the universality of what is suggested by the term. 'Physical and economic access' recognizes that food is not simply an issue of production, but is also contingent on the ability to get it, requiring economic and social structures, such as functioning markets, financial income (and thus, employment), inclusive social networks, and so on. 'Dietary needs and food preferences'

[15] This has been construed as indication of a vast plurality of differing definitions (Maxwell S 1996, Shaw 2007, p.383). Smith et al (1992) make clear in their introduction that the contents of their work are unified by a number of interlinked themes and interests, and that within the overall set under review there is reasonable congruence. This is corroborated in a review of the 32 definitions (none of which are dated later than 1991) included in Maxwell S. (1996). This suggests that the 1996 WFS definition incorporates the theme and foci of previous, more partial definitions concisely.

suggest that there are both physiological and cultural factors to be considered, suggesting that although it may be universally applicable, the modes of achieving it are contingent on social and cultural context. Finally, 'an active and healthy life' proposes not simply enough food to meet minimum requirements for survival, but rather adequate food to sustain a full livelihood. Although there have been adjustments to this formulation since 1996, the basic components of this concept have remained the foundational elements of subsequent definitions of food security.

The WFS Declaration goes on to state that food security is 'a common objective-food security at the individual, household, national, regional and global levels'. The supporting WFS Plan of Action document, which runs to 33 pages, details linkages between food security and gender, food safety, access to water and education, and biodiversity protection, but does not indicate how its targets are to be met, but rather what the general approach should be. It does not set out a singular global strategy as to how food security might be attained, suggesting instead that at national level, 'diverse paths to a common objective' could be applied (Sharma 2011). So, although the Declaration establishes a normative definition for food security and a global target, how to achieve that targets is subject to interpretation at the nation-state level. The 1996 Plan of Action was also silent on control of food production: where food should be produced, how and by whom, and who has the right to make these decisions. Over time this came to be seen as weakness, stimulating the development of alternative approaches such as food sovereignty and the Right to Food. (McKeon 2009 p.38). A synopsis of the interplay between these approaches and food security itself in included in Annex II.

The Millennium Development Goals, 2000-2015

While not necessarily representing a shift in the conceptual framework or definition of food security, the Millennium Development Goals, an interlinked series of goals and targets agreed to by 189 countries in 2000, provided a new momentum on food security which the World Food Summit had not delivered. The MDGs highlighted food security (or at least, one very specific aspect of it- malnutrition) as a top-level priority for all developing countries, establishing the first goal (MDG1) as the eradication of poverty and hunger[16].

[16] Literature on the MDGs is extensive and expansive, and the entire MDG project has been extensively critiqued from a wide range of viewpoints. For the MDG's focus on individual indicators and how this supports technocratic approaches over political considerations see Easterly (2013 p123-127). For costing per MDG and per region, see Sachs (2005 p290-308). For a critique of the MDG1 targets on hunger, how there were devised, measured and applied, see Fukuda-Parr and Orr (2013).

The pairing of poverty and hunger was consistent with development theory and prevailing narratives in food security: food security as a symptom of broader poverty issues, and its inverse- food security as the cause of poverty (Von Braun 1999). Ironically, the progress on poverty attained over the course of 2000-2015 (such that the MDG poverty goals were broadly met at the global level) versus the lack thereof on malnutrition served to decouple this assumption, as poverty alleviated = improved nutrition was shown to be not as tightly linked as once assumed- this was further borne out by research conducted in South Asia over the 2000s (Deaton and Drèze 2009, Banerjee and Duflo 2011).

Committed to the Millennium Declaration, developing countries were now to be expected to meet the targets set out in the MDGs, and would be assessed on their performance in the service of those goals. This took food security out of the remit of the purely 'technical' issue, and gave it international political importance, a socio-economic benchmark against which the development efforts of a state would be assessed[17].

MDG1 was framed as:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
    - Target 1A: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than 1.25 USD a day
    - Target 1B: Achieve Decent Employment for Women, Men, and Young People
    - Target 1C: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Crucially, the MDGs pushed nutrition to centre stage of the development project, with a DFID report (2009 p.3) stating 'Nutrition is, essentially, a foundation for the attainment of the MDGs.' In essence, nutrition became the *sine ne qua non* of progress on other MDGs.

In the service of target 1C, two key indicators were proposed: prevalence of underweight children under-five years of age (indicator 1.8, measured by weight for age) and prevalence of stunting (that is, chronic malnutrition) as indicator 1.9, measured by height-for-age.

The MDGs introduced a critical modification of the WFS target: these indicators were to be measured as a *proportion* of the total population, whereas the WFS target looked to a reduction the *absolute number*

[17] However, the process of the preparing MDGs alienated the main global institutional stakeholders in the WFS, notably FAO, with the consequence that institutional commitment within FAO to the MDGs was undermined (Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2013, p 15, 25).

of undernourished people. The MDG target was thus seen as a dilution of the more ambitious WFS target, which made no allowances for population growth. In policy terms, this also created the space for interpretation as to whether or not progress was occurring; or indeed, if the progress was adequate.

Equally importantly, in a development that eventually came to light in the food and fuel crisis on the back of FAO's claims of one billion hungry in 2007, was the shift of indicator from FAO's 'undernourishment' to anthropometrically derived nutrition-specific indicators. This reinforced the conceptual shift from food availability (and hence agriculture and productivity) towards nutrition and public health, although the emphasis specifically on malnutrition effectively reinforced the need for increases of carbohydrate consumption, and had little direct reference to quality of diet, or intake of protein and fats (Gill et al 2003 p21). Fukuda-Parr and Orr (2013) see the MDG focus on malnutrition as a negation of the more complex interpretation of the WFS formulation of food security as a matter of public health, gender equality, equity and human rights in favour of a more simplistic focus on 'hunger' (Fukuda-Orr and Parr 2013 p4). Coates et al. (2006) note that it is not immediately apparent how the MDG's underweight and undernourishment indicators relate to the WFS definition of food security. Aggregating these indicators at national and global level, as required by, for example, MDG reporting, may offer little illumination of food security at the regional, community or household level.

In their review of MDG1 and the Hunger targets, Fukuda-Parr and Orr (2013 p44) conclude

> [T]he MDG target and indicators frame the problem of food insecurity as a common-sense issue of supply and production, favoring quick and measurable gains in supply and production as the key solution, and marginalizing the complex socio- economic determinants and the human development and human rights priorities of distribution, discrimination, inequitable access, and lack of voice and autonomy.

Global political momentum to address the MDGs was considerable. It focused attention on malnutrition as the pivot point, and it set a new, more attainable target. Taken together with the WFS, where the World Food Summit provided the definition which was most commonly put into policy use, the MDG provided the target, singular: the reduction of malnutrition. Nevertheless, the state of knowledge around what was meant by food security continued to evolve, partly as a result of the disassociation of poverty and hunger mentioned above, and partly as reaction to the oversimplification of the MDGs. A new definition was to emerge from the World Committee for Food Security in 2012.

Food and Nutrition Security: The Committee for World Food Security, 2012

Even though technically precise definitions exist for some (but not all) of the terms used in food security discourse, the existence of such definitions does not guarantee consistency of usage. Terms such as food security and insecurity are used interchangeably, or in combination with terms such as hunger, malnutrition, undernutrition and undernourishment[18]. Undernutrition and malnutrition have formal definitions, but hunger does not (IFPRI 2011). Hunger (and its effects) are socially and culturally defined, and resist a single definition, or are used interchangeably with food security (Andrews and Clancy 1993, Massett 2011, Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2013 p4). Any or all of those three terms (undernutrition, malnutrition and hunger) can be understood as end states resulting from the absence of food security - but paradoxically, the absence of any of those three conditions does not necessarily equate to food security (Kracht 1999).

With the CFS revitalized in the wake of the 2007-2009 food and fuel crisis (Duncan 2014), there was global political momentum to revisit the broad rubric of hunger-related policy terminology. In 2012 the Committee for World Food Security released a document entitled 'Coming to Terms with Terminology', which had a twofold aim: to standardize terms related to food security and nutrition in common usage, and more importantly, to reevaluate the positioning of nutrition in the overall conceptual framework (CFS 2012).

The reevaluating of nutrition was a tacit acknowledgement of the shortcomings of the 'four pillars' approach to food security, discussed below under 'Conceptual Approaches'. The four pillars model suggested an equivalency between one pillar and the next, such that availability was equal to access was equal to utilization. However, improvements in food security can only be said to occur if such improvements translate into improved nutritional outcomes; that is, if fewer people are malnourished.

On a global level, this reduction in malnutrition had not been realized. Given improvements in global availability and access to food, this could only make sense if the problem of food insecurity was reformulated to be about more than food. Improvements in nutrition were increasingly understood not to be limited to food related factors alone, but were also a function of access to sanitation, health care, and feeding and child care practice, just as the WFS declaration had stated. Going further however, the

[18] Seeking to address this conceptual overlapping, Jones et al (2013) propose a Venn diagram with four overlapping ovals, in which hunger is a subset of food insecurity, itself a subset of nutrition insecurity, which coexists in shared space with undernutrition. It can be found on page 482 of their article.

CFS document suggested that food security was one component of nutrition security, but nutrition was not just a function of food. The World Bank (2006a, p66) put it as

> Food security, an important input for improved nutrition outcomes, is concerned with physical and economic access to food of sufficient quality and quantity in a socially and culturally acceptable manner. Nutrition security is an outcome of good health, a healthy environment, and good caring practices in addition to household-level food security.

Following on from this, the CFS sought to rebalance the terminology around these two concepts, concluding that henceforward, the term food *and* nutrition security was most applicable, defined as:

> Food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life. (CFS 2012)

This set the stage for dividing of policy narratives in food security, once which positions nutrition as a supra-level goal with food security as a subordinate strategy, a narrative that will be considered in greater detail in chapter 5.

This new definition went beyond a pat reinvention of what was proposed under food security, but further underlined the importance of how food is consumed, not just accessed. In practical terms, this revised definition has required a reorientation in terms of two policy sectors generally maintained as separate and distinct; specifically agriculture (as the bastion of food security) and nutrition, previously generally understood as the purview of public health. By virtue of tying food security to nutrition, there is now some obligation on policymakers in each sector to refer to the joined-up nature of the overarching approach. The findings section of this paper will explore what this means in practice, if indeed it is occurring.

By 2017, there were indications that even at the global level the uptake of this definition was far from complete. In 2013, Ruel described food security and nutrition security as 'related but distinct', with food security 'necessary but not sufficient' to ensure nutrition security (Ruel 2013). Within Southeast Asia, a 2014 article ironically entitled 'Rice and Nutritional Security: some connections and disconnections', Dawe and Jaffee (2014) presented 'the current definition' of food security as the 1996 WFS definition. At the global level, a joint UN flagship report in 2017 was titled 'The State of Food Security *and Nutrition* in the World' [italics added] (FAO et al 2017) – reintroducing a term the 2012 CFS had suggested be set aside, on the basis that 'the overlapping content of the term, both conceptually and operationally, causes

confusion' (CFS 2012). These terminological gyrations go to indicate how much definition and redefinition of the term is part and parcel of the discourse.

Key events in the evolution of food security discourse

	Major Events in Global Food Security discourse	Key developments in conceptual approaches to food security	Food Security in Lao PDR
1970's	▪ World Food Summit, 1974 ▪ The term 'food security' enters common usage ▪ Focus is on food supply ▪ UN Plan of Action for World Food Security, 1979 ▪ World Food Programme established 1963 ▪ IFAD established 1977	○ Focus on variations in global food availability and price volatility ○ "Green Revolution" continues to increase production, extensively introduced across Asia ○ Excess global production used as food aid to secure Cold War allegiances (Carolan 2012 p. 70) ○ Increased production through introduction of technological solutions to staple food production ○ Shift from global trade to autonomy at nation-state level as strategy ○ FAO introduces food balance sheets, 1972-4	○ Indochina wars end with fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, 1975 ○ Laos becomes independent under LPRP, 1975 ○ Collectivization introduced and fails, 1978-9
1980's	▪ Sen introduces "entitlement"; access becomes key issue, shifting focus from availability ▪ Income added to food security discourse; FAO broadens food security definition, 1984 ▪ Major famines in Ethiopia and Sudan promote emphasis on food aid ▪ World Bank, Poverty and Hunger report (1986)	○ Analysis of food security shifts to individual, household, and national level, focus pivots to access from availability ○ Non-food factors (including access to land, employment or other 'entitlement failure') incorporated in food security analysis ○ Differences between food poverty, food deprivation and food shortages proposed (Millman 1990) ○ Food security definition adjusted to 'access of all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.' (World Bank 1986) ○ Geographic focus of food security on sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia	○ New Economic Mechanism, 1986 ○ Crossborder trade with Thailand resumes ○ Foreign ownership of capital permitted, 1988 ○ Collapse of Soviet bloc stimulates economic reorientation
1990's	▪ 1992 International Conference on Nutrition ▪ GATT, 1994 ▪ World Food Summit, 1996 ▪ Definitions of food security proliferate, estimated by Smith et al at 200+ ▪ UNICEF publishes 'Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Causes of Malnutrition, 1990 ▪ Global food security discourse expands to include NGOs and non-state actors	○ WFS single definition agreed upon by 190 states ○ Updated definition of food security includes four pillars of access, availability, utilization and stability. ○ WFS sets target of total number of hungry people to be reduced by half by 2015 ○ Concerns over efficacy over food aid increase (Clay et al, 1998) ○ 'Nutrition security' defined as separate concept ○ Terms food democracy, food citizenship & food sovereignty emerge	○ Lao PDR joins ASEAN, 1997 ○ Formal reductions of swidden/shifting agriculture begins, 1996 ○ MICS survey 1994, stunting rate is 47 percent
2000's	▪ Millennium Development Goals, 2000 ▪ World Food Summit +5, 2001	○ MDGs Goal 1 and targets 1.8, 1.8A, 1.9 focus on undernutrition and malnutrition ○ WFS definition adjusted to include 'physical, social and economic access.'	○ Self-sufficiency in rice attained, 2000 ○ MICS 2000, stunting rate 41 percent

	▪ 2007-2009 financial, food and fuel crisis causes revival in food security as a global concern ▪ World Summit on Food Security, 2009 ▪ Lancet Series on maternal child health released, 2008 ▪ Right to Food becomes voluntary ▪ *Repositioning Nutrition as Central to Development*, World Bank 2006	○ Global trade liberalization results in food security being 'marketized' (Zerbe 2009, in Carolan 2012 p71) ○ Focus of nutrition efforts pivots to 'First 1000 days' from conception to 24 months. ○ Food sovereignty; food democracy, increased governmental commitment to Right to Food ○ Lack of progress on nutrition leads to calls for 'nutrition security' ○ Integrated Phase Classification launched, 2008 ○ CFS reinvigorated, increased interest in food security from global and regional groupings (G8, ASEAN)	○ WFP releases CFSVA 2007, confirming chronic malnutrition rates >40% ○ National Nutrition Strategy/Plan of Action released, 2009 ○ 6th NSEDP, 2005-2010 ○ ASEAN identifies food security as a strategic priority, 2008 ○ Expansion of export driven commercial agriculture
2010s	▪ SUN Movement begins, 2010 ▪ Committee for World Food Security reformulates food *and nutrition* security, 2012 ▪ Sustainable Development Goals launch, 2015	○ WFS definition of food security is adjusted to include "an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life.", CFS 2012 ○ SDG 2 includes Ending Hunger and Achieving Food Security, supported by five targets on hunger, malnutrition, smallholder agriculture, sustainability and biodiversity.	○ MDG1 identified as being 'seriously off-track', target is missed ○ Lao joins WTO, 2013 ○ Ag Development Strategy 2010 ○ Construction of Xayaburi dam begins 2012, Don Sahong 2014 ○ ASEAN Economic Community begins, 2015

Figure 2.1: Key events in the evolution of food security

Box 2.1: Food Security Policy in Lao PDR: A Concise History

In their review of land policy in Lao PDR since independence, Lestrelin et al (2012) identify three macro level drivers in policymaking: from independence in 1975 through the mid-1990s, national integration- that is, creating the Lao state- was the core commitment of policy, characterized by government decentralization and resettlement policy, expanding central control over peripheral regions. From the mid-1990s through mid-2000s, 'scientific expertise' became as a key driver, in which the role of the development sector and its proffered expertise came to be a major factor in policy processes. Thereafter to the present day, with the country opening up and increasing engagement with regional and market forces, FDI and economic growth is seen to be a key component of sustainable development, and the development sector declined in influence and importance in the overall discourse. Trends in food security policy described below broadly follow this progression.

Since independence, food security policy in Lao PDR has followed the conceptual shift from productionism through to food and nutrition security described above, albeit with a time lag of approximately five to ten years. In the latter half of the 1970s and 1980s, the focus was prevailingly on domestic self-sufficiency in rice. Collectivization of peasants with the declared goal of agricultural self-sufficiency was introduced in the late 1970s, with the border with Thailand closed to agricultural trade between 1976 and 1980 in order to build up domestic food supplies (Sacklokham 2014). Due to poor management and successive natural disasters, the collectivization policy was a comprehensive failure, convincing the LPRP leadership that modernization and private enterprise, rather than collectivization, was the basis for increasing production (Evans 2002 p.191-195). In parallel with the *doi moi* reforms in Vietnam, the 1986 New Economic Mechanism in Lao PDR set the stage for increased cross-border trade of food and agricultural inputs (both formal and informal) as relations with Thailand improved.

The policy focus on rice was maintained through the early 2000s, with the 6th NSEDP (2005-2010) stating 'food (rice) security is a pressing concern for the population in general, and for the poor in particular. Geographic and seasonal pockets of rice scarcity persist, and many communities still lack adequate coping mechanisms. Availability of adequate quantities of rice throughout the year is the key component of food security.' (NSEDP quoted in WFP 2007, parenthesis original.) A food security strategy was drafted in 2000, focusing on higher rice production for increased caloric intake, but made no mention of malnutrition, dietary diversity or nutrition knowledge (WFP 2007 p28). The policy was not well disseminated and was of little subsequent importance to the discourse.

Based on promotion of agricultural modernization, Lao PDR attained rice self-sufficiency at the national level in 2000, although interprovincial rates of year-round availability continue to vary. (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p95). Since 2000, although rice remains a first-order policy focus for agriculture, greater attention has been given to the development of cash crop production for regional export markets, including feedstock maize for Thailand and Chinese markets, rubber to PR China, Thailand and Vietnam, bananas to PR China, and coffee and tea to global markets. In parallel with this promotion of commercialized agriculture has been the discouragement of swidden or shifting agriculture in the uplands, included in the 2001-2010 Agricultural Development Strategy as 'Total end of shifting cultivation practices'

(MAF 2010 p29). This has been accompanied by village resettlement, promoting settlements with higher concentrations of populations at lower elevations to improve service provision.

Rice production has continued to increase, reaching 3.7 million tonnes in 2015. Per FAO estimates, the proportion of the Lao population with substandard food intake (measured in dietary energy) has reduced from more than 50 percent to around 22 per cent by 2013 (GoL and UN 2013 p42).

As described in Chapter I, food security policy discussions were expanded to consider issues of malnutrition in the late 2000s, with the publication of WFP's CFSVA document and the drafting of the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action. With Lao's progress in MDG1 nutrition targets reported as 'Seriously off track' in 2010, the focus of food security policy was expanded to include nutrition for the first time, with MAF acknowledging a role in nutrition by the time of the 2013 Risk and Vulnerability Survey. Subsequently, as a result of momentum from the SUN Network, the UN's 'convergence' programming and the build-up to the SDGs, there has been increased policy attention to multisectoral approaches to food security, within the context of development-sector led interventions in agriculture, nutrition, and water/sanitation in poorer districts and provinces. As an outcome-level focus of policy, the central emphasis is on reducing the prevailing rate of chronic malnutrition, as an outstanding MDG indicator which was not attained, and which impedes potential LDC graduation.

The Shaping of Food Security: Conceptual Frameworks

Underpinning the definitions presented above, the theoretical modeling of how food security was to be understood has also undergone important shifts over time. While high-level global expertise and summits have developed the broad definitions of the term, the conceptual frameworks which explain food security have been more incrementally developed. In the context of the present research these are important because it is these that form the basis for policy narratives, the chains of cause/effect logic(s) which are then applied in policy. Not coincidentally, these conceptual frameworks are developed and promoted by UN institutions with a role in promoting food security and nutrition.

As described above, three major approaches to food security can be seen between 1946-1996. The first emphasized production and availability of food at the global level (roughly 1945-1980). The second, informed by Sen's thinking, emphasized access and entitlements over availability (roughly 1980-1999). Subsequently, there has been a refocusing on the locally specific, subjective and qualitative aspects of food security, with the WFS definition adjusted to include 'physical, social and economic access' [emphasis added] (Barrett 2002 p2106, FAO and WFP 2009, Maxwell S 1996). More recently, as outlined in the section above, the definition has been expanded to include food and nutrition security, although this remains contested.

The first and most straightforward model of food security emerged from the 1996 World Food Summit, and is widely referred to as the 'four pillars' (or four dimensions) model. Although the placement (or relationship) between these pillars has subsequently varied, the pillars themselves have remained a constant feature of food security since their introduction, and include:

> **Availability:** the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports.
>
> **Access:** access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.
>
> **Utilization:** utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met.
>
> **Stability:** to be food secure, a population, household or individual must have access to adequate food at all times.

(EC and FAO 2008).

These are variously represented as four pillars supporting a pediment, or three pillars, with the fourth (stability) as a foundation.

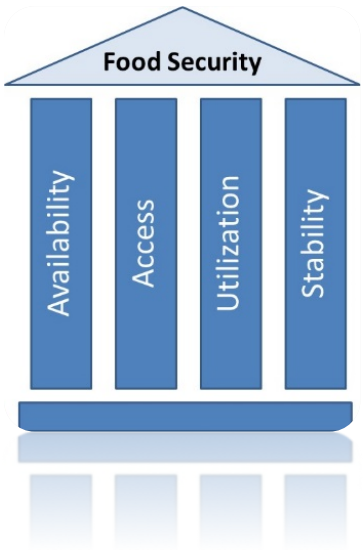


Figure 2.2: Four Pillars model of food security (adapted from Gross et al 2000)

The first three pillars refer to physical components, and the fourth (stability) is temporal: even if food security is achieved today, it may be at risk again tomorrow, or in six months' time- hence the inclusion of stability as the fourth pillar. This model gives equal weight to each of the pillars, proposing that all are necessary in the service of food security as a goal. Although subsequently outmoded by more complex models, this model served to confirm that availability alone was not the measure of food security. It

remains perhaps the best disseminated and understood model. However, the model was deceptively facile. Availability, access and utilization were sometimes equated with geographic levels; that is, availability pertains at the national level, access at the household level, and utilization at the level of the individual (IFRC 2007). As schematically attractive as this may have been, it oversimplifies the interplay between the four pillars. As Barrett puts it, food security is 'inherently an individual phenomenon', but food insecurity has causes and effects at individual, household, community and national levels (Barrett 2002 p. 2017). The four pillars model, despite its straightforwardness, provides no basis for indicating causality, and thus, what needed to be done.

The second conceptual framework presented here is the 1990 UNICEF *Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Causes of Malnutrition* included here in Figure 2.3. This conceptual framework is acknowledged as a landmark in understanding of malnutrition (CFS 2012). First, it added levels of causality, breaking down contributing factors as basic, underlying or immediate. This suggested that the causes of malnutrition were a function of political, economic and social factors, situating malnutrition in a wider arena than food alone. Second, it added multiple outcomes with different time horizons, differentiating between shorter-term and longer-term consequences. Finally, it put care practices and the living environment at the literal centre of the frame, suggesting that food (household food insecurity) was equally, but not more, important than these factors. This framework was hugely influential, and was adopted with some minor adjustments as also applicable for food security (WFP 2007).

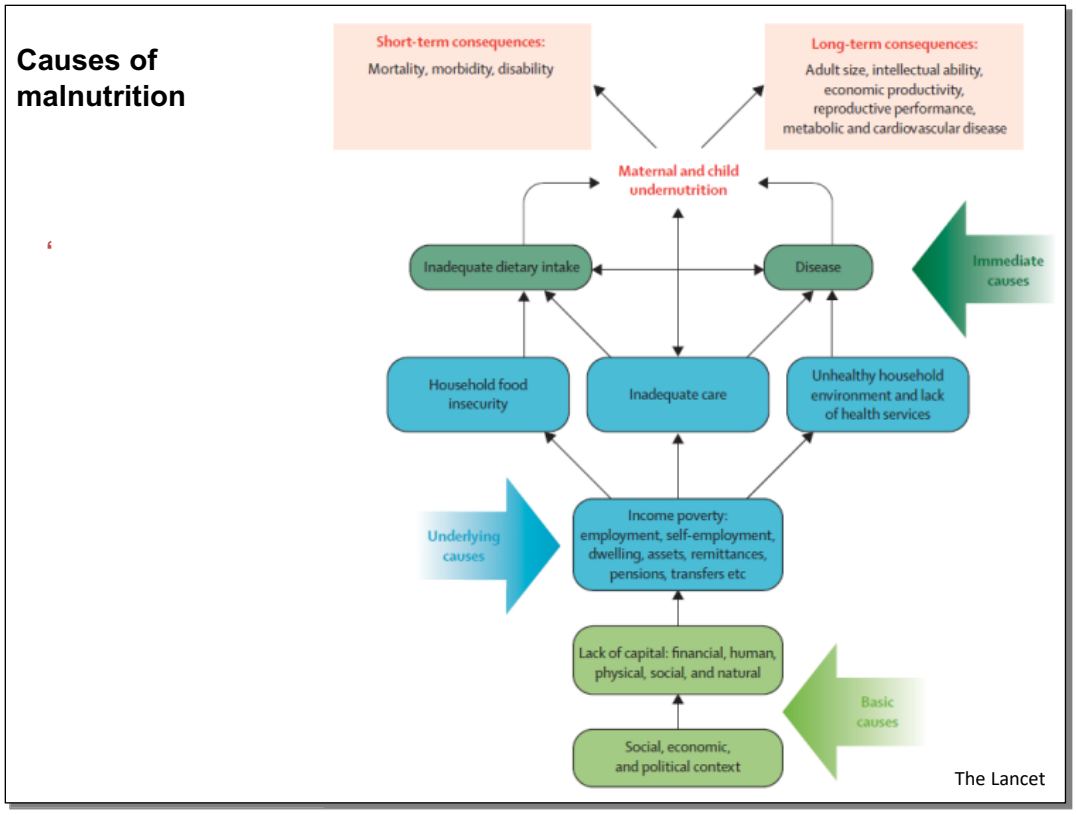


Figure 2.3: UNICEF Causes of Malnutrition conceptual framework (UNICEF 1997)

Over the 2000s the notion of *nutrition* security gained increased prominence in global discourse. Food security had initially emphasized availability, then access, but had given much less consideration to consumption: consumption itself was contingent on a wide range of non-food factors, including water and sanitation, education and the role of women in society. By the mid-2000s, food security (as understood as gross availability and access) had substantially improved in many nations, but malnutrition had not (CFS 2012 p.7). Following on from earlier definitions from the World Bank and the SUN Network, FAO in 2012 proposed 'Nutrition security exists when all people at all times consume food of sufficient quantity and quality in terms of variety, diversity, nutrient content and safety to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life, coupled with a sanitary environment, adequate health, education and care '. (CFS 2012 p.8). This formulation was incorporated into the new definition of food *and* nutrition security promoted by the CFS in 2012.

This broadening of the conceptual framework, such that food security is one component of nutrition security is presented in Figure 2.4 below. As can be seen, some aspects of the UNICEF framework are retained, such as the linear progression from bottom to top, and the geospatial levels from individual to national.

Nutrition security is an outcome of good health, a healthy environment, good caring practices and household-level food security

Food security exists when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.

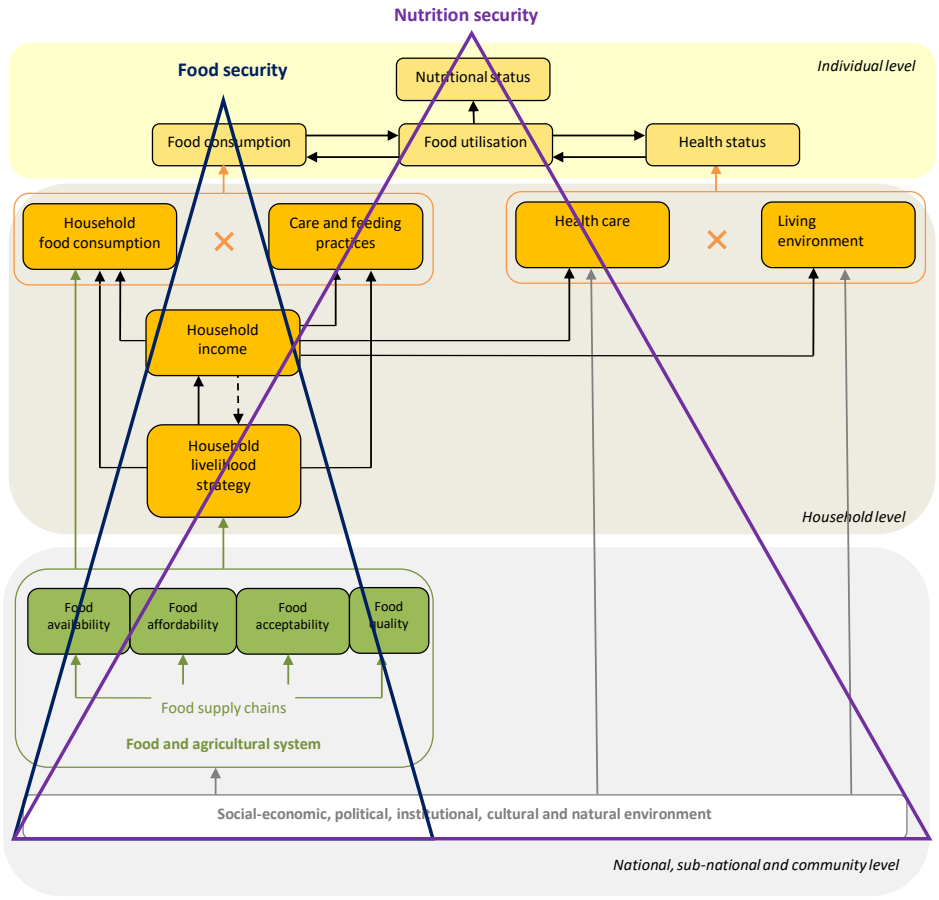


Figure 2.4: Nutrition Security conceptual framework (adapted from (EC 2012)

The final conceptual framework to be presented in this section is perhaps more abstruse and technically oriented than the previous three, but represents something of an attempt at grand unification. It includes both food and nutrition, food and non-food factors, and is the result of the collaboration of a dozen global institutions[19]. In suggesting that there are feedback loops, rather than linear progression, between outcome indicators and factors contributing to food insecurity, the Integrated Phase Classification also introduced an important innovation in the temporal interpretation of food security.

[19] Core members of the IPC include Action Against Hunger, CARE, Permanent Interstate Committee for drought Control in the Sahel, FAO, the Global FS Cluster, The Intergovernmental Authority on Development, The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), Oxfam GB, Central American Integration System, Save the Children, UNICEF and WFP.

The IPC is a joint initiative which, *inter alia*, attempts to develop a holistic analytical approach to food security analysis, and as the acronym indicates, standardized classification of food insecure regions. (IPC 2012). The analytical framework presented below is part of a wider body of ongoing work designed to improve the quality of information available for policymaking; this section concentrates only on the analytical framework, as the overall IPC initiative is more complex than can be readily summarized here.

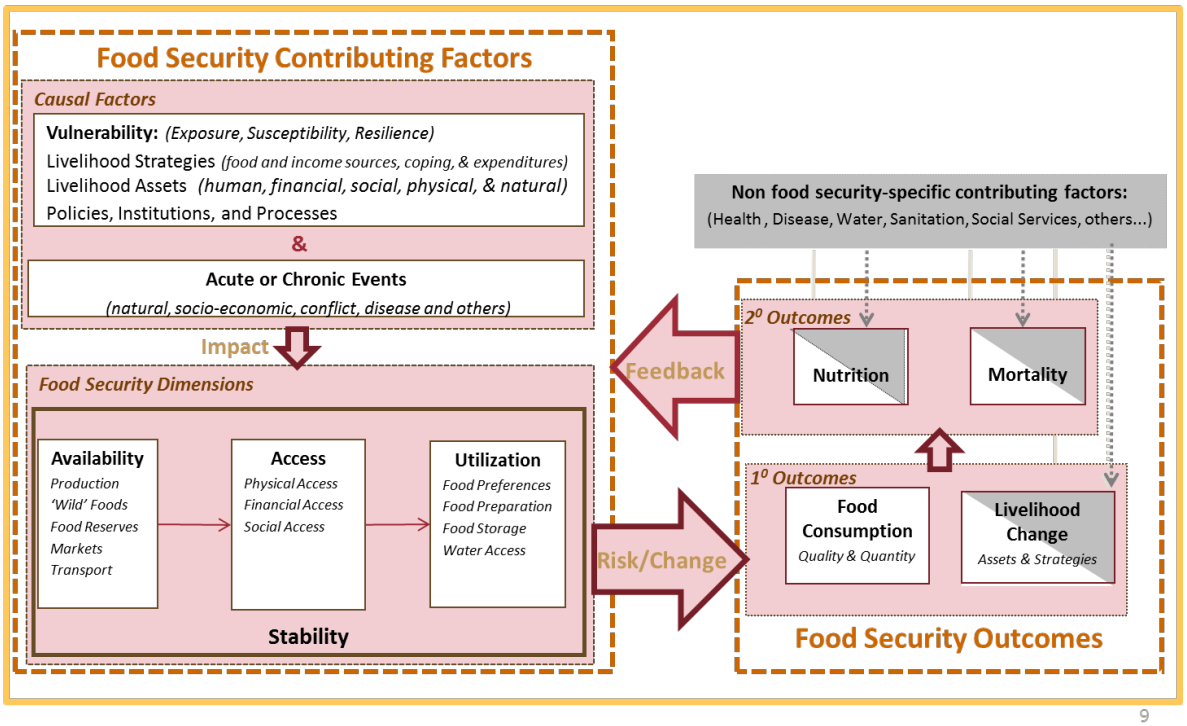


Figure 2.5: IPC Analytical Framework (IPC 2012)

Read from the top left corner of the diagram, the IPC analytical framework starts from those background contextual factors which contribute, positively or negatively, to vulnerability. Importantly, this framework also places economic and political policies and institutions within the framework for the first time. Next, events including the temporal aspects of food security, on either a short or longer-term basis are inserted, with the impact on food security reviewed per the three pillars over time in the bottom left. The innovation of the IPC framework comes on the right of the table, and changes to food security manifest as outcomes. As first level outcomes, food consumption patterns or livelihoods may change. At the second level, if first level outcomes persist, nutritional and mortality status will be affected. The influence of factors related to nutrition security- that is health, sanitation, and so on, are incorporated by the grey shading, indicating that these first and second level outcomes may yet be influenced by factors not directly related to the food security pillars. Finally, the arrow marked 'feedback' indicates that the cycle the begins again, that

food and nutrition security is not an end state per se, but an ongoing baseline which will be subject to further influence from the vulnerability context and the exposure to acute or chronic events.

The IPC does not present food security at the apex of a pyramid or the centre of a circle, but rather as an ongoing cycle of changes and feedback loops. Taken as a combination of food and non-food factors, the four pillars of the WFS definition, and the temporal elements of food security, this analytical framework represents a more complete conceptual modeling than previous models have attempted, and captures better what Coates et al (2006) describe as a 'managed process': the fact that human beings are active participants in the overall experience of food insecurity, and not passive recipients of macro level change. The IPC framework does better than most at illustrating this.

Other conceptual representations of food security exist, including the 'eye of the storm' proposed by Shaw (2007 p 384), the systems framework proposed by Hammond and Dube (2012), and IFPRI's focus on macroeconomic factors and global shocks (IFPRI 2012). Other representations are devised *in situ* for the purposes of indicating how a particular issue (such as climate change or social protection) fits into food security (EC 2012), or as a stimulus to action, as in the diagram used by WFP in Lao PDR shown in chapter 1 (WFP 2007).

Whichever conceptual framework is applied, there is one point on which all observers can agree: better data are surely needed. Appeals for improved data are a mainstay of global policy around food security, with targets for improved data collection, analysis and dissemination have been included in both the MDGs and SDGs. The logic is that better evidence will lead to better policy and hence, more progress on food security.

Accordingly, a substantial proportion of academic literature on food security is devoted to working out how to measure it[20]. This has led to a cascade of similar but not-the-same terms, with an associated means of measurement, which contribute to the overall confusion about the term itself: as Jones et al (2013) put it, 'a sufficiently large number of terms have been used in discussions of food security to cause difficulties in identifying what, exactly, is being discussed, measured, or intervened upon'. Discussions of

[20] See Wolfe and Frongillo (2001) for a short list of methodological approaches to food insecurity measurement (ethnography, rapid rural appraisals, food economy, livelihood approaches, etc.), Maxwell D (2008) on Coping Strategies Index, Holben (2002) on Household Food Security Survey Module, Hyman et al (2005) on mapping and Small Area Estimation, Haddad et al (1994) on indicator selection, Scanlan (2003) on basal empirical indicators, Vargas and Penny (2009) on adapting the FANTA model, Leyna et al (2007) on the Radmier/Cornell Food Insecurity Measure, Vellema et al (2016) on the Household Dietary Diversity Score, and Fuduka-Parr and Orr (2013 p35) for a synopsis of indicators per each of the 'four pillars' model of food security (availability, access, etc.).

measurement issues in food security are involved and complex- a concise summary is presented in Annex III.

Food Security as a Policy Issue

In order to understand how food security is interpreted in policymaking, it is necessary to understand where responsibility for food security lies. The 1996 WFS declaration is expansive and inclusive on the subject, stating that food security is simultaneously within the purview of nation states, regional and international cooperation (FAO quoted in Lee 2007 p.5). It coexists, therefore, as a collective and individual responsibility, shared between a wide range of actors at global, regional, national, sub-national, community and household levels. Determining at what geographic and socio-economic level food security is best evaluated represents another of the key tensions embodied in the concept. Concerns about (and criticism of) the polyvalent interpretation of the concept at different scalar levels date back at least to 1979 (Shaw 2007 p194). In this context, it may be more accurate to consider food securit*ies*, rather than one all-encompassing umbrella term. This exposes the deeply relativistic nature of the content, suggesting it may not be as universal as it seems.

On the face of it, food security is a zero threat, Pareto-optimum public good, which has no evident downside: everyone having enough to eat must surely be in the common collective interest of humankind. The devil, in this as in all cases, is in the details. Quoting Sen (1981): 'Calories are necessary for survival, but neither wheat nor rice is'. In other words, while states and global institutions can identify and agree on the physiological basal requirements for humans, determining the best and most appropriate way to produce, distribute, prepare and consume food that provides those requirements is profoundly more complicated[21].

At the level of declarative statements, national and global leaders have been vocal in their commitments to food security as a priority. Based on the institutional architecture which has been built around the subject, and its consistent presence on the global agenda for the past 70 years, it would appear that extensive policy commitments to food security have been made. Furthermore, food security effectively represents what Cairney called a 'valence issue' (2012 p.186), in that there is public consensus and no antithetical position: no one is in favour of food insecurity and a solution (ridding the world of hunger in all its forms) is agreed upon. This positioning makes the persistence and relentlessness of the issue hard

[21] And even this is an oversimplification- different countries provide different nutritional guidelines, and there is no single yardstick for energy intake which meets all potential physical requirements (Latham 1993).

to understand- if we all agree and know what to do, why isn't the problem going away?- hence Candel's characterization of food security as a 'wicked problem' (Candel 2014).

This 'wickedness' is borne of the coexistence of stated policy commitments with the persistence of undernutrition, malnutrition, and other forms of food insecurity. The flaw must, therefore, be in the nature of these commitments: it is not uncommon to ascribe a lack of progress on food security to what Patel (2009) calls 'the fairy dust of today's democracy': political will, or the absence thereof. FAO did this at the 2002 'WFS: Five Years' Later' summit, when it became clear that the 1996 WFS goal of halving the number of hungry people in the world would not be met (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p13). The summary report of the 2001 CFS session was titled 'Fostering the Political Will.' Toye (2010) suggests that the MDG targets themselves were selected primarily for the political will they would create in Rich World developed nations, to ensure that rich nations would generate the aid budgets required to pay for progress towards the targets.

Given the complexity of its constituent parts and the elusiveness of the goal itself, some commentators have argued that food security is intrinsically unobservable and/or unattainable (Barrett 2002 p2126, Maxwell D 1996, World Bank 1986, Timmer 2000). Other have suggested that it is better understood as an aspirational goal, rather than attainable objective (Clay 2002, WFP 2009a). Going further, Stock and Carolan see it as nothing more than an utopian ideal, a vision of how the world *ought* to be (2012 p129).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the history and development of the concept of food security, and has provided a summary of the overall conceptual approach. Definitions and conceptual approaches to food security have been shown to become more expansive and complex over time, as each new iteration has deepened the focus of food security from general assessments of overall food tonnages available, down to intra-household patterns. This process of expansion and inclusiveness had the knock-on effect of shifting understanding and measurement of food security from a quantitative (how much) to a qualitative basis (why this diet, what kind, what quality, how prepared) (Stock and Carolan 2012). It has indicated that despite its common usage, what is meant or implied by the term is malleable and subject to both technically precise and more general application, often interchangeably. Collective progress on the issue has been shown to be incomplete and lagging at the global level, with a disconnect between global commitments and national progress. Food security remains positioned as a state responsibility and a policy issue, a responsibility and obligation of the state to its citizens.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This chapter consists of two parts. The first sub-section of this chapter will present the selected methodological approach, that is, the policy discourse analytic approach. The basis for this choice of theoretical approach is discussed, particularly the advantages this holds for policy analysis in non-democratic systems. Discourse analysis and related approaches in food security, development studies, and in the SE Asian regional context will be presented. Organizing concepts such as epistemic communities and the role of expertise in policy discourse will also be presented. This chapter is heavily drawn from Fischer's *Reframing Public Policy* (2003), Haas's work on epistemic communities (1992), and Cairney's commentaries on both of these concepts in *Understanding Public Policy* (2012).

The second part of the chapter presents the research questions, fieldwork and overall design of the research. It sets out how the research questions were formulated, and then how the primary and secondary data collection and fieldwork were conducted in support of those questions. It outlines how non-discursive data, deemed essential to framing the national and regional policy context in which narratives were articulated, were selected, collected and interpreted. Lao PDR as the site of research is discussed, as is the development of Lao PDR in the regional context of Vietnam and Thailand, as well as the decision to include ASEAN within the scope of research. It covers the process through which key texts were analyzed, and how interviews were conducted to explore the constructed texts- that is, the discursive practices through which policy is revealed, interpreted and applied in use- which contribute to the formation of policy narratives for food security in Lao PDR. Research triangulation between direct observation, document and secondary data analysis, and elite interviews is discussed. It describes challenges and opportunities that arose during the fieldwork, in terms of identifying interviewees, issues in anonymity, and attaining saturation.

Defining Terms: Public Policy, Policymaking, Policy Studies

Presenting a set of six definitions of the term 'public policy', Cairney notes 'the literature generally questions our ability to define policy' (Cairney 2012 p24). At its broadest possible definition, public policy consists of: any actions governments choose to take or not to take (Dye quoted Fischer 2003 p2). It includes both intentions and actions (in that policy can exist without being put into action, as in the case of party campaign platforms), and includes principles, measures and practices (Page 2006). Public policy

tends to emphasize the primary locus of policy as the state itself, supported by non-state actors in various roles, distributed across multiple nodes of power and agency.

Despite the state-centric focus, public policy includes aims, decisions and outcomes, and is subject to a variety of influences, both from actors with formal authority, and those with none (Cairney 2012 p23). It includes both actions taken, and decisions to take no action.

Policy includes both the measures within a given sector, (such as health or education) and the specific instruments thereof, such as a piece of legislation or a planning document. It can also include specific proposals, government decisions, formal authorization and intermediate and/or ultimate outputs. Policy is defined not only by its intentions, but also by how well those intentions were translated into actual outcomes; those sequences in turn then generate a cycle in which policy creates more policy (Goodin et al 2006, p. 20).

In terms of both form and content, policy is contingent on the political system in which it operates, its timeframe and the area of focus: nutrition policies will have little in common with, say, a nuclear weapons program. Of the wide range of subjects available, policies coalesce around those topics for which a solution is possible: if no solution is known, then there are no policy options. As Marx has it:

> Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation (Marx 1859)

Identifying problems and suggesting solutions requires stories of causality: what is happening, why it is happening, and what is to be done about it (Cairney 2012 p.186). Only problems for which there are solutions become the purview of policy efforts: policymakers do not interest themselves in issues for which there are no solutions: to do so would a waste of time and effort (Goodin et al 2006 p26). Even so, agreement or consensus at one stage of the policy process (for instance, on the priority afforded an issue under discussion) does not equate to policy consensus throughout: different stakeholders may agree on the problem, but have diverging opinions on what the solutions are (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

Policy on a given issue may not equate to a single unified document, declaration or statement, but may be the net result of a bundle of policies across a number of different sectors, culminating in a specific outcome. The nutritional status of children will be the result of public health, education, social welfare and employment policies irrespective of whether or not a formal nutrition policy document exists or not. Policy for food security, therefore, is not only a function of explicitly stipulated policies, but is also

conditioned by policy in other arenas such as trade, climate change, the status of women in society, public health, and more.

A distinction should be sought between policy processes pertaining to policy intentions and policy actions- this is germane to consideration of food security policy, because the ultimate objective of global and national efforts in this regard represent an aspirational goal (see Chapter 2), which provides the 'ideational' (Schmidt 2011 p3) ballast for policy. Policy intentions tends to be broader in ambition and vaguer on details; by contrast, policy actions are not always easily linked to higher-order goals and outcomes. As policy discourse explores the role of ideas in policy discourse, the dovetailing of policy intentions and policy actions will be of importance in this thesis.

The omnibus term *Policymaking* refers the ongoing process through which different actors engage in producing what policy is defined as above: any actions governments choose to take or not to take. Choosing not to take any action or not to decide is as much a policy choice as deciding to take proactive measures (Rist 2000 p1001). Central to the process of policymaking is an ongoing discussion over the definitions of problems, the boundaries of categories, classification and ordering criteria, and the meaning of the underlying principles (Fischer 2003 p60). This is partly why the early chapters of this thesis have focused of the definitions of food security: defining of these concepts forms the framework through and for which policy will be crafted, and provides the language (including terms, descriptions and standard phrases) which inform and populate policy texts.

Policy is realized both in central-level documents and planning, but also at the level of practitioner, as individuals interpret and apply what is meant by a particular policy within their own frame of reference. Policy, therefore, is a negotiated process, subject to interpretation at every step along the way (Laws and Hajer 2006 p411). Policymaking is thus best understood as sequence of tweaks and adjustments to what is already underway, rather than a progression of carefully considered pivotal decisions (Rist 2000 p1002). It is not fixed or rigid, but is flexible enough to absorb ideas from multiple sources in order to maintain hegemony, incorporating new ideas and adjusting to changing circumstances. It must be seen as both relevant and persuasive, if what is proposed is to be taken up by politicians and citizenry (Goodin et al. 2006 p5).

Policy studies, then, is the process of reviewing and assessing political intentions and actions from an academic perspective. Policy studies are one sub-section of the policymaking process; despite the intellectual and public merits of analyzing policy, policy studies rarely have influence on policy making

processes (Rist 2000 p. 1003) As an academic field, policy studies are value-laden and prescriptive, and thus are fundamentally contestable (Goodin et al. 2006 p4-6). Policy studies privilege the role of the individual analyst, as interpretation is effectively the sum of an individual's understanding of the policy context under scrutiny. The analyst must also be complicit in the political process, both in order to gain access to the resources required to undertake the study, but also because the value of policy analysis (and recommendations) is only as valid as those who will listen to it: policy analysis must speak truth to power but equally, there must be someone listening (Deleon 2006). This level of self-reflexivity is a hallmark of public policy studies, and contributes to the overall sense of contestability which permeates the field. As Moran has it, in his introduction to a public policy text book, 'Our story, like all stories, is contestable. There is no single intellectually compelling account available of the state of either policy making or the policy sciences; but the irredeemable fact of contestability is a very part of the argument.' (Goodin et al 2006)

Defining Discourse

Discourse theory proceeds from the assumption that all actions, object and practices are meaningful, and that these are shaped by social and political struggles in specific historical periods (Fischer 2003 p.73). Defining discourse, Fischer proposes Howarth's formulation of 'historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects'[22]. Discourse analysis has focused how on power, control and knowledge influence subjects. As Foucault puts it

> What individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience? How is the relationship of the discourse to its author indicated and defined? How is struggle for the control of discourses conducted between classes, nations, linguistic, cultural or ethnic collectivities? (Foucault quoted in Rossi 2003, p 6)

In this regard, discourses are akin to systems. They are both constitutive and descriptive of the world and its subjects. In other words, discourses are both about and part of the world they describe. Discourse itself is social practice, and thus necessarily subjective (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). It operates at two levels: at the everyday level of communicating between institutions and at a meta-level, in terms what goes on within and between institutions among agents: that is, people themselves (Schmidt 2011 p9).

[22] Fischer also provides three supplemental definitions of discourse: discourse is 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed to give meaning to social relations' (Hajer), 'Establishes norms for developing conceptualizations that are used to understand the phenomenon (Shapiro) and Foucault's assertion that discursive practices are 'widely held, often repeated interpretations of social conduct that produces and affirms behaviours.' (Fischer 2003 p.73)

Discourse has both ideational and interactive elements (Schmidt quoted in Fischer 2003, Schmidt 2011 p3). Ideational refers to normative ideas which inform the core values and ideas of society. Ideas and institutions gain meaning and credibility based on how they are expressed, by whom and in what context, and in this regard, process may be as important as product: who is saying what to whom and in what form is as important as what is being said (Searle quoted in Schmidt 2011 p8). Within a given institutional setting, there will be explicit and implicit rules as to how to present a message in the 'right' way so that it will be heard by the 'right' people (Schmidt 2011 p17), but there are drawbacks to this. As Mary Douglas notes,

> Institutions systematically direct memory and channel perceptions into forms compatible with the relations they recognize… the solutions they proffer come only from the limited range of their experience. This is the process through which a term with an internationally agreed upon definition is filter through a local context' ([ellipsis original], quoted in McKeon 2009 p22).

For instance, the 1996 WFS definition of food security as including 'physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food' will be taken to pertain to rice in SE Asia, and maize in southern Africa. This is what Schmidt calls 'nationally situated logics of communication' (2011 p17).

Fischer defines policy discourse as 'the communicative interactions among political actors that translate problems into policy issues' (Fischer 2003 p 30). The interactive element of discourse includes two components: a) coordinative functions within and between policy communities, including government, civil society, epistemic communities and coalitions coalescing around particular issues; and b) the communicative component (or advocacy), which seeks persuasion and political legitimacy for a policy action. Taken together, this forms a discourse coalition: members may share beliefs or goals, but may disagree on specific or general objective(s), or how to achieve the goal (see Schmidt 2011 p13). Communicative and coordinative components need not always connect: the public many not approve, be interested or fully aware of actions taken in policy spheres (Schmidt p16 2011). Social movements, many of which consciously reject existing policy systems as non-inclusive (such as the food sovereignty movement) are thus more part of the communicative discourse, whereas institutions such as FAO are entrenched in the coordinative function; both sets of ideas and actors, although ideologically distinct, form part of the larger global discourse coalition on food security.

The Policy Discourse Analytical Approach

The discourse analytical approach put forward in Fischer (2003), proposes that review of empirical targets and results are an incomplete means for evaluating policy efficacy, and suggest a methodology predicated

on interpretative analysis. Policy discourse analysis thus explores the role of language, normative and empirical suppositions, narratives, rhetorical argument and discourse itself, filtered through the analytical lens of the interpreting individual (Hajer and Laws 2006). More simply, it explores the role of ideas in public policy (Farsund et al 2015). Care should be taken to distinguish policy discourse analysis from more doctrinaire interpretations of discourse analysis itself as practiced in linguistics and other fields, which may emphasize more emphatically close examination of written and spoken texts to examine the meanings communicated by what is expressed. That said, both approaches share a common focus on exploring language in use, in context, with the assumption that explorations of language used can yield insights into the deeper meanings underlying the language itself. Equally, the narrative analysis that is presented in chapter 5 draws its approach from Labov's linguistics approach, in which the focus of the analysis is the structure and content of the narrative: its substance, event sequence, actions and their meaning, and the resolution offered (Labov 1982 quoted in Merriam 2009 p 33).

The policy discourse analytical approach is not intended as a set of diagnostic procedures to be followed by rote, and does not provide 'methodological tidiness' (Fischer 2003 p.viii) but is rather a process of eliciting meanings from the widest possible set of sources (both qualitative and quantitative). In keeping with its inclusive approach, policy discourse analysis assumes that policy is not (or should not be) the exclusive purview of elites, but is comprised of explicit and implicit participants (and excluded parties).

Policy discourse analysis is an interpretive analytical approach, supporting the inclusion of qualitative, multidisciplinary perspectives on policy. In common with critical theory, interpretation is a fundamental: 'facts' are not self-evident or self-explanatory, but are contingent on how they are analyzed and understood (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000). It is expressly democratic, in that it seeks to demystify policy and remove policy studies from the rarified world of the elite and thus make it more accessible to ordinary citizens[23]. In this regard, the analyst is situated more as a facilitator than an *ipso facto* expert (Fischer 2003 p. 16), or as Mishler puts it, acts as 'coauthor' in identifying narratives and their meaning (Mishler quoted in Merriam 2009 p34).

Central to the policy discourse analytical model is the role of language. This incorporates what is said, what cannot be said, who can and can't say it, and who listens (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000). The choice of language used establishes normative requirements, performative function and reinforces hierarchy.

[23] This point will be revisited in Chapter 9 in some detail, discussing whether such a perspective was either feasible or appropriate of Lao PDR.

Leadership itself is derived from use of language and how it is interpreted, what Case calls 'language in use' (Case 2014). In this theoretical context, language is taken to include the ideas, interests, institutions and culture brought to bear on policy, and suggests that these can be understood by examining the language used in articulating policy, but equally that policy is indivisible from the culture in which it operates (Bobrow 2006): understanding that culture is therefore essential to understanding the policy context.

The underlying rationale is that all of the above (ideas, interests, institutions and culture) are social constructs, imbued with meaning by the language used to describe and understand their role in society: without language to describe them, they cease to hold function. Equally, ideas are not seen as separate and distinct from institutions and context, but rather, ideas and values are embedded in institutions, and institutions themselves are constituted by the discourse (Fischer 2003 p 44). In the course of analyzing policy, the discourse analyst will ask: a) have the number of competing narratives and interpretations increased or decreased? b) are policy implementers conscious of policy meanings? c) do institutions have flexibility to interpret or alter policy positions? If so, how much? Is this tacit or explicit? and d) How does ambiguity operate in context? (Fischer 2003 p.65)

Authored and constructed texts are analyzed in order to understand the applicable language used. Taken together, analyzing the policy communities, networks, and texts used form the broad outlines of the policy discourse analytic approach, providing the thick description needed to understand policy discourse in context (Fischer 2003 p.150).

Accordingly, the methodological approach applied in this research involved reviewing authored texts to identify and classify policy narratives, followed by an exploration of how these narratives influenced (and were influenced by) discursive practice at the institutional and individual level, through a process of elaborating the constructed texts through interviews with experts engaged on food security. When taken together, the institutions, narratives, and individuals engaged in the process formed the discourse as a whole, consistent with Howarth's formulation of 'historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects' quoted above. Nevertheless, it is worth cautioning that this may not provide a comprehensive overview of the overall discourse; as Fischer states 'whereas discourse functioning at the level of social action generally takes the narrative form, discourse at the socio-cultural level can take a broader range of forms' (Fischer 2003 p 161). Consistent with the focus on this research, the discourse analysis that follows pivots around policy narratives and discursive practices around food security policy in applied use.

Discourse Analysis in Food Security

In their article on food security and trade policy, Farsund et al (2015) note that in discussions of food security policy and governance, 'discourse, narratives, deliberation, world view, framing, frames etc. are frequently used somewhat indiscriminately.' Any review of how discourse analysis has been applied to food security must therefore allow some leeway in how policy terms are applied. In the paragraphs that follow, 'frames'; may be construed as roughly analogous to narratives, in that the term refers to a unifying structure providing an organizing logic to a conceptual model, and framing considers not only the content of policy but also the practices of policymaking (Hajer 2003), just as discourse analysis requires consideration of the 'nationally situated logics of communication' (Schmidt 2011) and development studies theory insisting that 'virtually the entire development literature agrees that successful aid programs must be designed around local conditions, circumstances, culture, and leadership (Bill Easterly and Jeffrey Sachs, the two polar extremes in the development debate, both agree on this)' (Natsios 2010 p51).

In an analysis of food security and nutrition's links to global poverty discourse, Maxwell (1998) identifies two narratives which have dominated the history of food security policy. The first is the ongoing legacy of Malthusian thinking; that as a result of population growth and upper limits to agricultural productivity, that there is a global shortfall of food. Therefore, the emphasis must be producing more, and the geographic focus should be on areas of high potential productivity. Maxwell identifies as a competing narrative the short-term crisis of hunger, exemplified by the 'x million people going hungry' figure. In this narrative, the foci are shifted not to where food is produced but where hunger is found (that is, the developing world and the Global South), and the emphasis is more on how food is accessed, not now how it is grown. While both narratives are presented as containing 'elements of truth'- in that both contain components of the overall policy scope of food security- addressing short term hunger is identified as the overwhelming priority.

Mooney and Hunt (2009) term food security a 'consensus frame' which supports multiple ownership and does not engender oppositional claims, making it expansively, amorphously inclusive (Mooney and Hunt 2009). Effectively, there is no antithetical position, making it what Cairney calls a 'valence issue': no one is actually in favour of food *in*security. For Mooney and Hunt, three distinct collective action frames (or narratives) are identified: food security as hunger, food security as a component of development, food security as a global or national security issue. These are congruent with but do not exactly match Von Braun's three narratives in food security: food security as symptom of broader poverty issues, food

security as the cause of poverty, and food security as a human right (Von Braun 1999). Findings from this research will identify some (but not all) of these narratives as present in the Lao PDR food security policy discourse.

Building on Mooney and Hunt's Consensus Frame, Candel (2014) and Candel et al (2014) have made concerted efforts to bring greater rigour to food security framing. In his analysis of the EU's CAP, he identifies six frames, all of which are of relevance to the SE Asian food security policy context: Ranked in order of frequency of application, these include: Productionism, the environment, development, free trade, regional approaches and food sovereignty. Crucially, Candel notes that different frames are used by the same actors over time or for different audiences (2014 p.8): multiple narrative threads are applied in pursuit of a policy goal.

In his review of literature around food security governance, a review process centred on discourse analysis of global food security documents, Candel (2014) identifies the narrative of food security as an issue of governance: that is, if the governance of food security was better, then food security itself would be less of a problem (2014 p12). This positioning presupposes a central role of those institutions responsible for said governance, notably the RBAs of the UN. As he puts it, governance is presented as both the challenge of, and the solution to, food security. Other themes he sees emerging are consistent with the expository information laid out in Chapter II of this thesis: the high complexity of food security supports solutions outside the scope of national governance, failures of institutional architecture, the emergence of new players (such as CSOs), appeals for greater coherency (noting the great promise held by regional governance bodies, namely ASEAN), and variation and conflict of ideas which damage overall coherency, and the allocation of resources.

Candel concludes by describing food security as a 'wicked problem', a characterization shared by Timmer (2015). Wicked problems are so-called because they are so complex as to that they defy attempts to model them, are ambiguous, contested and highly resistant to solutions. Recalling Goodin's observations (Goodin 2006), that policies only form around issues for which a solution is possible, 'Solutions to wicked problems are not verifiably right or wrong but rather better or worse or good enough.[…] In such cases, it may be more useful to consider how such problems can be managed best.' (Australian Government 2007).

While Candel's work is undoubtedly a step in the right direction in terms of applying more rigourous policy analyses to food security, it is circumscribed by its reliance on document analysis alone. As mentioned above, policy making is a negotiated process, subject to constant interpretation by practitioners at every

level (Laws and Hajer 2006 p411). The present research serves to expand the discourse analysis process to include those negotiated processes and constructed texts, and to better understand how normative global governance is brought to bear in locations deemed to be food insecure, such as Lao PDR, as opposed to rich-world contexts such as the EU. Furthermore, as Candel notes (2014 p14), discussions of food security governance tend to emphasize how it ought to be, not how it is. The present research serves to reverse that tendency, describing how it is, not how it ought to be.

Discourse Analysis in Development Theory

Exploring the wider remit topic areas included under the rubric 'development', in their book *Deconstructing Development Discourse*, Cornwall and Eade (eds) (2010) undertake a wide ranging review on the indiscriminate usage of 'catch phrases, buzzword and euphemisms' in the development sector, describing development speak as a linguistic form which is 'simultaneously descriptive and normative, concrete yet aspirational, intuitive and clunkily pedestrian, capable of expressing deeply held conviction or being simply 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' (Eade 2010 p. ix). Contributors provide an etymological history of the morphology of 29 development sector terms such as poverty reduction, good governance, sustainability and globalization[24].

From this work a number of important insights applicable to understanding food security policy discourse emerge. First, as Leal (2010) notes, terms in development discourse are systematically 'sanitized and depoliticized', with the implication that solutions are possible through the application of capital, technology and knowledge within and through existing systems. As an important corollary to this, the solutions to poverty and inequality (and all related issues) is an individual, moral duty, thus exonerating the state (and its development partners) if progress is not attained. Second, evasiveness, or a lack of clarity, is identified as an important function of 'development speak', with ambiguity and an absence of full definitions seen as useful abstractions, allowing for greater engagement from institutions able to manipulate their own meaning into ill-defined umbrella terms (Cornwell 2010 p.4). Finally, cycles of redefinition and reinvention of terms are presented a central component of development discourse, in order to obscure the lack of progress realized. As Leal (2010) puts it:

> The historic and systemic failure of the development industry to 'fix' chronic underdevelopment puts it in the challenging position of having both to renew and reinvent its discourse and practice enough to make people believe that a change has, in fact, taken place and to make these

[24] Although it is well within the remit of their review, food security is not included in this volume.

adjustments while maintaining intact the basic structure of the status quo on which the development industry depends.

In the terminology of policy discourse and policy belief systems, the ideological, core beliefs of development itself are not questioned deeper than the technical-analytical level. However, the overall structure of Cornwell and Eade's volume is based on unpacking individual terms (or buzzwords) which make up the vocabulary of development, presented on a point-by-point basis, and then critiqued within the scope of the term itself. The broader point drawn from this review relevant to food security, is articulated in the first paragraph above: that development terminology is muddled and imprecise by design, in order to encourage cohesion around ill-defined consensus, in order to gain as broad a constituency as possible (Eade 2010 p. ix, Chandhoke 2010).

Discourse Analysis in the research context

Much of policy studies literature in English has been based in policy contexts consistent with Western democratic traditions, characterized by access to information, transparency, public accountability, public debate, institutional checks and balances, and the rule of law. With these conditions not wholly met for the unit of analysis for this thesis, a theoretical approach adapted to more fluid and opaque policy contexts was necessary. This sub-section reviews various theoretical approaches that were considered and presents the explanation for the eventual selection of the policy discourse approach.

As a consequence, traditional theoretical approaches such as policy cycles, which explore the stages of policy making as a rational, incremental process from agenda setting through implementation to evaluation (Rist 2000, Cairney 2012 p4, 33) were deemed incomplete for this research, as cycles do not reflect the complexity of social relations and discourses that give way to policies and give shape to policy processes. This would maintain the apolitical technocratic approach applied to policy reviews within the development sector (Bouapao et al 2016), and thus would add little additional value.

The same held true for policy transfer approaches (Dufour and Dodé 2016). Rational choice theory, with its emphasis on 'market solutions and small government' (Cairney2012 p 136) did not seem a good fit for a centrally planned, non-democratic political system with an emerging approach to free markets, as is found in Lao PDR.

The choice of research site necessitated a theoretical approach that allowed for exploration of 'discourses in practice', that would explore not only how global discourses was duplicated at national level, but also, how local context came to shape the discourse itself, based on the interplay between institutions, political

culture, and individuals on an everyday basis (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). Gubrium and Holstein's insights on interpretive practice of discourse analysis was instructive in this regard.

Theoretical approaches that reject technocratic approaches to policy studies and which emphasize the role and important of belief systems were considered. Of interest in this context was Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework, detailed in Fischer (2003 p 94-114) and Cairney (2012 p 200-219). While this held particular interest because of its identification of deep core, near core and secondary belief systems (which would in turn be adapted by Fischer), its emphasis on longitudinal study over a decade or more did not render it a good fit with the fieldwork model. While the importance of belief systems is significant, ACF was more problematic in its relatively straightforward treatment of the role of expertise and quantitative data (Fischer 2003 p 97, 106). Especially in data-poor contexts (such as developing countries in the Global South), the choice and use of indicators is heavily freighted by policy concerns: in this context, the selection of indicators is as least as important and their application (Fischer 2003 p 104), and ACF did not adequately address this.

Given the importance of normative approaches to food security under the aegis of the global development project, how multi-level governance translated into policy actions at the level of the nation-state was a central consideration, especially in terms of mapping of the institutional architecture around food security policy in Lao PDR. The insights of this approach into the blurring of formal and informal policy processes and the introduction of new actors was certainly applicable to the research context, but multi-level governance tends to emphasize the top-down flows of policy from global to local. The intent of the present research was to explore how discourse was informed and shaped by local context and actors, as much as by global normative approaches.

In business studies, Case (2014) has analyzed the 'bounded enactments', performative forces and linguistic norms-in other words, the form and ritual- of Lao leadership protocols in development projects at that sub-national level, emphasizing the importance of adaptation of particular development-speak phrases (such as 'master plan') to influence of project implementation. Despite the insights of Case's examination of one set of factors that contribute to the policy context, the focus on ritual and performative aspect, while relevant to understanding framing of discourse, does not provide a comprehensive methodological framework for discourse analysis; nevertheless, it is a rare and useful study of how government business is conducted in Lao PDR, and its insights inform the findings presented in Chapter 4.

Given that little to no discourse analysis has been conducted in Lao PDR itself, this represented an opportunity to apply the policy discourse methodology in a new context. As a rare exception to this, Rigg (2009 p.10) has identified what he called four 'scalar discourses' for Lao PDR, suggesting that policy in Lao PDR can be viewed through four geospatial lenses:

- A global discourse of economic reform and market integration which has Laos entering and becoming part of the mainstream.
- A regional discourse of Laos as a component part of a wider Southeast Asian region, where an Asian identity creates and cements a common purpose.
- A national discourse of Lao exceptionalism, which separates the country from its key neighbours, Thailand, and which has its roots in centuries of interaction, contact and conflict.
- A sub-national, centre/periphery discourse which highlights the differences between the centre – the capital, Vientiane– and local spaces.

All four of these scalar discourses are explored in the food security policy context in Chapter 4 that follows, and find expression in food security policy narratives and multi-level governance, whereby Lao exceptionalism and centre/periphery narratives are equated with the 'unspoiled' traditions of smallholder agriculture, and Lao's entry into the region and global market place is based on rice protectionism.

With the researcher's existing professional experience on development-sector modes of analysis, there was research interest in exploring theoretical approaches that allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the policy context, rather than a *prima facie* review of the mechanistic processes of policy making, to explore the role of ideas, both explicit and subtextual, in policymaking processes. This is an under-researched area of policy making in the Global South and in Southeast Asia in particular. Discourse analysis therefore offered an opportunity to explore the moral and ideological underpinnings of food security policy, rather than the simply the structure and efficacy of the policy instruments themselves. Given the subject matter at hand, in which the elimination of hunger is posited as a moral priority requiring humanity's collective best efforts, exploring the moral and ideological layers of the discourse would go to exploring one of the fundamental paradoxes of food security, that despite consensus that there is an obligation to address hunger, it remains so intractably persistent.

With its interest on the role of ideas, not just belief systems, and with those 'ideas' supplied by normative global discourse on food security, the policy discourse-analytic approach appeared the best fit for both the research topic and context. The critical stance towards expertise also fit well with a nebulous, all-encompassing conceptual framework like food security, for which 'expertise' is partial and limited, and the role of expertise in defining the discourse is contested. Understanding how expertise is equated with

'credibility, acceptability and trust' (Fischer 2003 p.114) is a pivotal issue in understanding how global development institutions are operating and defining policy at nation-state level and how nation-states respond to this engagement.

Developing the frame, defining the problem

As a preface to this section, and bearing in mind Farsund's observations on the indiscriminate use of terms in food security policy analysis (cited above), it is worth nothing that framing and discourse are interrelated but distinct theoretical approaches to policy analysis. Framing refers to the process through which frames define problems, state a diagnosis, pass judgement, and reach a conclusion (Entman quoted in Fischer 2003 p.144). In this regard, framing is consistent with narrative analysis' identification of storylines and their structures. However, discourse analysis casts its net wider, seeking not only to understand framing, but also the interactions between multiple frames and the underlying process and institutions through which frames themselves are created: as Fischer put it, 'discourse both frames and carry knowledge'. (Fischer 2003 p.ix). As framing is both drawn from public discourse and forms the first step in understanding not only how a problem is presented but also who is presenting it, it serves here as an entry point for interpreting the evolution of a given narrative.

Narratives stem from the problem statement: that is, what is the problem defined as, and what is the context for that problem? Who is doing the framing? What has been included, and what has been left out of the frame? On the whole, problems are difficult to fully define, and there is often ambiguity or debate over key components of the problem statement. Problem statements themselves are not wholly evidence-based or empirically drawn, but may also contain emotive or ethical language to stimulate interest (Cairney 2012 p185). If the problem itself is ill-defined, then the contextual framing may be different within different policy communities, and the resulting narrative may be inherently ambiguous. Far from being a weakness, ambiguity can contribute to the robustness of a narrative, as there is greater scope for multiple or overlapping perspectives and interpretation (Sayer 2010).

Frame analysis explores not only the contents within the frame (the ostensible subject matter), but also the creation of the frame itself. Fischer proposes that interpretive policy analysis should be frame-critical, exploring the sources and details of multiple frames, examining assumptions, ambiguities and inconsistences across the overall set (Fischer 2003 p 140). For Rein (quoted in Wagenaar and Noam Cook 2003) frames are 'structures of thought, of evidence, of action, and hence of interests and values,' and

can only be properly identified *after* the policy actions are known; put simply, the policy defines what the frame was. Central to the framing process are the 'communities of meaning': policymakers, implementing agency personnel and affected citizens, all of whom will have differing takes on the frame and narrative (Yanow 2003). As Hall describes it

> Policymakers customarily work within a framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing…this framework is embedded in the very terminology though which policy-makers communicate about their work, and it is influential because so much of it is taken for granted and unamenable to scrutiny.
>
> (Hall 1993, quoted in Cairney 2012 p.229)

Furthermore, a plurality of meanings and interpretation may exist within each larger community. Senior management, line personnel and junior staff may all interpret a policy frame differently, while continuing to believe that they are working as a unified whole (Laws and Hajer 2006 p411).

Defining the process of framing, and the frames which define policy action is notoriously complex[25]. Yanow (2003) suggests that the key element of framing is geography, in that framing identifies and examines locally specific meanings- 'local' being understood as specific to community, province, nation and so on- resulting from policies, as Rigg (2009 p10) does in the case of his four scalar discourses for Lao PDR. This is consistent with Fay's point (Fay quoted in Fischer 2003 p142) that policies are specific to the time, space and political system in which they were developed. The policy making process in, say, the UK in 2017, Vietnam in 1986 and Lao PDR in 1975 will follow situationally unique paths and processes.

With the recognition that frames are variable based on local conditions, it therefore follows that policy frames are highly context specific: policies, or indeed the process of developing those policies, are determined by political, economic and social circumstance. This is not to negate global political processes: as the 1996 World Food Summit Declaration proposes, it is wholly possible to have broad agreement at the global level on a general framework, but locally elaborated strategies and frames within that larger framework to realize the stated goal(s).

Narrative Structure

[25] See Deleon (2006) on framing discourse, Winship (2006) on overlapping consensus, Majone (2006) on agenda setting and feasibility analysis, Hajer and Laws (2006) on addressing ambiguity.

Narratives can be understood as the prevailing logical through-flow which emanates from the problem statement, a unifying thread which seeks to create a meaningful sequence of assumptions, normative and empirical perspectives. With the framing and problem statement established, attention then turns to crafting the solution. The preceding sentence is intentionally facile, to illustrate that this is what narratives are designed to do: making complex issues simple, providing a beginning, middle and end. Narrative frameworks propose a logic that appears self-evident or axiomatic: for instance, the statement 'there IS a food security crisis BECAUSE people are hungry and/or malnourished'. Narratives do not provide all, but rather only certain details, ideally in the form of shared tropes or vivid images and ideas that allow the reader/listener to intuit what is meant. This allows for participants to fill in the blanks for themselves, encouraging them to draw a conclusion which has 'moral weight', based on the narrative's content (Fischer 2003 p 162-3). Narratives are therefore hard to interrogate, let alone refute- doing so suggests stakeholders have fundamentally misunderstood an issue, and this is difficult to accept.

The apparent simplicity of a narrative is underpinned by a blend of factual information, interpretation, opinion and evaluation (Majone quoted in Fischer 2003 p 191). Narratives do not spring into policy discourse fully formed, but are drafted and redrafted, mutating and evolving to incorporate new facets and elements as necessary. The process of crafting narrative essentially entails rendering great volumes of data down to a concise, easily understood form which has a beginning, middle and end, but elements of the narratives themselves may alter over time. For instance, the central theme of a policy narrative may be increasing food availability through improved rice production, but notions of how best to achieve this may change as opportunities arise and circumstances change.

Thematically, narratives tend to coalesce around two basic plotlines (Fischer 2003 p.169). The first is that of decline and crisis. In this theme, there is an imminent necessity to address an issue in the immediate term, lest things get worse. Whether as a result of conflict, climate change, population growth, unsustainable economic, social and environmental practice, overconsumption, peak oil, or any combination thereof, the crisis is here and now. As has been shown in Chapter II, this sense of urgency has been tied to global discourse on food security for decades. This is consistent with the first of Bourdieu's 'symmetrical illusions', that what is being observed is unprecedented (2010 p39) - hence the

sense of crisis[26]. An additional gloss on this theme comes from the suggestion that action must be taken now because all the tools required are in hand, possibly for the first time, so this must be the moment to act. However, as Easterly points out, the trope of 'the first time in history' itself has a long and repetitious history (Easterly 2013 p43).

The second theme in policy narratives is that of human helplessness, necessitating a strong set of actions to redress that helplessness (Fischer p169). This promotes the idea of intervention and external engagement and downplays individual agency. These two themes, decline and crisis and human helplessness, are resonant with Von Braun's (1999) identification of three key narratives in food security: food security as symptom of broader poverty issues, food security as the cause of poverty, and food security as a human right. The first two narratives conform to the theme of decline and crisis, insofar as the continued existence of poverty in a world of plenty is morally repugnant and must be addressed urgently. The third narrative, food as a human right, reflects the second theme of human helplessness, in which rights have been trampled, and the need to intervene to defend those whose rights have been abused.

Equally important to the formulation of narrative is what is omitted: what are known as non-stories and meta-narratives (Hajer and Laws 2006). Non-stories are critiques of the narrative itself which lack the full structure of a narrative, and pertain to what is ignored or otherwise dropped from the narrative. Meta-narrative is a consolidated analysis of the narrative and non-story elements of an overall policy context, drawing both together to form a broader understanding over the overall policy discourse. Metanarrative explores such questions as: if rice is the focus of food security policy discourse, what is obscured by the focus on rice?

Developing the Discourse Analysis Framework

Steps in a methodological strategy for policy discourse analysis include:

1) Identifying the artifacts (language, objects and practices) that are significant carriers of meaning[27].

[26] Bourdieu's second symmetrical illusion is that 'this' (i.e. the present situation) is the way things have always been, that there is nothing new under the sun. Where the first illusion advocates for action, the second embraces continuity with the past, endorses the status quo, and rejects any sense of urgency.

[27] According to Wagenaar and Noam Cook (2003 p149), practice includes: action, community, situatedness, criteria, standards, warrants, knowing, dialectic, discourse, notions and values.

2) Identifying the communities of meaning/interpretation relevant to the policy issue.
3) Identifying the relevant discourses and their meanings as communicated through artifacts identified above.
4) Identify the points of conflict and conceptual sources of that conflict.

(Yanow 2000 quoted in Fischer 2003 p147)

This generates thick description, providing full contextualization of the particular policy context, (presented here as chapter 4). With this thick description established, analysis shifts to the narrative, exploring both its structure and the validity of its normative and empirical components. Analysis of the narratives themselves include identification of the basic organizing statement, a statement of orientation (time, place, etc.), the complication (or sequence of events), and the evaluation, in which the significance of the narrative is presented (Labov quoted in Fischer 2003 p166). In the present context, 'communities of meaning' (point two above) will be explored as the role of expertise and epistemic knowledge communities, presented here as Chapter 6.

Having thus identified the frames, narratives, stories and counterstories, situatedness within the policy core can then be evaluated at a number of levels of policy discourse, including (Fischer 2003 p193-196):

- **Technical Analytical Discourse:** This explores the empirical basis for a given programme, its objectives and any unintended consequences.
- **Contextual Discourse:** This explores the relevancy of the objectives in the wider context, and any reasons why objectives may not be met.
- **Systemic Discourse:** Examines the value of the policy goal in terms of its contribution to society as a whole.
- **Ideological Discourse:** Beyond an individual policy, this explores whether the organizing principles of a society provide a basis for resolving conflicting judgments, and the extent to which normative assumptions support the inclusion of alternative principles, ideas and values.

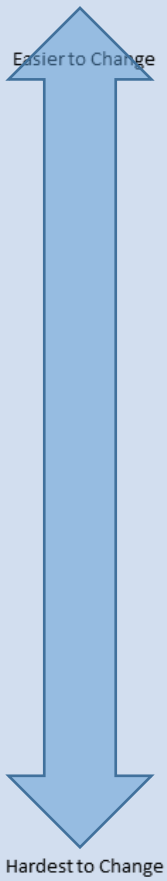
Discourse Level	Level of Enquiry	Key Points of Enquiry	Process	Policy Core Level	Receptivity to Change
Technical Analytical	Policy specific: does the policy in question succeed or fail on its own terms?	- Does the policy achieve its stated objectives? - Were there any unintended consequences - How could performance be improved?	Formal, quantitative, transparent	Secondary	
Contextual	Situational: Is the policy well designed for the context it is designed to address?	- Are stated objectives relevant? - What other objectives/approaches could or should be included?	Formal, Quantitative & qualitative, transparent	Secondary	
Systemic	Society: Does the policy contribute to the overall functioning of society?	- Does the policy have intrinsic or instrumental value to society as a whole? - Are there unintended consequences with important social, political or economic ramifications? - Are consequences of policy equally distributed across society?	Formal & Informal, Quantitative & qualitative	Near Core	
Ideological	Core Values: Is the policy consistent with the fundamental beliefs of the status quo?	- Is policy designed for the 'good' of society? - Is it consistent with the governing model and core values of the political system? - Is it above reproach? - Does it set the agenda?	Informal, Qualitative, opaque.	Core	

Figure 3.1: Levels of policy discourse, policy beliefs and receptivity to change (adapted from Fischer 2003 p193-198)

The items in Table 3.1 summarize the various levels of policy discourse analysis, and provides some examples of key lines of enquiry for each level. The column headed 'Process' indicates how such lines of enquiry are pursued. The terms Formal and Informal are used to describe the extent to which the analytical process is conducted via codified channels, and how accessible the findings may be. At the level of technical analytical discourse, this may be as formal and rigorous as a programme or financial audit, reliant on quantitative data, with its findings made public. The fourth column refers to policy belief systems, discussed in the section below. At the other end of the scale, the analytical process which

assesses how much a policy conforms to the bedrock ideology of the state is opaque and not subject to discussion or debate. Such judgments are made in a setting out of reach of the general population, impervious to evidence, and subject to interpretation. As the column on the right indicates, the more deeply held a belief set may be, the more resistant it is to change.

Policy Belief Systems

The underlying data which inform narratives is partial, discarding or excluding more than is included. The key data points and resulting narrative thrust is informed by policy beliefs at a number of levels, known as 'deep core', 'near-core' and 'secondary beliefs', broadly akin to Page's (2006) principles, measures and practices mentioned in the sub-section on Defining Terms.

Expanding on a conceptual structure developed by Sabatier's work on Advocacy Coalition Frameworks (Sabatier 1993 quoted in Cairney 2012 p 205-215, Fischer 2003 p 95), policy beliefs can be divided into three levels:

Deep core: this is the philosophical bedrock of a belief system, such as people are good or evil or that human rights are universal.

Near core: these produce the fundamental policy positions for the political system founded in the deep core, and may reflect: the proper balance between government and markets, proper distribution of power between a government and people, what society can or should do to solve problems.

Secondary aspects: These represent the sector specific actions and processes initiated to attain a particular policy goal, include funding delivery, planning vs. implementation indicators, monitoring and evaluation, sector specific policy goals, and so on.

The most profound, the deep core, is derived from foundational normative assumptions, such as free market capitalism, democracy or socialism, and can hold across entire policy systems. Deep core can be considered comparable to ideology, and is tightly bound to producing consent for the status quo. Deep core represents a master narrative and an overarching world view, and is often assumed to be beyond direct argument (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000 p303), but may not be as fully articulated as an ideology can be. Equally, deep core beliefs are supple, insofar as they are able to adapt to changing circumstances or 'reality shifts' without having their continued centrality in doubt (Fischer 2003 p. 198)[28].

[28] By way of example, Fidel Castro's 1959 axiom in his 'Words to Intellectuals' ('Within the Revolution, everything! Against the Revolution, nothing!') (Paneque 2016) encapsulates this simultaneous adaptability and immutability of core belief nicely, allowing for a plurality of actions and sentiments as long as the revolutionary ideal itself is not challenged.

Within policy discourse, challenges to deep core beliefs are deflected, or pivoted to more secondary levels of discourse (Fischer 2003 p197). Besides deep core beliefs, additional policy cores exist, within and across policy sectors (Sabatier quoted in Freeman 2006): near core beliefs are the basic strategies applied to support the deep core, and secondary aspects refers to sector-specific strategies to attain policy goals. Policy analysis therefore considers how much 'change' is simply the continuation of standard practice, and what changes represent a more substantial reordering of more deeply entrenched beliefs (Healey et al. 2003).

A solid narrative will incorporate assumptions and data pertinent to all three levels of the belief set (core, policy core and secondary), and will support multiple interpretations, thereby increasing its commonality and thus its power. Von Braun (1999) finds this to be the case for food security, arguing that the open and fungible nature of the concept allows for the widest possible number of stakeholders, and thus broad-spectrum commitment. In practice, competing narratives may use the same language or have common goals (such as the attainment of food security), but 'confirm' this narrative with divergent core and policy core beliefs, leading to disagreements among actors and institutions. As this research will show, the attainment of food security is underpinned by deep core beliefs about increased rice production by the government of Lao PDR, and near-core belief in the NGO sector in the importance of smallholder-led agriculture.

Hegemonic and Competing discourse

In general, alterations to the prevailing policy discourse may occur over time, but these are expected to come through, or at a minimum be endorsed, by established channels, thus reinforcing dominant power structures (Fischer 2003 p. 88). Alternative interpretations which question or reject the dominant position are thus understood as 'competing discourse'. In most policy contexts, both hegemonic and competing discourse coexist and interact. Hegemony is almost always contested, even if its continued existence is beyond direct argument (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000 p303): many US citizens may regularly question the running of the country, but few would contest the validity and relevance of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

Powerful participation in the discourse can include both strong and weak roles, as different circumstances require different modes of participation: Gubrium and Holstein (2000 p 495) gives the example of doctors and patients, where one party is surely in a position of dominance over another (but neither question the hegemony of modern medicine). Indeed, a hegemonic discourse derives its power from being 'seen but

unnoticed', by having its role as the only viable option go unchallenged (Gubrium and Holstein 2000 p 495).

Classifying particular discourses as hegemonic or competing need not suggest that there is conformity or consensus - large and small points of contention are constantly being negotiated and disputed (Sayer 2010). Classifying hegemonic and competing discourse also situates the players on the field: social and power relationships between individuals and institutions are described based on their positioning vis a vis a narrative's prominence- policy actors understand their role (and those of others) based on the positions associated with their role in that narrative. (Fischer 2003 p 83). A wide range of policy actors with disparate aims and interests may form coalitions around particular policies as a matter of expediency, pragmatism, self-interest or solidarity.

The Role of Expertise and Epistemic Communities

With the form and content of policy increasingly interconnected and complex, policy analysis is the purview of the (ostensibly well-informed) expert. Fischer's assertions of policy discourse as an inclusive process open to non-experts notwithstanding, Torgerson (2003) states that 'policy discourse typically projects itself as being for experts alone, a narrowly bounded and technocratic enterprise'. The next section describes what constitutes an expert, and introduces Haas' concept of epistemic communities (1992).

Expert? What's an Expert?

The modern role of the expert in human systems has its beginnings in the Industrial Revolution, and Taylor's 1911 Principles of Scientific Management, whereby the intellect of individual workers was subordinated to expert guidance on how best to achieve efficiency above all else- labour became a cog in a machine, with experts supplying the thinking needed (Postman 1992 p51). This coincided with thinking in agricultural science at the turn of the century, which was beginning to conceive of farms as factories, with livestock as raw materials for processing (Carolan 2012 p152), creating a role for expertise in food and agriculture production. Within the more recent context of food security, with the FAO's initial focus of increasing production and reducing hunger, agricultural expertise has long been seen as central to

global efforts to improve food security (Farsund 2015 p.4), superseding the direct experience of farmers themselves[29].

Expertise has subsequently come to permeate a huge range of subjects across the gamut of human experience. More importantly, expertise can 'claim dominion' on a wide range of social and moral affairs (Postman 1992 p87): a food security 'expert' may be asked for (or voluntarily provide) opinions on what crops to grow, how to eat, how much money to spend on what kind of food, how to nourish children, and much more besides. In their comparative survey of how expertise is defined on four continents (North America, Europe, Asia and Africa), Germain and Ruiz (2008) suggest that expertise has three core dimensions: knowledge, problem solving skills, and experience. Participants in their survey identified four key factors which contribute to expertise. Ranked in order of priority, knowledge, skills, experience and domain specificity were judged to be the key attributes of the expert. Other factors which were judged important included: self-awareness, in terms of self-critical analysis of their own knowledge, high levels of competence, and self-assurance. Equally interesting in this review was what appeared to have *no* significant importance: neither job nor profession *per se* were deemed necessarily important, and opinion was split on the importance of education.

Identifying what constitutes expertise, especially in the context of a multisectoral, fluid conceptual framework like food security is, in and of itself, a discursive process defined in and by local context. For food security, relevant expertise may be drawn from the fields and sub-fields of agriculture, nutrition, public health, trade, economics, environmental studies, development and more. Specialists in any of those fields may also be expected to be proficient (or at least aware) of food security issues within their domain.

Expertise may be highly domain-specific and rarified. Expert findings and recommendations can be difficult to catalyze into layperson's terms or simple synopses, such that experts are often referred to as technocrats (that is, experts involved in policy processes) or 'technical experts'. Although experts can and do participate in policy processes, and are necessarily complicit with the hegemon in order to gain access and be heard (recalling Deleon 2006 cited above), they do not see themselves (and are not seen) as explicitly political actors, but rather as more detached and objective, most ostensibly 'scientific' and

[29] Carolan (2012 p.182) cites the example MAFF (UK) personnel overriding the observations of Cumbrian sheep farmers of airborne fallout from Chernobyl on British sheep on the basis that they were not 'experts'.

therefore politically neutral. Indeed, Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins (2004) suggest that the role of expertise is to reformulate political issues into neutral language borrowed from management theory and the social sciences. More forensically, Foucault described expertise as a process for supplying 'truth' through the development and administration of 'systematic procedures for the generation, regulation and circulation of statements' (Fischer 2003 p39) - in other words, expertise determines the form and content of the narrative.

Expert engagement on issues exerts control and legitimacy over the policy process: expert opinions are routinely sought on a wide array of policy questions (Fischer 2003 p44), but the role of expertise is contingent on how the problem is presented: if an issue is framed as a 'technical problem' (such as, increasing Vitamin A intake in young children), then experts may lead the discourse. If however the issue is construed to have social, ethical or political dimensions (why are kids coming to school hungry?), then expertise will be only one of a variety of voices participating in the discourse (Baumgartner and Jones quoted in Fischer 2003 p62).

Expert-led discourse may therefore have an alienating effect, directly or indirectly devaluing the perspective of the non-expert. As policy issues are framed in increasingly complex ways, the result may be a sense of disempowerment, as policymakers and citizens alike may be increasingly uncertain as to how or if their actions will have any impact on the bigger issue (Rist 2000 p 1002). Furthermore, expert pronouncements may not be accepted uncritically by the public or political actors, but are more ambivalently treated, based on a range of personal beliefs and opinions regarding, *inter alia*, the experts themselves, the institutions they work for, and the content and implications of their findings (Fischer 2003 p.129). The example of climate change and its deniers is salutary: *who* is saying what is at least as important as what they are saying (Kingsnorth 2014).

Despite the pretense of apolitical neutral positioning, expertise is laden with classist and educational freight (Scott 1998 p 96, 305). Experts tend to be drawn from the intelligentsia, and hence from the elites of society, and thus biased towards maintaining the status quo (Fischer 2003 p82). Secondly, with a preference for the trappings of positivism and scientific method, and because many fields do require highly specialized knowledge only available via higher education, credence is given to individuals able to present in those terms, as opposed to the unformatted, 'non-scientific', locally-specific knowledge of the lay population. Although exceptions do exist, experts do not tend to draw much from traditional or non-

formal forms of knowledge, unless those forms themselves have been codified by formal academic research and presented accordingly.

Easterly (2013 p254) notes that experts are effectively insulated from both market and democratic forces, and are not publicly accountable to the implications or impact of their recommendations; there is no proforma set of measures against which the quality of expertise can be gauged, either ex-ante or post hoc (Tetlock 2017 p 232). This level of detachment is multiplied in the global development sector by the proliferation on international expertise: many development-sector experts are not citizens of the nations they advise, and levels of commitment, interest and understanding of local context varies from individual to individual. Expertise operates outside of public view, and can apply a range of non-transparent strategies to derive desired ends, (or those of the elites that employ them), proceeding 'uncritically accepting the politics of the existing system' (Fischer 2003 p 36). Christians (2000 p142) notes that 'There is no sustained questioning of expertise itself in democratic societies that belong in principle to citizens who do not share this specialized knowledge', suggesting that querying expertise is often seen as the domain of expertise itself, effectively a closed loop. More succinctly, Barling (2012) suggests that expertise is only as valid as how it is interrogated, and by whom.

As specialized jargon is developed and expert-led process becomes increasingly about the processes themselves (as opposed to the original subject under discussion), experts detach from the reality of their subject, and expertise becomes a hubristic realm of high abstraction fraught with jargon (Crawford 2006)[30]. In contexts wherein non-specialized voices are meaningfully included in dialogue (that is, solicited, listened to and acted upon), the importance of the expert is more circumscribed.

With the explicitly cooperative and supportive engagement that international development institutions maintain with host countries, the positioning of expertise is prevailing in the top left quadrant in Start and Hovland's mapping of 'policy influence strategy': the emphasis is on evidence, cooperation and providing

[30] Describing the function of jargon in linguistic discourse communities, DF Wallace quotes Gardner: '[Jargon] emerges from the urge to save time and space- and occasionally to conceal meaning from the uninitiated.' (Wallace 2005)

advice to government (Start and Hovland 2004).

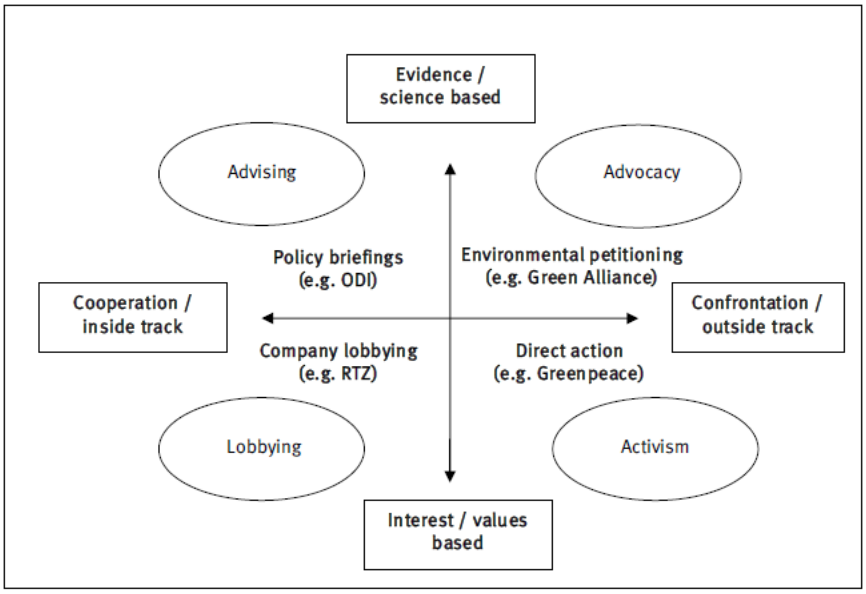


Figure 3.2: How to influence policy and practice (Start and Hovland 2004 p8)

Epistemic Communities

Individual experts do not operate autonomously, but are - as a function of the complexity of the issues they aim to address- highly interlinked with peers within and across disciplines. Haas (1992) describes a process whereby: increasing complexity breeds technical focus, technical focus breeds specialization, specialization breeds fragmentation. As a result of fragmentation, the remit of the individual expert is narrow and specialized - thus, no one expert that has the 'expertise' to address the bigger picture. This renders the process of developing relevant expert guidance difficult and functionally incomplete, as not all subjects can be equally treated. This in turn stimulates the creation of epistemic communities, which 'translate, transmit and maintain ideas about verity and applicability of particular forms of knowledge' (Fisher 2003 p 33).

Haas (1992) suggests 'epistemic communities' as an organizing concept, in order to understand 'how actors construct meaning' (John 2012) [31]. That is, knowledge-based community of experts, characterized by the sharing of:

- Principles or normative beliefs,

[31] Care should be taken not to conflate epistemic communities with a similar phrase, 'communities of practice', which refers to practitioners of a specific discipline, as opposed to epistemic communities, which are more explicitly multidisciplinary, focusing more on principles, causes and effects, rather than applied practice *per se*.

- Beliefs about causality, derived from an agreed-upon set of central problem statements
- Notions of validity: that is, internally defined criteria for evaluating the validity of data
- A sense of common policy enterprise.

The notion of epistemic communities shares common ground with discourse analysis in that both are concerned with the role of ideas, and the institutions and individuals which embody and communicate those ideas in policymaking processes. The choice of community as descriptor is important, as it represents a more general understanding of engagement- participation is open to anyone with an interest on the subject, whereas network tends to refer to a more formalized, codified platform (Fischer 2003 p 33)[32]. Epistemic communities may have no consensus on ultimate objectives, or how to get there, but share a collective sense of priority to an array of issues.

Epistemic communities represent 'a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area' (Haas quoted in Cairney 2012 p250-252, Schmidt 2011). Members of such communities are often engaged with work involving one or more policy issue and/or more than one state, adding to the sense of international endeavor. As a result, their sphere of interest tends to coalesce around issues of international interest, such as climate change or environmental issues (fields that were Haas' original examples).

Such communities are essentially voluntary, in that membership is not conferred by position or status but is based on the participation of the individual. Epistemic communities may operate at international and national levels simultaneously, and can include both state and non-state actors, professionals and interested non-professionals alike. Such communities exist independently of the formal structure of international institutions and are motivated by the sense of knowledge sharing and shared enterprise, not the pursuit of power. In the context of food security policy discourse, epistemic communities allow for the inclusion of consultants, development sector staff, parastatal researchers, research scientists and others. This inclusivity notwithstanding, such communities run the risk of reinforcing the notion of a 'knowledge elite' and the superiority of international expertise.

[32] It is noted that 'network' and 'community' are used in overlapping and diametrically opposing ways across the literature (Cairney 2012 p11-15, Fischer 2003 p33). As Haas uses community for his conceptual model, I have stayed with Hass and Fischer's formulation on this point, with community being understood as the less rigid, more inclusive, participatory mode of organization.

		Consensual	Disputed or absent
Interests	Shared	Epistemic communities	Interest groups, social movements and bureaucratic coalitions
	Unshared	Disciplines and Professions	Legislators and bureaucratic agencies

Figure 3.3: Distinguishing epistemic communities from other groups, Hass (1992)

As presented in Figure 3, Haas describes epistemic communities as distinct from 'special interest' groups in that their shared focus is on the level of principle, and may or may not be specific to a single issue. Smaller coalitions may form around a given issue and may include members drawn from the broader epistemic community, but these coalitions will expand and contract as dialogue around a given policy issue waxes and wanes. While members of an epistemic community may have institutional or bureaucratic agency, they are likely to interpret their role based on their normative principles, rather than on the procedural processes which they administer. This has echoes of basic network theory (Hajer and Wagenaar, Healey et al. 2003) which sees traditional hierarchic institutional models competing with horizontal, open-ended, *ad hoc* arrangements oriented towards learning and change. Examples of this can be found in the online user groups, blogs, websites and other web-based fora, which provide for exchanges on this basis.

Having laid out the methodological approach to be followed, this chapter now turns to establishing the application of that methodology in context, describing how the research was designed and implemented.

Research Development

Objectives and Issues

Based on a review of food security and policy studies literature, and preliminary discussions with key informants in Vientiane and Bangkok in 2009-2010, the following research objectives were identified.

A. Develop a profile of food security policy in Lao PDR, fully situated in the regional policy context (including both nation-state comparators and ASEAN-level)
B. Identify and elaborate policy narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR.
C. Examine the regional and national context for food security policy expertise and governance.

D. Critique the validity of food security as a conceptual approach to food security policy in non-emergency contexts in the Global South.

Research issues were then drawn from these objectives. With Lao PDR as the primary locus for research, research interest would focus on understanding how food security policy discourse was being defined and articulated in the national and for Lao PDR in the SE Asian regional context. Following a review of approaches to public policy analysis, the policy discourse approach was chosen as the methodological approach for the research process, with the proviso that given the specificities of the Lao PDR policy context, it would be necessary to provide non-discursive data as part of the findings, in order to situate and frame the policy discourse in regional and national context; this would serve to address research objective A. With this, research questions were then formulated.

Research issues arising from background review of Lao PDR and the SE Asian food security policy context (Objectives A&C):

- What are the contextually specific dimensions of food insecurity in Southeast Asia?
- How is food security policy defined and interpreted within SE Asia?
- To what extent is food security a regional and national policy priority? How is food security used to legitimate the existing policy mix, and to what extent is it seen as a priority in its own right?
- What is the food security governance architecture?
- How are long standing challenges (poverty, inequality) and emerging issues (nutrition transition, urbanization) being addressed under the aegis of food security?
- What are key points of contextual similarity and policy congruence between Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam?
- What role does ASEAN have to play in the context of food security?

Research issues arising from the policy discourse analytical approach: (Objective B)

- What are the policy narratives in food security discourse in Lao PDR? How do these adhere or deviate from global discourse? How are those narratives structured?
- What the key authored and constructed texts which inform the discourse?
- What are the food security policy communities and networks in Lao PDR? How do these coalesce as epistemic knowledge communities?
- How are normative global approaches to food security applied at national and regional levels? Do such normative approaches fit with existing national policy priorities?
- What is the role of expertise? Who are those experts? How does this link to international food security governance?

Research issues arising from a review of food security as a conceptual framework: (Objective D)

- How well disseminated/understood are global definitions of food security at the regional and national level?
- How have changes to international normative approaches to food security translated into policy at the national level?
- How are emerging issues such as urbanization, climate change and the Nutrition Transition addressed by food security?

Figure 3.3: Research issues emerging from the research design process

Research Questions

The first research question is presented as **How is food security policy mediated in Southeast Asia, specifically in Lao PDR?** Mediated, in this context, refers to the trends, policies, socio-economic, cultural and political factors at the national and regional level which make food security in SE Asia situationally distinct.

Central to this question is understanding how food security is perceived and understood by policy actors, and how it is situated as a policy priority: this in turn informs the second research question described below. Based on the review of secondary sources, key trends and drivers at the regional level will be identified, and a summary of key policy documents (authored texts) for Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand will be presented. A selective historical overview of Lao PDR and its relations with two neighbouring states, as well as discussion of the role of regional governance in food security policy, specifically ASEAN, are presented.

From this chapter, a sense of the overall policy context for food security policy issues emerges, what Schmidt terms 'the nationally situated logic[s] of communication' (Schmidt 2011). Findings on this research question are drawn from non-discursive data, in order to provide a concise profile of the food security policy context at regional and national level, providing a fuller framing of food security policy discourse by presenting the policymaking context, where later chapters will explore the content of policy.

The second research question is **What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR?** In chapter 5, the findings for this question are based on discourse analysis of key authored texts and constructed texts, drawn from fieldwork interviews. Within the overall policy context outlined in RQ1, narratives around food security will be identified, including the basic organizing statements, orientation (in terms of time and place), and sequence of events (Fischer 2003 p166). The core assumptions, supporting institutions and key indicators (which are used to illustrate progress and thus, improvements

to food security) will be presented. Recognizing that narratives do not exist independently of one another, key linkages and points of intersection between narratives will be identified.

The third research question consists of two interrelated parts, exploring the role of expertise, presented as a) **What is the role of international expertise in developing food security policy discourse** and **b) How is the normative role of international institutions presented and applied in the local/specific context?** The intention of this question is to explore the feedback loops between normative global food security discourse and the applied realities of policymaking at the nation state level. Drawing from fieldwork interviews, the relevant findings for this research question are presented in Chapter 6. This includes findings on how expertise on food security is defined at both individual and institutional levels and is brought to bear in policy discussions at national and regional level. This question will seek to establish how experts define their own roles and what their influence is on policy discourse. This question also seeks to understand how personal perspectives intersect with institutional mandates: how experts define their own roles and their perceptions of their influence is policy discourse will be considered.

With RQ4, the research process is brought full circle, returning to the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2, the context set out in Chapter 4, and the findings presented in Chapters 5-7, asking **Do practitioners of food security in Laos find food security a useful and valid policy framework?** Interview data on the utility and viability of food security as a conceptual framework will be presented, with reference to Lao PDR and SE Asia as applicable. In this chapter, food security is considered at the national, regional and global context, in order to understand the feedback loops between different levels of policy discourse.

Research Design

The research design ensured that research was conducted in a consistent and logical process over the course of the research period. While there was some overlap between steps in the process, the overall flow of the research process unfolded in an inductive, interrogative, hypothesis generating mode as follows. The time frame for the research as a whole was 2009-17, with fieldwork completed by 2013.

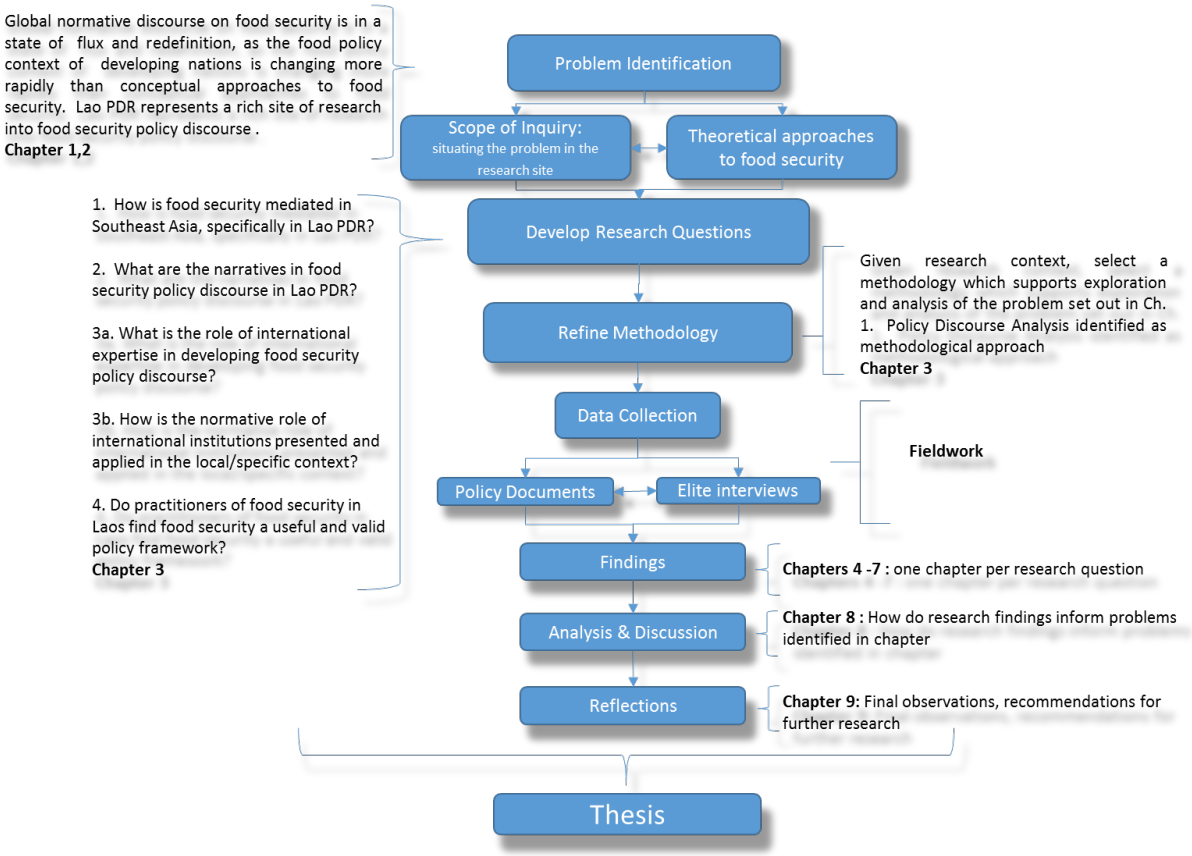


Figure 3.4: Overview of Research design[33]

Developing the Unit of Analysis

The nation-state of Lao PDR was selected as the unit of analysis, based on the assumption that the state is the primary locus for policy making (Fischer 2003 p2). The selection of Lao PDR was based on both the exploratory and explanatory potential of research in the country context (Yin 2003 p2). In explanatory terms, Lao PDR is a Least Developed Country (LDC), facing significant challenges in terms of addressing food insecurity and malnutrition, suggesting that research findings from this context would be applicable in considering food security policy in similarly classified nations in SE Asia and elsewhere. It also held the potential to be exploratory and descriptive, in that research on food security has tended to focus on Africa and south Asia, whereas SE Asia has been less considered.

In turn, within SE Asia itself, Lao PDR has tended to be underrepresented from a policy research perspective, rendering it worthy of interest in the regional context. Consideration was given to developing more than one unit of analysis (that is, including two or more states), but given the

[33] I am grateful to Jess Duncan for her insights on this design approach.

heterogeneous national contexts, it was concluded that such research could bog down in the exposition of extensive empirical data required to adequately situate the findings for two or more states in national and relational context.

Lao PDR's history, economy, culture, and future are intertwined with those of its neighbours, especially its more economically or politically powerful neighbours. It was therefore decided that the research would benefit from situating Lao PDR in its regional context, specifically with states with which Lao PDR had historical, social and cultural links. The intention was not to develop a comprehensive food security policy profile for each neighbouring state, but rather to identify key drivers and trends which held across the sub-region, so as to provide a comparative basis for analysis of national and regional policy discourse. This reconciled with the research interest on the role of expertise, as the institutional structure of development institutions meant that many key informants were located in Bangkok, Thailand with remits that covered multiple countries: interviews with such individuals would therefore lend regional perspective to the unit of analysis under review, and could provide insight in food security policy making at global, regional and national levels, as such experts effectively act as gatekeepers for such discourse.

The interwoven histories, cultures and economies of Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam made for a viable basis of comparison, and also served as the basis for exclusion two of Lao PDR's other neighbours, Cambodia and Myanmar. For a range of geographic and historical reasons, there is limited bilateral engagement between Lao PDR and these latter two states. In general, relations between Lao PDR and these two neighbours is described by Fox as 'friendly but unimportant.' (Stuart-Fox 2004 p31). Other ASEAN states, including the archipelago nations and southernmost member states (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore) were excluded based on uneven political, economic, social or geographic basis for comparison.

Finally, PR China is among, if not *the*, most important source(s) of FDI and political influence on Lao PDR, with an extensive and widespread range of interests in the country. Given the scale and complexity of PR China's engagement with Lao PDR, the lack of public accountability or transparency which characterizes the relationship, and a lack of access to expertise on this relationship, PR China was excluded from the research design.

Situating the Researcher

Understanding or 'situating' the researcher in the research context is an important element of any social science methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000 p18). This is particularly pertinent to research topics in

which there is a great degree of reflexivity (such that studying the policy discourse can in turn contribute to that discourse), as in the case of food security policy.

In a professional capacity, the researcher has been involved with food aid, food security, nutrition and agriculture at both policy and project level for 18 years in Africa, Asia and Europe, and involved in emergency and development assistance in developing nations for 20 years overall, giving him a high degree of applied experience in issues pertaining to development and food security[34]. This professional experience provided the researcher with an advanced level of access, observation and local knowledge which is a prerequisite of the interpretative analytic approach (Yanow 2003).

In this context, the researcher was situated as an insider, in that his professional experience provided access, understanding and participation from those experts whose opinions would be sought for research purposes, as well as access to policy documents relevant to scope of inquiry. Congruent to this insider status, the researcher's was able to adopt an outsider's point of view as necessary (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000), in part as a function of his professional status as a consultant, which is generally understood to be less rigidly institutionally affiliated than that more permanent staff positions[35]. Per Gold's typology (quoted in Merriam 2009 p124), for research purposes, the researcher could be classified as 'participant as observer'.

The timeframe for the overall research process was longer than initially envisioned, due to professional commitments. This was something of a calculated trade-off, as professional employment gave the researcher increased access to regional and national stakeholders on food security and to potential interviewees, but also limited the time available for research.

After fieldwork was completed, the researcher moved from Lao PDR to Zambia in late 2013, from where coding, analysis and writing up took place. This distance from the research site gave the researcher a more detached, objective position which provided a sense of perspective as to how those issues identified

[34] During the research period, the researcher consulted professionally for two UN Agencies (FAO and WFP), two NGOs (CARE and PADETC) and one donor (Australian Aid, formerly AusAID), and presented on food security at regional research and UN fora in Bangkok and Chiang Rai, Thailand.

[35] As Rossi (2003 p24) puts it 'The position of consultants is more ambiguous. Differently from bureaucrats, their roles are not entirely implicated in the development field. They often simultaneously belong to other professional fields (academic, scientific, etc.) governed by different norms and values. They can interpret development policy and practice according to different criteria which, while falling outside dominant development paradigms, can effectively be applied within their respective professional fields.'

in the SE Asian context were relevant in a broader global context. As is described in the final section of this paper, subsequent professional engagements over a period of six months in 2016 provided an opportunity to return to Lao PDR, allowing the researcher to revisit research findings and seek to understand changes that had occurred in the interim.

Research Process

2010-2011: Literature Review and Key Informant background interviews: Exploring RQ1

In order to address the first research question **(*RQ1: How is food security mediated in Southeast Asia, specifically in Lao PDR?),*** an initial literature review was conducted, with the intention of generating additional research questions. As part of the process of identifying research objectives, personal communications were initiated with academics, CGIAR staff, UN and NGO representatives with experience on food security in Southeast Asia, with discussions taking place in Bangkok, Phnom Penh and Vientiane, and farther afield via skype. These discussions were exploratory and purposive, with participants asked to recommend key readings and other individuals to talk with (Yin 2003 p16). All discussions were held off the record, but based on extensive note taking by the researcher, the process of formulating the research questions was begun; and with that, the process of exploring the methodological approach was concurrently started. In a number of cases, these initial background discussions formed the basis for enduring rapport between researcher and informant, and resulted in on-record research interviews later in the research process.

Background document review was conducted using City, University of London online libraries, academic facilities in Thailand, and locally available documents obtained either directly in Vientiane or via the LaoFAB online portal. The researcher initiated collaboration with the Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol University in Bangkok, and subsequently with the Department of Agriculture at Khon Kaen University in northeastern Thailand, giving him direct and remote/online access to faculty, departmental and campus-wide research facilities at both institutions. The substance of the review included academic journals and books, grey literature, development sector publications and online resources. Additional documents were provided in hard copy by academic and development sector counterparts in Bangkok, Vientiane and London. In all cases, citations in documents reviewed were then further pursued for relevance as applicable.

The literature review had a twofold intent, examining both food security at the global level as a sort of 'state of the industry' assessment, and in parallel, the national and regional policy context of Lao PDR.

Basic criteria for inclusion in the food security literature review was subdivided into three general subject categories: food security as a conceptual framework (including readings on the history and evolution of food security discourse and governance at the global level), food security in application, and more general readings on food security as a component of development. These readings formed the basis of data presented in Chapter 2.

For Southeast Asia, readings on the history, culture, political and economic context of Lao PDR were undertaken, including materials on public health, agricultural policy, environmental concerns, civil society, and consumer behaviour in Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam were also included. Close reading of relevant government planning documents, laws and legal documentation, and regular reports (such as annual or quarterly reports) were also included. Of particular value and importance for this stage of the research was the online portal LaoFAB. LaoFAB is a unique forum for detailed discussions around agriculture, food security and rural development in Lao PDR. With more than 3,000 members, and with an online repository of more than 2,300 documents, the LaoFAB online discussion boards bring together academics, practitioners, government personnel and interested laypeople from a huge range of disciplines on a daily basis. As a catalyst for information exchange on food security related matters, LaoFAB is an indispensable resource, and has been used extensively throughout this research.

The literature review served to refine the methodological approach. Readings in public policy studies, economics, development policy and regional governance were undertaken from which key sources on policy studies and policy discourse interpretive analytic approaches were identified, including Cairney (2012), Fischer (2003), Hajer and Wagenaar eds (2003) and Haas (1992). From this overall process, the first two steps described in the methodology section above were elaborated; that is, defining the artifacts (in the form of language, objects and practices) and defining the communities of meaning (via the institutional mapping and identification of expertise) (Yanow 2000 quoted in Fischer 2003 p147), which facilitated preliminary provisional identification of the policy narratives.

Based on initial information formulated during early discussions with key informants in 2010-2011, and fieldwork in 2011-2013, analysis moved through from an inductive process through the final analysis and writing-up in 2015-2017, whereby final ordering of the findings was deductive, developed based on the full data set (Merriam 2009 p178-187).

Populating the Non-discursive dataset

On the basis of the literature review and background interviews conducted in the early stages of research, it became clear that in order for food security policy discourse to be situated in the relevant national and regional context, there was a need to provide an expansive set of empirical data on Lao PDR. This would include basic data on geography, economy, political and cultural aspects of Lao PDR, which would serve to ground the policy narratives identified in later chapters in the specificities of the Lao context, an illustration of what Schmidt termed 'the nationally situated logics of communication' (Schmidt 2011): that is, the factors which make the policy context of Lao PDR unique and distinct as compared to any other country.

With the decision taken to include a comparative basis for the research, in which Lao PDR would be considered alongside two of its more powerful neighbours, and with the further addition of ASEAN as a site of research interest, the potential scope for empirical scope to be presented expanded substantially. As a consequence, the review of non-discursive data took in documents considering the shared histories of Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, the role and functioning of ASEAN, and the food security policy-specific aspects of these relationships. These were cross-checked against the researcher's observations derived from his professional experience over four years based in Vientiane.

In order to indicate the extent (and limits) of topics considered pertinent to food security in regional policy discourse, the range of topics considered relevant for inclusion was drawn from the rubric of food policy devised by Lang et al (2009 p7), which situates food as an 'intersection point' across policy domains which included, *inter alia*, culture, the environment, nutrition and public health, social relations and politics. This provided a general schema of topics to review in the regional context, from which the most regionally relevant findings were drawn together in Chapter 4.

With the research interest further refined to focus on the role of international development institutions and the expertise they provided (included under Research Objective B), a review of multi-sectoral governance theory suggested the need to present the national institutional architecture around food security, as has been presented in Chapter 1. In reviewing the overall role of the development sector, and the extent to which development sector narratives carried disproportionate influence in external perceptions and framing of Lao PDR (Rigg 2005), a synthesis of key framing assumptions about Lao PDR was included as part of Chapter 4, under the sub-heading 'Framing Lao PDR in Development Discourse'.

With the framework of the overall research approach, the intention of including these data outlined above was threefold: first, with a central element of the policy discourse approach being the interpretation of the metanarrative- that is, the dialogue between and across narrative threads, and identification of what is omitted, or classed as 'non-stories'- this non-discourse data would serve to identify those omissions and non-stories, and thus, the metanarrative itself. Second, the data would provide a sense of the extent to which food security was addressing the key dynamics and trends identified using a broader food policy lens- this would go to understanding Research Question 4, which examines the applied validity of food security as a conceptual construct. Finally, it was understood that readers' familiarity with Lao PDR, especially outside SEAsia, was likely to be limited: given the multiple, simultaneous, often paradoxical trends in SEAsian food policy, such as the persistence of smallholder farming with extensive and widespread rural/urban migration, or greater diversity of household food consumption offset by declines in dietary quality, presenting a profile of the complexity of the regional and national context would serve to underline the extent to which interpretations of food security were relative and subjective, conditioned as much by local context as by normative global discourse.

2012: Analyzing the Authored Texts, Identifying the Narratives

Key data sources for policy discourse analysis include authored texts (formal documentation with an explicit purpose) and constructed texts (commonly held, informal and mutable sets of beliefs). Narrative analysis of texts is not limited to language alone, but explores the institutions, choices, networks, socio-economic processes and ideas surrounding a policy or policies (Cairney 2012 p.286). Establishing the central authored texts from which to begin the discourse analysis, from which narratives would be identified (in the service of RQ2: **What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR?**) was conducted by an extensive review of policy documentation over 2010-2012.

Priority for inclusion was based on initially on foundational policy documents: with that in mind, the Agricultural Development Plan 2020 or the National Nutrition Plan of Action 2010-2015 were straightforward to select. Further factors considered for document inclusion included: authorship, timeframe, scope, influence and authority. With the focus of the research on international institutions and expertise, this allowed for the inclusion of documents developed by the UN, World Bank and others, which functioned both as policy documents themselves, and also analytical reviews of policy overall produced by those same institutions. This list was populated on a rolling, iterative basis as additional

documents were published. A summary of documents reviewed at this stage of research has been included as the Annotated Bibliography annex (Annex I).

This list of documents was then subject to close reading, supported by extensive memo taking, to help formulate ideas, work out relationships between narrative threads, and identify key actors within each policy narrative, informed by the process of institutional mapping (Charmaz 2000 p.517). From this, preliminary identification of narratives was conducted. These preliminary narratives were then tested via the interview process, though which participants were asked both to identify and reflect on what they saw as key narratives.

Over the research process, the progression of steps in identifying and refining narratives within the policy discourse was as follows:

a) Close reading of authored texts by the researcher, from which preliminary assumptions were formulated.
b) Testing of narrative assumptions via the interview process.
c) Revision of narrative master list based on inductive reasoning from interview data, with narrative structure and content adjusted on a rolling basis.
d) Interview data applied as a mode of critiquing and reviewing narratives identified from authored texts.
e) With fieldwork completed, a follow-up review of the authored texts conducted following the interviews, to re-confirm that narratives identified in fieldwork interviews were supported by formal policy documents.

Narratives were elaborated based on the identification of the basic organizing or problem statement, a statement of orientation (time, place, etc.), the sequence of events, and the evaluation, in which the significance of the narrative is presented, and the proposed solution offered (Labov quoted in Fischer p. 166). These were mapped and summarized in the table at the beginning of Chapter 5.

Consistent with the selected methodology, the overall approach was strongly interpretive, unfolding on an iterative, inductive basis based on the researchers own analysis, and informed by the insights and analysis of interview subjects themselves.

2011-2013: Fieldwork

Building the Constructed Texts: Research Question 2 continues, data collection for RQ 3a-b, RQ 4

The review of authored texts led to inductive identification of potential narratives, which was then followed by elite interviews of experts and stakeholders, in order to identify the resulting 'constructed'

texts (Fischer 2003 p150). Taken together, these formed the data set from which the policy discourse analysis was then derived.

With research questions 3a and 3b exploring the role and definition of expertise in shaping food security policy discourse (**RQ 3a: What is the role of international expertise in developing food security policy discourse? RQ3b. How are the normative roles of international institutions presented and applied in the local/specific context?),** identification of interview respondents was focused on international experts from with extensive experience in food security in Lao PDR and SE Asia, and were drawn from Western donor country representations, ASEAN staff, UN and NGO senior personnel, and independent consultants based in Vientiane and Bangkok and elsewhere. Criteria for participation in the interviews included:

- Present employment with UN institutions, donors, IFIs, NGOS or RECSs with mandate, policy, and programming experience in food security policy and/or related policy sectors
- Senior status within institutions listed above, including representative-level, senior management and/or supervisory-level technical personnel
- Extensive experience in SE Asia in general and Lao PDR in particular, with previous professional food security related experience in the Global South.

Initial identification was based on professional and personal contacts, filtered by the selection criteria listed above. Given the researcher's professional network and reputation, the great majority of the potential interviewees contacted were already known to the researcher, and resulted in a level of participation from senior donor, NGO and UN representatives which was unique in context, and very rare overall. This gave the researcher an unusually rich set of findings to work with, notably with regard to the distinction between individual and institutional roles and responsibilities: because respondents already knew (and presumably trusted) the researcher, there were less guarded and more forthright than they might have been with a third party researcher.

The composition of the interview sample began with individuals identified by the researcher, snowballed using recommendations from interviewees. Thereafter, in the course of interviews, selection become increasingly purposive, as interviewees were asked who they themselves went to when they had food security questions- this led to additional snowballing. As indication of insider access brought to bear on the research process, all but one of the interviewees were known to the researcher via prior professional contact, and consented to be interviewed based on interest in the research topic and the researcher's professional reputation.

Given the complexity and nuance implicit in some of the issues surrounding food security as a conceptual framework, professional fluency in technical English was identified as a criteria for inclusion, to allow for an equitable linguistic platform on which to base the analysis (Ryan and Bernard 2000). Interviews with less than fluent English speakers was expected to introduce bias, and may have had the unintended result of making non-English speakers- more specifically, Lao nationals employed by Government, the UN or others- appear less articulate or well-informed than their international counterparts. Translation options were considered, but despite the researcher's own working knowledge of Lao language, an appropriate counterpart for translation was not identified. This decision to base the research in English will have resulted in some bias in research findings, whereby some respondents spoke of the 'double language' or linguistic relativity of policy discourse in Lao PDR, with the content of policy discussions with international institutions in English bearing an unknown level of similarity to political discussions within the proceedings of the LPRP and government conducted in Lao language.

Saturation was reached on the basis that international food security related institutions in Lao PDR are limited in number, and in maintaining the focus of research on international expertise, it was reasonably straightforward to determine when all potential research participants had been reached. Thematically, redundancy in responses indicated that saturation had been reached (Merriam 2009 p80). An informal crosscheck for this was when interviewees recommended individuals already covered in the research to be interviewed. All in all, some 26 interviews were conducted, of which 25 were analyzed in this thesis.

Given the regional and nation-state specific focus of the research, UN, NGO or donor government personnel at headquarters level were also omitted from the interview process, with the exception of one interviewee managing a SE Asian food security policy project from her institution's headquarters- this exception was based on multiple recommendations by other interviewees that, given her reputation, this individual be contacted to participate in the research fieldwork.

Interviews were conducted between 14 June 2011 and 17 October 2013, with transcription and analysis taking place between May 2012- June 2015. Given travel schedules and other professional commitments (for both the researcher and interview participants), some interviews were scheduled months in advance, while others were conducted with only one or two days' notice. Interviewees were provided with the interview guide and consent form prior to face-to-face meeting. Informed written consent was obtained from all interviewees prior to any discussions-sample consent forms are included as Annex IV.

Interview Guides

Interviews were conducted on a semi-structured basis, with interviewees provided with an interview guide prior to the interview, comprising the research questions and a number of supporting questions for each. A copy of the interview guide can be found in Annex V. Additional verbal discussions and email exchanges with participants were conducted prior to the interview to ensure that all participants were well informed and comfortable with the process. Supporting questions included in the guide were indicative only, and were tailored to individual's interests or areas of expertise on a case-by-case basis. Respondents were encouraged to expand on their priority concerns within the general context of food security, as it applied to Lao PDR, and to SE Asia more generally.

Although not directly promoted to do so, respondents provided responses both on an individual and institutional level, often within a single interview. This provided insights into the congruence (or lack thereof) between individuals' opinions and institutional trajectories, which will be explored further in the findings chapters. All interviews were conducted in English. One respondent, of her own volition, submitted written answers to the interview guide prior to the face-to face interview, using this as her springboard to initiate the discussion.

Interview Setting

All interviews were conducted face to face, with the exception of one interview via skype. In total, 17 interviews took place in Vientiane, and seven in Bangkok at the interviewee's convenience, with the researcher travelling as required. Venues were selected by interviewees at their discretion, and included offices, restaurants, hotel lobbies and private homes.

Data Recording

In obtaining prior consent, all interviewees (bar one) agreed to have their interviews recorded in MP3 format, for subsequent transcription and analysis. Interviews took between 60 and 120 minutes. For unstated reasons, one interviewee declined to have her interview recorded, despite the fact that both her direct superior in Vientiane and regional supervisor in Bangkok both consented and were interviewed in the course of this research. As this represented something of a methodological anomaly, this interview was therefore excluded from the analysis. For all 25 recorded interviews, data has been stored per City University of London ethics standards on password protected external hard drives.

Ethics

Ethical approval for this research was granted by City, University of London in November 2011, and measures outlined in the ethics submission were maintained throughout the research process. After consultation with faculty at Mahidol University in Thailand familiar with research protocols in Lao PDR and Lao-based academic researchers, no additional ethical approval was required or sought within Lao PDR, as research did not entail primary data collection involving Lao citizens. All participation in the research process was wholly voluntary, and participants were advised of their right to withdraw at any time. Participation in the research was kept confidential, with all identifying information removed, and the identities of the participants anonymized as outlined below. Issues of confidentiality, anonymity and attribution were explained in detail prior to each interview, with written consent secured prior to interviews taking place. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, individuals agreed to be interviewed of their own volition, without seeking higher approval within their organizations. In one instance, additional approval and security clearance for the researcher was sought and granted by a donor representative's superiors in the donor's capital prior to the interview taking place. Written notes taken during research are kept in a locked room at the researcher's home, with computer files stored on a password protected external hard disk.

Anonymity/Attribution

In agreeing to be interviewed, as part of the process of obtaining consent, research participants agreed upon a generic job title for attribution, with the understanding that while verbatim quotes would be used in the thesis, they would not be directly attributed to either individuals or their institution. This was borne of a number of nested concerns, primary among which was the operating context in Lao PDR. For obvious reasons, no one interviewed wanted to compromise either their institution or themselves by having their comments construed in a way that would compromise their professional standing. Secondly, individuals were deeply critical of both their own institutions as well as their collaborating partners in government and the development sector- both as individuals and institutions- but did not wish to upset working relations with partners they were obliged to collaborate with, or compromise their own jobs. Thirdly, personal opinions were often at odds with 'official' positions, and with the focus of research being in part to explore the interface between individual and institutional expertise, it was important that respondents feel able to speak freely.

Within the circumscribed confines of the development sector institutions with an interest in food and nutrition security in Vientiane and Bangkok, genericized job titles did little to maintain anonymity. The

practical concern in this regard was the functional size of the institutions' offices in Lao PDR: for instance, in 2011, both FAO and IFAD had less than three full time senior international staff; other organizations had only one. In such circumstances, attributing any statement to an unnamed representative of an institution would *de facto* identify the individual who made the statement.

In order address this, the 25 job titles agreed to by respondents were grouped around common roles, which were then applied to all interviewees. All interviewees have therefore been grouped within the following generic designations and job descriptions.

- *Country Representative:* A donor, UN agency, REC/IFI, NGO or other institution's highest representative within a country. (5)
- *Policy Advisor:* Individuals engaged in the preparation or revision of major policy instruments, either employed directly by the government of Lao PDR, ASEAN, IFI, donor, UN agency or a multilateral project (that is, a project involving multiple international partners simultaneously). (4)
- *Programme manager:* Senior personnel tasked with oversight of a major component of an institution's programme portfolio, usually but not always operating at the national level. (7)
- *Technical Advisor:* Individuals with sector-specific expertise in a field of interest for food security, including: agriculture, development policy, economics, the environment, public health, regional and global trade, (9)

For institutional affiliation, institutions were grouped into four self-explanatory broad groupings: NGOs, donors, UN agencies and RECs/IFIs. This was supplemented by a designation of the respondent's area of geographic interest, either regional or national, as applicable. In total, some seven respondents had a regional focus and 17 had a national remit. Not all respondents had explicit institutional affiliation at the time of interview. In three cases, respondents had amassed considerable experience over decades of employment as consultants, working at various times and in various guises for the UN, donors, NGOs, research institutions and regional governments. These were accordingly classified as policy advisors, project managers, and technical advisors based on their most recent employment.

As an additional layer of anonymity, in the drafting of the thesis document, the feminine personal pronoun has been applied, regardless of actual gender of the respondent. Reference to individuals or institutions in quotes used in the thesis text which would serve to identify the speaker have been redacted, or substituted with a general descriptor in square brackets as applicable in order to maintain the structure of the statement. Ellipsis were added to respondents' statements for brevity or clarity as necessary.

Finally, it should be noted that two additional layers of anonymity have been added by the time lag between fieldwork and writing. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, since the interviews were

conducted, of the 13 women and 12 men that participated, some 17 respondents have changed jobs, either going to new employers or moving within their organizations. At least twelve have either left Lao PDR, retired, or both.

Triangulation

Initial working assumptions and common trends were identified based on document review and analysis, from which hypotheses on potential food security policy narratives were identified and tested through the interview process (Fischer 2003 p150). Both document analysis and interviews were supported by the researcher's informed observation throughout.

Triangulation was further derived from the diversity of perspectives which emerged from interviewee's perspectives and areas of interest. As food security necessarily encompasses perspectives from practitioners in a wide range of disciplines, including inter alia, agriculture, trade, nutrition, public health, public policy and environmental issues, interviews reflected this range of interests which supported rich description of the overall policy context.

Finally, in applying a policy discourse analytic approach, triangulation also derived from using a conceptual approach that considers both discursive practice- that is, the ideas and thoughts of individuals -with discourses in practice: how institutions act and operate (Gubrium and Holsten 2000). Discourses in practice are explored through the empirical data presentation, the document analysis and institutional mapping, cross checked against the constructed texts emerging from interviews, which operated as critique and commentary on the formal institutional processes from the individuals tasked with delivering those processes. The agency of the individual participants, is addressed via the interview process and discussion of individual's participation and role in policymaking processes, leading to the constructed texts. In this way, elements found in other theoretical approaches to understanding policy making, and resultant policy content from using other theoretical approaches are included within the chosen methodological approach.

2014-2016: Coding and Analysis

Coding

For authored texts, an initial shortlist was drawn from the literature review process. This was then cross-checked via on key informant discussions and interview data, resulting in a revised shortlist of key policy documents (including policy and sectoral analyses) subjected to two rounds of close reading, one prior to

and one after the interviews were conducted. Those documents selected are indicated in the Select Bibliography (Annex I).

This process included with a process of open coding, in which any and all themes of interest were tagged. This was then followed by grouping of the open codes around commonalities (such as rice production, smallholder agriculture, malnutrition, etc.), from which overall categories were derived (Merriam 2009 p. 178-180, Ryan and Bernard 2006 p.780). Codes were tagged directly into pdf and MS Word documents using the Comment function, with potential narrative categories grouped together in working tables (or codebooks) that were populated as the research went along.

For interview transcripts, once the transcription process was completed, a similar process was applied: close reading of transcripts was followed by open coding, grouped into categories around which narrative hypotheses were then built. Ranking of key narratives emerging was based not only on frequencies of mention, but also the emphasis and placement given to certain themes, with the working assumption that the higher priority afforded to a narrative, the earlier in the document it would appear. The prime example in this regard was the 'food security=rice' sub-theme, mentioned within the first few pages of every document analysis, and within the first 15 minutes of every interview. Emphasis and value was also considered in the context of the patterns of speech, metaphor and repetition as an indicator of importance.

As perhaps is clear from the process outlined above, a conventional coding model was applied. At various stages in the research process, the possibility of using a qualitative research software package such as NVIVO was discussed, but ultimately not taken up. Given the comparatively limited size of the research dataset versus the cost and commitment entailed in becoming proficient in such software, it was judged to be an undue complication and not pursued.

Identifying and Refining the Narratives

Central to the research process was the process of identifying policy narratives which formed the discourse. This process began with the initial review of authored texts, supported by background discussions with key informants. Based on a series of potential topic areas drawn from that review (such as malnutrition, natural resource management, smallholder agriculture, etc.), interview questions were raised to probe the extent to which these equated to policy narratives.

As the interviews unfolded, the process of identifying narratives was largely iterative: all 25 interviewees immediately identified rice as the central preoccupation in food security policy, but this did not automatically result in the identification of narrative per se. The identified theme was reviewed against the template provided by Fisher (2003 p 166), starting with a basic interrogation of the potential narrative thread: did it provide a problem statement, process of events, and a solution (including, *inter alia*, orientation in time & place, complication, sequence of events, process of evaluation)? In this regard, as will be presented in Chapter 5, the centrality of rice came to be seen not as a narrative in and of itself, but as a constituent component in a larger narrative to do with state modernization, regional integration and economic growth (Narrative 1).

Noting that the discourse itself consists of a skein of interwoven narratives, interview subjects frequently identified multiple narrative threads within a single interview, whereby they would identify the prevailing policy theme, a countertheme, subordinate or associated themes, and on occasion, non-stories, or what was ignored. Ordering of narratives was based on the valuations provided by the interviewees themselves in the course of fieldwork. While narratives coexist and intersect, the ordering presented in the findings was indicative of research respondents' sense of priority afforded to each narrative within national and regional policy. The extent to which those narratives identified conform to notions of competing vs hegemonic discourse will be considered in Chapter 8.

As the fieldwork unfolded, the narrative threads became more clearly identified, as they were explicitly or implicitly reconfirmed in interviews, but the iterative structure remained, and the possibility of additional narratives being identified was left open until the last interview was concluded. What became clear over during the interviews were that specific facets of the narrative were being emphasized- such as the need for better governance and coordination, or technical vs. political concerns, but these did not necessarily cohere into a narrative, rather, these were symptomatic of a larger narrative in the discourse overall.

This necessitated a slight but unanticipated reorientation to the analysis of the findings. Early-stage coding of interview data made clear that research participants were not only identifying policy narratives *within* food security policy as such, but were consistently situating within the broader rubric of development efforts as a whole: food security was seen as emblematic of, and only as effective as, the overall national development agenda, and more broadly, the global development project.

This led to the first categorization of subgroups within the overall set of narratives: three food security policy narratives that emerge from the texts specific to Lao PDR and SE Asia, and one narrative which situates food security as an index of development. This latter narrative is perhaps particularly pertinent in terms of the external validity of the research. In this way, findings reflected both situationally-specific food security policy narratives, as well as critiques of food security in and of itself.

It was through this process that three narrative threads (coordination, technical vs. political, and data) came to be grouped under a single narrative, in Food Security AS Development (narrative 4): none of these individually were presented as the unique 'solution', but taken in toto, these represented a combined solution set within a wider narrative.

Interview Analysis

The analytical approach adopted was strongly informed by Candel and Candel et al's work (both 2014) in the EU context. However, the dataset for this research expands upon that of Candel by incorporating both policy documents *and* everyday communications of key stakeholders, building the evidence base from both institutional and individual levels of discourse (Schmidt 2011 p9). Narratives were analyzed based on a matrix that takes its structure from Candel et al (2014), supplemented by categories and sub-headings applicable to the research context.

Based on the initial review of authored texts, preliminary identification of narratives was drafted, based on the importance afforded to each narrative in policy documents, and the frequency of repetition across the body of texts. Key themes within each overall narrative were drawn from the coding process described above, as interview data coalesced around issues repeatedly raised by interview participants. These formed the basis for the subheadings contained in chapters 6-8. Additional member checks (Merriam 2009 p. 217) were conducted with key informants on an *ad hoc* basis, to ensure that no important data had been missed.

Consideration was given to the structure of statements in declarative vs modal parts of: for instance, statements along the lines of 'rice IS the most important food security policy priority, but organic agriculture OUGHT to be the focus', would lead to two narrative strands being identified. That is, respondents' own ranking of policy narratives was valued, with consideration given to what they saw as most important: in other words, not only what was the stated priority, but also what other priorities they felt should be more prominent. As Fischer describes (2003 p.181), declarative statements tend to present

empirical information, whereas argument statements ('ought to') tend to present solutions, hence their contribution to the narrative overall.

Consideration was also given to linguistic connectors (such as because, since, as a result of), and their supporting clauses as these pertain to the indicators presented as evidence of a given statement, of interest in identifying the key indicators for every narrative (Ryan and Bernard 2003 p.7). Further attention was given to data being supplied as proof of the viability of a position: 'I know that X is correct because Y.' In this case, the data supplied was grouped together as key indicator data in support of a given narrative. 'Push' and 'pull' factors were identified, both within the Lao PDR context as stimuli to policy action, and in terms of individual's understanding of the conceptual validity of food security: was a narrative being externally imposed, or indigenously produced?

Adapting the structure used by Candel et al (2014), the constituent elements of the narratives were presented as follows:

a) *The narrative summary (or 'sound-bite'):* this provides the headline or capsule summary of the narrative. This summarizes the central ideas of the narrative in generalist terms. Although simplistic, this represents the point of broadest exposure and awareness of the narrative, and is a snapshot, its simplest iteration. As Fischer explains (2003 p162-3), no narrative furnishes all details and data, but instead allows for the observer to fill in details and intuit conclusions. Therefore, this narrative 'sound-bite' forms the most basic level of understanding of the issue.
b) *Problem definition/ Background assumptions*: This summarizes the basic presuppositions which underpin the narrative, making a subject of interest to policy. This is the basis of articulated or unarticulated consensus, from which point action can be taken and progress measured (Habermas quoted in Fischer 2003 p 199).
c) *Proposed Solutions:* With the problem defined and consensus established, this category presents what the recommended course of actions are to address the problem.
d) *Policy belief and discourse classification:* Based on Fischer's classification and Sabatier's policy belief system categories (presented in Chapter 3 above), each narrative is classified by both indices, from which the moral claim of each narrative is derived.
e) *Moral Claim:* Based on the data presented in columns a-d, the moral claim acts as the synthesis which presents the imperative for action- this claim provides the emphasis by which action is demanded.

Framing Devices:

f) *Geospatial and timeframes:* This indicates the overall geographic focus of the narrative (as mentioned by Rigg 2009), as well as the past, present or future orientation of the narrative. This will also consider the external and internal push/pull factors which inform the storyline.

g) *Indicators and evidence base:* For each narrative, key qualitative and quantitative data are presented.
h) *Institutional Actors:* for each narrative, the key government and development sector institutional proponents are identified
i) *Policy documents:* Drawn from Chapter 1 and the Select Bibliography annex, this will indicate the key authored texts in which this narrative is drawn.

Finally, the 'non-stories', or omitted elements and tensions which are not reconciled with the narrative are provided under each narratives' text. The do not necessarily coalesce into counter narratives per se, but rather indicate the limits of each narrative.

In presenting the findings of the research, the structure of the chapters that follow and the datasets used to populate each chapter are consistent with the overall research process laid out above. Because of the volume of empirical data and regional outlook of RQ1, Chapter 4 is drawn largely from authored texts and the literature review, so as to address the research question while setting the stage for the more situationally specific and fine-grained findings derived from the interview data. Findings in Chapters 5-7, addressing research questions 2, 3a-b, and 4, are emerge primarily from interview data, pulling together both the stories and non-stories which form the meta-narrative, and providing an overview of the policy discourse as a whole. The analysis offered in Chapter 8 considers the finding in the light of introductory information provided in Chapter 1 and 2, exploring the extent to which research findings conform to (or deviate from) food security policy discourse at the global level.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the theoretical approaches and concepts underpinning the methodology applied in the course of research, the policy discourse analytic approach. It has presented the basic assumptions of the approach, and how it fits into the broader context of policy studies. A synopsis of existing applications of policy discourse in food security, in Lao PDR and in the development sector have been presented, as has an introduction to issues in expertise.

This chapter suggests that the context-specific approach proposed by policy discourse analysis, involving extensive examination of assumptions and normative thinking at every stage of the policy process makes it well suited to policy analysis in contexts where policy systems are fluid and not confined or fully reflected in written documents. Given the fungible nature of food security as a concept, whereby normative assumptions and empirical data are comingled at every stage of the policy process, the policy discourse analytical approach provides a viable platform through which to explore this issue, and

underscore the fit of methodology with subject matter, given the primacy Fischer gives to a post-empiricist, interpretive approach to policy analysis.

With the methodology adopted, this section then summarized the steps taken over the course of the research process, from the formulation of key research issues through to the final analysis. It outlined how non-discursive data included in the research was selected, collected and interpreted. It has indicated the procedural steps followed in the course of identifying and analyzing authored texts, undertaking interviews with policy experts, and the process of coding and analysis which preceded the final write-up of this research. The next section turns to the Findings of this research process.

Chapter 4: How is Food Security Policy Mediated in Southeast Asia, specifically Lao PDR? (Research Question 1)

Recognizing that global food systems consist of 'heterogenous and fragmented processes bounded in multiple ways by the separations of geography, culture, capital and knowledge' (Pritchard and Burch 2003 quoted in Carolan 2012) this chapter will address the first research question (RQ1), **How is Food Security mediated in Southeast Asia?** In this context, the verb 'to mediate' refers to the combined effect of policies, socio-economic, cultural and political contours at the national and regional level which make food security policy in mainland Southeast Asia and Lao PDR situationally distinct in the global context.

While political systems, economic development, history, and culture hare resulted in situationally-specific policy contexts for nation-states in Southeast Asia, there are common factors which are consistent across and between states in the region. Drawing on non-discursive data drawn from secondary sources and authored policy texts, the first section of this chapter presents key dynamics and trends in the regional policy discourse, highlighting those issues which are in common across the region, with reference to both Lao PDR and its neighbours**.** It begins with an introduction to the importance of rice in food security policy, without which understanding of the sub-regional context is incomplete. Macro-level trends in demographics, income, the environment, and regional governance are also presented. Next, a concise overview of food security policies in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam is provided. In the case of Lao PDR, this will build upon information presented in chapters 1 and 2, emphasizing how food security is presented in authored policy texts; that is, policy documents and policy reviews.

The chapter also includes a concise summary the shared cultures and histories of these three nations, in order to present the relative position of Lao PDR with its more powerful neighbours. It will also demonstrate how external perceptions of Lao PDR contribute to the understanding of the nation as a 'blank slate', onto which policy narratives can be projected. This historical context will show how the shared and combined experience between these states at the national, bilateral and sub-regional level translate into specific political relationships and policy outcomes, presenting the conditions which make it impossible to extricate policies from context, describing what Schmidt calls 'nationally situated logics of communication' (Schmidt 2011 p17).

Narrative themes in Southeast Asian food security policy

Rice as policy focus.

> 'Making rice fields is eating rice, and eating rice is EVERYTHING; not enough rice means that there is not enough of ANYTHING.'
>
> (ethnic Kmhmu proverb, quoted in Simana and Preisig 2006 (emphasis original))



Figure 4.1: Three types of rice (Khao kai, khao dam, khao nieow), Vientiane Province, 2012

Prior to outlining the overall policy context, it is worth briefly underscoring that any and all discussions of food security policy in Southeast Asia needs must begin with the cultural superfood: rice. Historically, wet-paddy rice production has been at the foundations of Southeast Asia's major civilizations for hundreds, if not thousands of years: the cultivation of rice in irrigated paddy fields from the Middle Ages onwards was the apogee of early civilization and political organization (Scott 2009 p123).

This centrality is not only an agricultural or nutritional factor, but goes to heart of Southeast Asian cultural and ethnic identities. Lao identity is so tightly linked to consumption of *khao niaw* (sticky or glutinous) rice that *not* eating sticky rice is equivalent to not being Lao (Schiller et al 2006, Evans 2002). In class-conscious central Thai culture, perceptions of ethnicity, class and race find expression in whether one eats *khao niaow* (glutinous rice) or *khao jao* (literally, prince's rice): one is an indicator of poverty and rurality, the other evidence of refinement and culture (Lefferts 2005, Schiller 2006 p207)[36]. Such is the cultural importance attached to rice that even people who derive their livelihoods from another source (such as fishing) self-identify as rice farmers first and foremost (Baran and Myschowoda 2009).

[36] This cultural bias found expression in public health advice in Thailand, whereby causal links between Type II diabetes and sticky rice consumption were suggested, with people discouraged from eating sticky rice in favour of white rice (Lefferts 2005 p.8). There appears to be no nutritional basis for this advice, as both forms of rice have virtually identical nutritional content and glycemic index values. This linkage has yet to be abandoned, and remains in the public consciousness in both Thailand and Lao PDR, having been mentioned anecdotally to the researcher on multiple occasions.

Gross rice availability, self-sufficiency or surplus in rice has been tantamount to food security in Southeast Asia for decades (Asia Society and IRRI 2010, Schiller et al. 2006, Timmer 2010b, Timmer 2015), with competing claims on the inadequacy of rice self-sufficiency as a guarantor of food security presented for almost as long (Yap 1982). Overall production of rice has increased across Southeast Asia since the 1970s, and overall availability (per the four pillars model of food security) is no longer viewed as a major constraint (Mainuddin and Kirby 2009, Gill et al. 2003)[37]. Across Southeast Asia, 169 million tons were produced in 2008, approximately 280 kgs per capita per annum (IRRI 2010). Low, stable domestic prices for rice have been the cornerstone of food security policy, with explicit links made between social stability and low rice prices for consumers (Timmer 1993)[38].

Chanda and Lontoh (2010 p4) argue that food security policy in ASEAN member states ultimately boils down to a simple two-tiered goal: pro-poor economic growth and stable domestic rice prices[39]. Timmer (2000) describes a perceived 'virtuous cycle' of Asian food security policy as:

- Government investment in rice production
- Increased production
- Greater macro level stability in rice markets
- Expanded purchasing power at rural level and therefore expanded rural markets
- Stability of food intake at household level
- Lower disparities between rural/urban populations, thus less social unrest.

Because low and stable rice prices are seen as a prerequisite for social stability, government intervention on rice is seen (both by government and the Southeast Asian body politic) as a legitimate policy focus.

In terms of domestic food security policy, national self-sufficiency has long been the watch word for Southeast Asian rice policy for those nations that can attempt it, even if interpretations of what is meant by that term vary[40]. The 2007-2008 food and fuel price crisis underscored the rightness of this policy

[37] A more detailed overview of the agricultural, demographic and economic importance of the Green Revolution and Southeast Asia's economic growth in the 1970s and 1980s can be found in Webb (2002).

[38] Low rice prices do not, however, guarantee political stability. The Economist (2014b) records instances in 2013 in Thailand and Bangladesh when, for reasons unrelated to rice prices, political tensions were high and destabilizing, leading to a coup in Thailand and election-related violence in Bangladesh.

[39] This is consistent with Timmer's (2000) suggestion that Asian nations have ignored global definitions of food security in favour of a regionally specific formula that emphasizes rapid economic growth and stable rice prices.

[40] In her review of the operant definitions and policy usages of self-sufficiency, Clapp (2017) notes that 'Food self-sufficiency is an often-used term, but it is frequently left undefined by those who employ it.' In the Southeast Asian context, the focus of self-sufficiency has been focused explicitly on rice measured in gross tonnage available. A fuller exploration of self-sufficiency as it pertains to rice in Southeast Asia can be found in Dawe (2014).

direction, with Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines confirming commitments to attaining self-sufficiency by 2020 (Ewing-Chow and Slade 2016). Left explicitly undefined, self-sufficiency in this context represents something of a moving target, as per capita requirements are unilaterally determined by national governments; population growth means that self-sufficiency requires ever increasing rates of production. In practice, self-sufficiency defined as 100 percent of national rice requirements per capita has long since been surpassed in Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, but it nevertheless remains the primary focus of across national food security policy in the region.

Despite the fact that domestic rice markets are generally insulated from price fluctuations in international commodity markets (especially in rice surplus producing nations), the exceptions that prove this rule were demonstrations and riots in the region in the wake of the 2007-2009 food and fuel price crisis[41]. This resulted in aggressive government protectionism in Vietnam and moves to create a regional level OPEC-style cartel around rice led by Thailand (Jones 2010, Chandra and Lontoh 2012p22). This brought to the fore the highly irrational nature of Se Asian rice markets, whereby public anxiety over supply or price leads to further market volatility and social disorder. The signal to governments from this crisis was that rice is far too important to be left the invisible hand of the free market; one of the aftereffects of this was ASEAN's decision to make food security as regional priority, creating, *inter alia*, a regional strategic rice reserve, mentioned below in the ASEAN sub-section.

National governments in SE Asia remain extensively engaged at all levels of production, trade and marketing of rice. (Timmer 1993, Timmer 2010b)**.** This includes price interventions at the point of production and point of sale, state-subsidized inputs, debt deferment, and subsidized credit, all of which support production, and thus, it is inferred, social stability among rural populations (Gill et al. 2003). Government intervention in the sector reinforces the public perception that it is the government, not the market, which is responsible for the availability and affordability of rice, and therefore, food security. Intervention is legitimate *because* rice is tantamount to food security.

This level of government engagement is wholly consistent with the cultural primacy of rice in national diets. Policies which promote (or appear to promote) rice production are rarely questioned (with the exception of the 2011 Thai pledging programme discussed below), as they reinforce deeply held cultural preferences found across the region. Southeast Asian households privilege rice production over other

[41] Although it did not receive as much media attention, the 2007-2009 crisis also laid bare how exposed Southeast Asian rice markets were to shifts in global energy markets (Chongvilaivan 2012).

crops even at the expense of improved income (Linquist et al. 2006). Even in malnourished households in Lao PDR, having enough rice is perceived as having enough to eat (Miyoshi et al 2005). As one regional policy advisor with decades of experience in the region put it, rice is better understood as a cultural value akin to democracy or freedom of speech in Western cultures, not as a food stuff at all, stating '*even if you do eat rice, you don't eat rice like they eat rice*.' (**Regional Policy Advisor 2**)

In sum, rice (and therefore food security) in Southeast Asia is, by both public consensus and government commitment, a public good guaranteed by the state (Ngan PH 2010, Timmer 2010a). As mentioned above, food security policy in ASEAN states boils down to two objectives: economic growth and stable domestic rice prices Chanda and Lontoh (2010 p4). As domestic production and trade are easier to manage than regional or international trade, coupled with nationally differentiated, locally specific rice markets, there is a clear through line between increasing domestic production, maintaining low rice prices, and thus maintaining the national status quo.

Economic Development as the Policy Priority

The regional and domestic policy consideration given to food security is within the context of promoting economic growth, or in Drèze and Sen's (1989) formulation, growth-led development: in other words, policy actions are only as valid insofar as they promote GDP growth. Food security itself is presented as being achievable through economic growth: a rising economic tide will lift all boats, and improved food security is therefore an anticipated result of improved per capita income (Timmer 1983 quoted in Chandra and Lontoh 2010 p4). As one research respondent described it in Lao PDR, '*They don't promote food security. They expect food security to be a consequence of their current policies*.' (**National Donor Program Manager 3**).

Across Southeast Asia, state-led rural development policy centres on conversion of natural capital (including forests, arable land, waterways and mineral deposits) into financial capital, with an intraregional flow of natural resources from less developed states such as Lao PDR to more developed states such as Thailand, with the full support of governments on both sides. Regional integration, including easier terms of trade and free movement of goods and labour to stimulate regional and international Foreign Direct Investment are key strategies in this drive for growth. GDP growth rates of

6- 8 percent per annum (sustained over seven years in Lao PDR to date, and longer in Vietnam) are realized on conversion of reserves of natural capital for financial gain[42].

Economic growth as a national policy project in lower middle-income SE Asian nations is therefore about the conversion of rural economies based on small-holdings to large scale production of cash crops, timber, hydropower and mining, usually for export markets. This is consistent with the drive to 'modernize' traditional societies, such as rural populations in the Lao uplands. The transition from atomized smallholder systems to commercial agribusiness, resource extraction and the like therefore serves a dual process: it serves to bring populations under greater governmental control and into the market economy, and generates state revenues (Rigg 2009). Andriesse (2011) refers to this process as frontier capitalism, as remote, under-populated regions are brought more fully under national economic control through extraction or conversion of natural systems into commodities; commodities that are then sold on to more powerful, resource hungry regional states.

Megaprojects such as hydropower dams, mines, and railways are prestige ventures, symbols of the modernity and innovation of the country. FDI-led megaprojects are presented by governments and their private sector and IFI backers as necessary for reducing poverty and improving food security, generating greater opportunities for cash income even as they effectively eliminate traditional rural livelihoods and production systems (Fullbrook 2009). Recalling food security's status as a valence issue (in that there is no antithetical position) and a wicked problem (hard to disprove or prove) (Candel 2014a and Cairney 2012 p. 186), presenting megaprojects as beneficial to food security provides useful policy cover: it is easy to endorse and difficult to refute. The reality can be more nuanced; as households can be at once better off (improved incomes, access to markets, better services, electricity, etc.) but less food self-sufficient, having higher non-food costs, reliant on market purchases to meet their needs. (Rigg 2006, Deaton and Drèze 2009 p14).

The result is a more complex profile of potentially food insecure populations: subsistence farming rural poor, market-reliant rural populations, and poorer urban populations. This has relevance for trends in urbanization, population growth, labour, changing land and water use and climate change (Asia Society and IRRI 2010).

[42] Easterly (2013 p215) notes that in order for a country to present itself as a 'growth miracle', a figure of six percent appears to be the 'unofficial line' which needs to be attained.

Urbanization

Dixon and McMichael (2015) note that productionist approaches outlined above carry within them an inherent urban bias: as productivity gains are realized through improved technologies, more rural labour is freed up for off-farm employment in cities, where formerly rural populations will now migrate. In turn, increasing numbers if urban populations, unable to directly produce their own food, will require greater increases in productivity, bringing the linkage of production with economic growth full circle. The logical endpoint, *pace* Dixon and McMichael, is therefore universal urbanism, and the focus of food systems becomes 'feeding the city.'

Urban food insecurity remains under-researched across the three countries, and is rarely the focus of policy attention. Part of the reason for this is that new forms of exclusion and vulnerability resulting from rapid economic growth have added to existing, more long standing forms of vulnerability recorded across the region, related to poverty, ethnicity, exposure to economic or climate-related shocks, and seasonal food insecurity (Gill et al 2003, WFP 2013).

As of 2010, 42 percent of Asians live in urban centres, including 33 percent of Thais, 27 percent of Vietnamese and 31 percent of Lao. In Vietnam, urban growth is on the order of six percent per annum. (Bangkok Post 2011, UNFPA 2007). Both Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City have more than 7 million residents, and Hanoi has 6.5 million, with many more millions living in the urban and periurban periphery. With increasing numbers of Asians entering a non-agricultural based middle class, consumption patterns are expected to emulate those among middle class populations in North America and Europe, or have already done so (ADB 2010).

Pingali (2007) highlights a number of food security implications of the shift to cities in Southeast Asia. First, as incomes rise and globally integrated supermarkets provide a wider range of foods, dietary diversity increases, as does access to higher quality food. However, overall dietary diversity and increased consumption of fruit and vegetables tends to be offset by higher consumption of meats, fats and sugars (Popkin 2002). Using data from Dhaka, Bangladesh, The Economist (2018) notes that urbanization has shifted small to medium-scale agricultural production in peri-urban areas from staple crops to higher value proteins via smallholder aquaculture, resulting in lower prices and higher consumption of protein in urban areas, even among poorer consumers.

Second, as diets become 'westernized', there is increasing demand for the produce of temperate zones, which the local countryside may be unable to produce, such as potatoes, cheese, and wheat/bread products (as well as luxury goods such as wine and chocolate). As major cities tend to be located on coasts or estuaries with major ports (Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh, Jakarta, Manila, Singapore and Yangon all fit this description), it can be more cost-effective to import food from global markets rather than transport it from the interior. Hawkes (2004) notes that this demand is met by supply of processed foods from transnational food corporations, thus promoting increased consumption of processed foods and contributing to the nutrition transition, findings corroborated by Isaacs et al. (2011) in their survey of eating patterns in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

With moderate to warm weather year-round, high population densities and street-level socializing a longstanding feature of many urban cultures, street foods in Southeast Asian cities are renowned as some of the finest on earth, with street food vendors representing a vital source of both income and nutrition for millions of households. For millions of urban residents, street foods are a daily source of food, with 18 percent of all Thai meals and 21 percent of Vietnamese adolescents' daily consumption coming from sourced from street vendors (National Statistics Office et al 2012, New Agriculturalist 2012). Street foods in Bangkok, Hanoi and Vientiane are remarkable for their diversity, quality and price. Street food stalls and vendors are lightly regulated and controlled, leading to periodic concerns about food quality and hygiene standards, but against the volume, variety and innumerable sites at which street foods are produced and consumed across the region, public health concerns are comparatively limited. Equally, with their emphasis on low costs and convenience, street food vendors represent a direct vector for retail sales of ultraprocessed, high fat and sugar-content snacks, confectionery and soft drinks especially to children and adolescents.

The implications of an increasingly urban Asia have led for a call from Singaporean academics for a 'reconceptualization' of food security to better reflect the heavily urban present reality (Desker et al 2013). Urban food security is noted to have a number of elements which render it distinct from rural food security including: greater exposure to price fluctuations as a result of greater exposure to international markets, higher numbers of working women which corresponds to higher consumption of processed or pre-prepared foods, poor sanitation and higher rates of disease exposure, and competitive casual labour markets (Escaler et al 2010). This reconceptualization would consequently entail greater policy attention on urban food and labour markets, sanitation, the nutrition transition, and the potential for 'rurban' agriculture-agricultural belts around major cities to provide inputs for urban markets (Escaler et al. 2010).

Urban migration has taken a toll on labour available for agriculture, as elderly people remain behind in the rural countryside while younger household members head to urban areas (Desker et al 2013 p8). On the other hand, remittance flows from migrant populations has contributed to increased incomes for out-migrating households, contributing to more diversified, pluriactive livelihoods, thus lessening smallholder reliance on own-production (Barney 2012). This in turn sets up labour requirements for regional migrant populations to fill the rural labour gaps in commercial agriculture, as happens with migrant Lao working in northeast Thailand, and Vietnamese labour moving into northern Lao PDR.

The Rise of Retail



Figure 4.2: Topps Supermarket, Central Mall, Udon Thani, Thailand, 2012

In Thailand, multinational supermarket chains are well established: more than 50 percent of all retail food purchases happen in supermarkets (Alavi et al 2012). The Thai franchise for the convenience brand 7-11 is held by the Thai food conglomerate Charoen Pokphand, which operates more than 8,000 branches of the chain. Tesco Lotus, the Thai brand for Tesco, operates more than 650 outlets in every format from hypermarket to corner shop, employing more than 36,000 people, handling more than 500 million dollars of merchandise in 2009 (Tesco Lotus 2011). Big C (France's Groupe Casino company), Carrefour (France), Tops (Holland) and Makro (Holland) are also well established in Thailand. This proliferation of supermarkets has led to the closure of markets and traditional stores, and engendered some resistance to supermarkets, although further expansion continues (Timmer 2009).

In Thailand, supermarkets have positioned themselves as guarantors of food safety, setting standards above government levels (Isaacs et al. 2010). This is consistent with role of supermarkets in developing countries, in terms of improving the quality and availability of perishable foods (meat, dairy, fruits and vegetables) for urban populations, although there is a nutritional trade-off in terms of the availability of cheap processed sugars and fats (Popkin 2009). Consolidation in supply chains has meant that wet markets are now often supplied by the same wholesalers as supermarkets, leading to an upswing in food safety at wet markets, but reducing the number of smaller suppliers (FAO 2006 p43). This tracks also

with increasing consumer concerns in Thailand about food safety, and increasing demand for higher standards of food safety among upper and middle classes (Roitner-Schoesbereger et al. 2008)

For poorer producers and consumers, supermarket expansion cuts both ways, insofar as they are able to offer a wider variety of cheaper foods, but in so doing they may put small producers out of business (Timmer 2009). This is a point of particular sensitivity in the region: Tesco Lotus' website is at pains to highlight the thousands of small-holders it supports (Tesco Lotus 2011). The role of supermarkets as a guarantor of basic food supplies (and thus food security) increasingly tracks with the retail sector's importance in Europe and North America, and it has been suggested that governments engage directly with supermarkets to ensure uninterrupted provision of key staples, especially government subsidized cooking oil and milk in Thailand, and price-controlled rice. (Timmer 2010b).

Vietnam's retail sector remains more traditionally oriented, despite the limited presence of Big C and Metro (Germany), with 88 percent of all food purchases taking place at traditional wet markets and locally owned grocery stores. However, there are strong expectations that due to increasing wealth, urbanization, shifting tastes, and greater openness to external investment, Vietnam's retail sector will grow very rapidly (USDA 2007). As of 2015, Lao PDR has no major international retail chains, although various announcements have been made in recent years that opening of such facilities was imminent[43]. Pending that development, every weekend thousands of Lao cross the Mekong to shop in Thai supermarkets in Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Ubon Rathachani, and elsewhere. Anecdotal estimates of Lao consumer spending over the main Friendship bridge between Vientiane and Nong Khai in Thailand amounts to 3-4 million baht per weekday, and double that per day on weekends.

Rural and Urban Inequalities

With both Vietnam and Thailand well-established as regionally and globally important economies, it is easy to lose sight of how much of this growth has occurred in only the last few decades. Both countries have followed a development trajectory which has taken them from subsistence agriculture-led economies in the 1960s through to export-led, highly diversified economies in the early 21st century.

In his review of economic inequalities in Vietnam, Fritzen (2002) notes that affluent regions around Ho Chi Minh City have per capita incomes levels equivalent to that of Malaysia, whereas highland regions in

[43] For reasons of brevity, this paper will not cover the fast food sector, but the trend developed in retail would hold for that sector as well: heavy presence of international and domestic fast food chains in Thailand, small but growing presence in Vietnam, and limited to none in Lao PDR. Increasing expansion of both retail and fast food into Vietnam and Lao PDR seems the likely future progression.

the north have per capita incomes more than four times lower, equivalent to Lao PDR or Cambodia. Even as national per capita food availability has improved, food poverty in Vietnam is most prevalent in areas which are net producers, underscoring the high levels of disparity between provinces and districts across the country (FAO 2006 p3)[44]. Across Vietnam, household expenditure on food exceeds 65 percent for the poorest populations, indicating that even food producing households are net-food buyers (FAO 2011b). That poor regions tend to be more geographically remote from urban centres reinforces the societal isolation of these populations.

Although Lao PDR has not yet undergone the same rates of economic change as its two neighbours, as a consequence of the rapidity of growth, distribution of economic gains has been uneven in social and geographic terms deepening inequalities for marginalized populations (Cornford 2006, Arnst and Guttal 2011). As the benefits of growth are concentrated among well-off urban populations, the gap between richer and poorer populations becomes more pronounced. Although Lao PDR was able to reduce the overall poverty rate from 33.5 to 23 percent between 2000-2015 and achieve the MDG1 poverty target, this was the second-lowest rate of reduction in poverty compared to economic growth across the East Asia and Pacific region. (Sayalath and Creak 2017).

Nutrition

With economic growth at the forefront of national policy portfolios, the persistence of malnutrition and expansion of overnutrition (and related non-communicable diseases (NCDs)) in the sub-region has historically received less attention from regional policymakers, with nutrition generally understood to be a sub-section of public health. While the progress made in Thailand and Vietnam in addressing malnutrition is a remarkable achievement, national and regional policy attention on nutrition is intermittent. With the exception of Thailand, where the overweight and obesity component of the nutrition transition is increasingly recognized (and conversely, undernutrition is afforded less policy space and is seen as more politically awkward) there is limited policy acknowledgement that Southeast Asian diets are changing to include more and cheaper proteins, fats and sugars, especially in urban areas.

The prevailing policy focus on rice downplays the importance of other foods in the Southeast Asian diet, especially proteins and fats. Consumption patterns for protein and fat-rich food are considerably more variable than for rice; a factor borne out in the ongoing prevalence of stunting and malnutrition in least

[44] Food poverty refers to households with income from all sources (including own-production) unable meet their basic nutritional requirements.

developed countries (LDCs) in Southeast Asia, and the emergence of obesity as a major public health concern in more affluent states like Thailand and Malaysia.

Undernutrition

Rates of chronic malnutrition are in excess of 35 percent among children under five in Lao PDR. In Vietnam underweight children constitute 20 percent of the total population, and 30 percent of children are stunted. In 2007 in Thailand, following two decades of policy efforts that began with top-down policies for increased production of protein-rich foods and improved primary health care, followed by community-level efforts to promote local action, some eight percent of children under five were first degree malnourished[45] (Thailand NSO 2006, Levinson and Balarajan 2013). This lack of progress in the past decade undercuts the significant progress made in both Thailand and Vietnam in the 1980s and 1990s. DfID (2009) has noted that there were reductions from 25 to 15 percent underweight over ten years (1986-1995) in Thailand, attributable to multisectoral efforts in sanitation, community-led governance and poverty alleviation efforts. Alongside PR China and Brazil, Vietnam and Thailand were cited as two of four globally relevant examples of eliminating hunger and malnutrition by IFPRI in 2013 (Fan and Polman 2014).

By contrast, the 2010-2015 Lao PDR National Nutrition Strategy notes that, although GDP more than doubled between 2002-2007, levels of underweight children under five remained constant at 37 percent (MoH 2010). While Lao PDR's rates themselves are not unprecedented by global standards, what is of greater interest is that there has been limited change in these levels for more than a decade: rates of change in the rates of stunting are slower than the rate of population growth, indicating that the overall numbers of stunted children are increasing.

Striking also in the sub-regional context are very low rates of acute malnutrition, indicative of critical short-term shortfalls in consumption. Equally notable, economic growth has continued, chronic malnutrition notwithstanding. To proponents of the economic growth narrative (discussed in Chapter 5), this can be taken to suggest that malnutrition isn't that important after all, as its elimination is not a prerequisite for sustained growth. To critics of that model, the same data are proof of increasing inequalities and a gap between economic performance and positive health outcomes in the population.

[45] First degree malnourished refers to 76-90 percent median standard weight for age.

In sum, what is *meant* by malnutrition is not a point of consensus, but is a matter of speculation and opinion[46].

Obesity and the Nutrition Transition

The nutrition transition is of particular relevance in Southeast Asia due to the Barker hypothesis, which posits that early exposure to malnutrition may result in higher rates of obesity later in life (Cedeno and Cabada 2012). Given regional rates of chronic malnutrition which remain in excess of 25 or 30 percent, the medium-term public health implications of the Barker hypothesis are considerable. Further to this, research in Taiwan (and by WHO in south Asia) has shown that morbidity related to obesity occurs at lower body-mass index (BMI) and at lower ages in Asian populations than it does in North American and European populations, signaling further cause for concern (Wen et al. 2008, DeSchutter 2011).

Thailand has been the focus of considerable attention in the context of the nutrition transition for some time (Popkin 2002, Kantachuvessiri 2005, Aekplakorn et al. 2004), as have richer countries in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia and Singapore (Yoon et al. 2006, Tee 2002). However, public health efforts have not kept pace with change in the obesogenic environment, with the rise of consumption of highly processed foods in Thailand, which increased by 70 percent between 1999-2004, linked to multinational food FDI into Thailand (Carolan 2012 p.77).

[46] Based on research in south Asia, Deaton and Drèze (2009 p17) identify three hypotheses presented to 'explain' the persistence of chronic malnutrition, all of which are applicable in the Southeast Asian context: none of these are backed up by data, but are presented more as exculpatory rationales. Noting that these are not mutually exclusive, but can coexist and reinforce each other, Deaton and Drèze present: a) the *Social determinants hypothesis:* Stunting among children reflects social factors such as a poor epidemiological environment, inadequate social support, and inappropriate social norms relating to child feeding, b) *Genetic potential hypothesis*: Asian children do not have the same genetic potential as children in the international reference population – they are 'naturally' shorter, even when they are well-nourished and c)"*Gradual catch-up" hypothesis:* Asian children have the same genetic potential as children in the reference population, but it takes time for the heights of privileged children to catch up with the genetic potential, given the history of undernutrition. What is most important to note is the extent to which these are seized upon, especially by non-specialist nutritionists, as indications that malnutrition data is either suspect, incomplete, or meaningless.



Figure 4.3: Market Seller, Luang Prabang, December 2011

In Vietnam, there is increasing evidence that populations are experiencing a similar pattern to that found elsewhere in Asia, especially in urban areas (Ngyuen et al. 2007, Dieu et al. 2008). Nine percent of children under five and 30 percent of women (aged 18-49) were overweight or obese, triple the rate of a decade previous (Vietnews 2010). In Thailand, 6.9 percent of children under five were overweight, while among adult populations, some 28 percent were overweight, and 6.8 percent were found to be obese (Ministry of Public Health Thailand 2008, Aekpalakorn et al 2004). There is little to no routine data collected on obesity and overweight populations in Lao PDR, with one notable exception: in its 2007 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment, WFP reported 11.5 percent of rural women surveyed were overweight, a striking finding given that 38 percent of children in that survey were underweight, suggesting that the nutrition transition may be well underway (WFP 2007).

With urbanization, growing consumption of fats and sugars, and more sedentary lifestyles identified as drivers of this transition, obesity and overweight concerns are recognized as public health issues in Thailand and Vietnam (Nguyen et al. 2006, Dieu et al. 2008, Kantachuvessiri 2005, Aekplakorn et al 2004)., For Lao PDR this has yet to become a major issue, but with national development trends emulating those of its neighbours, especially in urban areas, the potential of increased overweight/obesity incidence is significant (Wells 2012). Health systems in Lao PDR are low capacity across the board, and as such are ill-equipped to deal with health problems (including NCDs) related to obesity. Body Mass Index is not regularly recorded or monitored at Lao health facilities. This process is being exacerbated by the proliferation of cheap, nutritionally low-grade foods available in rural Lao markets. One research respondent described what she saw as parallels between what was happening in the United States and Lao PDR.

> *In the United States, a lot of obesity is associated with poor, Latino, black, whatever, it's not that you're getting obese because you've got loads of money to spare […] And I think the same shift [is underway in] Asia. Shift to Asia- what do you see kids take to school to*

> *eat, instead of a little box of sticky rice, they will now take a packet of Mama [instant] noodles. And there's two of them, and one of them will get the crunchy noodles, and the other one will suck on the little packet of sauce.* **(National Donor Policy Advisor 1)**

The coexistence of malnutrition and overconsumption is not unique to Southeast Asia, but goes to underscore the point that food insecurity as manifested in sub-optimal dietary patterns and resultant public health risk is not an abstraction, but a factor in the present context, for both poor and rich countries in Southeast Asia alike. Its coexistence with malnourished populations within communities or households nominally situates it within the remit of food security policy discourse (Ghattas 2014), although policy responses that address the issue explicitly are infrequent.

Transboundary Environmental Governance: Regional vs. National approaches

The section that follows serves to highlight the increasing importance of environmental considerations in macro-level regional and national policy discourse across the region. In a summary of transboundary environmental challenges facing ASEAN, Middleton (2012 p9) describes:

- Transboundary haze from land and forest fires that severely affects air quality and health
- Freshwater, terrestrial, wetland, marine and coastal ecosystems are under intensified use and increasing pressure from industrial and agricultural activities. In many places, for example, river water quality is declining, and rate of water consumption is rising. Furthermore, whilst there are some successful protection projects, overall the loss of mangroves, peat lands and wetlands continues around the region.
- Ongoing deforestation and loss of biodiversity, the rate of which is still high compared to the world's average. The region's total forest cover declined by 1.3% between 2000 and 2005, although this rate is potentially significantly higher as government statistics incorporate afforestation in the form of monoculture tree plantations. Hundreds of species are endangered, with threats including habitat loss, illegal wildlife trade, pollution and invasive alien species.
- ASEAN nations are both increasing emitters of greenhouse gases and increasingly vulnerable to climate change's impacts
- Population in ASEAN is anticipated to rise from 580 million people in 2008 to 650 million people by 2020.
- Challenges of minimizing the environmental impacts of rapid urbanization and ensuring that both brown and green environmental issues are addressed fairly within urban areas

The most dramatic example of this debate is in the governance, management and maintenance of the Mekong river. In 2007, Oxfam Australia (2007) reported that 'The health, use and control of natural resources have also been subjected to the most profound change as a result of the GMS [Greater Mekong Subregion] economic transformation. Disturbingly, the ability of the natural resource base to continue to support the livelihoods of the poor in the Mekong is at a crisis point.' For 65 million people across Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, access to cheap or free water from rivers, lakes, ponds, and rainfall is an intrinsic component of agriculture (Mainuddin and Kirby 2009). Paddy cultivation of rice traditionally involves flooding of the paddies for the crop to succeed. River systems, especially the Mekong, are a key year-round source of fish, mollusks and crustaceans; affordable sources of protein and micronutrients, especially calcium[47]. Wild fish represents the the single most important source of protein for Lao populations (WFP 2007), with an estimated 66 percent of the population of the lower Mekong fishing on at least a part-time basis (Bouapao 2011). As river levels drop in the dry season, smallholders plant a wide variety of crops in the alluvial silts exposed along riverbeds. Any proposed changes to water use or free flowing of rivers therefore have immediate ramifications for food security. Increasing water requirements for urban populations and industrial use, the political and environmentally charged debates around hydropower, and weak or indeterminate governance of shared water bodies make water a much contested asset[48].



Figure 4.4: Featherback fish (*Notopterus chitala*) on sale at Luang Prabang market, April 2012

[47] Dairy in any form is rarely consumed in rural Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand's school milk program. Insofar as it is consumed, it is usually as an ingredient in ultraprocessed confectionery and dessert products.

[48] In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), Adam Smith describes four criteria across which the utility and value of rivers are assessed: by their proximity to other rivers, the extent of their deltas, the extent of their tributary networks, and how many parties are convened along its banks. Against these criteria, the Mekong excels on all counts.

Forests are of similar importance, with Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), a catch-all term for food, fuel, fibre and medicinal resources sourced from uncultivated areas held in the commons. In food terms, this includes animals, birds, frogs, insects, vegetables, fungi, bamboo and more, the 2011-2020 Lao PDR Agricultural Development Strategy identifies biodiversity as 'directly linked with preserving the Lao national identity and cultural diversity' (MAF 2010 p31), mirroring a symbiosis Carolan defines as 'agrobiocultural diversity' (Carolan 2012 p 171). A survey in Lao PDR (Foppes et al. 2011) identified 50 types of food sourced from the wild, representing 15 percent of total overall household consumption. The survey noted that this figure is declining rapidly, as access to forests becomes more complicated due to shifting land access regulations (Bartlett 2012) and market pressures on NTFPs increase (in terms of increased demand for specific products, intensified harvesting and non-local, and non-Lao becoming economically engaged in the process) (Rigg 2006 p 7).



Figure 4.5: Fried larvae (Douang Noh Mai) at Talat Dong Mak Khai, December 2010

Protection of forested areas is a priority for both the protection of rural livelihoods and biodiversity alike (Johnson et al. 2010). Evidence from Vietnam and Yunnan in PR China suggests that degradation of uplands ecosystems leads to a 'negative spiral' for upland peoples (Rigg 2006 p 8). Across the sub-region, a process is underway described by Scott (1998 p12) as the conversion of nature into natural resources, a revaluation of ecological systems based on the capital that can be extracted from those systems.

The most striking examples of shifting use of natural resources are proposals to dam the mainstem of the lower Mekong for hydropower, but other processes which take land out of production for commercial forestry, commercial cash crop production or mining are equally important (International Rivers 2012, Fullbrook 2009). Plans to dam the Mekong at multiple points, the shortcomings of the Mekong River Commission as an intergovernmental body, and the management challenges inherent in a massively complex riparian system that 'belongs' to six nations, and the ambition and scope of PR China's regional role are among the most pressing policy issues in the subregion. Middleton (2012 p2) notes that despite verbal commitments to cooperation on transboundary environmental concerns (many of which have a food security component), including 'nature conservation and biodiversity, transboundary pollution, water resources management, animal and human health, and energy and climate change', regional governance structures around environmental issues are incomplete and unenforced, with environmental

concerns seen as subordinate to the need for continued economic growth. This is presented in the discourse as an either/or scenario, with a senior official from the MRC stating in 2005 'If you want a lot of hydropower you are going to have less fish.' (Campbell quoted in Osborne 2000 p265). A similarly stark assessment could be applied to the forests, mountains, wetlands and plains of Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam.

For the past ten years, the government of Lao PDR has, been promoting itself as 'the Battery of Asia', aiming to become the go-to power source for its resource hungry neighbours, converting the potential of its rivers into hydropower for regional export (Christian Science Monitor 2010, Diplomat 2012, Sydney Morning Herald 2015). The complexity and implications of this positioning are beyond the scope of this paper to address, but what is worth indicating is that for its advocates, hydropower represents Lao PDR's best path out of poverty. This conforms to the narratives of state modernization and development, in which economic growth is the prerequisite and the goal, and poverty is the enemy. The viability of smallholder agricultural livelihoods that rely on the rivers and forests are subordinate to this vision of Lao PDR as Battery.

In this context, what is meant by 'degradation' is heavily contested, in biophysical, economic and cultural terms, and is highly sensitive to interpretations of scale and over time (Lestrelin 2010). A feedback loop in this theme emerges from regional interpretation of global discourse around climate change, whereby climate change is evoked as an underlying rationale for 'green' energy from hydropower and biofuel production, in order to reduce regional and global consumption of fossil fuels. Although the threat potential for climate change in the region is not to be underestimated, especially for the millions of people living a less than a metre above sea level in the Mekong Delta, short to medium term environmental degradation may be more as a result of shifts in land use, urbanization, population growth, water scarcity, or other factors than by changes attributable to shifts in climate (LeFroy et al. 2010). Nevertheless, the spectre of climate change has also been used justification to increase rates of hydropower and biofuel cultivation, to reduce demand for fossil fuels by investing in renewable energies (McMichael 2012).

ASEAN's Expanded Role in Regional Policy

Founded in the 1960s, the Association of South East Asian States has endured for more than 50 years to become one of the more effective and respected regional groupings in global politics (Acharya 2009). As of 1999, it consisted of ten states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar/Burma,

Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Strongly egalitarian in nature, with all ASEAN member states given equal representation on both external issues and within the organization itself: this is of particular value and interest to smaller states (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p32). Politically speaking, its member states include multiparty democracies, one party oligarchies, military governments, and royalist regimes[49].

ASEAN operates on a one state-one vote basis, with the chair rotating annually. It has no means to legislate or enforce policy, and tends to operate more on the basis of voluntary guidelines, codes of conduct and informal agreements, rather than legal obligation (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p33). ASEAN's *modus operandii* has been referred to for much of its history as 'The ASEAN way'. This emphasizes informality, a light institutional and bureaucratic footprint, consensus building and 'soft' power (Acharya 2009 p.79, 201). Headquartered in Jakarta, the ASEAN Secretariat itself is minimal, and largely funded by the EU (Dosch 2012 p137). The work of the Secretariat itself is largely focused on organizing meetings for senior ministers from member states, some 700 of which take place every year (Dosch 2012 p 123). At member state level, ASEAN does not maintain separate offices- the EU, the UN, and the United States all have larger official presences in Lao PDR than ASEAN itself.

With contentious issues not discussed in public view, 'the ASEAN Way relies heavily on the personal connections of political elites to arrive at mutually acceptable agreements. The entire process is generally non-transparent, unaccountable and, critics claim, a self-serving mechanism designed to underpin the legitimacy of regional elites who have often not been democratically elected' (Beeson 2009 p21). Equally, ASEAN reinforce the state-centricness of policy processes in Southeast Asia, ASEAN's efforts in collude

[49] In Southeast Asia as elsewhere, what is contained by the term 'democracy' is very much subject to interpretation. For much of its history, Singapore has been a democracy with only one party, with its founding father, Lee Kwan Yew, stating that what was needed was 'discipline more than democracy' (Lee, quoted in Easterly 2013). Malaysia is a democracy beset by massive corruption scandals with an entrenched elite and opposition leaders incarcerated or standing trial for more than a decade. The Philippines has regular elections and strong civil society, but corruption is so rife that government's ability to govern is severely curtailed (Beeson 2009 p14), and President Duterte is globally notorious for the ruthless violence of his 'war on drugs'. In Cambodia, Hun Sen came to power in 1985, and despite periodic election exercises, is virtually certain to retain power until he chooses to give it up. Thailand has seen military coups depose democratically elected leaders in 2006 and 2014, with violent street protests in Bangkok in 2010. As Parry (2012) puts it 'the recent history of Southeast Asia presents various examples of pseudo and quasi-democracies which, for a while at least, have prospered, from the parliamentary dictatorship that was Suharto's Indonesia (32 years) to the authoritarian democracies of Malaysia and Singapore (49 years and counting). Their success depends on delivering economic growth high enough for the steady improvement in living standards to soothe the frustration of political repression.' In the context of the present research, it is important to make clear that although Lao PDR is not a democracy, this does not necessarily put it out of step with its neighbours.

non-state actors have been partial and incomplete, reflecting the elite capture of state apparatus (Beeson 2009 p15).

By the late 1990s, ASEAN's agenda shifted towards promoting the development agenda through normative change (Acharya 2009 p216). ASEAN took steps to establish a more formal legal footing for the organization, with the adoption of the ASEAN charter in 2005, and a constitutional framework in 2007 (Acharya 2009 p7). A vision for ASEAN consisting of three pillars of community was established (political-security community, economic community, and socio-cultural community), under which 34 ministerial or technical level fora are held (Dosch 2012 p123).

ASEAN and Food Security

With the establishment of the three community pillars, ASEAN took on a more engaged role in the development agenda for the region. This interest in taking a more pro-active role was borne in part of a response to unilateral actions taken by the world's largest rice exporting nations (ASEAN Members Thailand and Vietnam) in the wake of the food and fuel price crisis of 2007-2008 (Ananta and Barichello 2012); this convinced ASEAN leaders of the need to establish harmonized regional policy mechanisms to ensure 'food security', for which a regional strategy was drafted.

In 2009, at the ASEAN summit in Chiang Mai, Thailand, as a consequence of 2007-2008 food and fuel crisis, global price volatility, and extreme weather associated with climate change, food security was designated by ASEAN heads of state as a 'permanent and high priority' (ASEAN 2011). This was swiftly followed by the ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework (AFIS) and Strategic Plan of Action for Food Security (SPA) which adopted the 1996 WFS definition, and had as its objectives:

a) To increase food production;
b) To reduce postharvest losses;
c) To promote conducive (i.e. expanded) markets and trade for agriculture commodities and inputs;
d) To ensure food stability via price and supply;
e) To promote availability and accessibility to agriculture inputs; and
f) To operationalize regional food emergency relief arrangements.

The four initial main components of the AFIS were:

- Food security arrangements and emergency short-term relief
- Sustainable food trade development

- Integrated food security information system
- Agricultural innovation

(Briones 2011)

The SPA prioritizes increased production and greater yields, identifying five commodities as key to regional food security, including rice, maize cassava, soybean, and sugar. It anticipated the establishment of a regional rice reserve known as APTERR (ADB 2009)[50]. Key regional partners for ASEAN on food security include the Asian Development Bank, MAFF Japan, and the FAO Regional Office in Bangkok (FAORAP). The ASEAN Food Security Information System was introduced in 2009, followed by APTERR, the ASEAN+3 (that is ASEAN, PR China, Korea and Japan) regional emergency rice reserve facility in 2010, although the institutional arrangements and strategic viability remain an issue of some speculation (Briones 2011, Trethewie 2013). From 2015 onwards, with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) approaching, food security continues to be on the ASEAN agenda, as a key outcome of the food, agriculture and forestry sector in the ASEAN Vision 2025 document.

Subsequently, nutrition-enhancing agricultural development was added (see Figure 4.6 below) as part of the AFIS 2015-2020 strategy.

[50] An overview of the conceptual and practical functionality of APTERR can be found in Briones (2011 and 2014) and Trethewie (2013).

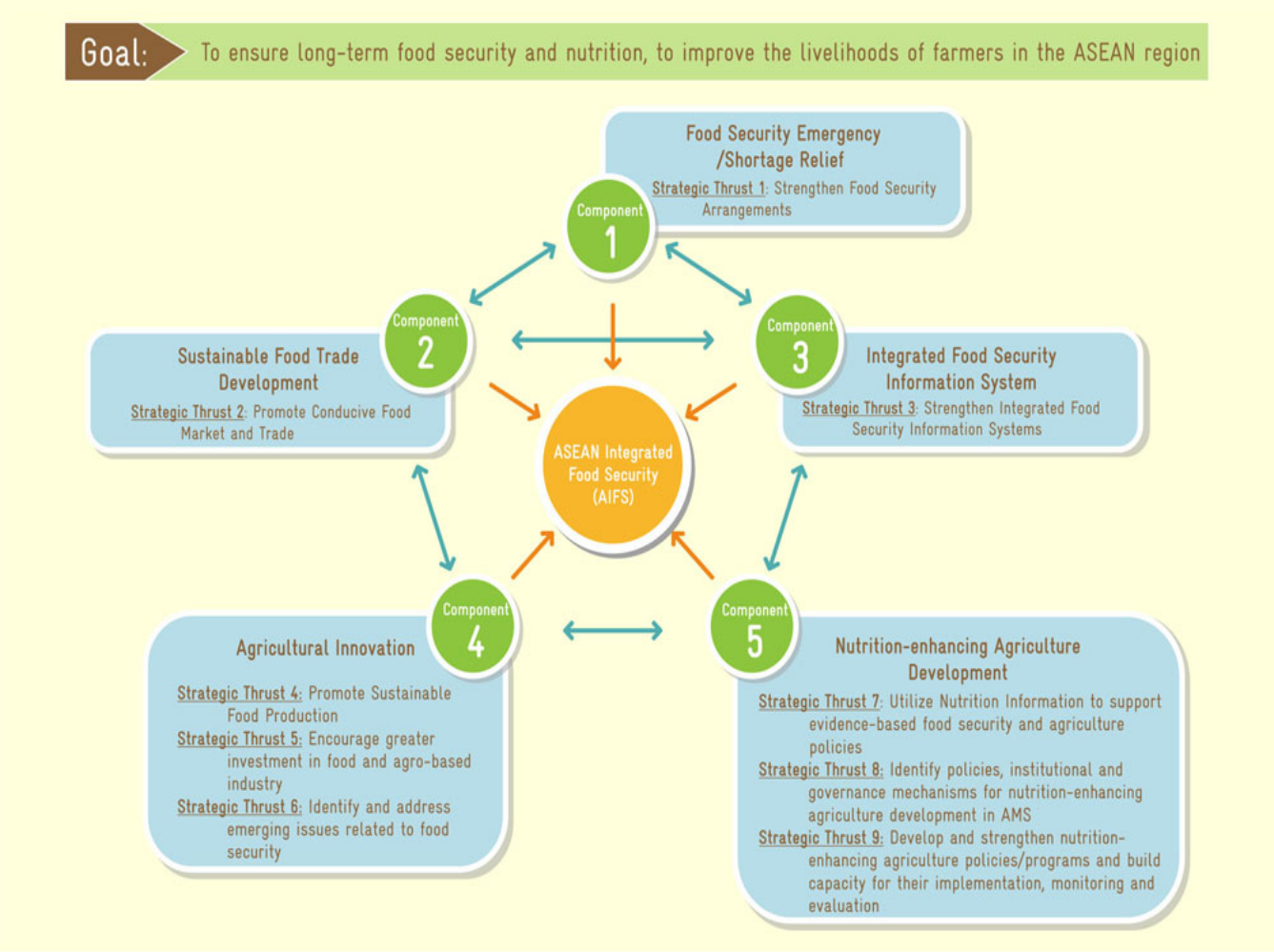


Figure 4.6: AFIS 2015-2020 Strategy (ASEAN 2014)

In addressing food security, ASEAN promotes a 'metanational' approach, which emphasizes commodities over national production *per se*. As can be noted from points a and c above, ASEAN's focus is on increasing production and market competitiveness (Desker et al 2013 p18). ASEAN's focus is on regional approaches, but does not necessarily entail bilateral engagement between member states; in applied terms, this means that while ministries of agriculture may engage at ASEAN regional forum, bilateral engagement between national ministries remains contingent on nation-state initiative. In the national policy context for Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand, engagement with ASEAN on food security issues has been under the aegis of the Ministries of Agriculture, through the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) grouping. In this context, food security is identified as the second priority, behind increasing ASEAN's

competitiveness in international markets, and just above providing a unified negotiating position for the bloc in global trade negotiations (Priyono 2012, Chandra and Lontoh 2010).

The trade focus of food security in ASEAN is reflected in the siloed nature of regional mechanisms around food security and environmental concerns, which are broadly treated as mutually exclusive, and neither as high a priority as economic growth (Middleton 2012).

ASEAN efforts to develop what Ewing-Chow and Slade call 'rice regionalism'-whereby barrier-free trade would act as a more predictable basis for regional food security- are offset by the resolute policy insistence on national self-sufficiency in rice among member states discussed above (Ewing-Chow and Slade 2016)[51]. On this, national governments show little sign of compromise: under the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement initiated in 1992, member states are allowed to exempt 'highly sensitive' items from the agreement. Indonesia has exempted 60 different agricultural products, and all of the 24 exemptions claimed by the Philippines are agricultural (Chanda and Lontoh 2012). Rice is exempted from the agreement altogether (ASEAN 2010). This situation is unlikely to change as ASEAN moves towards an ASEAN Economic Community, the details of which, like the details of many ASEAN initiatives, remain unclear (Chandra and Lontoh 2012).

A common economic community, the AEC, was slated to be launched at the end of 2015. The overall goals of the AEC are: 'a single market and production base; a highly competitive economic region; a region of equitable economic development; and a region fully integrated into the global economy' (ASEAN 2008 quoted in Middleton 2012 p.6). Despite the formal ceremonial steps, and allowing for the fact that this has been presented as a gradual and incremental process, it is not immediately clear what this means (or will mean) in practice. Although not explicitly stated, the establishment of a free trade zone would effectively shift ASEAN from a state-centred organization to a facilitator for the private sector- given its very light institutional footprint, it is unclear how this reorientation will be conducted (ANN 2013a). There is no consensus on whether the organization and its members are adequately prepared for such a step (Bangkok Post 2015).

[51] The overall efficacy of regional approaches to food security is tempered by ASEAN's weak record in responding to crisis and its unwillingness to override or countermand actions by member states. Chandra and Lontoh (2012) give the example of Thailand's ultimately fruitless suggestion of establishing an Organization of Rice Exporting Countries (analogous to OPEC) at the height of the global crisis in April 2008, a move which was hugely problematic at both global and intraregional levels; ASEAN remained mute on the issue (Chandra and Lontoh 2012 p8).

Within such a regional economic framework, national interests remain a higher priority than regional interests (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p127)[52]. Moreover, how smaller, less developed states will fare when competing in open regional markets with better resourced and organized counterparts in wealthier member states also remains to be seen (ANN 2013b). As of January 2018, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR became full members of ASEAN, and thus subject to the demands of the regional free trade zone; the positive and negative trade and labour implications of this are a matter of speculation (Nikkei Asian Review 2018) Even so, there appears to be momentum growing the AEC; as one respondent put it, *'It will be interesting to find out how this ASEAN AEC actually turns out, because it sounds like they're taking it more seriously than anything I've seen ASEAN take in the past.'* **(Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2)**

Food Security Policy in Thailand, Vietnam and Lao PDR

The sub-sections that follow will provide some of the salient characteristics of food security policies for Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. Recalling the point made in chapter 3 that food security policy refers not to a single document explicitly described as a food security policy (insofar as those exist), but rather to the bundle of policies which influence food security at the national level, this section is not intended as a comprehensive food security policy review for each state, but rather a concise synthesis of key information. This serves the purpose of focusing the thesis on those issues particularly pertinent for comparison with Lao PDR, but is also a matter of expediency: the UN SCN (2013 p27) identifies 20 separate policy documents which form the policy framework for food and nutrition security in Thailand, and a similar number would be applicable for Vietnam. Moreover, with academic and grey literature more widely available for both neighbouring countries, the relevant sections below have relied more on secondary sources (such as policy reviews) than on policy documents themselves.

Food Security Policy in Lao PDR

Within an overall policy orientation of maintaining and promoting economic growth set out in *the 7th National Socio-economic Development Plan* (MPI 2011a), the central policy texts for food security in Lao PDR between 2009-2015 are the *Agricultural Development Strategy 2011-2020* (MAF 2010) and *the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015* (MoH 2009). Where the NSEDP sets out the

[52] Bello (2009) notes that South-South investment is not intrinsically more principled or virtuous than investment from developed nations: oilfields vacated by Western oil firms as a result of sanctions in Myanmar were quickly absorbed by Malaysia's state-owned Petronas (Reuters 2011).

overall development trajectory of the country and sets system-level objectives, the sectoral plans for agriculture and nutrition then provide the sector-specific actions and overall policy directions to be pursued in service of the macro level goals of the NSEDP. Taken together, these three documents provide a point of entry for a review of the authored texts of food security policy.

The Seventh National Socio-economic Development Plan (2010-2015)

The benchmark policy document for the government of Lao PDR, the 7th NSEDP sets out to 'transform the country into a modern and industrial society.' (MPI 2011a p11). Its goals include an annual GDP growth of 8 percent (a result of FDI in mining, hydropower and commercial agriculture (LIWG 2012)), graduating from Least Developed Country Status by 2020, attaining the MDGs by 2015, and supporting infrastructure development. Four specific targets are presented under the NSEDP, including

1. Ensure continuation of national economic growth with security, peace and stability, and ensure GDP growth rate of at least 8% annually and GDP per capita to be at least USD 1,700.
2. Achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and adopt appropriate technology, skills and create favourable conditions for graduating the country from LDC by 2020.
3. Ensure the sustainability of development by emphasizing economic development with, cultural and social progress, preserving natural resources and protecting the environment.
4. Ensure political stability, peace and an orderly society.

(MPI 2011a p11)

In order to achieve this, a number of targets are set for in food security related sectors:

- Agriculture should grow by three percent per annum and contribute 23 percent to overall GDP.
- Rice production should increase to four million tonnes per annum, across 1.04 million hectares, with a yield of 3.9 tonnes per hectare. Growth across various livestock sectors is estimated at 2-6 percent
- Decrease poverty to < 19 percent of the total population
- Reduce underweight to 20 percent and stunting to 34 percent for children under five
- Ensure forest cover is 65 percent of the total area of the country
  (MPI 2011a p14-15)

'Ensuring food security' is presented as a sectoral priority for agriculture (p17), listed second after 'industrialization and modernization priorities in areas that have favourable conditions'. As indicated above, specific targets are given for rice, commodities, livestock and forestry. In the section entitled Nutrition Development, the strategic direction is presented as 'It is important to ensure adequate nutrition and food security for the Lao people, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.'(p24). Elsewhere in the document, cooperation with ASEAN is emphasized as a priority, in preparation for the ASEAN economic community proposed for 2015 (p15).

Per the 7th NSEDP, national policy priorities are threefold: maintaining economic growth with peace and stability (at a proposed growth rate of 8 percent per annum), graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2020, and achieving the MDGs; for food security, 'It is important to ensure adequate nutrition and food security for the Lao people, *to achieve the Millennium Development Goals*' (MPI 2011a p24, emphasis added). Within that overall blueprint, food security (interpreted in the NSEDP as increased agricultural production and improved nutrition outcomes) is presented as: a component of economic growth, part and parcel of Lao PDR adhering to its international obligations, and as a contributing factor for transitioning from LDC status.

The NSEDP presents a number of the basic organizing statements around which narratives in food security policy are developed, and illustrates the extent to which trends in food security policy in southeast Asia (as described above) are reflected in the national context. In the section entitled 'Overall Directions of the NSEDP', seven directions are presented, including 'support a shift of economic structure and labour structure towards an industrialised and modernized one' (MPI 2011a p13). With agriculture the mainstay of the economy (agricultural targets are listed first in the sections on macroeconomic targets, economic sector, and economic development targets (MPI 2011a p15, 17)), industrialization and modernization in agriculture (and natural resources management) is a baseline assumption from which the narrative of state modernization is constructed.

The first indicator of economic performance listed in the sub-section on economic indicators is rice production, listed above extractive industries, infrastructure development, and tourism. Rice yield targets are set at four million tonnes per annum, on productivity projections of 3.9 MT per hectare (MPI 2011a p14). Production targets for all crops are provided on a kgs/per capita/per annum ratio in sector specific targets for agriculture. Improved rates of chronic malnutrition is listed in sixth position in the sub-section on social indicators (MPI 2011a p 15), with targets for underweight and stunting derived from the MDGs. All indicators are qualitative, expressed as percentages (for malnutrition data) or absolute numbers (for rice).

Strategy for Agricultural Development 2011-2020

Developed in 2010, the 2011-2020 Agricultural Development Strategy serves to orient the actions of both the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and development partners in the agricultural sector overall, taken to include commercial and smallholder crop production, livestock, fisheries and forestry. As well as a

contributor to GDP growth, agriculture is presented as a means towards alleviating rural poverty, and that to date, agriculture's role therein has been 'below its potential' (MAF 2010 p11). The Strategy foresees a significant shift in the role of the Ministry: as market-oriented commercial agriculture and private sector investment increases, the role of the ministry will transition from that of service-provider to regulatory agency, overseeing and facilitating the work of the private sector.

The Agricultural Strategy recognizes the diversity of agricultural systems in place in Lao PDR, and proposes a dual goal, servicing both the for national development policy priority of economic growth and the needs of smallholder farmers. The Goal statements of the Strategy is presented as:

- Gradual introduction and increased application of modernized lowland market-oriented agricultural production, adapted to climate change and focused on smallholder farmers
- Conservation of upland ecosystems, ensuring food security and improving the livelihoods of rural communities

In the ADS, food security is defined per the 1996 World Food Summit definition, with the following caveat added; 'the key word is 'access' which implies that merely increasing food production is an insufficient concept to achieve food security. Among others, additional measures of generating cash income (market integration of producers, off-farm income opportunities, etc.) are indispensable complimentary elements' (MAF 2010 p. v). High levels of chronic malnutrition, although not analyzed, are defined as 'the biggest problem' (MAF 2010 p7), a phrase taken from the National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action to be discussed below.

Within these goals, the following specific goals to 2015 are proposed:

Goal 1: The improvement of livelihood (through agriculture and livestock activities) has food security as its first priority.

Goal 2: Increased and modernized production of agricultural commodities will lead to 'pro-poor and green value chains', targeting domestic, regional, and global markets, based on organizations of smallholder farmers and partnering investments with the private sector.

Goal 3: Sustainable production patterns, including the stabilization of shifting cultivation and climate change adaptation measures, are adapted to the specific socio-economic and agro-ecological conditions in each region.

Goal 4: Sustainable forest management will preserve biodiversity and will lead to significant quantitative and qualitative improvements of the national forest cover, providing valuable environmental services and fair benefits to rural communities as well as public and private forest and processing enterprises.
(MAF 2010 p.ix)

The 2011-2020 Agricultural Strategy illustrates three key aspects of food security policy in Lao PDR. First, it seeks to reconcile the need for national economic growth and the need to preserve the livelihoods of smallholders in spatial terms, suggesting that market-based agriculture is applicable in the lowlands and along the Mekong Valley, whereas more remote uplands should preserve biodiversity and cultural practice through more traditional modes of smallholder agriculture. It proposes that by 2020, lowland farmers will provide national food security: that is, enough rice, vegetables, fodder crops and oil seeds to meet national requirements. Upland farmers will seek to produce enough to meet 'local' needs (MAF 2010 p42-3). This two-tiered policy orientation of commercialized lowland agriculture and more-subsistence oriented upland livelihoods is a recurrent feature of rural policy in Lao PDR (Lestrelin et al 2012)

Second, the Strategy acknowledges that finding a balance between modernization and tradition may be a challenge (MAF 2010 p37). This sets up a tension between traditional modes of smallholder agriculture and commercialized agriculture. Third, viewed in historical context, the 2011-2020 Strategy represents a recognition of the multifaceted role that agriculture plays in the country, with reference to livelihoods, climate change, sustainability, globalization and biodiversity protection throughout its text. Its predecessor exercise had as its goals a straightforward series of quantitative production targets (MAF 2010 p29).

Finally, the 2011-2020 Strategy presents a set of 13 drivers of change for agricultural development in Lao PDR which would not be out of place in Rich World food policy discourse. Presented in the order provided in the Strategy document, these include:

Emerging Agricultural Development Trends: Drivers of Change

- Intensive farming driven by FDI
- Globalization and Lao's accession to the WTO requiring adherence to global trade rules
- Global markets and potential growth for high-value, niche products

- Higher consumer demand for food safety
- Organic agriculture
- Fair Trade
- Geographic indicators, potentially useful for rice, coffee, and tea
- Comparative advantage in global markets on the basis of organic, biosafety, non-GMO and low carbon footprint
- Climate change, links to hydropower
- Climate change, adaptation needs across the sub-region
- Biodiversity under threat
- New international finance mechanisms (i.e. REDD, REDD+)
- Private-sector carbon markets

Figure 4.7: Emerging Agricultural Development Trends: Drivers of Change (adapted from MAF 2010 p37-41)

The 2011-2020 Agricultural Development Strategy attempts to balance two narratives: on one hand, modernization and consolidation of the agricultural sector (presented as a means towards poverty reduction), and the need to protect and strengthen smallholder rural households on the other. The ADS does not posit these two narrative threads as an 'either/or' proposition, but rather as a 'both': food security policy can simultaneously be increasingly commercialized and market oriented *and* responsive to smallholders.

In service of national growth and poverty reduction, the ADS states 'The agriculture and forestry sector continues to be one of the key sectors contributing to the reduction of rural poverty. Accelerating poverty reduction depends largely on delivering an adequate combination of public investment, foreign direct investment, and trade liberalization to the sector' (MAF 2010 p.11). As will be seen in Chapter 5, the smallholder narrative is not antithetical to the narrative of increased modernization, but is rather repurposed in the service of state-led modernization: smallholders can continue to exist, but will need to modernize.

Goal 1 of the 2011-2020 ADS is presented as 'The improvement of livelihood (through agriculture and livestock activities) has food security as its first priority' (MAF 2010 p47). This will be attained through agricultural diversification, improving resilience to climate change, better responsiveness to global and

regional market demands and improved land management. Goal 2 is given as 'Goal 2: Increased and modernized production of agricultural commodities will lead to "pro-poor and green value chains", targeting domestic, regional, and global markets, based on organizations of smallholder farmers and partnering investments with the private sector' (MAF 2010 p47). This will be attained through improved value-addition, increased integration with global and regional value chains, upgrades to market infrastructure and human resource capacity building.

Taken together, these goals illustrate the two major narrative themes in food security policy. In order to reconcile the potential divergence between the two goals, the ADS introduces geographic frames which serve to situate the policy in global, national and sub-national contexts. First, at the global and regional level, Lao PDR's engagement and integration with global political and economic systems is presented as a net-positive *fait accompli.* It is then suggested that Lao PDR has a nascent global market advantage in what the ADS calls 'the new agriculture', including organics, free trade, and geographic indicators/GDO products.

At the national and sub-national level, the ADS suggests that it is possible to reconcile the needs of national development (including GDP growth, poverty reduction, food self-sufficiency, agricultural export promotion and industrialization) by applying two geographic frames. Lowland areas in central and southern Lao PDR with strong rice production will supply adequate volumes of food for 'national' food security:

> Lowland agricultural production in the Mekong corridor will foremost [sic] provide sufficient rice and other staple crops (i.e. vegetables, fodder maize, pulses and oil crops) to maintain national food security. Lowland smallholder farmers also will raise sufficient livestock and fish to supply low-cost sources of protein to domestic markets. Lowland agricultural production will be responsible for providing both sufficient quantities to guarantee that the nutritional needs of the population are met (MAF 2010 p42).

By contrast, upland farmers in more remote, biodiverse and less agriculturally productive (in terms of yield) will provide for more localized food security needs (MAF 2010 p43), through the production of fish and animal proteins, and high value cash crops. In both cases, smallholders are presented as central to the overall policy, and increased commercialization and market integration is presented as wholly consistent with the aims of both national and local food security.

> Smallholder farming systems and the economies of rural communities will be upgraded and become more diversified, to increase production for food security and improve rural living standards. Smallholder agricultural production will be market-oriented, linked by farmer organizations and contract farming to local traders, agro-processors, and agribusiness

> enterprises, including land concessions. The aim is to contribute to reducing rural poverty by creating rural employment opportunities, transferring modern technologies to increase productivity, channelling agricultural production inputs and finance, and facilitating linkages to regional and global value chains. (MAF 2010 p13)

Within this delineation of national vs. local food security/self-sufficiency, no quantitative thresholds are identified; while a 'continuous improvement of national rice self- sufficiency and local food security' is noted (MAF 2010 p21), targets are not identified, nor are any other metric by which these targets will be measured, other than total rice production.

Also striking in the ADS is the fine line between Lao PDR's engagement and exposure to globalized markets, and the risks this poses to smallholders. Globalization is presented as an external stressor, counterpoised by Lao 'traditional society and natural livelihood systems'. This establishes an important tension in the policy narratives, as 'Lao values' (internal) are set against the forces of globalization and modernization (external) (MAF 2010 p45).

The ADS situates smallholders in the cross hairs of these two policy narratives, suggesting it will support their adaptation to a more commercialized context (MAF 2010 p46). However, what constitutes a smallholder is flexibly interpreted, potentially including a cohort of farmers engaged not only in farming, but also aquaculture, livestock husbandry, collection of NTFPs, cash and food crop production, both environmentally responsible (as stewards of biodiversity) and irresponsible (excessive use of pesticides, herbicides and other ecologically unsound practices). To its credit, the ADS does acknowledge this in the front material, stating 'For the context of Laos, a legally binding definition of "smallholder" is outstanding and urgently needed' (MAF 2010 p.iv).[53]

As illustrated by the syntactically muddled phrasing of Goal 1 ('The improvement of livelihood (through agriculture and livestock activities) has food security as its first priority'), food security is presented both as an instrumental objective, in order to alleviate poverty and protect livelihoods, and as an intrinsic goal in and of itself, as a 'first priority', and as a target for MDG1. Food security is both been achieved (measured by national rice self-sufficiency) and is not (measured by geography and accessibility).

Finally, the ADS notes prevailing levels of chronic malnutrition, and sets up the third narrative theme in food security policy discourse: malnutrition as 'the biggest problem', with little to no progress over the past decade (MAF 2010 p22). More problematically, it attributes malnutrition to overall availability,

[53] In this, the ADS echoes similar concerns in global discourse on smallholders. For a comprehensive summary of the difficulty in defining or comparing smallholding at global and Asian levels, see Rigg et al (2016).

stating 'The most significant constraint to the availability of food is the low level of domestic production of food items resulting from low levels of productivity and high risks in the agricultural sector', before stating that nutrition will be more fully treated in the National Nutrition Strategy. This goes to emphasize that whether the focus is on promoting smallholder traditional agricultural systems or full agricultural modernization and industrialization, the focus remains on increasing productivity, putting food as measured by volume, yield, and quantity at the centre of the discourse, a narrative that is questioned by nutrition advocates, as will be described in chapter 5.

National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015

The National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action (NNS/PoA) is the first policy document developed by Lao PDR expressly to address malnutrition. As with the Agricultural Development strategy, it is intended as a guide to all actions to be taken in the nutrition sector, and is developed in line with the broader 7th NSEDP framework. The NNS/PoA frames Lao PDR's commitment to addressing malnutrition in the context of international agreements to which Lao PDR is signatory (MoH 2009 p1). In this document, food security is presented in a somewhat modified form of the 1996 WFS definition: 'Food Security is achieved when adequate food (in term of quantity, quality, safety, socio-cultural acceptability) is available and accessible and satisfactorily used and utilized by all individuals in all regions, at all times to live a healthy and active life.' (MoH 2009 p36)

The four principles underpinning the NNS include: defining a realistic but bold strategy, promoting good governance, achieving short term measurable impact (within 2-5 years) and sustainability, and maximizing impact and cost effectiveness (GoL and UN 2013 p 51, MoH 2009 p13-14).

The NNS includes an analysis of the immediate, underlying and basic causes of malnutrition (taken to apply at the individual, household and national level respectively), consistent with the UNICEF framework presented in Chapter 2. Chronic malnutrition is described as a 'crisis' and 'the biggest problem in Lao PDR' (MoH 2009 p2, 4). Populations with the highest rate of malnutrition are described as

> These would include poor households, households with unskilled laborers or whose household heads have no or low education, households that live in villages with little or no access to key infrastructure and services like access to sanitation and safe water facilities. Specific ethnic groups were found to be at a higher risk of undernutrition like the Sino-Tibetan and Hmong-Mien and Austro-Asiatic ethnic groups. These ethnic groups can be found living mostly in the Northern Central and Southern Highlands of the country. (MoH 2009 p6)

Food insecurity and malnutrition is presented as being interrelated with poverty, ethnicity, low education levels, poor sanitation and altitude.

In terms of the 'basic' causes of chronic malnutrition- per the NNS' own formulation, applicable at the national level- the issue is presented as fundamentally a result of poor planning and policy processes:

> Food security and nutrition objectives have not yet been incorporated in national development policies and plans which consequently resulted in limited investments made for nutrition and related actions. Knowledge/information systems, targeted initiatives and programmes supported by consistent, coherent and effective actions at all levels of government are required to ensure a sustainable, effectively integrated and holistic nutrition strategy and action plan. (MoH 2009 p10)

Progress can therefore be achieved by more concerted, better coordinated collaborative efforts led by government (MoH 2009 p26-27).

In its review of the overall policy context around MDG1, the Government of Lao PDR and the UN in 2013 described the challenges and opportunities which were affecting progress toward the target as follows:

- Unclear accountabilities and the limited awareness of nutrition outside of the health sector translate into low levels of investment in appropriate interventions for nutrition.
- Malnutrition is a cross-sectoral issue that involves many non-health factors.
- Access to the right types of food is required, not just food availability.
- Budget allocations to the health sector need to be increased.

(GoL and UN 2013 p50)

In the 2010-2015 National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action, two policy narratives emerge: first, the nutrition narrative, whereby the clearest proof of a food security 'problem' is the high, stagnant and persistent rates of chronic malnutrition. Second, challenges in addressing food security and malnutrition are presented as a question of governance and coordination, such that addressing how the issue is 'coordinated' will address the issue itself.

The NNS begins by identifying malnutrition as both a global and national crisis, epitomized in Lao PDR by rates of underweight and stunting estimated at 23 and 37 percent[54]. These data are then followed by

[54] Due to different methods of computation applied to the national datasets, rates of chronic malnutrition for this period are variously cited at between 37-44 percent, and underweight at either 23 or 27 percent. In the NNS, data is not consistently used, with a figure of 37 percent undernourished cited in the introduction, and 40 percent stunted later in the document. Acknowledging that these figures may refer to different methodologies (see Chapter 2), whichever data is used, the point to make is that these percentages are presented as definitive proof of the existence of a crisis.

supporting indicators indicating poor performance on breastfeeding, vitamin A deficiency, anemia, iron deficiency, parasitic infection rates (MoH 2009 p5). Reinforcing the sense of crisis, all of these indicators are presented as 'problems requiring urgent action.' Progress on malnutrition over the lifespan of the NNS will be measured by 13 quantitative indicators (MoH 2009 p12).

As with the ADS, addressing malnutrition is identified as a priority in order to 'achieve the priority development goals of the MDGs.' (MoH 2009 p.iv). In other words, just as in the ADS, Lao PDR is resolved to address malnutrition *because* of its international commitments. This explicit imposition of external commitment into national context is reflected throughout the NNS document. The document is framed around the UNICEF malnutrition framework (presented in chapter 2 above), with sections detailing the immediate, underlying and basic causes of malnutrition. One of the basic causes of malnutrition is presented as 'Food security and nutrition objectives have not yet been incorporated in national development policies and plans which consequently resulted in limited investments made for nutrition and related actions' (MoH 2009 p.10), underscoring food security and nutrition as a governance issue. This is consistent with Candel (2014a).

In keeping with the UNICEF conceptual framework, the NNS hews closely to the language and approach of global nutrition discourse. Large sections of the document are given over to boilerplate statements which are both globally applicable and wholly lacking any local specifics. By way of example, the section on family planning (Strategic Objective 5, Action Area b) is quoted in full below:

> **SO5: Improve Mother and Child Care Practices**
>
> b) Promote Family Planning Practices / Responsible Parenthood
>
> The promotion of family planning practices will address the interlinked areas of populations, the economy, health and nutrition. It recognizes that previous emphasis on improved family planning services have contributed to a decline in mortality rates. Giving women access to contraception and family planning resources will help to boost economic growth and hence increased means to access food. It will also reduce high birth rates and thus contribute to the reduction of endemic poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, poor education, and high numbers of maternal and infant deaths.
>
> (MoH 2009 p 23)

This extent to which food and nutrition security policy is drawn directly from global normative development approaches contributes to what chapter 5 will describe as food security *as* narrative, whereby food security is seen as so closely interlinked with the development sector that it functions as a synecdoche for development discourse itself.

The scope of the National Nutrition Plan of Action encompasses 99 interventions, with a pricetag of 600 million USD over five years, involving the active engagement of 20 government bodies (including 17 ministries) and 20 development partners, including donors, UN agencies, IFIs, and NGOs. With this scope in mind, it is understandable that a great deal of the NNS and NPAN is given over to governance and coordination. Indeed, inadequate coordination is presented as a contributing cause of malnutrition itself: in order for the nutrition problem to be addressed, it must be better coordinated. In this context, better governance *becomes* the solution to malnutrition. Under Strategic Objective 7, Action Area 'a' is presented as

> Enhancing the existing structures and practices of coordination, represent a critical step in the government's on-going efforts to address malnutrition and food insecurity throughout the country. Here, coordination is defined as the systematic sharing of information and joint planning of interventions by partner organizations in such a way that duplication is avoided and cost-savings are realized. […] As such, coordination is the first step towards organized cooperation and joint-implementation of actions (MoH 2009 p26)

Coordination within and between government and development partners is not only an instrumental outcome (in that in contributed to more effective actions taken to address malnutrition), but it is an intrinsic outcome in and of itself. Moreover, it is so complex that coordination *itself* needs to be coordinated (MoH 2009 p.27). This level of reflexivity is replicated in the National Plan of Action, which stresses on its first page that it is not an implementation plan, but is rather 'a plan for a plan.' (MoH 2009 p1). It follows, therefore, that addressing food and nutrition security is a process of constant refinement and upgrading of the planning and coordination process itself, from which positive outcomes can then emerge.

Interjecting a couple of observations from research respondents on the efficacy of what has been described above, respondents suggested that the scope and ambition of planning documents far outstrips the resources available to carry out such plans: such documents do not supply the praxis that would move then from planning documents to actionable policies.

> *One thing that I am struck by is that here, they have many plans. They have Masterplans, they have Agriculture Sector Strategy Plans, separate from food security, they have investment plans […]. To do anything, you need a plan. That is the Soviet, central kind of model, but the world has moved on from that kind of thing. But here you still see that. Very much.* **(National UN Country Representative 2)**

The focus of food and nutrition security policy in Lao PDR has consistently been on rural populations with agricultural livelihoods and high rates of malnutrition. Food insecure and malnourished populations in

periurban and urban areas are largely exempted from consideration. Issues of NCD, overweight and obesity are also excluded. The importance of trade and the private sector is partially treated, largely as a source through which improved economic performance can be derived. Above all, food security is presented as a policy problem which can be solved through the simultaneous increase in agricultural production, and the reduction in incidence of malnutrition.

Food Security Policy in Thailand

With an economy, population and agricultural sector larger than Lao PDR's by an order of magnitude in every regard, a point-by-point comparison of the food security profile of Thailand's with that of Lao PDR's is not practicable. Despite the differences in scale, however, there are consistent narrative threads across food security policy in both nations, suggesting a sub-regional coherency of approach which is worthy of inclusion.

In formal terms, Thailand has formulated and adopted a national definition of food security which is broadly consistent with international definitions:

> 'Food security' is defined as "each citizen has access to an adequate supply of food that is safe and nutritionally suitable for all ages. Food security also means that food supplies have suitable, balanced production cycles that are appropriate for the ecosystem and the natural resources needed for national food production under normal circumstances, as well as during natural disasters or terrorist attacks related to food" (Thai National Food Committee 2012 quoted in UN SCN 2013 p.32)

Thailand is one of the most globalized economies in the region, with more than 150 years of history as a food exporting nation. Despite political fluctuations through military and civilian political leadership, the nation's commitment to and integration with global markets and free market economics has been consistent. Thai agricultural production is well attuned to global market signals and state support to agriculture have long been oriented to export promotion (FAO 2006 p27). Thailand has sought to link food exports to pro-poor domestic policies, using tax proceeds from exports to subsidize domestic consumer prices and rural development (Yap 1982). Efficiency gains from consolidated commercialized agriculture is seen as promoting off-farm employment, whereas smallholder agriculture is encouraged as a social safety net (FAO 2006 p31).

A wide range of policy instruments have been applied to rural development and agriculture, including price supports (the most important of which is presented in a separate text box below), debt deferments, consumer price subsidies, subsidized credit, as well as investments in research, infrastructure, and human resources (FAO 2006 p19). Because off-farm options are widely available, Thai smallholder agriculture has remained reasonably flexible and adaptive, as agriculture is not the only source of rural household income. Thailand has offset domestic rural to urban population movements by encouraging formal and informal migrant labour, especially from Cambodia, Myanmar and Lao PDR.

Thailand's status as a major food exporting nation is a source of considerable national pride, encapsulated in the branding of Thailand as the 'Kitchen of the World' [55] (WEF 2012) or, as Thailand's food systems shift from primary production to food processing, 'Asia's Supermarket' (Dixon and McMichael 2015). The rationale underlying this branding is much more than a public relations exercise; it forms the core of food security policy narrative in Thailand: the ability to export food is assumed to be the result of surplus, of all domestic needs being met (UN SCN 2013 p25). Food exports are 'proof' of domestic food security. In a Thai government report released in 2011, prevailing levels of undernourishment of 16 percent of the population (or 10 million people) were rejected even as they were reported:

> The high levels of the prevalence of undernourishment and number of undernourishment estimates were of great concern to the Government of Thailand considering the fact that the country has an excess food supplies and food exports continuously been on an increasing trend during the past decades. The Government of Thailand, which is very committed in reducing hunger among its population through its various agricultural development policies, considered that those reported figures did not reflect a true picture of food insecurity in the country. (NSO et al 2012 p.24)

Thailand's role as a food exporting nation is also presented as evidence of its commitment to food security at the global level, with the vision statement of the National Food Committee stated as 'Thailand can produce safe and high quality food and have sustainable food security for the people of Thailand and the world'.[…] Hence, Thailand has the vision and determination to be the kitchen of the world by providing nutritious and safe food globally'. (UN SCN 2013 p33).

As Dixon and McMichael (2015) have noted, Thailand's status as a global supplier stands in contrast to the second important theme in food security policy in Thailand. In this second theme, the centrality of rural, smallholder livelihoods, adhering to traditional cultural values – that is, socially conservative, modest,

[55] A Google search of the term leads to a Thai government public relations department website.

discreetly successful and reverently Buddhist- is embodied in the notion of 'sufficiency economy', propounded by the late King of Thailand, His Majesty Bhumibol Adulydej (Rama IX), a figure of unparalleled moral and spiritual authority in Thailand for 50 years, who passed away in 2016. Describing his vision in 1998, HM Rama IX described it as 'This sufficiency means to have enough to live on. Sufficiency means to lead a reasonably comfortable life, without excess, or overindulgence in luxury, but enough. Some things may seem to be extravagant, but if it brings happiness, it is permissible as long as it is within the means of the individual…' [ellipsis original, quoted in UN SCN 2013 p83).

Given weight and authority by its royal chief advocate, and buttressed by legal restrictions on FDI in primary agricultural production (HLPE 2013), the sufficiency economy is presented less than a theory of rural economic development than as a 'philosophy'. Guidance on proportionate allocation of land (i.e. 30 percent for water, 30 percent for rice, etc.) is set alongside three philosophical pillars, in which positive moral and agricultural attributes are intertwined[56].

The sufficiency economy model is described as a 'middle path' or a 'middle way', a phrase deeply resonant in Buddhist thought (Chalapati 2008). Although termed an 'economy', in the sufficiency model, the village community is positioned as a place where social and cultural considerations are more important than economic gain (Rigg and Richie 2002 p4). Individualism, brought on by modernized economies, urbanization and social decline, are at the root of rural poverty (Rigg and Richie 2002 p4). Positioning village communities at the centre of royal philosophy therefore reinforces the traditional, socially conservative values of rural Thailand as central to national identity.

Unequivocally a vision of localism and self-sufficiency, 'the sufficiency economy' propounds a vision of smallholder agriculture communities, in which community level self-sufficiency is achieved before anything is sent to market, with each household responsible for its own food security. 'Since rice is the staple food, it is recommended that each family should grow rice and other crops with raising animals, contributing to having enough food for year-round consumption and being self-reliant. Furthermore, each community has cultural tradition of mutual helping each other. This can help reduce labour costs.' (UN SCN 2013 p91).

[56] Those three pillars include: *Moderation*: Achieving sufficiency in practice, for example producing and consuming moderately; *Reasonableness:* A rational decision on the level of sufficiency must be made by considering all factors involved and carefully taking into account expected outcomes; *Self-immunization or Risk management:* Preparing for likely impacts and changes by considering the probability of possible future scenarios (UN SCN 2013 p91)

With Thailand's agricultural economy heavily commercialized and globally competitive, this vision of sufficiency is reflective of an 'imagined rurality', a vision of agriculture which is more based on urban, middle-class 'notions of a rural idyll' than a viable economic reality- one in which the nominal rural targets of the vision have not been consulted (Rigg and Richie 2003). That said, the sufficiency economy has had a number of net positive outcomes for Thai agriculture, with dozens of Royal Agricultural institutes established across the country, low-status professions such as agricultural extension agents valorized, and farming presented as an essential component of 'Thainess'. Organic agriculture, crop diversification and limits to pesticide use have been promoted. In their review of food security in Thailand, Dixon and McMichael (2015 p11) conclude 'The Thai example is a valiant attempt to create a place for non- or less socially and environmentally exploitative food systems.'

Finally, any consideration of food security policy in Thailand must acknowledge the remarkable gains made in the field of public health and nutrition. From undernourishment rates in the 1960s in excess of 50 percent, underweight among Thai children has dropped to seven percent in 2011, a success rate attributed in part to the sufficiency economy approach (UN SCN 2013 p36), and to a broad whole-of-government approach to the issue (World Bank 2006a). Thailand has built an impressive public health system, with 95 percent coverage, universal free (or very low cost) access, school snack and lunch programs, and has developed and disseminated guidelines on nutrition and food safety. Thailand has pioneered tax regimes on alcohol and tobacco which are then channeled to health promotion, at the rate of 35 million USD per annum (Hawkes 2009).

Against this record of progress, Thailand has also become one of the prime examples of the nutrition transition, with rates of NCDs, in both adult and child populations among the highest in ASEAN, with an estimated cost to the country of 720 million USD (Pitayatienanan et al 2014). An estimated 32 percent of the population are overweight or obese, and NCDs have been identified as the top priority in national public health (UN SCN 2103 p.28, Lalande 2016).

Box 4.8: The Thai Rice Pledging Programme, 2011-2014

Since 2010, the highest profile food policy in the sub-region has been the Thai rice pledging scheme which ran from 2011-2013. Introduced by the Yingluck Shinawatra government in 2011, the rice pledging scheme was the most expensive non-military expenditure in Thai history. It resulted in a national stockpile of more than 18 million tonnes of rice, contributed to the fall of the Yingluck government and end of the Shinawatra era which had defined Thai politics since Yingluck's brother Thaksin Shinawatra's election in 2001, and led a return to military rule in 2014.

The initial rationale for the program was twofold- first, to shore up Thailand's position as the global leader in rice exports, and to bolster the Yingluck government's political power base among rural Thai, which included thousands of rice cultivating households in the northeast (the Diplomat 2015). The government established a floor price to purchase all rice produced in the country, and closed off exports, on the assumption that, based on its 30 percent global market share, it would build up a stockpile, and then release its stocks when global prices were high. The policy guaranteed that the state would buy every kilo of rice in the country, and would do so at a very high rate of return.

The pledging program was predicated on two assumptions which proved baseless. First, the floor price was set at an astonishingly high rate, more than 100 USD per ton above global market rates, and well above Thai domestic rates at 14,000 baht per ton- this appears to have been based on historic highs recorded at two markets over a one week period in April 2008 (Poapongsakorn 2010 p211). Furthermore, this rate included a number of costly errors (or omissions). At a minimum, those errors included the fact that the price offered farmers was for unmilled rice- recovery rates of rice (that is, the amount of milled rice remaining after milling) vary from 50-80 percent, meaning that the government was paying for hulls and bran, and had to absorb milling costs. It also failed to factor transport costs from rural depots, which meant that the Thai government was paying for on-forwarding from local depots through mills and warehousing facilities to onward global destinations. Compounding these errors, the robustness of Thailand's market position in global rice markets was overestimated, with exports from India and Vietnam rapidly expanding to absorb Thailand's global market share as it hoarded to build its stockpile, causing world prices to decline, and leaving Thailand with nowhere to sell its overvalued stock (Poapongsakorn 2014). The anticipated increase in global prices did not materialize, leaving the Thai government with huge debts to rice farmers, and massive stocks of rice it could not sell.

For political reasons, the programme proved almost impossible to reverse- an attempt to revise the floor price was quickly abandoned in the face of public protests. As Thai stockpiles grew, global buyers realized that Thailand was not in a position to bargain, and prices did not rise, but rather continued to remain low. As the stocks piled up, new warehousing facilities were required and allegations of corruption were made at virtually every stage of the process (Poapongsakorn 2010 p203). Because rice's shelf-life is short and finite, up to 20 percent of the stock (approximately three million tonnes, more than Lao PDR's entire annual production in 2010) was lost due to spoilage, and consumer concerns about food safety and quality began to rise (Poapongsakorn 2014).

As with subsidy schemes elsewhere, the monetary benefits of the programme accrued to larger producers able to deliver large volumes of rice, rather than smallholders. Poapongskaorn argues that the programme actually had the opposite effect of its intention, and led to greater consolidation in Thai rice markets, promoting the interests of larger-scale producers and exporters, distorting domestic markets in their favour (Poapongsakorn 2010 p203). As there was no quality criteria attached to eligibility for the program, it promoted the growth of lower grade rice; this was a factor because globally, Thailand's brand image and market share is linked to high quality, fragrant jasmine rice (Poapongsakorn 2010 p213). Finally, the huge incentives to grow rice delimited any interest in growing anything else. Inevitably, rubber farmers in the politically restive south began to demand that their crop also get an equivalent level of subsidy, a call taken up by producers of other crops in other regions as well.

The upshot of the Thai pledging program for rice producers in neighbouring states was that it made economic sense to try to get rice into Thailand, in order to pass it off as Thai and claim the government-pledge prices. As a precaution, Thailand closed its borders to all imports of rice, but the long and porous borders with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar meant that the possibility for informal imports was a serious concern. The Thai press reported rumours (which were not substantiated) of half a million tonnes of rice illegally imported from Cambodia.

At a more micro-level in Lao PDR, the border closure undercut an informal milling mechanism which had existed for decades, whereby Lao producers would take their unmilled rice into Thailand to take advantage of better and cheaper milling facilities, then take the milled rice back to Lao PDR. With the borders shut, the lack of milling facilities in Lao PDR became more apparent. At a policy level, it was quickly taken as an example of what *not* to do: the 2012 IRRI et al *Lao PDR Rice Policy Study* stated 'The [Thai] scheme is creating perverse incentives for rice milling, storage and financing systems, and a situation that could be difficult to correct in the future. If the Thai rice mortgage model provides any lessons, it is on what practices can best be avoided.' (IRRI et al 2012 p144)

As an illustration of the close integration of domestic and regional policy within Southeast Asia and the absolute centrality of rice in food security policy, the Thai rice pledging programme remains a potent cautionary tale.

Food Security Policy in Vietnam

Where Thailand shares linguistic and cultural similarities with Lao PDR, Vietnam, as one of the few communist countries in the world, is one of Lao PDR's closest ideological and political allies. While Vietnam's influence in Lao PDR has been tempered somewhat in recent years by competition from PR China, Vietnam maintains considerable political, military and financial clout.

Vietnam's overall food and nutrition security policies are characterized first and foremost by an almost unparalleled rate of economic growth and improvements in social indicators. After decades of war, the in the late 1980s Vietnam was a net food deficit country, on the brink of famine as support from the crumbling Soviet Union dried up (Gill et al 2003 p.125). As a result of the *doi moi* economic reforms, which recentred the economy on households as the primary unit of production (as opposed to state or collective enterprises) (Ryan 2002, FAO 2006 p62), Vietnam embarked on two decades of economic growth, with total GDP doubling in ten years (1995-2005) (Church 2006 p196) and some of the fastest reductions in poverty ever recorded (Fritzen 2002 p.7). Over the past two decades, it has become one of the most dynamic economies in the region, and one of the world's major food exporting nations. Vietnam continues to be characterized by macroeconomic stability, strong social order, and pragmatism (Fritzen 2002).

Borne of the hardships of decades of revolutionary struggle, defeating famine has been an ideological lynchpin for Vietnam since Ho Chi Minh laid out his Six Tasks at Vietnam's first attempt at Independence in 1945. Eliminating hunger and poverty are positioned at the ideological core of Vietnamese communist thought, and as a consequence it has consistently been given high political priority. In its report to the World Food Summit in 1996, Vietnam declared 'food security has been, and will be, the national priority in Vietnam' (World Bank quoted in Gill et al 2003). In terms of international commitments, Vietnam is unusual in that it not only met the 1996 World Food Summit target (of halving the number of undernourished people), but as early as 2003, it was already ahead of the 2015 MDG targets on a number of indicators. Doubling down in its achievements, Vietnam then set its own Vietnam Development goals, with a tighter timeframe (by the year 2010) and with more ambitious targets (Gill et al 2003 p.333).

The most dramatic proof of the success of these efforts is demonstrated by declines in rates of malnutrition, with chronic malnutrition rates in 1994 in excess of 44 percent of children, to just over 19.9 percent 2008 (Van Arkadie et al 2010 p.26) . Some 50 percent of moderately stunted children in 1993 had regained normal height by 1998, and 20 percent of children went from severely stunted to normal growth (Baulch and Masset 2003). Food poverty rates dropped from 25 to seven percent between 1993-2006, with further reductions projected to 2010 (Van Arkadie et al 2010 p.24). Fritzen (2002) notes that this reduction took place against a backdrop of extraordinary economic growth, and that in terms of other important social indicators (life expectancy, literacy and infant mortality), Vietnam is considerably more socially balanced than other states with similar rates of chronic malnutrition. Even so, higher rates of malnutrition and inequality remain prevalent in rural areas and among ethnic minority groups, as is the case in Lao PDR.

In terms of policy apparatus, Vietnam bears considerable similarities with Lao PDR, with five-year Socio-economic Development Plans setting the overall development strategy (and similarly sets quantitative food security targets in per capita availability of Kcal and macronutrients), buttressed by five and ten year sector strategies for the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and a National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action overseen by the Ministry of Health. Elimination of hunger is also included as part of the Vietnam Development Goals in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (Gill et al 2003 p133).

As a consequence of the 2007-2008 global crisis (in which Vietnam was both exposed, with exports subject to international price volatility, and contributed, by imposing export bans which led to uncertainty in global markets (Tsukada 2011)), the government of Vietnam adopted *Resolution 63/NQ-CP (23/12/2009):*

New food policy for ensuring food security to 2020, and vision to 2030: 'By 2020 with a vision towards 2030, to ensure adequate food supply sources with an output higher than the population growth rate; to put an end to food shortage and hunger and raise meal quality; to ensure that rice producers earn profits average more than 30% over production costs' (GoV quoted in Dao 2010).

In order to achieve this, Resolution 63 calls for further intensification of rice farming, a doubling of farmers' incomes, the maintenance of export levels at four million tonnes per annum, and an end to food shortages of any from by 2012 (Dao 2010). This resolution underscores the extent to which rice remains the central pivot of food security policy, and further, the extent to which food security policy options are filtered through the lens of state-identified and administered solutions (Dao 2010 p.8).

Bonnin and Turner (2012) summarize the food security policy in Vietnam as: 'a constant preoccupation of the central government concerns appropriate profit margins for farmers' rice, along with apprehensions over rice exports, maintaining rice storage systems, brand recognition, and ensuring food security and incomes for rural producers.' State engagement and control at every stage of the rice value chain is seen as essential to preserving 'social stability' (Ngan 2010 p.219). Accordingly, the bulk of food security policies pivot around rice, including: distribution networks supporting domestic trade, setting of national production quotas (including land set aside for domestic rice production), temporary and periodic bans on exports, and export targets established based on domestic requirements (Ngan 2010 p.220). Two major state-owned enterprises, Vinafood 1 and Vinafood 2, are heavily engaged in rice exports (Van Arkadie et al 2010 p35), with more than 4,000 state owned enterprises operating the agriculture and forestry sector (Oxfam 2012 p35)[57]. That said, the overall trend in the agriculture sector trends towards increased market liberalization. As part of Vietnam's WTO accession in 2007, the wholesale, franchise and retail sectors are slated to be fully liberalized, although limitations on expansion and investments remain in place (USDA 2007).

It is not certain that this policy focus has necessarily addressed domestic food security concerns. Noting that malnutrition rates are highest in the Mekong Delta region which produces the most rice, the World Bank ascribes food insecurity 'less to do with food production than a lack of access to food, sharp increases in food prices, temporary loss of income or livelihoods and in some cases, chronic poverty' (WB quoted in

[57] A concise by comprehensive review of the institutional arrangements around Vietnamese export and domestic rice markets can be found in Dao (2010). A more detailed breakdown of geographic and historical trends in rice, including export destinations and domestic disparities in production and consumption at the provincial level can be found in Tsukada (2011).

Oxfam 2012 p.21). Noting that the very narrow margins on rice mean that the financial benefits of exports do not accrue to smallholders, compounded with urban migration, Dao (2010) suggests that Vietnam's export potential may be reaching its upper limits. To some extent, this reflects one of the classic dilemmas of food and agricultural policy, insofar it reflects the need to balance the availability of cheap food for urban markets (and social stability), and the need for rural farmers to make a decent living (Chanda and Lontoh 2010, Tsukada 2011).

Vindicating a regional reputation for being hardworking, Vietnam's rice farmers, especially in delta areas, maintain double or triple cropping for rice, interspersed with shrimp, fish, vegetable and fruit production. Ngan (2010 p221) attributes this to the narrow margins in the rice sector, with non-rice crops grown to shore up household income. More than 80 percent of Vietnam's nine million rice farmers work fields of less than half a hectare, and are unable to sustain a livelihood based on rice alone, and are increasingly reliant on off-farm and non-agricultural incomes (Jaffee and Nguyen 2014). Vulnerability and exposure to risks among smallholders reliant on global and regional markets to sell their produce remains high, with Oxfam (2012) describing the situation for Vietnamese smallholders as 'poverty and even destitution are only one shock away'.

Over the medium term, as a result of increasing inequalities, environmental pressures, urbanization and population growth, and the very real prospect of climate change related ecosystem shifts, notably in the Mekong delta, there are concerns that Vietnam's mode of resource-intensive agriculture and export oriented growth will need to be adjusted (Van Arkadie et al 2010), redressing issues of rural/urban inequality and exclusion, land governance and management, putting environmental stewardship and ecological approaches at the centre of the policy agenda (Oxfam 2012). At a Hanoi conference in 2011, Jaffee (2011) proposed the transition required as moving from an old rice bowl (rice) to a new rice bowl (food security, rural development, environmental concerns and trade).

Situating Lao PDR in the sub-region

The Political Culture of Lao PDR:

Political culture is defined as 'shared meaning[s] underlying patterns of action that have political effect' (Stuart-Fox 2008 p6). The political culture of Lao PDR distinguishes it from its neighbours within the region and other states around the globe. Lao PDR is one of only five states which identify as Marxist-Leninist, one of only four Theravadic Buddhist states, and the only one which is both (Stuart-Fox 2008 p2).

Since independence in 1975, Lao PDR has been ruled by the Lao People's Revolutionary Party, a Marxist-Leninist Party with Soviet-styled hierarchy and structures, including a Politburo, Central Committee, Party Congresses and a military that responds to the diktat of the Party (Stuart-Fox 2004 p7). Party control of the government, bureaucracy, military and mass organizations is comprehensive[58]. There are no opposition political parties of any significance in the country or in the global Lao diaspora. Based on its wartime experiences as a guerilla movement, the government of the LPRP is characterized by 'non-transparent, top-down decision making and obsessive secrecy' (Stuart-Fox 2008 p9)[59]. The LPRP government is socially conservative, opaque, and maintains tight controls over freedom of the press, personal liberties, civil society, and rejects any form of dissent. Party members themselves are seen as being above the law, or indeed *are* the law, by virtue of their position (Stuart-Fox 2004 p. 16). Unlike PR China under Xi Jinpeng's leadership, there have been very few examples of senior Party members indicted, arrested or tried for corruption, although there are indications in 2016 and 2017 that this may be changing under the leadership of Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith (the Diplomat 2017, Sayalath and Creak 2017).

Despite the ostensible ideological alignment with communism, Stuart-Fox describes the Lao as 'never more than ersatz communists' arguing instead that a greater political influence is exerted by Theravadic Buddhist notions of social order and karma, whereby an individual's present status is a result of merit gained in previous lives. This interpretation of karmic balance means that rich or powerful people are morally entitled to that position (Stuart-Fox 2008 p6), and questioning their motives or intentions is seen as introducing disharmony to the karmic balance; humility and acceptance of one's position improve one's changes for rebirth (Stuart-Fox 2004 p.5). Social order is established and maintained by this worldview, simultaneously confirming that the established social hierarchy (with whatever inequalities are present) is the prescribed and proper way of things. In both Lao PDR and Cambodia, 'those who disrupt the social order may be reprimanded, even censured. Among the people of both countries there is a deeply ingrained reluctance to provoke confrontation with established power holders.' (Stuart-Fox 2008 p7).

[58] In a political culture in which civil society is expected to synchronize with the Party-defined interests of the state, 'mass organizations' nominally act as a cipher for civil society, but are under the leadership and control of the Party, and thus are not representative of civil society as internationally defined (Stuart-Fox 2004 p20). The four major mass organizations are the Lao Front for National Construction, the Lao Women's Union, the Federation of Lao Trade Unions, and the Revolutionary Youth Union.

[59] In their review of the 10th Party Congress, Sayalath and Creak (2017) suggest that the top-down structure of the Party is overstated, and that the 'bottom-up' promotion from lower levels of the LPRP via 'elections' forms an important process of renewing the party with new members- with the understanding that these newly promoted Party members will support existing patronage networks at the highest level.

Within this system, formal title or office matters less than patronage networks, which include extended families, personal friends, business partners and regional government officials (Sayalath and Creak 2017). Personal connections and networks become paramount, with intermarriage between powerful families widely used a business strategy (Stuart-Fox 2008 p3). This is also a function of scale: as Lao PDR is a small state with an even smaller political elite, (compared to PR China or Vietnam), and patronage networks are able to retain influence in multiple sectors simultaneously (Stuart-Fox 2004 p7)[60].

Over the past 30 years, the LPRP's adherence to Marxist doctrine has waned in favour of the pragmatic path developed in PR China since Deng Xiaoping: liberalization of the economy is to be permitted and encouraged, but political freedoms are not (McGregor 2010 p28). The rule of the Party is to be maintained at all costs; as Osborne puts it 'communism as a political and economic theory has little relevance in these countries [PR China, Laos and Vietnam], except as a way of describing the determination of those who hold power to ensure that it does not pass to others.'(Osbourne 2000 p254). All policy agenda are subordinate to the requirement to maintain the control and status of the Party, and for the Party to endure in perpetuity. This represents the deep core policy belief and corresponds to directions in economic policy as well: macroeconomic stability, a stable currency and steady GDP growth reinforces social order and confirms political legitimacy on the Party, but these are a means to an end: perpetuating the LPRP's rule (Stuart-Fox 2004 p 27). The LPRP's position appears to be unlikely to be challenged in the near or medium term (Sayalath and Creak 2017).

With Party systems and government institutions operating in parallel (such that each government entity will have Party members within it, reporting up the Party hierarchy, but not all government officials are necessarily members of the Party), and the writ of the Party effectively overruling that of government, the robustness and functionality of Party institutions outstrips the apparatus of government itself (McGregor 2010 p173). Procedurally, all government policy documents are based on directives from the Party Congresses, whereby the Party directs the government as to what to do. For instance, the preamble of the 7th NSEDP document reads 'The Sixth Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan […] was prepared on the basis of a shared common goal, of the country's socio-economic development strategy until the year 2020, and the Resolution of Eighth Party Congress, which was endorsed at the initial session of the Sixth National Assembly in July 2006.' (MPI 2011a p8)'.

[60] Tight linkages between family relations and political power have long been a feature of Lao authority, and predate the LPRP by decades if not centuries, having been a feature of the Kingdom of Laos and royalist governments that ruled prior to 1975.

Based on a cellular administrative structure, party officials are in place at every tier of society, down to the sub-village level (Stuart-Fox 2011 p2). Information is expected to flow up, and decisions are handed down to citizens who are informed of their obligations and responsibilities, with power retained by the Party elite (Stuart-Fox 2011 p2). Case (2014) describes this as 'command and control' bureaucracy, with all initiatives, decisions, and innovations coming from within Party structures. Anything which does *not* come through these structures is therefore understood as suboordinate to whatever the Party recommends, and on that basis, is not considered anything more than information sharing.

Despite the rigidity of control and structure, Bestari et al (2006) describe Lao PDR's political economy as a manifestation of weak governance, describing its shortcomings as

> an overly bureaucratic, politicized, and underperforming civil service; a weak judicial system and poor legislative oversight; and the lack of empowerment of civil society. There is some nepotism and patronage within the political and bureaucratic systems. With inadequate transparency and accountability, observers (including aid agencies) find it difficult to understand the decision-making processes and structures. The Governance Research Indicator Country Snapshot (2005) of the World Bank rated the Lao PDR below all countries in the region except Myanmar on measures covering the rule of law, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and government effectiveness.

This analysis is echoed in remarkably forthright terms in government policy documents. Paragraph 48 of the 2011-2020 Agricultural Development Strategy (MAF 2010) states:

> Institutional and regulatory weaknesses remain however, that affect the efficiency of service delivery. Accountability, predictability, and transparency in the management of ANR [Agriculture and Natural] Resources] are weak. Underpaid officials and decentralized agencies operating with weak rule of law and lack of accountability contribute to the slow establishment of capacity for effective management of a market economy. Information systems managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, including statistics, are only moderately reliable. Important sector trends, such as the evolution of cross-border trade are hardly monitored.

As in Vietnam, civil service *functionnaires* are assessed based on their loyalty (or 'virtue') rather than their talent (Fritzen 2000). In day-to-day functioning, the overlap in Party and government bureaucratic structures is often so convoluted that the result is operational paralysis. In a political culture in which taking decisions may lead to rebuke or criticism, even granular-level issues are referred to senior levels for approval (Stuart-Fox 2004 p9). With public questioning discouraged, policy issues are frequently presented as either black and white issues, or without merit: 'there is no point asking questions…either there is no answer…or it has already been decided!' (Bartlett 2011, all punctuation original).

As this research considers the role of expertise in policy discourse, it is worth emphasizing that Lao political culture does not promote the questioning of senior power holders or public disagreement of the sort that

might be seen as part of the give-and-take of public debates in other countries, nor does it encourage change or independent initiative proposals from outside existing power structures (Case 2014 p.12).

Despite the *de facto* primacy of the Party systems described above, Lao PDR has an extensive body of legislation, regulations and other legal instrumentation, with scores of laws passed since 1992. Much of the legal documentation of the country is drafted with foreign assistance, or written directly by foreigners, often in English. The overall objective of this policymaking process of creating a body of law is to stimulate foreign investment by creating a favourable legal environment (Stuart-Fox 2004 p 17). Existence of laws on paper in Vientiane does not guarantee that they are well known or understood, or that either civil servants or the general public are even aware of them, if indeed they are available in Lao language (Stuart-Fox 2004 p18-19). One National UN Country Representative stated

> *I think we have to be aware of, what it is, something that sounds like policy for development partners: it's in English, it's made for development partners' readers, and what is actually Lao decrees and the Party machine that we don't know that much about.* (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

This was echoed by another respondent.

> *I am absolutely convinced there is a double language from the government for all sorts of reasons I don't want to go into, and I'm not judgmental. But I think there is one for the* falang *[foreigners], and there is one, the proper Lao one, which corresponds to the way the country is run, the way the Party is functioning, the society is functioning, this very pyramidal structure of the country, and I think, I mean, maybe donors are schizophrenic, but I think the government of Lao is schizophrenic too, because they are having this double language all the time.* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

Policies on paper are seen as guidelines or general statements of intent, but are not assiduously adhered to, if they are followed at all. As Stuart-Fox puts it, 'Laos has comprehensive environmental protection and anti-corruption laws. They are just not enforced. If they work at all, it is to provide benefits to a new set of officials appointed to police them, through payments to circumvent whatever new regulations the laws contain' (Stuart-Fox 2008 p.12).

It is into this context that international development policy institutions (including donor governments, IFIs, the United Nations agencies, and to a lesser extent, international NGOs[61]) oriented towards

[61] At the level of policy discussions, although NGOs are invited to participate in fora such as the Annual Roundtable meetings and the Sector Working Groups, and have some collective representation under the aegis of the NGO Coordination Group, their participation is more a matter of government courtesy than a substantive effort to solicit their views. By virtue of the unstable operating space afforded to NGOs in Lao PDR, few NGO representatives at such meetings are willing or able speak openly.

promoting Lao PDR's adherence to global normative standards, operate. With senior level policy processes and Party decisionmaking concealed from public scrutiny or external influence, a political culture which discourages direct public disagreement or criticism of any form, and a social order which confirms that the status quo is a function of divine ordering, the role and influence of external international expertise is circumscribed. Certain topics are explicitly off-limits, such as political reform, or human rights, especially pertaining to ethnic groups (that is, non-Lao peoples). Other topics, such as land tenure and village resettlement, are seen as deeply politically sensitive, and are addressed only very cautiously. Development discourse in Lao PDR is heavily conditioned by national political culture in this regard.

This is not to suggest that ODA, especially as delivered bilaterally, via the UN or IFIs, is discouraged. Positive engagement with the international development sector provides Lao PDR with international legitimacy and diplomatic cachet, which again confers legitimacy on the Party's rule. Government ministries and departments in Vientiane and provincial capitals are replete with project-specific implementation units, international cooperation departments, donor coordination units, and other such sub-units established specifically to address the particular requirements of a program or donor, an extensive example of the institutional 'isomorphic mimicry' international development engenders (Pritchett et al 2010). In a culture which deeply values etiquette and propriety, formal contact between government and development partners is unstintingly polite, if light on substance.

Finally, as highlighted in the quotes earlier in this section, while the language of international development discourse is English, the internal language of government is Lao. Very few international experts (including other Asian nationals) are fluent enough in Lao to read official texts or technical documents in Lao, adding another layer of obliqueness in the contents and interpretation of authored texts. In international, regional and national development fora in which external parties are present, the language used is English, sometimes with simultaneous translation. As elsewhere in Southeast Asia, this underscores the arena of policymaking as an elite domain, indicating how language is used to reinforce leadership (Case 2014). There are few efforts to verify if what is contained in English language policy documents are back-translated accurately into Lao, and vice versa. As a result, there is a considerable degree of linguistic relativity, as different words mean different things in different languages in different contexts (Case 2014.)

Subregional Intersections of Economics, Politics and Culture

While undoubtedly partial and selective, this sub-section seeks to explore those key points of intersection between the politics, economics and cultures of these three states as they pertain to the overall policy context for Lao PDR. With both larger states expressing a stance towards Lao PDR which can be perceived as protective (or patronizing), characterized as 'Master and Apprentice' or 'Big Brother-Little Brother' for Vietnam and Thailand respectively (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p16, 35), and with both larger states wielding considerably more geopolitical and economic power and influence than Lao PDR itself, understanding the interface between these three states is an important factor in understanding the policy context at both the national and sub-regional level.

The government of Lao PDR is acutely sensitive to its status as a poorer nation amongst richer neighbours, and upgrading the country in line with its regional economic competitors is a major policy stimulus. It is the basis for the longer-term policy commitments of the Lao government, the foremost ambition of which is to formally graduate from LDC to middle-income status by 2020 (or 2024). Whether supported under the aegis of ODA, FDI, hydropower or extractive industries revenue, commercial agriculture, or any other source of income, economic growth is seen as the overriding priority of policy in Lao PDR, to which all other policy measures must contribute.

Lao PDR and Thailand

Culturally, linguistically and economically, Lao PDR has close ties to its southern neighbour, Thailand, most notably with the northeastern Thai province of Issan, home to more ethnic Lao than Lao PDR itself (Keay 2005, Hujismans quoted in Rigg 2009). Thailand's cultural presence in Lao PDR is near ubiquitous, making Lao's relationship with Thailand its most 'difficult', due to the legacy of Thailand economic and political domination, Lao's economic reliance on Thailand, and the closeness of linguistic and cultural ties (Stuart Fox 2004 p31).

Thai food, clothing and electronics are widely available throughout Lao PDR. Thai television, radio and online media are a constant feature in Lao households. Year on year, tens of thousands of Lao travel to Thailand for medical care, education, employment and trade, with hundreds of thousands working as migrant labour in Thailand (Hujismans, quoted in Rigg 2009). This is partly a function of geography, as the Lao-Thai border runs along the Mekong valley for much of its length, with border points regularly interspersed along the way. The border with Vietnam, by contrast, runs along the Annamite Mountains, with fewer major settlements close to either side of the border.

In the Thai popular consciousness, Laos represents a prelapsarian world and values which Thailand itself has lost: polite, conservative, spiritual and pure (Evans 2002 p226). As a negative flipside to this vision, Lao people, or more specifically Lao language or *phasa Issan* (Issan dialect) speakers are perceived as rural and uneducated, compared to speakers of standard or central Thai spoken in and around Bangkok. In this lens, Thai look upon Lao 'sometimes with envy, sometimes with condescension.' (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p64)

Lao's sense of cultural closeness to Thailand engenders concerns about Lao's culture being subsumed by Thai dominance: while many Lao appreciate and take advantage of the possibilities Thailand offers, Thailand is also seen as a place of decadence, political and social turmoil, and overmuch freedom (Jerndal and Rigg 1998, Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p67). Commentators have characterized the relations between the two as 'Whereas the Thai see in Lao society a version of their social and cultural organization several decades back, the Lao authorities define their culture in opposition to the image given today to Thai society' (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p67). Lao culture, therefore, is partially defined by what is not; that is, modern Thai culture. Policy actions taken by Thailand are viewed through a specific lens in Vientiane by the very fact that they were taken in Bangkok (Rigg 2009 p10).

Despite its repeated reversion to military coups and dictatorships, Thailand has historically had one of the more vibrant civil societies and freer presses in the region, factors that have contributed to more stringent environmental protection policy and enforcement measures established in response to public demand. As a consequence, Thailand has outsourced its natural resource requirements to its poorer, less democratic neighbours, most notably for power generation. The controversial Xayaburi, Don Sahong and Pak Beng hydropower projects in Lao PDR will have some or all of their output purchased by EGAT, the Thai electricity parastatal. This regional outsourcing represents something of a double-edged sword for Lao PDR, as Thailand represents a massive market for energy, timber, biofuels, feedstocks and other raw materials, but also veers towards monopsony, with Lao producers unable to find alternate markets and thus are obligated to accept Thai conditions (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p 87).

In sum, while it resents Thai paternalism, Lao PDR is acutely sensitive to suggestions of underdevelopment, traditional or old-fashionedness in its affairs: there may be disapproval for the permissiveness and decadence of Thai culture, there is enviousness for its material accomplishments.

Lao PDR and Vietnam

Lao PDR shares political and historical links with Vietnam dating back to the establishment of French colonial claims on Indochina in the 1860s. Following the end of the Indochina wars, with the communist parties in both nations assuming full control in Hanoi and Vientiane, both nations signed the 1977 Special Friendship treaty, underscoring the interlinked path both states had taken to independence. Encouraged by perestroika in the Soviet Union, (Church 2006 p195) Vietnam's 1986 *doi moi* (renovation) policy opened the door to private ownership of capital and expanded FDI, reversing decades of economic stagnation and international isolation[62]. Lao PDR quickly followed suit with the New Economic Mechanism, which emulated the measures taken in Vietnam. The ruling Parties in both countries maintain close ties on a wide range of military, diplomatic, trade and economic affairs.

Borne out of revolutionary struggle, both countries' Parties draw legitimacy from a foundation myth of liberation, of vanquishing a larger, stronger adversary in the service of liberating the people. This is not to belittle the military achievements or downplay the human costs and massive destruction wrought on the peoples of Indochina by decades of war, but is rather to underscore their continuing relevance to the political context of both nations. Unexploded ordinance from that period continues to claim lives every year, especially in the border regions formerly used for the supply routes known as the Ho Chi Minh trail.

In both nations, communism is not seen as an externally derived idea imposed from without, but rather is seen as organically consistent with the national religious beliefs, whether Confucianism in Vietnam, or Buddhism in Lao PDR. In Lao PDR, articles in the state-run press indicate that Marxism and Buddhism both complement and reinforce each other, with Marxism's egalitarian society buttressed by Buddhism's focus on individual improvement (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p161). In Vietnam, General Giap stated 'Marxism also seemed to me to coincide with the ideals of our ancient society when the emperor and his subjects lived in harmony, when everyone worked and prospered together, when the old and the children were cared for. It was a utopian dream.' (Karnow 1997 p155). By emphasizing the historical continuity between political power, spiritual status, and benevolent rule, senior political figures are proposed as figures to be deeply respected.

In both Lao PDR and Vietnam, socialist-style central planning continues, with the intent of 'improving' society, with the objective of making a state more governable by making it more ordered what Scott refers to as 'state-initiated social engineering' (Scott 1998). From Vietnam, Lao PDR inherits a commitment to

[62] For a concise but vivid description of conditions in Vietnam just before and during *doi moi*, see Sheehan (1991).

what Scott calls high modernism, of converting nature into more manageable systems- this is manifest in policies around resettlement of upland villages, the conversion of smallholder agriculture to commercial scale agribusiness, and the high prestige accorded to hydropower megaprojects.

Central to this focus is the notion of output legitimacy: with no popular mandate from the national body politic to speak of, the legitimacy of communist rule as based on outputs, such that the end justifies the means: sustained economic growth confirms of the political rightness of the chosen path (Metha quoted in Anderson 2012, Sayalath and Creak 2017). Accordingly, economic growth and prosperity are the benchmarks of political legitimacy, a point on which both notionally communist and neoliberalist capitalism appear to agree. While other elements of Marxist theory may have fallen by the wayside, the continued need for output legitimacy has resulted in the perpetuation of the Soviet-era notion that nature is a resource to be exploited, in the service of projects such as hydroelectric dams and industrial development (McNeil 2000). Having said that, environmental externalities have recently led to some reverses on this in Vietnam. Vietnam has publicly expressed doubts over the Don Sahong hydropower scheme in southern Lao PDR, suggesting divergence of opinion with its neighbour on environmental issues, notably over stewardship of the Mekong, which may yet become greater cause of disagreement between the two nations (Sydney Morning Herald 2015).

Framing Lao PDR in Development Discourse

In order to understand how food security policy discourse is elaborated in national and regional context, it is useful to explore how external perceptions of Lao PDR inform international development perceptions, in order to identify how these assumptions provide the starting point from which policy narratives supported by development institutions emerge. These baseline assumptions contribute to the external discourse of Lao PDR, and thence, how international institutions and their experts situate themselves, in terms of where they are and what needs to be done.

First, it is not unusual to describe Lao PDR as *tabula rasa*, as a country about which little is known and of little consequence. Jerndal and Rigg trace a history of Laos being described as a 'non-country', a 'forgotten country', a 'neither a geographic nor a social entity, but merely a political convenience' (Jerndal and Rigg 1998 p3). In later writing, Rigg (2009 p1) describes Lao PDR depicted as 'a blank page and a black box- the invisible country of Southeast Asia', going on to note 'Most economic studies of the Southeast Asian region, for example, either omitted Laos entirely or, having noted that the country was a geographical

component of the region, were either unable or unwilling to say much more.' Although he goes on to suggest that things have since improved somewhat, in Andriesse (writing in 2011), Lao PDR is still described 'a generally less well known country' (Andriesse 2011 p. 7)[63].

This insistence on the unknown-ness of Lao PDR forms the first component of the external narrative of Lao PDR. While self-evidently not unknown to the Lao themselves, this sense of obscurity gives great latitude to the individual expert, researcher or development practitioner to provide their own interpretation of the country and its people, privileging the role of the author as an interpreter and guide to the unknown. This is consistent with Easterly's notion of the 'blank slate' approach that prevails in the development sector, applied to legitimate support to autocratic regimes in order to further social (rather than political) gains (Easterly 2013 p125). The apparent mystery enshrouding Lao PDR is overstated: but has an important corollary effect: with a paucity of publications in academic and popular press on Lao PDR, narratives about Lao are disproportionately formed by the development sector (Rigg 2005 p280)[64].

In addition to being unknown, Lao PDR is described as isolated (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006 p131, Guardian quoted in Dwyer 2011). Whether proposed as a result of ideology, language, history, or geography, this reinforces the peripheral status of Lao PDR. As Rigg (2005 p38) notes, this isolation supports one of two frames: either a) Lao PDR has been shielded from the negative effects of globalization as a result of this isolation and thus remains purer and unsullied, or b) it has fallen behind and thus become underdeveloped, less modern than its neighbours. For development institutions, the latter framing supports their relevancy to national development efforts; for proponents of biocultural protection and preservation, the first framing applies.

As with its unknown-ness, it is worth noting that this isolation is not wholly accurate- Pholsena and Banomyong (2006 p18) notes that politically speaking, Lao PDR is acutely aware of being a smaller state among powerful neighbours, and has balanced Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, American, and Japanese influence with remarkable adroitness for decades (Evans 2002 p196). Lao has allowed full foreign ownership of investments since 1988, has set up SEZ across the country, and FDI exceeded 1.16 billion

[63] Acharya's *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia*, quoted extensively in the section on ASEAN, bears out the continuing accuracy of Jerndal and Rigg's observations. In a book of 300 pages, Lao PDR is afforded one sentence of its own: it is noted that Laos raised 55,000 USD for victims of the 2004 Asian Tsunami (Acharya 2009 p 276).

[64] Proving the author's point rather neatly, the publication in which this claim is made is itself funded by an EU grant.

USD in 2011 (World Bank 2012). This is not to imply that this has been an unmitigated boon, but it goes to suggest how misleading the frame of isolation may be.

Isolation is then intertwined with the suggestion of somnolence, with the country and people regularly described as languid, lazy, slow moving and easy going (ANN 2013b). An apocryphal axiom attributed to the French *colons* suggests that ' The Vietnamese plant rice, the Cambodians watch rice grow, and the Lao listen to rice grow'.

Finally, Lao PDR is described as poor. This is a different valuation than those other characterizations listed above, insofar as common, internationally agreed upon definitions and measurements exist; but it is axiomatic that references to Laos include mention of poverty (for QED evidence of this, see the first sentence of Chapter 1 of this thesis). It is a matter of some chagrin to the government of Lao PDR that it is so perceived, and addressing this forms one of the longer term policy commitments of the Lao government, graduation from LDC status scheduled for 2020 (or 2024). Nevertheless, the prevalence of poverty, and the associated educational, public health, nutritional, environmental and social ills that are assumed to accompany poverty, form the primary litmus test by which a country's need for external development assistance is measured. Poverty is therefore put forward as the prevailing priority for international development assistance, couched in global normative discourse of the MDGs and SDGs. Noting the confluence of environmental and socio-economic factors found in Lao PDR, Lestrelin et al (2012) describe Lao PDR as 'an ideal "laboratory" for policy experimentation'.

However, as Ng and Somphone (2011, p2) suggest, this is reductive and misleading: focusing on the lack of income does not adequately reflect the richness of Lao biodiversity, culture, handicrafts (covering everything from sericulture to boat making), language, foodways, and ethnicity. As one respondent put it,

> *I wanted for years to write a project document […] with 'Laos is a rich country'. We start off every bloody project document with 'Laos is a poor country, Laos is poor in this, that and the other' whereas we could start off by saying 'Laos is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of biodiversity and cultur*e (**National Policy Advisor 1**).

Rigg (2006) summarizes this state of metaphoric affairs as Lao PDR's 'descriptive simplification': poor, isolated, unknown, agricultural, subsistence-oriented, undeveloped, and slow moving. Always at a crossroads (see chapter 1). Taken individually or in toto, these terms contribute to the conscious and subconscious external preconceptions of Lao PDR, and are repeated, deliberately or not, in constructed

texts. In some cases, these assumptions are rejected and inverted, as in the case of advocates for smallholder farmers, who argue that the future for Lao PDR is based on protecting and promoting traditional livelihoods: that which is apparently slow-moving and anti-modern. Overlaid with the political culture, the regional and national frames (Schmidt's 'nationally situated logics') into which food security policy discourse is created is made clearer.

Summary

This chapter has summarized the regional and national specificities of context into which food security policy in Lao PDR is understood. Southeast Asian food policy narratives are defined by economic growth as the overriding policy goal, shifting trends of urbanization and nutrition, the emergence of environmental governance as a proxy site of interstate relations, and the role (both real and potential) of ASEAN as a site of regional governance. It has indicated that food security policy in the region and Lao PDR itself is strongly mediated by the centrality of rice to the discourse.

A review of key policy texts for Lao PDR have indicated the drive for economic growth (and graduation from LDC status), increasing agricultural production and addressing chronic malnutrition as foundational problem statements in national policy narratives. This is presented alongside a summary of food security policy in Lao PDR's neighbours: Thailand, which emphasizes Thailand's role as 'the Kitchen of the World' and the sufficiency economy promoted by the Late King, and Vietnam, site of a remarkable transformation after decades of war to a globally important food exporting nation, while all the while maintaining a high degree of socialist central planning and control.

The chapter has also considered the interwoven social, political and cultural histories of Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, considering how the combined heritage of these states supports or discourages bilateral policy engagement; this is of particular interest in the context of food security, in that both Vietnam and Thailand have made great strides on improving national food security, especially as regards malnutrition, while facing a series of present and future challenges (such as the nutrition transition) which are likely to gain in momentum in Lao PDR. It positions Lao PDR as culturally closer to Thailand, but ideologically more proximate to Vietnam.

Chapter 5: What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Southeast Asia? (Research Question 2)

This chapter presents the findings on this thesis, RQ2, **What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR**? Based on analysis of interview transcripts (forming the constructed texts which both contribute to and serve as critique of the policy discourse under review), it reflects an expansion of the food security policy discourse analysis undertaken by Candel (2014) and Candel et al (2014) in the EU context, in that it is drawn from the everyday communications of key stakeholders, at both institutional and individual levels of discourse (Schmidt 2011 p9). Narratives are presented based on a matrix that takes its structure from Candel et al (2014), supplemented by categories and sub-headings applicable to the research context.

The chapter identifies three narratives *in* food security policy, presented as narratives 1-3. In this context, three intersecting storylines are identified, ordered based on the researcher's analysis of the frequency of mention and ranking of each narrative as suggested by research participants, based on their perceptions of the importance and/or centrality of each narrative.

1) **The Modernization narrative:** in this narrative, food security policy is an instrumental component of support to the overriding national policy objective of the government, which is sustained economic growth. Economic growth is driven by FDI and greater integration with regional markets. Reflexively, food security will be the *result* of economic growth. Food security is therefore a national policy issue, with the emblematic evidence in support of progress being rice production. This drive for economic growth has positive impacts on income, positive and negative impacts on nutrition and negative impacts on access to natural resources.
2) **The smallholder agricultural narrative:** this emphasizes the centrality of traditional modes of agriculture and smallholder households to achieving food security, defining them as bastions of culture, biodiversity and responsible environmental stewardship. It emphasizes support and protection to non-commercialized modes of agriculture based on livelihoods which have existed for generations, and which are, in many cases, unique to Lao PDR. External pressures as a result of the drive for economic growth (narrative 1) are compromising these systems, but are also creating opportunities for pluriactive, diversified livelihoods. Food security is best understood at the community or household level. Support for this narrative comes from international donors and NGOs.
3) **The nutrition narrative:** A technocratic discourse in which food insecurity is encapsulated in ongoing high and stagnant levels of chronic malnutrition, to be solved by the application of technical expertise based on normative global best practice, overseen by international development institutions. Nutrition (and nutrition security) are seen as a higher-order conceptual approach, into which food security is only one component. Buttressed by

international commitments made by the government under the framework of the MDGs and SDGs, supporting institutions for this narrative are drawn from the United Nations institutions.

4) The fourth narrative illustrates the role of food security within development discourse, presenting **food security *as* narrative** (narrative 4). Food security is so closely identified with global development discourse as to be indivisible from it: food security functions as a synecdoche for global normative approaches to development. Within this narrative, food security policy discourse is defined by three interlocking problem statements, from which three solutions emerge:
    a) *Coordination and governance:* within this narrative, as a 'multisectoral' issue (in that it requires simultaneous consideration of multiple disciplines), food security is a source of tension between actors over institutional mandate, jurisdiction, funding and control: its efficacy is contingent upon the efficacy of the coordination and governance arrangements between government ministries, donors, UN agencies and other development partners.
    b) *Technical vs. political:* Food security maintains two separate but parallel applications in policy. In the absence of crisis, food security is presented as a 'technical' issue, of interest primarily to specialized expertise, strongly focused on data, building the evidence-base, and the implementation of sector-specific programs. By contrast, in the 'political' sphere-implicitly presented as separate from the technical-food security is only considered at times (and in the context) of crisis, and is defined the use of individual data points, such as rice production. In this dichotomy, political considerations trump technical concerns; coordination at 'technical' level may or may not correspond to coordination at 'political' level.
    c) *Data/indicators:* The utility of food security as a conceptual approach is limited by a lack of data, and weak consensus over which indicators are most applicable, pertinent and trustworthy. This lack of consensus is a function of global and local debates over what such indicators mean and why, as well as the two themes identified above (weak coordination and technical vs political). Indicators are not perceived as institutionally-neutral and objective, but are seen as aligned to particular institutions and mandates.

The four policy narratives, three in food security and one for food security as narrative, are summarized in the table below, with supporting evidence drawn from respondents' interviews and authored texts elaborated upon in the sections that follow.

Narrative Matrix

Narratives IN Food Security							
Narrative 1: The Modernization Narrative					**Framing Devices**		
Problem Definition	**Proposed Solutions**	**Level of Discourse**	**Policy Belief Classification**	**Moral Claim**	**Geographic focus**	**Key Data and Indicators (Qual/Quant)**	**Supporting Institutions**
Food security will be the *result* of economic growth. <u>*Background Assumptions:*</u> • Food Security= Rice. • Rice is the responsibility of the State. • State-led economic growth will improve livelihoods. • Modernization requires mechanization and concentration in agriculture. • Traditional methods are backward, inefficient and destructive.	**Increased food production, via:** • commercialized agriculture (including rice and cash-crops for export) • regional market integration • FDI in agriculture • increased exploitation of natural resources • export promotion	*Ideological:* Strong political, cultural, social support.	*Core:* graduation from LDC status as a result of sustained economic growth is the highest-order state development priority	The state has an irrefutable role in providing security (including food security) and prosperity to its citizens, and is best placed to determine how to attain this.	*National, Regional:* Lao PDR in ASEAN	*Quantitative:* • GDP Growth(%) • GDP per capita (USD) • Rice production (MTs) • Rice exports	Government of Lao PDR at all levels ASEAN (via emphasis on national sovereignty) FAO (at national level as partner to MAF)
Policy Documents and Studies • The Seventh Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015) • Strategy for Agricultural Development (2011-2020) • Rice Policy Study (IRRI et al 2012) • Trends in the Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Sectors of the Lao PDR (SDC 2012) • Agriculture in Transition: The impact of agricultural commercialization on livelihoods and food access in the Lao PDR (WFP 2009)							

Narrative 2: Smallholder Agriculture					Framing Devices		
Problem Definition	**Proposed Solutions**	**Level of Discourse**	**Policy Belief Classification**	**Moral Claim**	**Geographic focus**	**Key Data and Indicators (Qual/Quant)**	**Supporting Institutions**
Traditional, indigenous systems are a viable (if not the only) basis for ecologically responsible, socially sound, sustainable food security in Lao PDR. *Background Assumptions:* Food security relies on traditional systems of agriculture and natural resource stewardship systems which have served Lao populations for centuries. These are now threatened by commercialization and modernization. Rural smallholder farmers represent the social and cultural heritage of the nation.	Smallholders require a series of external supports in terms of legal, economic, educational and social skills in order to deal with the changing rural context. This includes: • Protection of ecologically-vulnerable areas including forests and rivers • Extended land governance in terms of land tenure, land access, and revenue sharing from natural resource exploitation. • Within commercialized	*Systemic:* Proposes legal solutions within the framework of the political system.	*Near-core:* By making linkages to cultural and social heritage of the state, critiques the relationship between rural populations and the state itself.	Lao PDR's ethnic, cultural and ecological heritage are globally unique. Ensuring the continued viability of traditional ways of life assures food security is maintained in contextually appropriate ways.	*Sub-national:* Particular focus is on the uplands, areas with high ethnic and livelihood diversity, ill-suited to large scale agriculture.	*Quantitative & Qualitative:* • Dietary Diversity • Biodiversity (especially fish and NTFPs) • Access to NTFPs • Deforestation levels • Expansion of commercial agriculture/ concessions	International NGOs IFAD Donors Civil society (at regional level) FAO (at global and regional level)

	agriculture, make the focus on opportunities for niche and specialized agriculture						

Policy Documents and Studies

- Managing Land, Forests and Natural Resources: Growing in Equity or growing Inequity? (LIWG 2012)
- Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples' Issues: Lao PDR (AIPP, FAO 2012)
- CFSVA (WFP 2007)
- So we don't forget…(SDC/PADTEC 2011)
- Understanding Food Security in Northern Laos: An analysis of household food security strategies in upland production systems (NAFRI 2011)
- Shifting Cultivation Livelihood and Food Security (FAO et al 2015)

Narrative 3: The Nutrition Narrative					**Framing Devices**		
Problem Definition	**Proposed Solutions**	**Level of Discourse**	**Policy Belief Classification**	**Moral Claim**	**Geographic focus**	**Key Data and Indicators (Qual/Quant)**	**Supporting Institutions**
Chronic malnutrition, an indicator of MDG1 and SDG2, and is significantly off-track. The persistence of chronic malnutrition 'proves' that there is a food security problem. *Background Assumptions:* Chronic malnutrition is only partially a function of food security, and there are important non-food factors to consider. Nutrition policy necessarily	• Comprehensive joint action across development partners. • Application of the 13 evidence-based priority interventions (the Lancet 2013) (i.e. breastfeeding, micronutrient supplements,	*Technical:* Global evidence and resulting best practice is unequivocal and demonstrably shown what is required: the issue is to implement it.	*Secondary:* technical approaches, properly coordinated and implemented, will address chronic malnutrition	Bringing down malnutrition is a universal moral absolute, to the benefit of all humanity, which development institutions (notably the UN) have a mandated obligation to address.	*National, Global:* focus is on improving Lao PDR's performance vs. global standards	*Quantitative*: • Chronic Malnutrition rates • Associated indicators in micronutrient deficiency, MCH, weaning practice. • Data on: access to education,	GoL: Ministry of Health UNICEF WFP International NGOs SUN Network

needs to consider issues including water/sanitation, women's education and weaning/infant feeding approaches. Food security is therefore a subordinate factor within the framework of food *and* nutrition security. Causes of malnutrition and policy options to respond are still poorly understood and incompletely applied.	deworming, etc.) within the first 1000 Days.					water/sanitation.	

Policy Documents and Studies

- National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015 (MoH 2009)
- Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (MAF et al 2013)
- The Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for the Lao PDR (GoL/UN 2013)

Food Security AS Narrative							
Food Security = Development discourse					**Framing Devices**		
Problem Definition	**Proposed Solutions**	**Level of Discourse**	**Policy Belief Classification**	**Moral Claim**	**Geographic focus**	**Key Data and Indicators (Qual/Quant)**	**Supporting Institutions**
Food security is a product of global normative development discourse: its efficacy is contingent on the overall success or failure of development efforts in the national context.	Improved processes will lead to improved outcomes, specifically: ○ Better coordination at all levels: intra-governmental,	*Technical:* Food security has an apolitical, technocratic function. Results are evaluated based on	*Near-core/Core:* The conceptual validity of the global development project is beyond dispute, but falls short in	Food security is necessary component of development. Food security is only as effective as development as a whole; Strengthening	*National, Global:* Structural strengths and weaknesses of global development are reflected	*Qualitative:* Subjective, contingent on practitioner perceptions of coordination and governance apparatus.	Based on Individual responses, subject to personal and professional experience, job satisfaction

Background Assumptions: Food security is only as effective as the development institutions mandated to have a role in this field. Food security 'competes' (and often loses) against other development frames, such as poverty reduction. Outside of the development sector, food security has no discernible policy presence.	intra-UN, development partners (donors, NGOs,etc) ○ Better integration of evidence-base with political considerations, rather than 'technical' vs political' dichotomy ○ Coherency and consensus on data, indicators and analysis.	globally established indicators.	application at the national level.	food security strengthens development efforts overall.	in national context.		
Policy Documents and Studies • National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015 (MoH 2009) • Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan (MAF et al 2013) • CFSVA (WFP 2009) • REACH Stocktaking (REACH 2009) • Risk and Vulnerability survey (MAF/FAO 2013)							

Figure 5.1: Matrix of policy narratives

Narrative 1: Modernization - Food Security as a function of Economic Growth

The foremost food security policy narrative is that of food security as a result of economic growth, modernization and regionalization, of Lao PDR's ongoing integration into regional and global economic markets.

Growth-led development, as articulated in Lao PDR government policy documents, is presented as the engine for national prosperity: GDP per capita will increase, which will in turn reduce poverty and with it, food insecurity. Food security is (and will be) a knock-on effect of increased national economic growth. This narrative reflects the past decade of sustained economic growth that the nation has undergone, characterized in the agriculture and natural resources sector by the conversion of land into capital, waves of FDI in agriculture for export (including both food and feedcrops, as well as cash crops like rubber, coffee and tea) and natural resource exploitation (notably hydropower, extractive industries and timber). FDI in agriculture is seen as a necessary means to bring Lao PDR up to its own potential and regional standards.

At the centre of this narrative is rice. As has been laid out in Chapter 4, food security policy across the region has long maintained an emphatic focus on rice, and this narrative is consistent with that regional trend. Food security is seen as both synonymous with and equivalent to rice; overall rice production, measured in millions of metric tonnes, is *the* indicator of overall food security. The primacy of this policy narrative for food security was reconfirmed in every interview with research participants; no respondent queried its status as the overriding focus of national policy. Given its importance to this narrative, it is treated separately in the sub-section 'Food Security= Rice' below.

The rate of change proposed by this narrative is rapid and increasing, as decades of isolation and inactivity are reversed. In this context, traditional smallholder agricultural practice is inefficient and possibly destructive, contributing to environmental degradation and social isolation, unfit for purpose in the modern regional context (Erni 2015). With food security closely linked to agricultural productivity and economic growth, responsibility for food security is presented as resting squarely with the state. Efficiencies in agricultural production through increased commercialization and consolidation will in turn contribute to GDP growth, which will in turn improve food security, generating a virtuous cycle.

In this narrative, continuing economic growth is the objective to which all others are subordinate: GDP growth, expressed as a percentage, in and of itself takes on totemic status irrespective of how it is derived. Transitively, food security is a desired outcome insofar as it supports national economic growth. It is expected that food security will increase as poverty rates fall. One respondent summarized it as

> *It seems that the government's theory of change is this: we will reduce poverty rates by ensuring that we use our resource base to increase our GDP. And we will attract FDI. And for sure poverty rates will fall, and it's been doing that. But when we went through our own analytical process, we said yeah, that's true, there's reduced poverty if you look at the documents we're seeing, but if we go to a community and you see people actually not really benefitting from it*. (**National Donor Program Manager 1**).

Economic growth is seen as a rising tide which will lift all boats, from which other positive gains will follow. In order for this to be realized, Lao PDR positions itself as open for business, with FDI supporting the desired rate of economic growth. This pointed to a new mode of policy in the nation, as steps were taken to engage the private sector across the board- in this regard, what Lao PDR had to offer was raw materials and natural resources.

> *I was very informed by an article, maybe you know it, the title 'Laos: A State Coordinated Frontier Economy' [Andreisse 2011]. This is a very good paper, explaining that it's completely coordinated. Because the economists were saying that the government is completely lost control, but when you see this analysis, you see that no, they did not lose control, in fact there are more neighbours who want to use the resources, they are playing more or less with this- there is not just one big neighbour which is trying to eat them, they have three, so it's an advantage, but also the pressure is big!* (**National Donor Program Manager 3**)

Respondents repeatedly stressed the newness of this policy direction, and how despite the broad-level commitment to this as a policy trajectory, how underprepared the apparatus of government was to respond to the implications of this shift.

> *[T]here is very weak capacity for regulation. There should be some regulation in any economy to, for example, protect environmental health, public health, food safety, because those are legitimate concerns of the state. But then whether Lao has that capacity, both technical capacity, human resources and then funding capacity, if you need good food safety, you need to have well trained food inspectors, and you need to have good food laws. And then you need to have courts that can dispense justice at a minimal cost. So for an efficient market system, the transaction costs should be small. […] So all these things are lacking, and so you cannot really regulate.* (**National UN Country Representative 2**)

This growth-led transition was seen as having predominantly negative effects on the production side at the sub-national level, as a result of degradation of natural resources traditionally held in the commons in rural Lao PDR. As was raised by the WFP CFSVA in 2007, and subsequently by SDC (Fullbrook 2009), government policies around resettlement and commercialization were seen by research participants as

explicitly contributing to food insecurity, a dynamic that will be explored further in the stallholder narrative later in this chapter.

> *Some of the things that impact on [food security] in those areas that really impressed me in terms of their impact are the concessions. The amounts of land that being leased out, and how that's going to impact in food security for those people around there. And the shift of those people from where they've lived for generations, and become adept at achieving some form of food security, even if it's not nutritionally sound, but at least the quantity usually is there. And when they're resettled into new areas, what that does to their ability to achieve food security, that to me is going to be a major factor looking down the road, how that's going to be addressed.* (**National UN Country Representative 2**)

One respondent noted that the policy reflected in the Agricultural Development Strategy, promoting commercialization and smallholder agriculture simultaneously resulted in a policy mix where land was available for external investors while smallholder farmers were required to support themselves and concurrently, adapt to new modes of agriculture.

> *The issue is, as farmers are losing land, and/or the land they have is degraded with pesticides, and/or men are leaving agriculture for construction, and acting as labourers on God knows what, what is then the mechanism, the safeguard, the option put in place for either women to do what they need to do and/or families to have enough income to buy their food, and good food. So it's not just about growing- and that's the issue in the policy, is that right now that have a policy that actually contradicts itself. On one hand they're saying, yes, farmer organizations, green agriculture, organics, and then they've got this other side that says, commercialization, integration into open markets*. (**National NGO Program Manager 1)**

An interviewee expressed her disquiet at the role that her organization and others was taking in promoting smallholders' transition to commercial agriculture, effectively passing exposure to risks on to rural households by promoting commercialization.

> *If we wouldn't take care, if we wouldn't have food security on the agenda at all, we would have a worse effects on food security. We [are] promoting commercial agriculture, the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture, so the replacement of production or own food purpose to production for the market and if you do that too hasty or in the wrong way, I, I…You really, you can really negatively affect food security. So we have to think about it, what we do, so if you promote commercial crops, don't do that for the whole area a family is cropping, do that for a certain area, so you have to mitigate risks, commercial risks. Commercial agriculture is a lot more risky than subsistence agriculture. And the risk boils down to food security issues. If you produce for the market and you have a missed harvest, you lose out on assets, and you will not have anything to eat, simple as that.* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

Another respondent indicated that the traditional smallholder vs. commercialization argument was an oversimplification, and that there were positive benefits to export market cash crops, even for ethnic minority smallholders.

> *There's a particular point there with upland rice, which is it's really fucking hard work, and all the complaints by people like me and NGOs that 'well upland rice is being replaced by replaced by rubber and that's terrible because it's damaging the biodiversity and it's destroying culture and traditions and undermining their food'. The best of these arguments, if it was real, would be about undermining their food security. Sure, there are documented cases where people have lost their land to rubber and their food status has declined, but there seems to be lots of other cases where that isn't the case, where they're earning income and can buy food, and life is actually a bit easier* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**).

Respondents also noted that in addition to the impacts on production, changes were also in evidence at the point of consumption. The range of resulting changes was both positive and negative, in terms of increased incomes for food purchases, cheaper food prices, but declining dietary quality.

> *I think it's also interesting because even in our nutrition responses, there are communities that are telling us, 'we can buy whichever food you want us to eat from the market, you just have to tell us what to eat, because we have money, we have money coming in.' So, you know, when we talk about, we don't have to think about their food security in terms of whether they can produce it or whether they have access to it from their forest. You know in Sing district in Luang Namtha [province] there's a really great district market so you can impart a lot of nutrition knowledge into these communities who have, maybe have rubber maturing soon, will be able to buy the best beef, or chicken or eggs every day for their child, so you know, in some ways, it's a good thing, because they're all being nourished.* (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

The influx of greater diversity of foods into Lao markets was seen in largely negative terms, due to the quality of foods on offer, much of which was ultraprocessed.

> *Just the fact that there's more of these small bags of chips available in every village and people have less NTFPs and more of these very cheap, very unhealthy goodies from China is already a shift in the nutrition pattern and will create more malnutrition I think. When I see what the Lao kids here around the house are eating, they eat chips and sweets all day, and by the time there's sticky rice, they're full.* (**National NGO Technical Advisor 1**)

Although there were widespread and multiple concerns raised about the social, nutritional and environmental impacts of growth-led development, on the whole, respondents considered that the role of inward FDI had a more positive and meaningful role in developing the country than ODA itself.

> *Laos has never been food secure, there has always been poverty and malnutrition, it's not something new, it's a very historical thing. And what can happen is that FDI will even make the problem bigger- but it's ridiculous to say it's causing the problem. It was there always, and some people they want to see this ideal Laos were no children were dying where everyone had enough food and then the FDI came in* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

Part of the argument on this point was to do with the scale of ODA vs FDI: where FDI was having impacts at every level of the country, the comparative impact of ODA was more circumscribed. As the last line in the quote below suggests, FDI was not an unmitigated benefit, but there were more positives than anticipated on this point.

> *It's another discussion what ODA has contributed to the development of this country. And then when I think of all the money we've pumped into Laos and you compare what we've achieved, whoa. But then when you look around, and you see how many people did get out of poverty because a lot of FDI came in, that's very substantial, I think. But then, the segment of society that's not connected, the poorest, the most remote, is going to be the victim of all of that. I think a large part of the Lao population is profiting from economic growth […] So I do think a lot of people have benefitted, and the benefit doesn't come from ODA, it comes from FDI. But at what cost*? (**National NGO Technical Advisor 1**)

Reiterating the quote above, one respondent noted that underestimating the impact of FDI on food security was a function of attribution among development sector institutions, whereby positive impacts which could not be ascribed to an development sector actor were downplayed.

> *And we don't talk much about FDI, but surely that is also having a positive impact on food security somehow. So we go back to this point and this issue of attribution, in that we want to attribute to an agency, to an NGO, and I think that's a problem. It's quite an issue because at least if we're all just contributing to something that's a common goal, then I think it would be healthier.* (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

Noting the above, the economic modernization and regionalization narrative was, despite the general concerns raised and contrary to expectations, not posited as an 'either/or' proposition of commercialization vs. smallholder agriculture (the subject of the next narrative). In other words, the government's dual-track policy promoting commercializing and smallholders was possible, if reducing inequalities was kept firmly in focus.

> *It's possible for both [smallholders and commercialization] to coexist, but one side, especially the government side, would need to ensure that they don't lose sight of the people's needs: make sure that that gap between the rich and poor doesn't grow any deeper. And yet, make sure that it actually grows smaller. And that equity issues are addressed. For instance, if they continue to get*

> *all the lands that people need to produce rice, and give it to a company to get them to develop it, sure yes, your GDP will continue to grow, but at whose expense? So you may have a good picture on your left, but on your right people are getting poorer.* (**National Donor Program Manager 1**)

Another respondent noted that this balance was largely hypothetical, and that the dominant focus of policy making efforts has been on commercial agriculture.

> *[W]e are here to help with food security, we discuss with MAF about food security. At the same time, policies and plans, and the greed from companies and other countries and stakeholders are putting the historical food security of this rural population, is putting this in danger. This is an enormous paradox, actually. And so for me it was amazing when I came. I was believing…I had heard two things. I had heard first that, and that's what's MAF people are saying and the institutions and the common discussion, well food security will be achieved or will be better if there is more technology, if there is more modernization of agriculture. So this is considering that there is a supply, or food availability is a problem. And that's the common understanding.* (**National Donor Program Manager 3**)

This focus on availability consistently leads into discussions of the staple food, to be presented in detail below.

Regional respondents also noted that there was abundant evidence across Asia that negated the causal logic of the modernization narrative, indicating that positive food security outcomes were decoupled from economic growth.

> *[W]hen you say the economic growth links to better nutrition, we see also to some extent, in many countries there has been economic growth but no improvement in nutrition- India is perhaps the best example. But even Indonesia and China, there has been improvement, but the number of people still malnourished, and those who have benefitted...and what we are doing now, we are doing an analysis in time of who has benefitted the most, and you see that the decline in malnutrition has benefitted the richest. And Laos, you have that decline like this for the poorest and like this for the richest in malnutrition over the past few years, and you see that yes, economic growth, is benefitting mostly the better nourished*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**)

The impetus for increased regional economic engagement was seen as coming from a combination or two factors: market signals from regional economic powerhouses, and the openness of the Lao government to FDI, but not from stimulus from regional governance institutions or market arrangements *per se*. Absent therefore from this narrative was reference to the role of regional governance in food security at either the Lao, sub-regional, or ASEAN level.

Structurally, this narrative suggests a centralized, top-down model of policy making, in which the centre leads and the periphery follows. As will be seen in the next narrative to be presented, there is evidence to suggest that this is not the only policy dynamic in play. In identifying the non-stories in this narrative, the focus of the narrative is overwhelmingly rural. Insofar as urban food security is considered, modernization is generally assumed to be a net positive, as higher incomes and bigger urban markets should result in more income for rural populations; but urban food security itself is rarely afforded greater attention.

Food security = Rice

Rice was mentioned as a central focus of food security policy in 25 of 25 interviews, and is by far the prevailing focus of policy documents in the agriculture sector (MAF 2010, IRRI et al 2012). It is presented here as a sub-theme within the modernization narrative because it lacks the basic organizing principles of a narrative proposed by Fischer (2003 p 166) (basic organizing statement, orientation in time & place, complication (sequence of events), evaluation), and is simply understood as it is presented in the sub-heading above: food security=rice, a formulation derived from a verbatim phrase used in three interviews (National UN Program Manager 1, National UN Country Representative 3, Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2). As one Donor Program Manager presented it

> *I don't know what is the literal [Lao] translation is for food security, but what I am sure is that food, is the same word as rice. Actually, rice means food. So most of the time when we are talking about food security, and we are translated in meetings, we are translated as rice. Which I think is also one of the reasons what it is so important in the policy of the government when, why they are always talking about rice. So I cannot figure out, if the policy speaks about 'khao'- as rice or as food- in the policy itself, what is the rationale behind it, and I'm not sure how people who read it, understand it. Do they understand it as rice? Do they understand it as food(s)? And the second thing is when we're discussing amongst ourselves and we're discussing with Lao colleagues from government or NGOs, I think that many around the table don't understand 'foods' they understand the food. The rice. And I think this is where we are having strange discussions with people, where's we're saying 'bloody hell, for ten years we've been saying it's not just rice' and they're still talking about rice.* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

This emphasis is perceived as having two mutually reinforcing elements: first, as a basis for government policy, and second as a cultural value, which reaffirms the policy centrality of rice. One **National UN Country Representative (2)** described how this cultural affinity translated into policy.

> *For the Ministry [MAF] and many people, food security is having enough rice. People do not say 'did you eat?' [in Lao language], they say, 'did you eat rice?', or something like that- that is the common thing in Asia. So that perception plays into the policy of keeping rice, export restrictions and such things, to keep prices low and also support more rice production, even though there has*

> *been analysis which shows that Laos, really, it is not in its best interest to produce more rice, because, where, how can you compete with Thailand and Vietnam?*

Rice is presented as a 'win-win': first, by producing it, it is made available to feed the nation, and second, by encouraging exports, it helps the growth of the national economy, supporting the first narrative- this therefore appears as a double benefit to food security.

> *A lot of the policy statements would be focused on the very first [component of food security], availability. Even if you just took the daily newspaper and sat down and read it, it's all about improving rice yield, improving production of this and that, and trying to export more, so beefing up, increasing the availability of food, not just for own consumption, but also to help in the economy*. (**National Donor Program Manager 1**)

In terms of specific policy approaches, interview respondents indicated that the focus of policy was gross supply and demand, as measured in metric tonnes- more complex policy interventions (as outlined in IRRI et al 2012) were not taken up. The basis of rice policy is a set of production targets disaggregated at the provincial level, control of interprovincial rice movement, and once self-sufficiency targets are attained, regional exports.

> *What we have seen in the context of rice policy, they observed that there is a concern to keep rice prices low, and for that at the provincial level the central government does not impose. The provinces tend to impose export restrictions, so that the rice supplies remain in Laos and that prices remain low. So that shows that they have…that is not the only option, but they have taken that as a solution. The other approach could be pricing policy, taxation policy, customs tariff polices which can also do the similar thing or [have] similar result[s]. Or there could be more interventions to increase the efficiency of rice which would bring down the cost of rice, which would have the downward pressure on the prices, rather than export restrictions.* (**National UN Country Representative 2**)

One respondent noted that increased rice production was presented as a self-evident goal in and of itself, and was not explicitly correlated to other public health or economic policy targets.

> *What people are telling me in Laos, is that Ministry of Agriculture are really focused on food, but defined as rice production. Everything is rice production, not on quality. And, so Right to Food, first thing that comes to my mind, is where's the quality? If you define it as calories, and I don't know what the policy goal is, why rice, rice, more rice? Is it for exports, balance of payments, need?* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

Interview respondents saw this synoptic focus as detracting from policy attention on other issues even within the agriculture sector, emphasizing the fact the focusing on rice also have the effect of ignoring other elements of food security.

> *So is there like even a discussion going on internally at government level that looks at food security beyond rice availability or rice production? I keep reading all these articles on how fish is such a key element of the Lao diet, right? Have you heard of any policy statements on fish?* (**National Donor Program Manager 1**)

One respondent noted that the emphasis on increasing rice production was so pronounced, that food security was, as a consequence, a secondary concern; that is, not perceived as a priority for the Ministry of Agriculture, but rather a function of nutrition and therefore, the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Increasing rice production, was itself a higher-order policy goal than simply ensuing food security. Paradoxically, food security concerns should not get in the way of increasing rice production.

> *In fact, Lao has done quite well since 1990, in terms of developing production of rice. […] So as far as the Ministry of Agriculture is concerned, that is their priority- increasing production. […] Their mandate is not to ensure food security. Food security, you know, for example, it's a cross sectoral concern, and nutrition for example has been given to Ministry of Health, so Ministry of Agriculture's main priority has been production.* (**National UN Country Representative 2**)

Respondents also noted that this limited policy focus persisted, despite the fact that even on its own straightforward terms, self-sufficiency in rice had long since been attained. This did not, however, correspond to any policy revaluation of the logic of rice=food security.

> *I think the easy way out for governments, like the Lao government- which tends to always look for the easy way out, never wanting to make hard decisions- is to simply continue with the argument that food is rice and rice is food. Because it's the easy way, out, it's the easy way to do it. But the question now is, […] you have this enormous surplus of rice. How can you say you don't have you don't have enough food? How can you say you don't have food security? Or are you saying, are you talking about food insecurity? Does it mean that simply having rice is not sufficient? It's essential, but not sufficient to meet the daily needs of your people. And if we look at it that way […] what is it that we need to address?* (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**)

It was widely noted among interviewees that this policy weighting was largely consistent with and supported by the status of rice in Lao culture. One **National Donor Policy Advisor** (2) with extensive experience in rural Laos noted that at the household level, food security is calculated by the number of months of rice supply in hand: '*[Households] exactly know this year we will have four or five months shortage, so the concept of not enough rice is very vivid, it's very alive. But to me, the other, very typical thing for Laos, is that food is rice and food security is rice security and that's very cultural I think*.'

This cultural valuation is replicated up to the highest levels of policy, and as a result, rice takes on the characteristics of an ideological issue, in that it is above scrutiny, not up for discussion, and is seen at the core of policy.

> *I remember one meeting with [the MAF] Vice Minister [...] So there was this big discussion about food, about rice, etc. and […] we had an argument, and I was telling him that 'rice is the basis, you need to have rice, you don't have a good food security if you don't have rice, but it's not because you have rice that you have good food security.' And then […] he was shouting at me saying 'you are not Lao, you don't understand, rice is food.' […] I think there is something which is culturally deep here, and there is a sort of, maybe not very conscious, but a sort of panic: you must have LOTS of rice in the country. And then you're saved.* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)[65]

One respondent noted that in her experience, rice policy was impervious to external scrutiny and analysis, and was best left to the government alone, in favour of other topics and sectors for which there might be greater receptivity to external assistance.

> *[I have] stayed away from looking at rice in SE Asia for my entire professional life, until last year. […] There's just too much, too deep, and there's too many dynamics playing at the same time. And sure enough, you go out with the [UN agency] representative […]. And he would start shouting at me 'They are not telling us the truth! They are lying! Why aren't they telling us the truth?' And I said, 'I told you from day one: you will never know the truth about rice in Asia. Because you're white. And you don't eat rice. Even though you do eat rice, you don't eat rice like they eat rice*.' (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**)

Although not a fully-fledged narrative in and of itself, it is worth noting the non-stories in the rice=food security sub-theme. First, it assumes that demand is unmet and if not at least constant, then increasing: there is no consideration of any scenario in which demand for rice would stabilize, let alone decrease. Second, the linkages between increasing production and domestic self-sufficiency, once attained (or indeed, what threshold would constitute self-sufficiency, and how such a threshold is calculated), is unarticulated; the emphasis is consistently on quantities of rice produced, without reference to quality, or consideration of the cultural premium placed on rice grown by traditional methods (ideally by one's own family) (Ng and Somphone 2011). These details notwithstanding, rice remains at the very core of

[65] This statement is particularly revealing on the depth of feeling engendered by discussions of rice. As mentioned in Chapter 4, formal discussions between the government of Lao PDR and its international partners is conducted on a scrupulously polite and protocol-heavy basis, and the exchange described here is highly unusual. In the course of other interviews, other respondents also present at that meeting, notably National Donor Program Manager 3, corroborated this account, and cited it to make a similar point about the intensity of government commitment to increasing rice production.

food security discourse, impervious to concerns which apply to other aspects of agricultural or nutrition policies. As in other SE Asian countries, rice is a vital component of not just food security, but national security in Lao PDR. This will be explored in further detail in Chapter 8.

Narrative 2: The Smallholder Narrative

The next narrative in food security policy is intertwined with Narrative 1 on a near-constant basis, and is defined by its competition with that narrative. Where the modernization policy storyline sees economic growth powered by external market forces defining policy, the smallholder narrative sees history, tradition and culture providing a blueprint for a sustainable future. Where the first narrative emphasizes the importance and centrality of national policymaking processes, the smallholder narrative focuses on decisions and choices taken the community (or household) level, suggesting that food security is indivisible from traditional smallholder livelihoods, which are under threat and requiring protection to be preserved. As with narrative 1, the rate of change is rapid and dramatic, with negative intended and unintended impacts on society, health and the environment.

In this narrative, Lao PDR is a globally and regionally unique crucible of biodiversity, culture, language, ethnicity and tradition, with culture and environment intertwined with livelihoods, an example of Carolan's 'agrobiocultural diversity' (Carolan 2012 p 171). The viability of these livelihoods is reliant on commons-based access to forests, mountains, rivers and plains. Food security is therefore linked to biodiversity protection and open access to natural resources (as set out as Goal 4 in MAF 2009 described in Chapter 4).

In this narrative, this cultural and bio- diversity is valuable and worthy of protection in its own right, but also represents a long-established system of environmental stewardship and protection which represents the best means of protecting the country's natural assets. These traditions are not undemanding, requiring much physical labour, exposure to multiple manmade and natural risks, high levels of deprivation, and poor access to goods and services. This legitimates and requires external intervention to support these populations, be it from government and/or development institutions. In the absence of democratic representation or domestic civil society, international development institutions (notably donors and NGOs) have a central role to play in advocating for and supporting rural smallholders across the country.

Respondents emphasized that reliance on NTFP and wild-sources foods was so central to livelihoods that even describing rural Lao livelihoods as 'agriculture' was a misnomer, with important elements of livelihood activities more akin to hunting and gathering than cultivation.

> *When I arrived first time in Laos was in 1995, and I worked in Bokeo at that time, and what I really liked, and what is still the case for many parts is how much of the food comes still from the natural environment, from the forest. Food that is just collected. So it is a very traditional…it's more food gathering than food farming here. However, with increasing pressure on the natural resources, of course it's getting, yes, a bigger problem nowadays to get enough food from the forest, and the transition towards getting food from farming is not yet fully done. But what I think is special for Laos and unique is the high amount of food that is produced here, is backyard food, produced in the backyard like the livestock, or is a lot of things from the forest, and secondly the Lao people always say '*kin tamasat' *[eat naturally],no? You hear everywhere.* (**National NGO Program Manager 2**)

Similarly, this non-cultivating aspect of rural livelihoods had received scant attention in government policy, which tended to focus on more formal agricultural activities.

> *I think in, in my sector, the agricultural sector, there is a really, really a misunderstanding about the status of, of Lao agriculture in general. Farmers are hardly farmers in the sense that farming is their main activity- to a large extent, they are still hunters and gathers, that what they do- next to that, they do farming. Seasonal. And if you talk food security, this part which is gathering and hunting, it's extremely important. And if we talk about replacing parts in the agricultural system, we only talk about the agricultural part, and if you talk about food security, you talk about replacing the rice with something else and we forget about these other activities which are extremely important for their livelihoods and especially for their food security. And it's a very difficult issue to address in my sector, in the agricultural sector, we that that up, we say 'how many hectares do you farm? Two hectares? Can you make a living on that? Yes.' And next to these two hectares, they gather in 2,000 hectares of forest and grazing land thereafter. Which is not counted for*. (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

In terms of specific policy instruments, one respondent noted that in policy planning documents, both commercial agriculture and economically productive smallholder agriculture were expected to coexist, but in practical terms, respondents saw the policy attention given to smallholders as insignificant compared to the emphasis for commercialization and modernization.

> *In Laos [food security policy], you have food security in the uplands, you have agribusiness development, you have it all. I talked to [Vice-Minister] once and he said […] 'Laos has got to have, as a policy to develop the niche, the niche markets'- special charcoal from the forest for the Japanese markets, special high value NTFPs, he likes the idea. Or the organic farming, and coffee and tea. He liked the idea- but on the other hand they are also promoting the agribusiness. Then*

> *sometimes one gets the impression that the whole is not well balanced because small-scale backyard farming is supported by INGOs, NPAs, or by some innovative farmers in semi-urban areas around Luang Prabang or Vientiane. And the other sector which is more the agribusiness, globalized, big size sector is supported by the companies, by the Chinese, by the Vietnamese, by the Thai, and by European companies also- look at sugar cane. So the private sector are strong, but the big private sector is developing large scale stuff, and the government is following, I think, very much- it doesn't set the objectives*. (**National NGO Program Manager 2**)

This quote illuminates a key element of agency in this narrative: its strongest advocates are international donors, NGOs and other non-governmental actors. From their perspective, government's interest in smallholders was contingent on development funding provided via those institutions, not public budgets. Two donor respondents noted that even within her own institution, smallholders and sustainability were seen as minor concerns, subordinate to supporting economic growth.

> *There is a sort of double discourse from the donors, all the blah about equity, sustainability, and then exactly at the same time [snaps fingers] graduate out of LDC, graduate [into] WTO, export, go on the market- it's a bit schizophrenic, and I'm sure partner countries sometimes are like 'What am I supposed to do now? Because I cannot do little things at local level and be on the international market at the same time'. I think that this is key, and I can see in my own organization's discussion, because I am defending sustainability, equity-equity for me is extremely important- environmental sustainability, some colleagues, who are more on the macro-econ stuff say, but 'you are a leftist hippy from the 70s and you don't understand anything, you are against progress and development, and against growth', and I'm saying 'no, I'm not, but maybe my vision is different, and maybe I look more at individuals and you're looking at big pictures.' The problem with big pictures is you don't have human beings anymore*. (**National Donor Programme Manager 2**)

With donors and international development institutions present the country with a primary focus on alleviating poverty, another donor respondent noted that biodiversity was perceived as a second tier consideration.

> *On biodiversity, I have some hope, but you'd be surprised. A few days ago my head [my boss], she said 'Why, why is biodiversity of interest to people with no income?' And I said because necessarily it's provided food security so far for centuries and centuries, it can mitigate the risk of losing everything. She is very much income, income. For her people are stupid [if they do not produce] the most productive variety- but of course if they lose it, they lose everything and they die*. (**National Donor Programme Manager 3**)

Smallholders were simultaneously perceived as both victims and beneficiaries of modernization. While commercialized agricultural opportunities were providing more options for salaried rural labour (and

hence, cash income), food sourcing strategies which relied on wild-sourced foods were being compromised. A UN Program Manager (1) noted that households were simultaneously involved in both commercialized and smallholder agriculture, with gendered impacts on different family members.

> *In our nutrition training we talk about using foods available in you in your natural environment to improve the quality of your diet. And [a] woman was telling me that she now has to walk two hours to get to the natural environment because there is a lot of logging that going on by Chinese companies. And that means they are not collecting as much NTFPs that they were able to sell, so there was a reduced income, her husband has to go out and get a job because they can't make ends meet. And I asked her what her husband was doing and she said 'oh, he's working for the logging company.' So the husband is logging the forest, making his wife walk two hours longer than she did before, so yeah, we hear stories like this all the time*. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

One NGO Program Manager (1) saw this as the point of entry for her organization, indicating that the food security work of NGOs was to create awareness of choices for households to decide for themselves.

> *Our program approach as a sort of cross-cutting foundation that addresses agriculture production and productivity in an aim to address food security issues in the country. That's the first, very straightforward issue. And of course this becomes an issue the more remote you get in our target areas. In terms of how we address it at the village level, it's really about providing options, so it's not so much about imposing a type of commodity or a type of production, but offering people options, so they can better adapt to the changing environment, as well as having more ownership over their livelihoods, be it at household level or at community level.* (**National NGO Program Manager 1**)

Despite the international development institutional interest in protection and preservation of smallholder livelihoods, respondents were doubtful than the ways in which they were engaging with smallholders was particularly effective or meaningful, but no better options were necessarily identified.

> *But I'm just thinking, food security now, with our project, what is our priority? We need to try to find something that works at community level and then duplicate it, and then try to make it available to everybody, a real scaling up approach, where the government will pick it up or organizations etc. And I don't feel like we got something like that in Laos. We're still talking about vegetable gardens, but not really…it's a kind of déjà vu. Things are already…something is wrong is what we're doing. I'm not saying there's anything wrong in vegetable gardens, but maybe the way we're doing it is not correct. I feel that we need a successful story that you can tell, and then it's easy to duplicate and replicate, even though given the number of ethnic groups, it's never going to be that easy because it's not vaccination, right? There is no vaccination for food security- it would be easier*. (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

As with the modernization narrative, respondents noted that a possible means to unify the policy thrusts of both narratives was through the commercialization of smallholder agriculture, focusing on high-quality niche products produced through non-input intensive means. The inference of this suggestion was not that economic growth or commercialization were necessarily negative, but that the focus should shift from quantity to quality, in which Lao PDR may have more market advantages.

> *We don't want a globalized system, we need just to counterbalance, countervailing power. […] I think it might be the way, like the Austrians or Switzerland, because here there is also a lot of upland. […] But maybe for the uplands it's an opportunity to produce small scale, high quality food that can be then exported to the cities, because people in the restaurants, they would love to buy the basil leaves, ginger, they would take everything lemongrass, they don't want to buy they want to have organic stuff for the restaurants, for the hospitals.* (**National NGO Program Manager 2**)

In considering this narrative, respondents noted that the notion of protecting the traditional cultures of ethnic peoples bore a particular emotive appeal, which they responded positively on a personal level. This emotional appeal masked some of the more complex aspects of the situation, as one respondent noted.

> *It's interesting how within the NGO, development community, there seems to be quite an enthusiasm for shifting agriculture, a sort of knee-jerk reaction to/against big modern development- 'why should the government try to eradicate shifting cultivation, it's totally authoritarian?' those arguments are valid, but hell, it [shifting cultivation] isn't a lot of fun. […]I think what I'm saying here is that there's a lot of argument over technical efficiency, over benefits to the country, over tradition vs. modernity, which overlook the choices that would be made, that can and should be made by rural people. The maize boom in southern Xayaburi [province] replaced shifting cultivation with a cash crop, which is going across the border to be turned into animal feed by the Thais. That wasn't imposed by the government, that wasn't the result of some big foreign investor being given concessions. That was the choice, at least at the start, of individual choices being made by thousands of farming households.* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

In identifying the non-stories in this narrative, it is worth noting that the geographic and ethnic orientation is on rural, upland, ethnic groups- the smallholder narrative does not address food security concerns for: urban populations, Lao *loum* populations (who form the majority), and populations in the plains and Mekong valley (areas more suited to commercialized agriculture as a result of infrastructure, access to regional markets or terrain). It tends to emphasize agricultural production, not allowing for a more diversified livelihood among rural communities, in which commercial and own-consumption related activities coexist and can mutually reinforce each other. This section closes with an appeal from one respondent for a more nuanced understanding of how rural populations are finding their own path to food security.

Shouldn't the next question be, if you only have food for six months, what do you do for the other six months? And again, it's this mentality of rice security/food security, food security/rice security. Meanwhile, I also make tens of millions of kip on my coffee every year, and I take that money and I buy my rice. And in the north, they are already thinking in that way, and they say, my kids are working in Luang Prabang, I've got my trees in my teak forest, I've got this, I've got that, I've got my cattle, and so I'm not afraid. It's a more sophisticated definition perhaps. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**)

Narrative 3: The Nutrition Narrative

Under an overarching nutrition framework- in which nutrition is defined as being not just about food- food security is presented as a contributing factor to nutritional outcomes alongside access to water, sanitation, education, the role of women and more. Accordingly, the third narrative identified in Lao PDR food security policy is the nutrition narrative. The CFS 2012 formulation of food *and* nutrition security (described as chapter 2) is endorsed, seen as vindication of the importance of nutrition as a policy issue at the global level, with one respondent stating '*I think there's a sweeping change going on now [globally], with the SUN initiative, with the focus on nutrition, I think we're witnessing a huge change in thinking on food security. And I like it*.'(**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**).

Addressing chronic malnutrition is presented as an outstanding obligation for improving Lao PDR's status in the world. On one hand, reducing undernutrition is a component of exiting LDC status, thus it is an issue for government attention: '*If you have a malnourished country, you're not going to graduate off the LDC list. So it's one of those entry points that no one can argue'*. (**National NGO Program Manager 1**). On the other, chronic malnutrition is included in the MDGs as a target of MDG1 and SDG2, making it a priority issue for development institutions.

The problem statement of this narrative pivots on a totemic indicator: some 40 percent chronic malnutrition among children under five in Lao PDR. While the precise data and 'actual' figure underlying this figure may be queried, and acknowledging a declining trend over time, the figure of 40 percent (or 37 percent, or 35 percent- never less than 30 percent) is presented as proof of the magnitude of the problem. The fact that this form of malnutrition is chronic (the result of consistently inadequate diet over time) is indicative of a structural inadequacies deserving of policy attention. This indicator is fundamental to this narrative, with one respondent saying, '*I think stunting's probably the best single indicator of the whole development sector. Because it includes education, women's empowerment is in there, all the gender issues, it's all there*.' (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

In the service of addressing this issue, extensive policy and institutional architecture has been put in place, including REACH (Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition), the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, and the Multisectoral Plan of Action (see Chapters 1&4). The blueprint for global best practice on this issue is clear, derived from the 13 priority interventions for nutrition presented the Lancet (2008) - the solution to malnutrition in Lao PDR is therefore a straightforward matter of applying those interventions in context and at scale, as soon as possible.

This narrative stands in contradiction to narrative 1, in which food security is presented as a simple matter of increased production. The nutrition narrative highlights that modernization and commercialization of agriculture is not resulting in improved nutritional outcomes, indirectly calling into question the validity of the core policy objective of narrative 1, promoting economic growth. Where narrative 1 sees food security as a knock-on effect of economic growth, narrative 3 sees nutrition as the result of direct, external interventions on nutrition-specific programmes as the path to improved nutritional outcomes.

Nutrition is positioned as more inclusive (in terms of scope and theme), more difficult, and more important than food security.

> *The primary work that we do, we say we work in nutrition, so the term 'food security' for us, we say food is a necessary, one of the necessary preconditions or elements to achieve a good nutritional status*. (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

This understanding of food security was expressed in multiple interviews with research respondents.

> *I'm sure you've seen the UNICEF conceptual model which has nutrition at the top, and then you have food intake, then disease, so basically that's the food and the health [points, draws]. Then you have the health, and the water, and the antenatal care services and somewhere in there you've got caring practices, and vitamins, they come in somewhere. So yeah, nutrition is much more about food from our perspective. Food security is useful talking about the food aspects of nutrition, but I think when you're coming from the agricultural background, it's quite normal to put the foods part first […] but from the nutrition perspective, nutrition is the end point- that's what we're working towards.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 2**)

For the respondent below, addressing malnutrition among children was so fundamentally the priority that all approaches needed to be oriented towards the service of that goal.

> *I think in a way, nutrition security, despite my hatred of the term, in a way, the UNICEF framework and what has been done with that, the REACH set of minimum interventions, in a way is an attempt to move away from a too rigid frame work of food security, and that there is a multidimensional*

element, and maybe we should throw out food security as a concept, and we should just start with nutrition security and just build it back from there. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**).

The process of emphasizing nutrition *over* food security had the effect of increasing the profile of other factors which also influence nutrition status, a line of thinking especially pertinent in a context such as Lao PDR's, in which food availability is perceived as not a major problem, and yet malnutrition persists.

> *It's really interesting. Now the whole issue they [nutritionists] are looking at is the whole importance of water, sanitation, in nutrition, its impact on nutrition. Its impact is much, much greater on nutrition than previous considered. So when we talk about, that's one element of the food security, you have to be able to absorb the food, and that one, very little recognition at all. So if you can, if you live in an environment filled with shit, and you eat the best food in the world, you will be malnourished. But that's not well recognized. So even, what we mean by food security, what we mean there- absorption of WASH, environment, huge, huge impact. Enormous, way more than even the earlier Lancet studies suggested. Very interesting.* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

Some respondents felt that there had been an overcorrection that policy emphasis was now too much on nutrition, and agricultural and economic factors were consequently given less attention than they required.

> *I see some agencies which were historically pushing for lowering the average price [of food], which is one of the main causes of low-incomes for farmers, which is one of the causes of their food insecurity. They don't like to discuss about that, let me tell you, including IFPRI, they are simply against to discuss about that. And they immediately shift to malnutrition, and they can show you a beautiful Powerpoint with all the vitamins lacking [i.e. deficiencies], the minerals, the nutrients, so you have, a class about physiology instead of what are the causes of all this poverty and food poverty, which is a lack of income of the people and the lack of possibility to [agriculturally] produce more, better.* (**National Donor Program Manager 3**)

One nutrition sector respondent noted that the drive to improve nutritional quality bore environmental risks which were discounted in the service of addressing malnutrition.

> *Even animal product consumption is not linked only to the nutrient aspects of consumption, but also the pressure it makes on agriculture, because you need to feed those animals, right? And some people say, I have sometimes discourse with social policy colleagues who say, because, you know, we always say 'the first two years of life make sure have iron rich food and when you can, animal products'. But then, if everybody starts doing that, you have more animals, more, you're going to create…and it's true, you have to think about that!* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**, ellipsis original)

Within Lao PDR itself, three key elements of the nutrition narrative were highlighted. First, despite a sense of urgency represented by the chronic malnutrition rate, the root causes and reasons for the persistence of chronic malnutrition were still described as not well understood, neither by government nor development institutions. For this respondent, the 'urgent' need to respond masked a lack of understanding of the issue which resulted in limited progress.

> *We really need to see where we need to intervene, where it's more urgent, because we don't have this feeling, we say okay malnutrition is very high, the rate is very high, and I think that it's very high, and I think that's something I still don't understand, how can we have the same rate of malnutrition as ten years ago? And this, it's something that policy can help but if you don't know what the issue is, I don't know how the policy can help you in that sense*. (**National UN Country Representative 3)**

Other respondents disagreed with this observation, noting an absence of urgency:

> *I'm not saying it's not a key priority, but it's less tangible. Because if you don't go to the villages, and if you don't understand what stunting means, sometimes people don't even see it, because it's not what you see in Africa. So I wonder, there's not that sense of emergency, that sense of we've got to get together, we've got to do something.* (**National UN Country Representative 3**).

Lack of progress on the issue is seen as indicative of a poor understanding of what the key factors are, and thus they are being left unaddressed.

> *I think here there is a lot of malnutrition but it's under the radar- maybe it's not so under the radar but it's much more difficult to get a grip on what the root causes are. Here, it seems to be very multidimensional*. (**National NGO Country Representative 1**).

Whatever the case, respondents concurred that progress was inadequate, too slow, and a sense of needing to 'do something' persisted.

Government understanding of the issue was seen to be limited or factually incorrect, and subject to intra-governmental competition for mandate, control and resources.

> *That's the problem in Laos: people say, 'okay stunting is no problem, because people are just short, and the body is just compensates, and for all people it's not a problem.' But if the whole population is stunted then it is a problem, it's a lack of food for the mothers and the children, and it's a lack of priorities, and that's why I think it's very much linked to a lack of education*. (**National NGO Program Manager 2**)

Another respondent concurred, stating: '*the Minister of Health got on that […] kick, and there's been a couple of high level, influential people who have been saying, this is an ethnic thing, it's genetics, it's not a matter of nutrition. We're just short*.' (**National UN Country Representative 1**)[66]

In an issue that will be explored in considerably greater detail in the section below on food security *as* narrative, some respondents saw the current high priority given to nutrition at the national level as a result of additional funding becoming available and trends in global development.

> *Nutrition has become, certainly the last five years I've been here in Laos, rather sexy. […] When I came in 2007, no policy, no talk of nutrition, to now where we have a policy, a strategy, a plan of action, more than a tripling of government budget to nutrition-related activities in the health sector, all of these things happened, so there has been this move to make nutrition the face of nutrition and food security, also vis a vis the global movements like SUN, REACH and everything*. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

One respondent noted that similar to food security, the expanding inclusiveness of nutrition left it open to being diluted past the point of utility.

> *I like the nutrition, nutritionally specific indicators and nutrition-sensitive [approach]…but getting back to the point, I think that almost anything can be then tied to nutrition, which kind of waters it down. It kind of waters it down but on the other hand, it also gets back to this being the trend, and everybody and their brother wanting to jump on it because they think there's funding involved.* (National UN Country Representative 1)

In terms of specific policy instruments applied to nutrition, there was general agreement that as laudable as the overall multisectoral approach might be, the overall complexity of the 2010-2015 Strategy and Plan of Action (described in Chapter 1) rendered it difficult, if not impossible, to implement, and was as a result informally abandoned.

> *When we were developing the nutrition strategy, the process was largely driven by MoH because it was very health focused. It's quite health focused because a large part of the strategy just takes into account short-term nutrition interventions. Agriculture-related [like] improving productivity, diversifying crops, things like that that are more nutrition-sensitive interventions that were not really looked at. We made a plan and then […], it became dormant because people could not implement the plan- maybe the plan was too ambitious to be implemented? Or, the plan was ambitious but it did not come with the corresponding fundraising and advocacy strategy, donor strategy, somehow, you know? You really didn't know what to do with that document*. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

[66] See footnote 45, for Deaton and Drèze's (2009) Genetic Determinants hypothesis.

Despite the emphatically multisectoral focus of this Plan of Action, due to shortcomings in the preparation process, cross-government commitment was limited.

> *People are familiar with the National Plan of Action for Nutrition, which has 99 actions [laughs], recommended action, cross sectoral, 44 have been, and are, considered priorities. Yeah, it's really impossible, it cuts across sectors, but I mean there were problems with it right from the start, because it has to be cross sectoral, so it's got…I'm sure agriculture's in here…but it's signed off by the Ministry of Health, so already there's a big disconnect. And the Ministry of Agriculture told me that it was just developed by some consultants, and they don't feel any ownership at all. Although they're not opposed to the Ministry of Health coordinating, if they're given that mandate, but no ownership at all.* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

And as the quote below illustrates, nutrition may be seen as overarching compared to food security, but still competes for resources against other priorities within public health: nutrition may be a priority for nutritionists, but that did not necessarily make it one at ministerial level.

> *Trying to get an increased allocation of resources to nutrition is very challenging because the government is saying, 'but we need to achieve 90 percent immunization coverage' so do we have to move from here? And maternal mortality is the worst in the region, do we need to take it to emergency obstetric and newborn care? So, and people are fighting for, we want to put more money here. And we need to pay for the cost of the treatment for the poor. So in the end, when you're trying to get your money for nutrition, it's always competing for resources between competing priorities*. (**National UN Technical Advisor 2**)

The non-story in this narrative is any consideration of how it is that those populations which are *not* malnourished (some 60 percent of the population) came to be so. Also exempt from this narrative discourse (but not from the observations of respondents, as will be discussed in Chapter 7) are issues around obesity and overweight: malnutrition in this case is deprivation and inadequate consumption of diets of appropriate quality and quantity. Excess consumption is not routinely considered in this narrative.

Narrative 4: Food Security as Development

The fourth narrative identified was one in which food security was seen as both representative of, and indivisible from, global development discourse. In this narrative, respondents suggested that the strengths and weaknesses of the development sector itself were embedded within food security policy discourse: where development policy efforts were working, food security was also working, and where such efforts were misfiring, food security policy was also misfiring.

Because of its multidisciplinary, multisectoral approach involving many stakeholders, food security was seen as a testing ground for development discourse as a whole. It was perpetually contested because the successes in one arena (such as overall agricultural production) would be offset by shortcomings in another (such as high rates of chronic malnutrition): progress on food security could only be meaningful if there was progress in multiple sectors simultaneously, which in turn would only be possible if development efforts were coherent across the board.

In elaborating this narrative, respondents generally took a pessimistic view: food security's failings were examples of the shortcomings of development overall. One respondent that food security was only considered a policy issue when higher level policies has not delivered.

> *To me, food security didn't fail, it's development in general that's failed. So, you know, why can't we produce enough food for a local population? Is that a food security question or that a development question? Is it a science question? To me, I would think, I really like this movement towards governance, because technically, scientifically, we can feed the world easily. So it's not an issue of technology, it's an issue of political will, of political commitment.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

Another respondent noted that development's shortcomings were indicative of systemic failings at the global level.

> *If [NGOs] are saying that food security is not working, they're missing the context- you have to look much beyond. It's a bigger question for development! A bigger question is why has development failed in the last 60 years? Why is there widening disparities? Why has the US failed? […] So the question really, is, how has development failed over the last 60 years, and I would say that it's missed out on looking at the inner values. That part of humans that's totally overlooked- we've made everything materialistic, we've missed out on the driving force for the majority of humanity.* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

Most cynically, one respondent suggested that the problems food security aims to address were perpetuated, to give supporting institutions a reason to exist. Another suggested that creating highly complex conceptual frameworks and institutional arrangements was a hallmark of the development sector, with the same ultimate intention, of providing such institutions with a *raison d'etre*, ensuring that those institutions retained control of the discourse.

> *A cause of malnutrition is the needs of the development industry to do something useful, or more cynically, to keep themselves employed. We need problems. In the same way that the food industry, in the same way that IRRI and the pesticide industry, they need that problem of increasing population to attract funding and keep themselves busy. NGOs, WFP, UNICEF, FAO, they need*

problems in order to justify their existence, attract funds and keep them all going. (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

Similarly, another respondent saw the presentation of food security as a conceptually complex issue as a means to provide cover for a lack of more tangible progress.

> *I think you have the same [for food security] as you do with poverty alleviation. We make it very complex, partly because we can hide behind the complexity, in terms of not being able to show some success. 'We are working in a complex institutional environment' and then blah blah blah. And in the end that's where we're stuck.* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

Respondents noted that food security as a policy framework was competing for attention (and losing) against other development sector frameworks, notably poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods. The application of differing frameworks led to competition because, at the level of programming- that is, deciding what actions to take- no matter what framework was applied, the actions to be taken were ultimately the same. Even so, the selection of one policy framework or another mattered because it dictated institutional control. It is worth quoting one respondent at length on this point.

> *I tend to draw overlapping concentric circles to show that no matter what your development objective is, whether it's economic growth, poverty reduction, rural development, food security, or sustainable livelihoods, many of which are cross-sectoral development objectives, many of which are encouraged from outside, for countries to take on those objectives, when it comes to action that needs to be taken or investments that need to be made, they're often the same, across the various multidisciplinary approaches.[…] In [Asian nation], we had a national strategy on food security and nutrition, it got always overshadowed by the need for the country to produce a PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Program] and the emphasis on poverty reduction, and the overall food security and nutrition debate was marginalized by the poverty debate. In countries where we're successful, we've managed to overcome these institutional jealousies if you want, or it's not always jealousies, it's ignorance, people don't realize: they're bringing in a new initiative with great enthusiasm, and they don't realize they're derailing ongoing processes, or making it difficult to subscribe to two or three processes at the same time. They might have been very well thought out internationally, but when you take them to the country level, they might cause policy conflict, in terms of should the country follow a poverty reduction strategy, or a food security strategy or a nutrition strategy, or a food and nutrition security strategy. What's the difference?* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

Three solutions were presented as the means to improved food security policy: Coordination and governance, reconciling technical vs. political concerns, and issues in data management. In this case, 'coordination' tended to refer to relations and institutional arrangements between development institutions, sometimes (but not always) including government ministries. This solution was premised on

the assumption that: all the available resources and requirements to address food security existed, and if coordinated properly, would generate coherent policy, tangible progress and lasting change. Concerns about coordination coalesced around a lack of leadership, a lack of common understanding or consensus, and the value-addition of coordination efforts.

What coordination arrangements existed were described as inadequate. A leadership role for the UN was assumed by all respondents irrespective of institutional affiliation, but this was widely agreed to be lacking, an impression shared by UN respondents themselves.

> *I think that the UN have a mandate to support the government on key agriculture, food security, nutrition policy, strategy, etcetera. So yes, they should take the lead- and if they were to take the lead, really, and intelligently and with a bit of vision, I suppose DPs [development partners] would follow and support, but it's a bit of a vicious Catch 22: you don't perform, so you are not paid, so you perform even less, so you are even less paid. But I don't see any donors ready to give 50 million to anyone in the UN here to build up capacity. Which is I think a problem, because the UN has the mandate.* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

Another respondent concluded, '*I guess we all looked to the UN for that leadership, which was a mistake*' (**National NGO Country Director 1**). A regional respondent noted that this lack of coordination was not new or unique to Lao PDR or Southeast Asia, but had precedents over two decades of poorly coordinated nutrition responses at global and national levels (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**).

Coordination between partners was counterpoised with institutional competition, whereby institutions expected to coordinate amongst themselves were often simultaneously competing (or perceived themselves to be competing) for the same funding and visibility. Coordination in and of itself was seen as something undertaken more because it was *de rigueur*, rather than because it added value.

> *The other thing that happened to some UN agencies and certainly happened to us was the amount of human resources you had, and you had our own programs to implement, and then coordinating anything talks a lot of time here, due to the number of levels of approvals required, how many partners are involved, so it involves a lot of human hours, a lot of investment. At some point in time I think we all became a little bit inward looking, and we said, should we just push forward with the things we have in our approved programs and projects, rather than just thinking about the bigger picture*. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

Coordination was viewed as an additional set of tasks which were above and beyond individual's own workloads, with uncertain outcomes and benefits for participating individuals and institutions- all of which functioned as disincentive to engage.

> *Sometimes, when I feel tired with trying to coordinate, I feel, why don't I do it by myself, but at the end you get stuck, you don't know which one to go for. If you don't do your work, you don't produce anything. But if you do your work, others also do similar work, and we compete with each other. And when we try to work together, we cannot reach agreement.* (**Regional REC/IFI Technical Advisor 1**)

Other respondents saw the lack of coordination as a mirroring of similarly disconnected institutional arrangements in government. The result of this was that food security remained something of an institutional orphan, or perceived as being in competition with other sectors or targets.

> *When you look at food security interventions, or nutrition if you want to put everything together, we are missing an institutional home to make sure there is coordination, because there is not coordination. And you have MAF in one corner, MoH in the other, Industry and Commerce, Education, and I can continue […] It's up to the government to say what they want, we are just here to support you. But we cannot work in completely separately, where MAF does their strategy, the MoH does another strategy on nutrition or whatever. There was this Nutrition Policy which was the main outcome of REACH, with an Action Plan to 2015. I actually thought it was a good starting point, because the priorities- maybe too many priorities, I think they had 41 priorities! [laughs]- But at least there were objectives, institutions, government agencies' responsibilities and so on. And from there, I don't feel like something really happened. It's kind of blocked there*. (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

A second solution within the narrative was the reconciliation of technical vs. political concerns. This refers to the perceived disparity between the highly detailed, data-heavy technocratic approach undertaken by sector-level experts in various disciplines, and the exigencies of 'political' concerns about food security. Political, in this context, refer to senior-level state politicians at national level (and to a lesser extent, state participation in senior regional governance fora), and suggests a level of policy discourse insulated from 'technical' detail, subject to national-level considerations to do with the national priorities of the state. 'Politically' defined food security was seen as being largely defined by government, attuned to the potential for crisis, and focused on availability, self- sufficiency, and rice production.

This is pertinent to the 'food security *as* development' narrative because it suggests that food security policy is subject not only to the interpretation of food security policy provided by global normative approaches, but is simultaneously subject to nationally-specific policy priorities defined by the sitting national government. International development institutions must therefore navigate between these two sets of priorities. In this duality, global development is presented as technical and apolitical, versus the political interests of national government counterparts.

> *When governments talk about food security, it's a 100% political issue. Look at Bangladesh and being 100% rice self-sufficient. It's like a religion, becoming rice self-sufficient. Forget crop diversification, forget having a balanced diet available, let alone accessible. Forget that, because if you make the country rice self-sufficient, and they've done remarkably well since independence, then that's the biggest political issue out there*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Political food security policy was seen as a result of: a lack of political interest in technical details, cherry picking data which fit the preferred political outcome, and as a form of policy cover, as described in Chapter 2 and 3.

> *[In ASEAN], when [food security] policy is released to the general public, food security is used as a, a very generic kid of policy objective. It's not really interested in food security. Basically you can say anything about food, then link to food security, which to me is not a sensible policy, because eventually you want to see how each of the policies established by the government correspond to various dimensions of food security and really there is some positive response on the ground, right? But we do not see this link. We see only the very vague kind of policy statements, which say that things are properly taken care of. That means that because they see food security as a political issue, and it should be part and parcel of political agenda. But that's it. That's why when I see a number of country policies addressing food security, they either provide it as part of…sorry if I make something very radical here- as part of budget justification, as justification for budget appropriation, or as part of so-called 'decorative item' to the national policy*. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

Most interestingly, one respondent put this political valuation of food security down to a lack of trust in market forces, based on the financial crisis of 2007-2009[67]:

> *[Regional governments] certainly see this as not a technical issue, they see this as a socio-political issue. Socio-political issues means, that technical grounds is not only the basis for making the decision. In terms of conducive food markets and trade, because ASEAN was put to the test by the situation of 2007-8, which raised the concern of raising self-sufficiency ration of food. Why? Because even if you have the money, if something happens, trade or export may be blocked. People don't trust trade to help you address food security*. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

One respondent saw this split between technical vs. political food security reflected in global development discourse in the use of emotive language, especially the word 'hunger', to garner public attention in global

[67] This analysis is of a piece with Timmer (2010b), quoting the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2010 as saying 'The unprecedented food crisis of 2007-2008 has compelled the entire world to attach high priority to food security. Particularly it has proven the international market as an unreliable source of food at times of crisis and reminded us the need to exploit whatever comparative advantage we have in food production. In Bangladesh, the crisis has signaled a policy shift from self-reliance to self-sufficiency.'

contexts. In this analysis, 'hunger' is the political, emotive term, and food security is the technically precise definition.

> *There's a whole debate ongoing as to should we not call a spade a spade and talk about hunger, such as the Zero Hunger [Challenge] of the [UN] Secretary General- which is an emotional term. If you look at the Challenge itself, it has five broad areas of work, from stunting to agricultural productivity to food waste- the five pillars of the Zero Hunger Challenge have little to do with hunger per se, but are more about broad based food and nutrition security. So people saying should we not use the correct term, should we not stop using the emotional term hunger, and rather use food security or food and nutrition security, because that is conceptually correct. So there you get the political dimension again.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

Striking also in respondents' consideration of political vs. technical food security policy discourse was the recognition that this did not necessarily present an either/or option, but that realistically, both usages of the term 'food security' in policy would continue to overlap, especially in national (and regional) policy contexts. This was summarized by the respondent quoted at length below, in a synopsis which proposes allowing global approaches to coexist with national policy which sets its own priorities. This quote serves as useful description of the challenges faced by development institutions in parsing the policy demands at national and global level.

> *I would say [food security], it's not just a technical issue until it's a political issue, but it's also a technical issue until it becomes, and you can say it's also political but not really, also an institutional issue. Because […] there is a distinction, even a divide at times, between the way countries or national governments see food security and the way its framed from a normative point of view simply because it's easy to come up with a nice normative concept, and food security is indeed a nice concept, but how to apply in practice is a whole different story. So countries will have to deal with, yes I would say largely political pressures, but also they simply have to be realistic about how the normative concept can be practically applied, and that's when you do often find the divide- […] Because it's a complex concept, you have to continuously remind people of the complex nature of the concept for them to also work along those lines. So yes, there definitely is a difference between the normative concept and the practical application of it at country level, and it's certainly a challenge no matter where you go.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

The third solution coalesces around the perceived absence of data, and/or the selective interpretation of existing data. This links to the development discourse as a whole because reporting on global initiatives such as the MDGs is a process largely brokered and funded by the United Nations and donor agencies[68].

[68] In principle, one of the major changes introduced by the SDGs has been that states, rather than the UN, are responsible for their own reporting against SDG targets. However, with the bulk of the 169 standard indicators

Data may be 'owned' by national statistical institutions, but as mentioned in chapter 4, data are interpreted by international institutions and compared against indices of global progress. Data collection and analysis was not seen as values-neutral, but contingent on institutional interest and mandate. Both the choice of indicator and what it means were seen as carrying institutional freight, with particular indicators seen as specifically 'belonging' to one institution or another.

Respondents consistently highlighted the disconnect between what data was collected, and how it was linked to food security (or nutrition) policy. These debates were not viewed as be specific or particular to Lao PDR, but was rather reflective of weak data systems, especially within the UN. One regional UN respondent described the state of affair as '*I think collectively I think we've been pretty abysmal at measurement, and it's probably the case for all agencies'*, later adding

> *You find what you're looking for. It's like South Korean research institutes interviewing North Korean defectors. They'll ask them the questions they want to hear the answers to, and they'll ask the question in a certain way which gets them the answer that they wanted to hear in the first place*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Expanding on this theme, other respondents noted:

> *I think reporting on progress is related to who is collecting the information to report because if you look at. There's a lot of things to be reported on [which are] project-specific. I'm sure if you asked [UN Agency] what they're doing in XYZ areas they will rattle off 20 indicators that they have measured and with the befores and afters are. Similar to us- ask me anything to do with [province], I can tell you that. But I think there is no sort of central body that's collating this data and looking at it in context*. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

Resonant with issues raised in the section on measurement in Chapter 2, respondents felt that the core indicators applied to food security, notably stunting and kilocalorie consumption, were not representative of underlying issues, and especially in the case of stunting, were used to suggest correlation or causality when none could be reliably confirmed.

> *You have those nice food security indicators, and data on all of the supply side, kilocaloric data and blah blah blah. And then you have also all the nutrition indicators and we have included hygiene and sanitation indicators- it has to be looked at together as a whole. Yes, it makes it cumbersome when you try to define food security but…let me rephrase that- you would still remain with some of the key food security indicators, but I think in the interpretation one has to be*

tabled by UN, it seems virtually certain that there the UN will play a central role in reporting against the targets. The first test of this will come in 2020, when the first midterm SDG reports are due.

cautious and ask always look at the other indicators in order to make a conclusion and this should be looked at together. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**)

One respondent noted that while food security was a component for nutrition, using nutrition indicators to 'prove' food security did not necessarily follow: stunting could persist in areas which were food surplus (such as the Mekong Delta- see chapter 4), or conversely, nutritional performance could be better than expected in food insecure areas.

If you're using nutrition as the indicator for food security you're shooting yourself in the foot because there's much more involved that's not about food, even in situations where you have, even when they are very food secure, pregnant women still need vitamins. People still need iodized salt. Okay, we're back to food again, but okay, you know, vitamins in pregnancy, folic acid in pregnancy to prevent defects, prevention of illness, clean water, all of these things […] So maybe you need better indicators. Or different indicators. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 2**)

Another respondent evoked the moral hazard involved in measurement (a point noted by the US National Academies 2012), suggesting that because institutions had a vested interest in data which made their programming look effective, the only trustworthy data could be derived from third parties.

I think we went for years thinking we had to do these things in-house. I can tell you where we are now in Asia for this, and it's certainly outsourcing it to someone who's qualified to so it. […] So we're now trying to contact an external party, it could be CDC, it could be someone else- to really monitor very well the outcome of a stunting program run by [UN Agency] and others. And it's been interesting discussing it, because I think that everyone is now is in full agreement […] that it should never be done by [us]. Even if we had the skills to really do it- and I think that very few people do- even if we had the skills to do, it, no results coming out of [this agency] which makes the case for food-based nutrition as a tool for stunting prevention, no result coming with a [UN agency] logo would be that credible. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

In closing this section, one final quote from a respondent who acknowledged that the importance of evidence might be overstated, situating evidence and data is a wider range of factors which impact and influence policy.

There are many interventions which have a strong evidence base at work. But it depends on what kind of evidence. If you look at effectiveness, or ability to address to stunting, that's the evidence base for most of them. Now, in terms of value for money, cost-benefit, there are some interventions which are much more effective than the others, but donors who give money, they don't know that necessarily. So really it depends on more than just evidence- I mean, people don't base their decisions on evidence only, but on so many more other factors. Evidence is number 24 on the list of things which matter for decision making- there was a study on that, by the way- and particularly in Asia. (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

What distinguishes this narrative from those that come before it is its insularity: where narratives 1-3 make reference to external events or changes as a result from macroeconomic, political, social and environmental change at the national and regional level, this narrative emphasizes the role development sector itself in national food security policymaking. The role of the private sector, or market forces (positive or negative) more generally on food security, are not considered. Equally, individual, household or community level issues are not included.

Summary

This chapter has identified three narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR, and one narrative in which food security is seen as representative of and contingent upon broader trends in development discourse as a whole. These narratives are seen not to exist in isolation, but are interlinked and coexist, both in policy documents and in the perceptions of research participants. The overall conceptual framework of food security is thus shown to be capable of supporting multiple competing policy claims simultaneously. However, as research respondents pointed out, this plasticity may result in stasis or limited progress towards policy goals, as debates over competing definitions displace momentum on collaborative action. Across all narratives, food security is seen as multidisciplinary, involving multiple domains of knowledge in the discourse, generally referred to as 'expertise'. In the next chapter, the results of the research inquiry in the role and form of expertise in shaping food security discourse will be presented (RQ6a), as will the role in international institutions that provide such expertise (RQ 6b).

Chapter 6: The Role of Expertise and International Institutions in defining the discourse

Research Question 3a: What is the role of expertise in developing food security policy discourse?

Recalling the role of expertise in policy discourse presented in Chapter 3, and Torgerson's (2003) characterization of policy discourse as 'typically project[ing] itself as being for experts alone, a narrowly bounded and technocratic enterprise', the next set of findings presented in this thesis seeks to present what constitutes expertise, how it is defined, the influence and points of entry for expertise in the policy discourse, and who is excluded from the discourse as non-expert (or put another way, what scope exists for non-experts' voices to be included in the policy process). Institutions considered in the research context are international development institutions representing donor country governments, the United Nations, NGOs, regional governance bodies, and international finance institutions, which, taken together, operate in support of application of normative global development issues at the national and regional level in developing countries.

The first part of the chapter sets out findings pertaining to expertise considered at the individual level, and the second part then considered the role of international institutions in facilitating that expertise. A final section considers the regionally unique role of ASEAN in the policy discourse.

'Expert? What's an Expert?' Revisited

When asked to consider the role of expertise in food security, respondents described 'expertise' is something of a misnomer. In multiple interviews, respondents questioned whether such a thing existed, denied that such a label would apply to themselves, and professed themselves unable to think of anyone who fit the description; other than, in a few instances, the researcher himself. Statements to that effect included '*I'm far from being an expert. You are, but I'm not*.' (**National UN Country Representative 3**), '*I mean, this topic, it's so…it's obvious you thought about it much more than I have. It's a topic that so complex…*' (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**) and '*Do we have experts in food security, per se? Other than you*.' (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**). Based on her own experience, one respondent described expertise in food security as overblown, when all that was really required was common sense.

> *I started in 1995 or 96, I don't know…I started with [an NGO], and I started as a logistician and when [the NGO] created the food security unit or whatever name it was, I was asked to join. So I had absolutely nothing to do with food security, but the person who created this unit, gave me some books to read, briefed me for two hours, then said 'now you go to Sierra Leone and you use your common sense. Because it's just common sense'*. (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

One respondent suggested that in her experience, the complexity of the various topics to be considered under food security engendered humility, and that anyone who willingly described themselves as a food security expert had likely not considered all the potential issues, and thus would not engender confidence.

> *[You] have very young, inexperienced people who present themselves as food security experts, and as soon as you talk to then, they do not have a clue what they are talking about, yet they are food security experts. They are hired as food security consultants, they work for an NGO, and they're 25 years old working for an NGO as a food security officer. And that's what they think they are, the food security officer. So yeah, I think it's probably more […] the mature, seasoned professionals, who know, who understand that food security is not, you know… […] In the early 90s I was a food security consultant before they even used that term, so my career has developed with that title and that phrase, then in the early 2000s I would hear people describe themselves as food security experts and you would think 'Oh? What have you done?', and you know, it's a different thing. So you know, I don't have any answers, I look back on my career and think what difference have I made to food security in the world. Maybe little bits, here and there.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

One respondent noted that as conceptual models of food security increased in complexity, the more expertise in food security became more abstract and less grounded in policy context. Expertise had become a headquarters-level function, of limited consequence or utility at the national level.

> *The more complicated something becomes, the less likely you're going to be able to implement it to any effect, so your question of who is a food security expert and how do they attain that, I'm not really sure. We've got some food security experts in [UN Agency] obviously. Most of them stay in headquarters*. (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

Specific vs. General Expertise

Expertise in food security was posited not as a bounded, well-defined topic as such, but was rather seen as an *ad hoc* amalgam of technical specialization in a number of interrelated fields. Mirroring the 'technical vs. political' narrative thread outlined in Chapter Five under Narrative 4, 'technical', in this context, was taken to mean a set of specialized knowledge, methods and approaches within a particular domain (such as nutrition, agriculture, public health, water/sanitation and so on), for which an individual

would have, as a result of professional experience, academic qualification or both, very high levels of proficiency.

Technical specialization in a given field was seen to indicate affiliation, such that individuals would be expected to prioritize their sectoral interests above others; for instance, a nutrition expert would be expected to promote nutrition interventions. While such technical specialization might contribute to food security policy overall, it did not necessarily follow that such specialists were themselves well-versed in or well-suited to having a comprehensive perspective on food security.

> *If you want an expert on NTFPs, it is [name]. You want an expert in nutrition education, it's [name]. You want and expert in agricultural development, it's [name]. You can go through the list. You want an expert in rice production, it's x, you want an expert in artisanal fisheries, it's y. Having somebody who's an expert in food security, I'm not sure be able to say there is one.* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

Food security policy discourse was contingent on a wide range of inputs from experts in different sectors, but those same experts did not necessarily express a *quid pro quo* interest on food security as such. Control and reinforcement of an expert's professional domain was seen as a higher priority than cross sectoral collaboration with other domains.

> *From my experience I see that it seems to encompass a lot of different directions or types of expertise. You have your sort of people who seem to be more economists, and then people who are more focusing on the policy and the more macro level sort of indicators then you have the nutritionists, then you have the people who are more interested in direct programs and so…of course the term itself is quite broad, and I don't know if historically there was a direction to merge all those issues under one umbrella but it seems that they are all really can be often disjointed and maybe working towards in principle related but sometimes very different goals and objectives- are we talking about a nation's economy? Are we talking about the wellbeing of children and women? Are we talking about industry? There's just so many facets to food security.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 2**)

Expertise= Coordination

Taken therefore as the sum total of a combination of different technical interests at the sector level, expertise was presented as only as valuable as its ability to communicate and collaborate across different sectors.

> *This complex, intersectoral thing [food security], it has to be implemented sectorally. But you have to engage the right parts of the sector and make sure they are resourced, either from domestic or*

> *external funds. And it's very difficult to get expertise in one or two or three people, particularly for cross sectoral issues. And I think this is the factor of success, having a good external team who understand who work well with each other, and who are ready to compromise, that can link to an appropriate national team across the sectors and is able to engage with them.* (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

One respondent observed that sectoral level policy discussion tended to be more common and frequent than cross sectoral discussion, even though this was exactly what was needed.

> *I guess I don't have a good sense for the conversations between the different camps within food security. I don't have a good sense if the people who are really interested in metric tonnes, what are the conversations that they have with the people who are interested in nutrition education, what are those conversations look like, and what are the usual kinds of areas where directions merge or people disagree, or issues which are problematic or less problematic, are there actually any conflicts between someone who is trying to grow more, and people who are saying we don't need more, we need better? Coming from the nutrition perspective, I don't see a lot of the interaction with people involved in the broader issues of production and how this relates to national economy and trade.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 2**)

In this context, expertise in food security was posited as: the ability to bring together technical specialist expertise in relevant sectors, what one respondent characterized as 'the 90 percent'- the other ten percent being the coordinative turn, and hence food security expertise itself.

> *90 percent of those people should be subject matter specialists but you still need the 10 percent to pull it together into a meaningful thing, otherwise it's going to be piecemeal, not connected. And we know that coordination, that food security coordination mechanisms, it's very difficult. […] I think we do need people who can bring it together like you and me, there's definitely an important role for us, but I don't think we can create a food security policy without the agriculturalists, the nutritionist and the like.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

In this assessment, coordination across and between these sectors would be the process through which a holistic food security understanding would result. In order to do this, experts would be required to act as advocates for global conceptual approaches to food security (per the 1996 WFS definition or similar), countermanding narrower local interpretations of the term. Food security *expertise* therefore, could be seen to be the ability to bring different sectors and interests together. However, without the engagement of the 90 percent, there would then be nothing to coordinate, so both aspects would be required in order to have a functioning system of expertise.

In a loop of feedback, one respondent noted that a lack of coordination cheapened the value and utility of expertise overall, and noted that whatever expertise is applied, the process of transferring this expertise to national counterparts is still wanting.

> *I think we don't really get anything from […] expertise. Because of lack of coordination and competing with each other. Like I said, you may be very good, you bring your expertise, you bring your model, that agency that is also expert on this also brings their model, and tries to introduce and build capacity of the government to use that model. But in the end, the country still don't [sic] have the system*. (**Regional REC/IFI Technical Advisor 1**)

Expertise vs. bureaucracy

Respondents pointed out that individuals with technical skills and qualifications- including themselves- are frequently employed in positions with managerial or bureaucratic responsibilities distinct from their technical specialization. In some instances, the technical expertise individuals are able to bring to bear is subject to management-side concerns (including human resources, organizational planning and budgetary issues) which dilute or impede their individual and collective ability to deliver technical guidance. Whether as a result of the competing demands on their own time, or demands imposed on them by others from their own organization, government or other institutions, 'management' was seen as being at odds with technical expertise. This was seen as to the detriment of the quality of expertise offered.

> *I wish I had more time to do this kind of work [research] in general. Because sometimes as a development worker I think we get too lost in bureaucracy and we tend to have less time to really think about issues*. (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

An NGO Country Representative noted that irrespective of the expertise on offer, decision making authority rested with generalist management staff.

> *I think possibly there's…we haven't invested in getting a decent technical person to come in. CARE did, I think for two weeks, three weeks, and then they do the analysis and it's left to the generalist management to make the decisions. We actually need to invest in getting these people in.* (**National NGO Country Representative 1**)

One respondent recounted a recent experience in which she was given inadequate guidance from her own headquarters, illustrating the gap between institutional mandate and the 'expert' support available at the national level. This indicates how food security policy discourse remains subject to national-level interpretation of normative issues which are beyond dispute at the global level.

> *You know the most recent one, the French Ambassador, we took him out to the field, […] so his theory is, [chronic malnutrition in Lao PDR], it's ethnic: some people are taller and shorter. […] And I'm thinking, well how do I tell him different, except for, 'the experts say', and I believe the experts. You've got thousands upon thousands of nutritionists, and anthropometric PhD students or whatever who have studied all this stuff, and I don't know the details but I believe that, and that would be my only rebuttal. So when I went to [a conference in] Brighton, I said look, this is an issue, and there were two or three others who said the same thing, asking, how do we rebut this? And to be frank, it went around- our experts couldn't really pin it down for us. Our head nutritionist, I pulled him aside, and I said, you're talking in circles! All you did out there was just confuse us about that issue. And that's not what we need, we're coming up here to get trained up to be advocates, and all you've done is muddy the water.* (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

Legitimating International Expertise

In terms of the role of expertise in Lao PDR itself, responses coalesced around the very low human resource base of the country itself, which resulted in a situation whereby if expertise was required, it would need to be brought in.

> *I was talking with my colleague, and I was asking, if you consider universities, if you consider MAF, if you consider NAFRI, how many people can you consider food security specialists? Someone who could participate in these conversations? There is no one.* (**National Donor Program Manager 3**)

This underscored one of the issues experts noted in the national context- translating global normative approaches to food security and its constituent technical sectors required a degree of expertise that was not present or available among national counterparts. This was seen as partly as a result of a low human resource base among Lao citizens, and partly due to the specificity of the expertise required. As a consequence, experts were not only advising, but responsible for introducing and directly managing the application and use of normative global frameworks, such as the Zero Hunger Challenge or the SUN Movement.

> *Oh it's such a complex issue. One of the things that I think we need to consider, whenever developing these complex, multisectoral approaches is that developing countries have very weak governance capacities within the government. By creating this very complex management structures is not going to solve the issue because simply, they cannot, they cannot do them.* (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

In this operating context, experts were effectively given the operating space to decide what national and subnational policy demands were, based on their own opinions and institutional mandate, rather than any locally derived inputs.

For a project like us, we're supposed to be demand driven, but when there's no demand- well of course not no demand, because of course they say 'yes, yes we want your project, and we want your funding and we want your activities', but when there's no, when they're not identifying the priorities, or when they're not providing the necessary support and structure to actually implement the activities- because one thing is saying 'we'd like this', and the other is providing us with what we need to be successful, because if it's not going to be successful we don't want to waste time and money. So then at some point, it's a question of, do we wait for the country to decide what they want, or do we decide what the country wants. And I'd say that this project we have is a combination of both. (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

The influence of consultants

With Lao PDR seen as being a comparatively small operating context, respondents raised concerns about the overall influence of what one respondent called 'a clique of consultants', reflecting the reality that with a limited number of individuals with the relevant skills and experience to work at policy level in Lao PDR, a substantial proportion of policy documents were written in whole or in part by the same individuals.

And also when we get to nutrition packages, I have the one from [UN organization] there on my desk- I'm trying to understand a bit better even though I'm not an expert, I'm not a nutritionist at all, but you feel there is a kind of competition sometimes, right? There is [a different nutrition strategy], there is other one I don't know what it's called, and you end up wondering what's the difference, at the end of the day? It seems like almost the same consultant working for both, making slightly different recommendations. It doesn't really look like this is really helping the cause. Because again, we, you are developing packages that all, like a supermarket technique- you have this package, [that] package… So this machine of […] just more consultants, very complicated, and at the end of the day, we are not resolving any problems. (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

In the quote below, consultants are perceived as being more about building their own reputations than servicing the needs of the client institution.

What I discovered in that is, it's not enough to have your expertise, you've got to have your brand to go with it, you've got to be an expert in a particular approach or methodology, and [individual] was unwittingly, I believe, developing a brand. She had an online group. They had the ToT. They had the package. They had the certification, the materials were there. And it was, she was not only becoming an expert, not only she made herself an expert on food and nutrition in Laos, she established a brand which could be picked up so that projects could fund it. (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

Institutions themselves may not be prepared to critique consultant's work, leaving their recommendations unchecked.

> *Critically for Laos, and this is a clear problem, and I know some of them, and I love some of them, but you have this clique of consultants, who are self-declared experts on absolutely everything, […] and you're like, 'Guys, where are you coming from?' And then, there is a problem, because the institutions are not able to question what they are seeing- 'that's just crap, what you are just saying.' […] I have lots of respect for consultants, I have been a consultant myself, but I think if you are consultant, so you are to be consulted by institution who know where they want to go, and who have the intelligence or maturity to accept to be questioned or challenged from time to time*. (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

Expertise as Elitism

Respondents were also conscious of their implicit and explicit affiliation with national and global elites, manifested most clearly in the affluent lifestyles they displayed, versus the lack of time they spent in the ostensible focus of their expertise, notably poor or food insecure rural communities.

> *We may tend to forget about the simple concept, which is that at the end of the day, these people are going to bed hungry. And most of the time, most of these experts have never been to any village. Or maybe when they were 20, but then they never went back.* (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

Expertise was thus presented with a kind of clinical detachment, and that this lack of personal connection neutered the value of the expertise on offer.

> *I mean, all of us spend in a day what a family of 10 in Phongsaly [province] spends in a month! If not more. And I think there is such a total disconnection, that I think that sometimes, generally people just don't realize- ah, they go from time to time 'oh poor little boy, poor little woman' and then [dusts hands]. Maybe it's because it's sentimental, and for someone like me it's not sentimental anymore- a child dying doesn't make me cry anymore- but bloody hell do something, because we can do something- fix it! Don't cry, fix it*. (**National Donor Program Manager 2**)

In this light, expertise was not provided by altruistic motives alone, but came with considerable personal gain for its purveyors, at scales disproportionate to the levels of poverty prevailing in the country.

> *I really think that we set the bad example- in the houses in which we live, in the cars we drive around, in the swimming pools we have at our houses, the salaries we earn, I don't think we have to be on voluntary conditions, but many people are earning 4-5 times what they would in their home countries, and what justifies that- the hardship? So I think a good way to start would be half all development salaries and see who's left, and why they're in there*. (**National NGO Technical Advisor 1**)

The role of expertise: a preliminary summary

The picture that emerges of the role of experts on policy discourse is heavily conditioned by the multisectoral, multidisciplinary foci which the food security conceptual framework requires. Expertise in food security *per se* is difficult to identify, with few individuals meeting that description precisely, and skepticism expressed about those who would self-identify as such. The value of expertise in food security is thus its convening power and its continuing emphasis on a multisectoral conceptual approach to food security policy- in this, it faces competition or opposition from more narrow definitions of the term subscribed to by national governments, as described in Chapter 5 above.

Expertise in food security is informed by and reliant on 'technical' specialization in various sectors, and is stands apart from both political and bureaucratic concerns, finding itself at odds, ignored or overridden by internal bureaucracy or political expediency. Experts are expected to be advocates for their particular field, and defend the best interests of their institution and field of interest, leading to competition for status and resources which has a lessening effect on the role of expertise as a whole, a finding consistent with narrative 4 (food security as development).

In Lao PDR, the international, external nature of expertise is legitimized by the low availability of national experts in a wide range of fields, with experts sometimes required to develop demand for their services within a country. The limited number of country-specific experts was so finite that a very small number of consultants exerted extensive influence across policy processes. Respondents acknowledged that experts operated at some distance from the populations they served, and suggested that the levels of personal gain that resulted from their employment distanced them from the people they were there to assist.

Research Question 3b: How are the normative roles of international institutions applied in context?

This question explores what Schmidt refers to as the interactive elements of discourse: that is, everyday communication among individuals themselves (both as individuals, within and between the institutions they represent), in parallel with the more formally defined structures outlined in previous chapters (Schmidt 2011 p9). It sheds light on how institutional mandates and roles are interpreted and applied in practice. In so doing, this question provides the basis for an examination of how food security-related

components of global normative police discourse enshrined in the UN and major development initiatives such as the MDGs and SDGs are translated into policy discourse at the national level.

Of particular interest in this chapter is the role of ASEAN. With its inclusion of regional comparators, and with an increased focus on food security policy at the regional level manifested by ASEAN itself (see Chapter 1), this research process was undertaken with an expectation that respondents might see a new dynamism in regional food security policymaking as a result of ASEAN's interest. The extent to which this expectation was validated in the course of the research is presented in the last sub-section of this chapter.

Individual self-interest

With small delegations and official presences (as described in Chapter 3 as a challenge to maintaining research participant anonymity), the perceptions of senior development institution personnel have impact on the overall portfolio within small nations such as Lao PDR. The role of individual agency in determining an institution's role was described by one respondent as: the difference between an individual's position and an individual's interest.

In this interpretation, an individual's overall engagement on food security as a conceptual approach was contingent on whether they saw it as being in their own best interest or not. Individual decisions, especially at senior management levels, had significant bearing on interpretations of institutional mandate. While this decision process implied trade-offs between competing obligations implicit in an individual's official position, the key insight of this respondent was that the individual (and consequently, institutional) engagement on food security was based on perceptions of individual self-interest.

> *I think it's hugely important as to food security is or is not taken up as a concept or not […]. If someone's interest is to promote a different concept or different priority, it's not in her or her interest to promote food security. It's a simple as that. So it's linked to the relevance question, but if you've done any course on negotiation skills, there's a clear difference between understanding people's positions vs. people's interests, and the relevance of the positions and the interests in the debate that goes on. And I think those are important words to keep in mind.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

This is presented at the beginning of this section of the chapter because it goes to illustrate the gulf between the morally laden declarations of global mandate statements and internationally declared goals described in Chapter 2, with the pragmatism of decisions taken at the individual level. It goes to

underscore the tension described by Giddens, in which 'agency produces structures, which in turn conditions agency' (Giddens quoted in Galston 2006.)

More specifically, agency at the level of senior institutional representative(s) defines structure insofar as institutional mandates tends to be broad, multiple and divergent, covering a range of topics and issues. Senior institutional representatives have considerable scope for determining the institutional priorities in-country, but are also beholden to regional supervision and headquarters-level initiatives which national representations are expected to adhere to: these may be interpreted as opportunities or constraints. Given the exigencies of maintaining one's own career track, promoting the prominence of the institution serves a dual function, promoting the institution's profile (and ideally, it's resourcing), and in so doing, furthering one's own career. More to the point, over the course of a career one's institutional reputation matters substantially more than one's standing with the host country government. There is therefore, given the limited size of institutional delegations in Vientiane, a degree of confluence between individual and institutional self-interest, of agency and structure.

Institutional Self-interest

In what was the second-most consistent set of findings across the fieldwork interviews (second only to the centrality of rice in Southeast Asian food security policy discourse), respondents repeatedly characterized institutional commitment on food security as subject to what can be termed institutional self-interest, defined as a function of: a) availability of potential funding, b) trends in the development sector, and c) the extent to which such commitment reinforced the prestige and profile of the institution.

Institutional engagement on food security, in this interpretation, was less of a mandate issue that it was an economically opportunistic, image burnishing, calculation of increasing institutional remit and control. Within its plastic and inclusive conceptual framework, food security is easy to selectively or intermittently engage on in the service of an institution's area of interest at any given moment.

> *Well, having worked with [three UN agencies] for a total of 15 years…it's an industry, it's a business. It has its franchises, and its products, its business cycles. It operates…the word sustainability come up again and again, and the most important thing is you've got to be able to sustain your own operations. Everyone's always looking for projects, and it's like this big game. […] Donors need to deliver funds. Agencies need funds to implement projects, so then you're left with projects need problems to be solved by them. And it's not difficult to find problems*. (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

Economic self-interest created self-perpetuating, reinforcing cycles seen at both individual and institutional level. One respondent succinctly put it, 'we are really blind, but we have a good system to occupy ourselves here' (**National Donor Program Manager 3**). As another put it,

> *It becomes a machine. If you look at the experts in food security, or even in research centres, IFPRI comes to my mind but there are certainly others. They all have an interest in keeping this up, right? Because otherwise what are they going to do?* (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

Donors as drivers

This pursuit of funding was identified as having three important aspects: first, it was seen as been initiated by donor institutions: as and when donors announced funding, institutional interest among potential recipients would increase, and institutional mandates would be found to fit the funding. Second, this led to competition (as described under Narrative 4 in Chapter 5 above, and earlier in this chapter). Most importantly, it centralizes donors as the keystone of the institutional architecture: donor funding to development actors (including IFIs, the UN and NGOs) and national governments is a foundational concern for all institutions (see figure 1.4 in chapter 1). It suggests a top-down approach from the global to the national level, from the Rich World to the Global South, with national governments expected to accede to the global agenda in order to access development funds. This impression was articulated most frequently by UN respondents.

> *I think it gets back to what the donors want. If the donors want it, that's what we do. I recall years ago working with WFP when someone said, we're not donor driven, and I said bullshit, give me a break! If the donors think that something's worth doing, we'll try it, we'll dance around it, come up with a story about it, but we'll definitely make an effort.* (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

A regional respondent noted that without the stimulus of the EU in this instance, her institution would not have engaged on food security at all.

> *Funny to say, but this funding we have from the EU, under the food security thematic program, […] if we would not have had the funding, we would not be working so much now on food and nutrition security, honestly we would not.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**)

This pursuit of funding has resonances for the overall conceptual approach- in the quote below, a recent uptick interest on nutrition was seen as being driven by the prospect of additional funding, with institutions able to discover roles based on available money, not due to a new iteration of conceptual thinking on the definition of food security.

> *[Discussing the then-recent introduction of Food and Nutrition Security] We're on the honeymoon right now. I have to be cynical but I've been around for a while, we do go through trends. I don't think we'll lose nutrition completely, but for whatever reason, the current trend of the decade I suppose or whatever it might end up being […]. A lot of this gets back to money, basically, as far as I'm concerned, and people do what money tells them to. […]But if somebody says we have 10 million dollars for food security, everybody will say, we're doing food security.* (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

This chain of causality from funding to institutional interest was a source of frustration for one donor respondent, who noted that donor portfolios in any country are rarely limited to development assistance alone and include a wide range of sectors which may be unrelated to development (including bilateral and multilateral military, economic and political relations between states and RECs). Moreover, she suggested that by relying on donors, UN institutions had offset their mandate obligations, so as to sidestep more challenging political engagement with government.

> *This is, in a way, something that bothers me here, because I have a feeling that the donors, not the DPs [development partners] but the donors are in a way, although not very active, but are the ones more leading [sic] than the UN. They are the ones asking the bad questions, they are the ones raising the difficult issues in meetings, which shouldn't be the case because most of the donors bring ODA, but also bring military support, commercial support, political support, diplomatic approaches. Aid to development is one of many tools for a donor, so it's a bit surprising to see a donor representative in MAF talking about human rights for instances- whereas for [us], we have a specific human rights dialogue with the government which is very codified where you address specific questions in a particular way, but that's a political relationship, that's not ODA anymore, that's purely political. And that's part of the big machine, the big international and diplomatic machinery where you move things forward.* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**).

Linking policy problems to institutional mandates

Overall institutional approaches to food security were summarized as institutions utilizing the plasticity of the conceptual framework of food security to find roles for themselves, rather than first analyzing the problem and then considering the role they might play. Simply, food security problems were made to fit institutional mandates.

> *It's more [about] understanding the principles on which the organization adheres to when it talks about these terms [i.e. food security]. I think that would be quite useful, because there's a bit of blurring across organizations in terms in of food security. In Laos, I think that's evident across NGOs, UN agencies- it seems to mean slightly different things. The difficulty is in trying to understand the root cause of those insecurities. I think organizations take their mandate, or take*

their framework and then try to fit the problem within that framework. (**National NGO Country Representative 1**)

In this, institutional response at the national level was consistent with responses at the global level. One respondent described how, in her opinion, FAO had turned the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 to its own institutional advantage.

> *It's interesting to look back to the 2007 price hike, because what came out of that, and I'm not sure how much it was pushed by FAO, and how much it was pushed by others, what came out of that was supposedly, what we tried to get out of that was a supposedly balanced framework for action which, utilization, access got equal weight to agricultural development. But what actually happened was the was a big resurgence of the push for agricultural development, there was a mea culpa declarations by governments, by the World Bank that we'd detuned agriculture for our portfolios, we deinvested, that was a big mistake now and look at what happened, and the global food system would have been fine had we just kept that development going. So we ended up with a slightly skewed food security outcome, because when you look at- what was that big American initiative [GAFSP], but also the American channel was [Purchase for Progress]- now when we tried to have discussion with Food for Progress [sic] about access and utilization, they said 'yeah, yeah, yeah, that's really important, help us to build it in', but in effect, you know, what really happened, and maybe I'm being slightly unfair, by was a massive pushback into agricultural development. […] Even now that FAO is arguing for food and nutrition security, I find it quite a big shift for them because coming out of the 2007-8 crisis, they were just rubbing their hands together, saying 'this is a fantastic reemphasizing of the need for agricultural development.'* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Individual vs Collective Efforts

Returning to the theme of coordination treated in Chapter 5, institutional accountability and responsibility were seen to be higher priorities that cross sectoral efforts. This issue was seen to be especially accentuated among the multiplicity of UN organizations present in the country. In the quote that follows, institutional efficacy was equated with the personality of the senior representatives.

> *WFP, UNICEF, FAO and WHO have different understandings of what each sector should be doing. And it's so difficult to get them on the same page. It's simply unimaginable, how different we are, and how everybody fights to get their leader or not to… it depends, it depends on the agency, and on the individuals who lead those agencies. But some agencies tend to lead without having the understanding across all sectors and pushing their own agency specific mandates. It depends on the personality. Other agencies are afraid to take the lead because either they are bullied by the other heads of agencies, or don't feel empowered personally to do that or don't have technical staff to support their efforts, or lack time, just to...again, it's a cross sectoral issue for the UN.* (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

Institutional engagement on the value of collective efforts was contingent on what the institution would get out of it. In the quote below, it was noted that institutions would never voluntarily suggest another be funded at their expense, even if there were prevailing policy reasons to do so.

> *I think people are focused on their own small piece of the pie, and that's all they do, and that's all they hold themselves accountable for. And there's also competition, on the donor side, people don't say- people always say, I want more for my piece of the pie, rather than saying, I've got enough, and to really make this work we need to fund the other side because there'll be synergy there. And therefore money should go to that other agency, so we have agriculture and WASH in the same community. But those are other agencies! [laughs] that gesture never happens, they just want more for their piece.* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

This level of institutional insularity was elaborated upon in two examples provided by UN respondents. The quote below comes to the issue of measurement, in which evaluation of the efficacy of efforts within a given sector would prioritize those indicators which were seen to be 'owned' by a given institution, a process described in Chapter 5 above. The quote suggests that while this would nominally fulfil the need to base policy on the 'evidence base', this commitment remains superficial because datasets are not compared across institutions, privileging that data which the institution felt reflected them in the best light.

> *Let me give you an example. In the project area, […]this was the original plan- we wouldn't measure or even ask anecdotally, whether during the period there had been a change in the quality of water, […] had anything been done to change the quality of water, had anything changed in terms of market access, had anything else changed, all those other related factors that are in the nutrition framework. […] In our own thinking as an institution, we didn't even think about looking at those other factors in an outcome survey. Now we are, because I've insisted and people get it, but that's an interesting anecdote which shows how you can get very blinkered in an organization*[69]*.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Another respondent suggested that because of the competition for funding, measurement was fatally undercut, as institutions would frame the issue of food security in a manner which best supported their specialized interventions. Her particular insight in this regard was that points of contention between institutions need not focus on the problem as such, but rather on the sequencing of the proposed

[69] This quote encapsulates an element of global development institutional culture Banerjee describes as a 'resistance to knowledge', which he ascribes to motivational factors: it's more satisfying to provide aid than it is to undertake extensive processes to figure out what worked (or didn't) and why (Banerjee quoted in Jerven 2013)

solutions. The higher priority given to a particular intervention, the more likely it would be to secure funding.

> *I think sometimes there's even exaggeration, to get more resources, this is my perception. I think that, in some case, UN agencies tend to overestimate the problem, or overemphasize a particular response to the problem, because- well, you cannot overemphasize because you have a huge problem of undernutrition- but I think where we lack agreement is what should be done, because you cannot do everything at the same time. So you need a decision on sequencing action and prioritizing, because first of all you cannot get resources to scale up everything or capacity from government to scale up and sustain*. (**National UN Program Manager 2**)

As this quote suggests, prioritizing of the actions to be taken was a process of maneuvering for institutional control and therefore, funding. With resources unlikely to be available to fully fund policies, the higher priority issues were more likely to secure funding than lower-tier issues.

Government engagement with food security institutions

Respondents provided Lao-specific examples of how government counterparts were engaged in this process, whereby government counterparts agreed to a global development approach in order to access funding. This was consistent with observations made in chapter 4 in the food security as development narrative, whereby the influence of a particular conceptual framework (such as food security) was dependent on the volume of funding associated with it.

> *[Food security] is in the MAF strategy partly because MAF expects that it attracts donors. It's the thing to put on your banner now. A lot of other organizations including the INGOS are doing the same. [International agricultural research institution] has eco-friendly agriculture for the poor. What we are largely doing is promoting high yield varieties of cassava. And that's not eco-friendly, and that's sure not for the poor.* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

This demand for government adherence to the international derived discourse was presented as non-negotiable and not optional for national governments.

> *I often think, I think that often what happens is that the international institutions, including the UN, including the WB [World Bank], almost bully some of these countries into saying, okay, now everybody's going to have to have a climate change strategy. Everybody has to have a food security strategy. Everyone has to have a nutrition strategy.* (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**)

In closing this section, one respondent observed that the expertise was used by international institutions to show how the institution *itself* had delivered 'results'; but what was less scrutinized what how well (or poorly) this was reconciled with the conceptual level goals of improved food security.

> *I'm lucky enough to work for an institution where they give me, six years, seven years before showing some impact. But my colleagues on other UN agencies have to deliver in three years. So how on earth do you have a program addressing a food security problem where you have two years or three years to spend one million dollars? I mean, to me the concept itself is already wrong at the beginning. […] So all this machine of development, and food security as a broad concept as well, you're pushing one side, you want to do good, no doubt everybody wants to do good, but on the other side it becomes competition, so then you have to plant your flag, then you have to count how many out of poverty, how many are now malnourished… But we should be more realistic about you really can do, what's the trade-off for doing all this, spending money, is it worth it, or at the end of the day is it not that important?* (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

'A Long Way to Go': The Role of ASEAN in Food Security policy discourse

Prior to presenting the findings on this topic, a caveat about the size of the sample is required. Of the 25 interviews included in the research process, only seven respondents had had direct engagement with ASEAN on the issue of food policy, and felt able to comment on its role. Six of those seven respondents were in regional roles, whereas at the Lao PDR level, familiarity with ASEAN's role was much more circumscribed. This suggests a disconnect in terms of interface between regional and national policy discourse, picked up on by respondents. Furthermore, the overall lack of familiarity with ASEAN's efforts across the sample goes to demonstrate the comparatively limited impact of those efforts.

Potential and actual roles for ASEAN

The quote included in the sub-heading above was used independently by two respondents to characterize ASEAN's role in food security policy. Other future tense phrases such as 'it will be interesting to see' and 'by the time' were used by other respondents to indicate that ASEAN's role at the time of research was better characterized by its potential than by its actual implementation.

> *There's a long way to go in ASEAN though. To what extent will countries respect ASEAN's authority? For the moment it has credibility but it has no traction on that much. Except on the economic side. […] 2015 is the first big step. We'll see*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Despite the lack of concrete actions in food security policy, respondents identified a strong potential role for ASEAN, most notably in engaging with the private sector, under the relatively well-established aegis of economic cooperation. With private sector actors in agriculture, natural resources and food processing increasingly operating in Southeast Asia as a unified zone, rather than a dozen separate markets, ASEAN was seen to have an important role to play. ASEAN was perceived as a particularly well-placed conduit for dialogue between the private sector and governments eager to retain control of national food security.

> *At a political level, ASEAN is at a crossroads. Food security is socio-politically sensitive, especially staple foods. I'm sure that most governments won't foresee in the near future to lower their profile and try to enhance more the role of the private sector. […] And to help the government to level the playing field, particularly with multinational firms and so on and so forth, therefore the role of government still needs to be there. Therefore I find that most governments want to ensure that they still play a key role*. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

One respondent offered a concrete example where she saw ASEAN having a strong good role to play, on an issue which was relatively non-controversial, on which regional level action as overdue.

> *There is no harmonization of standards. I think, I don't know, to me that's one example where yes, in theory, why would you not have harmonization of standards? I mean the private sector is constantly saying, it costs us a fortune because every single country has its own requirements for testing seeds, for example. So if we want to bring in a new type of seed to each of the 10 countries, we basically have to test 10 times, and that price is passed on to the farmer. And the governments' understand that at a conceptual level- it makes perfect sense, why would not sit at a table and come to agreement as to what the standard will be then your farmers will benefit? But it's all over the region, it's not just ASEAN, but there's no harmonization.* (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

As these quotes indicate, respondents saw a role for ASEAN in brokering discussions between private sector and national governments, and as the regional forum for establishing regulatory standards. Another respondent saw ASEAN as a useful platform for CSO-led advocacy (**National NGO Program Manager 1**). No respondent indicated that they saw no role for ASEAN to play, or suggested that food security was a poor fit with ASEAN's mandate.

Impediments to Engagement on Food Security

In considering why ASEAN was not taking up a more proactive role on food security policy, respondents identified three reasons as to why this remained more a potential than a reality. First, structural weaknesses within ASEAN, notably at the level of the ASEAN Secretariat. Second, a separation between regionals and domestic policymaking spheres, such that the same individuals and national institutions were not engaged in processes at both levels. And finally, the 'ASEAN Way' itself, as described in Chapter 4, was presented as an incremental, slow-moving process, more likely to coalesce around non-controversial issues for which there was no disagreement.

> *I think there's multiple problems, and a big problem is: what's ASEAN? ASEAN is the ASEAN Secretariat? The ASEAN Secretariat operates on zero funding because all the countries give the same dues, and so everybody's at the level of Laos, so they have zero operating budget. So ASEAN*

> *secretariat is- it's terrible to say 'nothing', they're not nothing, they're important- but they have no capacity, they have no people, they are consistently understaffed. They have...the ASEAN Secretariat is not a body that actually, really capable of doing much because they are underfunded, understaffed, you know, there's no...there's just not enough of a structure there. And if it's not them, then who is it, because they are the convenor?* (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

These weaknesses at the level of ASEAN were consistent with low capacity at the national level: as this respondent put it, engaging in ASEAN-led efforts did not mean the resources existed in-country to follow up.

> *The issues are a number of countries, particularly weak countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar in particular do have national policies, but most national policies exist on paper. They do not have supporting institutional arrangements, supporting programming, when we're talking about capacity building- you train people, they go back to their own reality and they don't know how to things will be put into implementation. They engage in regional initiatives, they want to strengthen policy and so on, but there, resources are not there, not to mention about interagency collaboration and cooperation. What I'm trying to point out here is that the basic assumption of meaningful regional policy cooperation and collaboration seems to be given less recognition, and this prerequisite was not well put in place*. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

In describing the 'ASEAN Way', or the *modus operandii* of the organization, respondents described a process whereby consensus in and of itself was seen as a result, rather than a basis for decisionmaking.

> *I think the problem with the ASEAN framework is it's not strong enough. They're Asians, in that sense. They're Asians dealing with Asians, so everyone is….no one's rocking the boat, every one's being too polite, at the end of the day, because everyone understands innately the issue of saving face, being polite and blah blah blah.* (**National NGO Program Manager 1**)

In this reading, the need to preserve the appearance of harmony and propriety resulted in an ASEAN which was not prepared to address more difficult issues for which consensus was elusive or impossible.

> *It's very inclusive. It's a consensus based organization, so it's whatever everybody agrees to, and wants to hear. And I guess it's by definition what you get by consensus- you can't get, you don't get quick, focused decisions by consensus, with consensus you wait until everybody agrees, and necessarily it becomes more broad and vague*. (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

ASEAN's role in the world, and relationship with global development institutions

In keeping with the theme of institutional self-interest as a primary motivating factor, one impeccably placed respondent suggested that ASEAN's top priority was on ensuring its own profile and reputation. If an issue was deemed likely to burnish ASEAN's credentials, then it would take up a role. This respondent

saw ASEAN's interests in food security as primarily about improving its global political profile, not about ameliorating the regional policy mix around food security. Within ASEAN, food security was framed within the context of trade, as part ASEAN's role as a negotiating partner on trade issues at the global level, emphasizing the narrative of economic growth and modernization.

> *ASEAN community building is not a standalone process. It has been part and parcel of how individual ASEAN member states position themselves in the global society, and very much receive push and pull forces from big nations. To name a few, China, US, Russia and India. What this means to the leaders is, if ASEAN provides an enabling platform to address global issues, then ASEAN will continue to be valid and relevant to these powers. The question would be, how does food security make this position of ASEAN member states stronger, and provides a more strategic position to ASEAN? The answer would be, well, this doesn't seem to be a burning hot priority agenda item, what are the issues? The issues would be trade partnerships- this is a big agenda [item]. Second is some sort of facilitating trade flow, ensuring that there won't be a financial crisis, and so forth. So what happens to food security is part and parcel of making the broader ASEAN policy agenda valid*. (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

More charitably, respondents questioned what ASEAN's core mandate consisted of. Chapter 4 described a process of organizational expansion which was largely completed by the mid-2000s, but ASEAN's shift to issues of social development raised questions about the role of the organization on such issues which remain open to debate. And critically in this context, systems for ensuring that regional-level policy correspond to national level polices do not exist.

> *To put into process, a number of policy initiatives, once it is concluded and we're going to start looking into implementation, and linking it to national policies requires time. […] On one hand the big policy sets some kind of expectation. People expect, oh, once this is done, this should already be organized. But still we keep repeating some problem. […] It's the issue of how well, and how ASEAN can ensure more collective action together. And at the moment I find that in the context of food security, particularly on food security, I don't think the issue is given due or enough consideration*. (Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1)

Echoing the top-down approach from donor government priority issue to national level as a major determinant of policy support, one respondent noted that her based on her understanding of institution's engagement with ASEAN, it had been integrated into existing institutional arrangements much as a national government ministry might be. In other words, donor governments maintain the same approach and financial incentives, and ASEAN responds similarly.

> *For us, our strategy with ASEAN, actually our initial effort before I was here, but there was an effort to work in Laos because it was like, food security in this region? Laos. But Laos is not a, not*

> *of particular interest to the [donor] government, and so basically within ASEAN there was this decision that we should work at a regional level, within ASEAN. And so the project is specifically to support ASEAN on its own food security priorities. And I mean, that's an interesting, I think that's also an interesting reflection of what you say, who decides what. The project specifically is designed to support ASEAN, and so it's supposed to be about support ASEAN, but...has ASEAN really defined what they want?* (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

This would suggest that ASEAN-specific food security policy discourse is likely to be heavily conditioned by and contingent upon international donor interests.

Summary

This chapter has indicated how expertise employed by global development institutions tasked with promoting food security have translated or adapted that discourse at the level of the nation-state, and has explored the role of international expertise and institutions in context. Based on reflexive consideration of their own roles and those institutions that employ them, respondents indicated that global declarations of intent notwithstanding, the role of expertise in context is defined by more prosaic concerns.

Expertise on food security itself was found to be difficult to define, if indeed it was possible to do so- it was suggested that expertise in food security is better understood as a fluid combination of technically specific specializations across a number of sectors such as economics, agriculture and public health. In this context, expertise in food security was posited as the ability to cohesively join together these various fields into a coherent whole. This process was seen as subject to personal and institutional rivalries and bureaucratic demands, which mitigated against the quality of expertise provided. In Lao PDR, expertise was defined by its overwhelmingly international expatriate composition, and by a small number of influential consultants. Expertise was seen as aligned with elite interests, and out of touch with the rural populations it purported to support.

The role of global development institutions was seen as motivated by self-interest: a chain of continuity was defined whereby donor institutions would define their priorities and provide funding, development institutions would adapt their position to access that funding, while supporting the government to do the same, thereby 'supporting' the government. Interpretation of institutional mandate in concrete terms was seen as subject to availability of funding. This generated competition among institutions, who continued to declare their commitment to collaborative approaches among themselves, while remaining unsatisfied with the results of such collaboration.

This chapter also considered the role of ASEAN in setting regional food security policy. While scope for such a role for ASEAN was readily identified and welcomed, ASEAN's role was seen more as a potential, rather than an actual factor in the regional policy context. This was seen as a result of disconnects between policy processes at the national and regional levels, a lack of institutional resources, and the overall institutional approach, referred to as the ASEAN Way. Institutional self-interest, notably oriented towards burnishing ASEAN's reputation on the global stage, was identified as a key driver.

Chapter 7: Do practitioners of food security in Lao PDR find food security a useful and valid policy framework? (Research Question 4)

In this chapter, findings on the continued utility and viability of food security as a conceptual framework for policy will be presented. Research participants were asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of food security: as a conceptual framework, did it make their task easier, or more difficult? Was food security a conceptual approach which added value and supported progress towards the policy objective of reducing the prevalence of food insecurity, making the country more food secure? With interview participants drawn from a wide range of sectors and disciplines, data is drawn from respondents' reflections on the applied utility of food security to their particular discipline, whether or not it was well suited to the Southeast Asian context, and its application in the Lao PDR context.

'Unmanageable' Food Security

Describing food security, respondents portrayed the conceptual framework as amorphous, complex and altogether too big, impossible to manage or control. The expansiveness of the conceptual framework was seen as ongoing and potentially endless. As a consequence of this expansiveness, the term was seen to be widely embraced and applied precisely because it could include virtually anything and simultaneously mean different things to different people, without risk of contradiction.

> *The trouble with food security is that it means something different to everybody. And that's one of the problems with it. Within [UN Agency], we'll all talk about it. Then we'll talk about it with a Minster, and the Minster will understand rice self-sufficiency. It's exactly the problem, it's a term which is in a sense too broad. […] Because there's been too many discussions when one person's talking about one thing, and one person's talking about the other. You want to have a food security policy for a country? Try and have that discussion. Everyone wants to talk about a different thing. The term's too broad.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4)**

As the quote below illustrates, this amorphousness also made it impossible to assess or measure. The observation below differs from those contained in Chapter 5 on data in that it suggests that the sheer plurality of potentially relevant data makes it impossible to adequately assess the overall picture.

> *If you want to talk about food security and nutrition, you have to go to 55 different places- the person in the market, the miller, the farmer producing the rice or the cassava, the person in the health centre. There are just too many sub-concepts contributing to the larger concept of food security, food and nutrition security, whatever you call it. And it's just…I think, you know, it's an*

unmanageable large monster- it's like a blob. It keeps growing as lots of things keep getting added to it. (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

In partial contrast, one respondent suggested that compared to the other conceptual frameworks food security competed with (see Narrative 4 in Chapter 5 for discussion of this competition), food security was reasonably clear, but critically, it lacked a tangible endpoint; progress of food security was circumscribed by an inability to determine when it was attained, and therefore, what was needed to attain it.

> I *think what's interesting with food security is there has been an attempt to pinpoint an issue. If you compare food security to say rural livelihoods- If you compare food security to sustainable human development, food security has got more focus. Compared to those things food security is a fair, concrete, precise, well bounded set of issues compared to those dominant approaches. So what we may need is […] maybe we need to get a lot more precise about this. What is the issue here? Is it an issue of childhood malnutrition? Is it an issue about the Right to Food? Is it an issue about the governance of the global food industry? Maybe we need to figure out the actual things that need to be addressed, rather than having a…food security's like a slogan, it doesn't actually describe a desired outcome* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**).

Another respondent voiced similar concerns in describing how the conceptual framework of food security was then applied in the Lao context, highlighting a lack of connectivity between efforts, and an overall absence of coherence.

> *There's a lot of rhetoric about food security, but it gets very little attention in practical terms. There is hardly a proposal where it's not mentioned, there is hardly a policy coming out where there is not food security, but if you see how it is translated into basic, practical measures- we lack a vision, and we lack a general picture how to address food security. That why we all talk about it, but don't know how to handle it in practice. And then you get this very ad hoc, piecemeal type approaches, whereby, UNICEF, or an INGO hangs posters with the five food groups, for the balanced diets, and you see the villagers standing in front of the posters not knowing what it's about. The [donor] home gardening project, the other NGOS fighting land concessions because it would affect food security, but there is not one coherent…we don't find each other, we all talk about it, but on the national level, what should be done first*? (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

As will be discussed further below in the section on food security's utility as an entry point on more sensitive matters, this plasticity can be turned to the advantage of more politically sensitive agendas, by virtue of its widespread acceptability and use.

Communicating Food security

Resonant with the sub-theme described above around coordination (in Narrative 4), respondents noted that irrespective of its overall design, content, or relevance to policy, food security was only as effective as how it was communicated.

> *You need to first and foremost demonstrate the relevance and added-value to what they are already doing and say, this is how a food security approach can help you do what you are already doing. And that's the key challenge that you have to, and that relates to a key question that people often ignore, which is simply communication. And how to communicate the concept.* (**Regional Technical Advisor 5**)

With a broad scope of issues to be potentially considered, food security (however it was interpreted) was not controversial, assuming it could be well presented and conveyed. What is striking about this point was that is underscored that fact that engagement or commitment on food security is not automatic, but contingent on advocacy and communication skills, which in turn are reliant on confidence and trust in the individual(s) presenting on the topic.

> *I think increasingly, as food security becomes more and more of a familiar term- because food security is still not a familiar term for a lot of people- it doesn't happen very often, but I pretty often have to define to people who don't work in the sector, I have to define what it is. To me that's a problem with the term itself, is that it doesn't conjure an image to somebody that has no idea, I mean to me, 10 years ago, food security what does it mean, there's no automatic image.* (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

At regional and national levels, this need for a strong advocate was referred to as 'finding a champion', ideally a politically high-profile individual who commands respect. But as the quote below indicates, such champions are difficult to control- they are able to tailor their interpretation of food security to service their own agenda, and given their status, it may be impossible to dissuade them.

> *I think it takes a champion, that's all- one person, who's able to make a difference, who people listen to and respect to say 'this is important, and this needs something to be done in this manner.' I mean, you've got someone like [individual], who's very respected in what he does, and he's using the term food security, but to me he's using in a way that suits him […] and not the food security community. So he's the champion of food security, but he's still compartmentalizing it*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

In the regional context, the ASEAN food security policy agenda was described as stalled, as a result of the transfer to another institution of one person perceived as the 'champion' (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**).

The combination of a policymaking audience only partially familiar (or unfamiliar) with the term food security, and a technocratic approach which presupposes expertise is required to speak about food security, is that the individual expert is afforded space to interpret and present food security policy issues to fit what they see as the priorities. As is described in the section below, for non-state actors such as NGOs, this can be of utility in discussing politically sensitive issues, as food security is used a fulcrum to introduce political questions into what appears as apolitical technocratic discourse pursuing an uncontroversial political net gain- that is, addressing food insecurity.

Food Security and Productionism

As described in chapter 5, and reiterated by respondents when considering the ongoing relevance of food security, with global, regional and national policy interests oriented towards increasing production (especially of rice), food security is used extensively in policy discourse in the service of productionist goals, presented as both the underlying basis for (and the desired outcome of) producing ever-increasing volumes of food. In this reading, food security is retained in use in policy discourse because it supports expanded agricultural production- which in turn supports economic growth.

This emphasis on increasing agricultural production was seen as consistent with the historical evolution of the term presented in Chapter 2, and its use in this context by developing countries was consistent with that of developed nations which promoted the 'feed the world' narrative in the 1970s.

> *Off the top of my head, why has food security been developed as a concept? […] Is it because it's, it was, valid as a concept years ago and is a useful, if you like, framework for compartmentalizing and organizing a series of thoughts around hunger? In other words, the availability stream, the access stream and the utilization stream. Or, was it really borne out of the supply side, […] was it really borne out of, out of the whole food aid surplus dumping era, when we needed an intellectual framework to justify surplus dumping? And food security was borne out of that- again, I don't know the answer, I'm speculating. I would ask, my first question would be, was it ever a valid concept from a technical, technically rigourous intellectual standpoint, or was it really one of those retrofitted things that came out of a food aid era*? (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

As has been presented in Chapter 4, food exporting nations like Thailand (presenting itself as 'the Kitchen of the World') are able to conflate national food security with global food security: food exports are not just a means to promote national economic growth, but are a necessary strategy for the greater good of humanity, to combat global food insecurity and hunger.

> *I always ask the question when hearing national policy on food security and initiatives that the country is trying to implement, I always ask two questions: how, can things be translated all the way through addressing food security, making sure that people on the ground will have access to decent food. Second, I always ask the question: for whom? Because often times, food sec is a disguise for export promotion policy. In other words, you produce food but not for your own people. But still you try to make things, put cosmetics on this and say 'it's part and parcel of food security', but's not for your own people. So by trying clarify these two things, often times we see disconnection of policy […] and that to me is something that needs to be addressed.* (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

Respondents therefore saw this productionist interpretation of food security as the result of a confluence of both global trade interests between both governments and the private sector, and at the national level among nations competing for their share of export markets. There was, however, a great deal of skepticism of 'feed the world' logic: the respondent above saw it as a cloaking device for export promotion. The respondent below framed the issue as a misunderstanding of basic ecological principles, such that predictions of population growth were self-fulfilling as long as food supply kept rising.

> *It's entirely possible that increasing food production is…you know, the cause and effect needs to be looked at the other way round, right? You know, with an animal species- take rats. The fertility of rats, the population of rats responds to available food supply. You increase food supply, you increase the number of rats. Now we're saying, our population is GOING to increase therefore we need to produce more food. Whereas in actual fact, the population is only going to increase IF we do produce the food. That's sense from an ecology point of view. So by giving in to this argument that because the population inevitably will increase therefore we must produce more food, we're just maintaining this […] Isn't that what we're doing? We're giving, we're making our predictions come true?* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**)

One respondent noted that the shallowness of this emphasis on increasing production was demonstrated by the lack of attention paid to post-harvest losses, which she estimated at 30-50 percent across the region, describing the issue as 'a no-brainer' which nonetheless was largely neglected (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**).

This was seen to have historical roots in the evolution of rich-world agricultural and trade interests, and is predicated upon the notion of increased consumption. Whether considering the issue from global, regional or national perspective, respondents situated food security as a subordinate, supporting factor to the central policy issues of economic growth, trade expansion, and global competition. Responding to a question about the continuing validity of food security at the global level, one respondent gave the following observation.

> *As long as the Chinese want to hold onto it, yes. As long as the Japanese feel insecure, then yes. As long as you continue to have a siege mentality on the part of the Middle East, yes. I mean, these different blocs- China is a bloc in and of itself, Japan has its own way of thinking about food security, it has to have the lifelines. China's just got too many people, it cannot risk being one grain short of rice. We're stuck with it, because of these various factions. As long as the Americans continue to subsidize rice production in the US, we're stuck with that too.* (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**)

Taken together, these observations suggest that although conceptual models of food security are of increasing complexity and increasing attention is given to non-food factors, food availability continues to maintain an outsize influence on food security policy as a whole.

Availability First. Everything else second

Two regional respondents saw a systematic progression in how food security policy was considered, with productivity/availability seen as the first and most important pillar, to be addressed first. In this reading, the reason that other topics were getting space in the discourse at all was because on the whole, at both regional and national levels, availability had largely been addressed. In a loop of feedback, however, the fact that undernourished populations still existed could be used as the basis to maintain the synoptic focus on availability, in line with state-led policy focus on commercialized agriculture and economic growth. This also went to underscore the rural focus of the discourse, as food is, on the whole, highly available in urban areas, but may not be accessible- that is, affordable- for poorer urban populations.

> *I think the automatic reaction that governments in the region have when they think of food security, it's productivity, and then later on, and maybe hopefully more and more there's post-harvest loss, there's obesity, overweight, but those are maybe the tangential, luxury items, and the immediate thing is feeding people is feeding people who don't have enough to eat*[70]. (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

This was framed as an emerging issue, of increasing importance as nations in the region were increasingly classified as middle income, and had higher proportions of their populations living in urban areas.

> *Now over the past few years, the issue of food security has been broadening in terms of initiative and because of growing population in the middle class, and also the projection that the region is*

[70] This supposition that undernutrition must be dealt with first and then (and only then) can overnutrition be considered is not uncommon: Gardner quotes Nobel Laureate Robert Fogel as saying 'You can only start worrying about over-eating when stop worrying about under-eating, and for most of our history, we have been worried about under-eating.' (Gardner 2008)

> *now no longer a least developing region, and we're going to deal with a number of issues that were not perceived as food security in the past, but now also are related to food security like obesity, like nutritional aspects, not only in terms of the physical volume of production but also the nutritional aspects. All of these bits and pieces are coming from all kinds of directions: consumers within the region, consumers from importing countries, society at large.* (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**)

The implication therefore, was that where deprivation focused food security policy was an approach pertinent in the even very recent past, future policy orientation would need to include greater consideration of urban malnutrition, and the double burden of the nutrition transition.

One regional respondent observed that engaging on obesity was not just a question of a potential expansion of institutional focus, but has implications for the existing policy mix oriented towards addressing chronic malnutrition, which could inadvertently contribute to increased rates of obesity. Even if the possibility of this was remote, it pointed to a need for greater familiarity with the continuum from under to overnutrition at the level of national policy.

> *You have to be careful that by improving all those things, you don't create the double burden of malnutrition, which to me is a big big big worry. Even- it's technical but just to share with you- I was recently reading that all those problems where we have to address severe malnutrition, but if it's not well implemented, and if we supplement those children too long, we risk to create children in the future, who will have problems. They may not be undernourished anymore, during those couple of years, but if they grow too fast in their weight, when you supplement them, then you're increasing the risk of diabetes in the future*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**)

Food Security vs. Nutrition vs. Food and Nutrition Security: Semantics or Fundamental?

With research taking place between 2011-2013, coinciding with the drafting and circulation of the CFS' 'Coming to Terms with Terminology' document, which proposed that food *and nutrition* security be used instead of food security as the standard term in use at the global level, respondents has multiple reflections on the value and utility of this redefinition. Some felt this was a welcome evolution, allowing for consideration of issues beyond food alone. Others saw nutrition is even more fluidly defined than food security, and consequently so loose and mutable as to be less rigorous than food security.

The redefinition was not seen as food AND nutrition coming together, but rather, was the exertion of nutrition's influence and importance over that of food security. Of central importance to claims of being the organizing principle was the notion of multidisciplinarity: whichever of the two terms (food security

or nutrition) could stake a claim to being more multidisciplinary must therefore be of greater importance, and could therefore assume a higher status.

> *I've said this also to nutritionists who get very frustrated when [they say] food security people or non-nutritionists' don't understand nutrition well enough, and to them the overarching importance of nutrition as a multidisciplinary concept…I understand what they're saying, but I very much see nutrition as a, not nearly as multidisciplinary as food security from my perspective, when they see it as more multidisciplinary than food security, when they see it as more multidisciplinary than food security because their whole world is nutrition and everything relates to nutrition. So what I've told them is, their job, as nutritionists is not to just keep saying that nutrition is multidisciplinary and needs to be better understood, etc., but they need to make nutrition relevant to non-nutritionist, they need to demonstrate how nutrition is relevant […] The same is true for food security- unless you can explain to others who are not as familiar who you would like to take on the food security approach, you need to first and foremost demonstrate the relevance and added-value to what they are already doing and say, this is how a food security approach can help you do what you are already doing*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

Respondents noted that the process of defining food and nutrition security has been itself, a source of debate and institutional conflict. Defining the terms themselves as seen as crucial to determining institutional jurisdiction.

> *My observation over the past two and a half years, HUGE confusion over the definitions [of] food security. So we throw around food security, nutrition security, food and nutrition security, yeah, with nutrition overarching food security, food security overarching nutrition, and it's caused a lot of frustration and confusion. And then when you link that to mandates of agencies, that's also confusing because you've got a couple of agencies have food in their title, a couple don't but do a lot with nutrition, and so there's been a lot of pushing back and forth around who takes the lead, just around definitions*. (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

Illustrating this point, one respondent noted that while she welcomed the discussion, she also did not feel it pertained to her institution, suggesting 'food security and nutrition' are more relevant.

> *I think the new definition adds some value to the way we think about things, but I don't think food and nutrition security is [UN agency's] mandate. I think that goes beyond [UN agency's] mandate. I think [UN agency's] mandate is food security and nutrition [emphasis added]. So to me, it's almost an institutional thing. But I think, as another term, I'm okay with it. It's taken me two years to be able to say I'm okay with the term. I really struggled with it initially, trying to think about what it means and I do think it's significant- the difference is really quite significant. Not token.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

Two respondents suggested that interest in the new term was a function of the availability of funding, rather than a critical revaluation of the overall approach, more a function of a need to maintain public interest than a genuinely new approach.

> *Is it rebranding, because things need to be fluffed up once in a while? I mean, when you're in the private sector you put a new logo once in a while or you have a new, your website has to be updated all the time because people get bored- and sometimes I think that's true also of what [donor agency] does to some extent- the programs are not all that different from what they used to be, but part of it is pitching it a different way, just to get people excited. And I mean, for food security, it really does make sense to have more integrated approaches…* (**Regional Donor Technical Advisor 2**)

Another respondent concurred, observing that irrespective of changes in the overall titling or terminology, very few substantive changes has been made to the content of the conceptual framework itself in decades. As the quote below also highlights, changes to the terminology do not influence the content or underlying analytical modeling. What is telling about this quote is that it suggests that 'changes' are in practice more superficial than they appear.

> *You tend to have this kind of people come in with all their theories and at the end of the day you cannot apply the same thing to everywhere- and so we go back to the context which is important, the knowledge of the country, the culture etc. etc. So having these kind of big think tanks, or so called- experts, I'm not sure. What I read from both FAO and […] IFAD about food security, it's so general concepts. There's nothing new! I think I've never read in the past ten years, nothing new. I even came back today with this [indicates document], very recent, March 2012, this is their high level taskforce, they are actually based at IFAD, I don't know what they are at FAO, but anyway. So you scan it quickly, and it's always the same thing*. (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

One respondent noted that whatever definition was applied, it did little to clarify what policy responses should be.

> *I think it's [food security] a useful concept- I think broadly people can agree. I mean my definition, my understanding can't be too dissimilar from other peoples'. One hopes. For me, the question is much more what makes households food insecure. We can agree on a definition on what is a food secure household, but it's more about understanding how households become insecure or food insufficient*. (**National NGO Country Representative 1**)

This was echoed in the quote below, in which it was suggested that the more complex a conceptual framework became, the less likely it was that it would (or could) be used at national level.

I mean, when you make something too complex, the question becomes 'so what?' I tend to think of food security as pretty basic actually, particularly for my work. The concept of food security, and the concept of food security and nutrition. So my concern or question would be, the more complex the models are, do you not lose a certain amount of utility? It becomes a kind of academic argument which is really 'so what?' to me. (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

Positive gains associated with the redefinition of food and nutrition security were seen in dealings with national government counterparts, if only because it required that separate ministries come together to acknowledge both their own and their government colleagues' roles; previous iterations of food security and nutrition as separate entities had allowed them to remain separate and distinct in ministerial portfolios. The insight of the quote below is that by incorporating food security and nutrition within a single term, it gives equal weighting to both, correcting an existing imbalance in which nutrition is seen as secondary to food security.

The [UN] Resident Coordinator took the initiative to try to clarify terminology, how we work together on our side, and also with the government. Because as we said, we really feel that they [govt] are working in silos. So we said, okay, on our side now, we agreed that we are going to use 'food and nutrition security', for example. And I'm not a big fan of terminology, I actually couldn't care less, they can call it whatever they like. But at least this makes everybody happy, in the sense that food and nutrition security gives enough importance to nutrition, which if you say food security and nutrition, is always considered like coming second- and it really merges the two together in such a way that the government does not take them as separate concepts. That's the idea. But it's more a question of how you present things, at the end of the day it doesn't really change anything. (**National UN Country Representative 3**)

Food Security as stalking horse

The conceptual complexity of the 'unmanageable' described above has its advantages. Respondents suggested that one of the utilities of food security was that by virtue of its non-controversial status, combined with the exceptionally wide range of topics included in its potential purview, it served as a useful basis for an exploration of other, more politically sensitive issues- hence its description as a stalking horse for more political issues, making it well suited for oblique insertion of political discussions into ostensibly technocratic spheres.

For us, what food security has allowed us to do is address some of the more sensitive issues. Because at policy level, in terms of MDGs, interestingly enough, in spite of the FDI, MDG 1, among others is the one lagging behind. So being able to use food security as an entry point to address some of the interdependent which are certainly exacerbating this issue, it gives us a safe entry

> *point. So, land issues, for example. […] I think food sec is acting not only as a safe entry point for us, but it seems also a safe entry point for the government representatives who are genuinely concerned. I think for them it offers a safer topic to engage directly.* (**National NGO Program Manager 1**)

The quotes above illustrates two important dynamics at play in this usage: first, the lack of progress on malnutrition and thus the MDGs, is used to give higher priority to the underlying issues, providing a constructive sense of urgency. Second, it provides government personnel unable to raise concerns more directly with a respectable pretext through which to air their concerns without compromising their position. This was a role taken up especially by NGOs, given the very limited policy inputs they were permitted to offer. Under the aegis of food security, NGOs were able to introduce land tenure and governance issues into food security discourse, creating an operating space which otherwise would not exist.

> *So we are thinking now of renaming LIWG [the Land Issues Working Group, see chapter 1], we are thinking of calling it the Food Security Working Group, because we hope, we think, it is still visible, we can still work, but it is more like a research and advisory body to the government, not so much an activist network, maybe it was too much perceived by the government at this group is too much interfering into land rights […] But at the moment they don't allow working on land- they don't allow it! You can see it, […] they don't want it. But maybe they want it with food. It will be, look: Food is a major issue.* (**National NGO Program Manager 2**)

Even on topics *without* political sensitivity attached such as primary education, food security required analysis of an interconnected, interlinked set of concerns which facilitated a fuller consideration of factors that uniquely sector-specific approaches did.

> *Taking the food security and nutrition aspect of education as an example, that doesn't necessarily mean that the whole education focus is going to be on food security and nutrition, but it does certainly bring it to a higher level of awareness and concern that necessary. How it competes with the other education issues or whatever, I don't think it needs to dilute anything. I think it's basically bring the awareness into various sectors of their impact on a specific issue, and I will continue to use food security and nutrition as somewhat interrelated. […] And yet it allows for an opportunity for showing an interrelated, a real interrelated focus on an issue that's not necessarily there otherwise.* (**National UN Country Representative 1**)

Food security, Urbanization and Obesity: 'I really haven't thought about that much':

In considering if and how the food security conceptual framework fit the policy and operating context, respondents' feedback coalesced around the dichotomy between the conventional, historical focus of

food security on undernutrition, versus the emerging importance of urban populations, more likely to be overweight or obese than undernourished. Respondents questioned whether:

a) overweight/obesity was indeed part of food security at all
b) if it was, what role development institutions should play (if any), and
c) if indeed if they should play a role, if they were equipped to do so.

No respondent mentioned any prior experience in policy or programming to do with obesity or overweight[71]. As terms, 'urban food insecurity' and 'overweight/obesity' were used interchangeably in interviews, suggesting that rural overweight and obesity- or conversely, urban chronic and acute malnutrition- was not viewed as an important issue.

The prevailing focus of food security on deprivation was ascribed by one respondent as a legacy of the linkage between food security and hunger, which necessarily assumed an inadequate, rather than a surplus intake of food; as a result, she described '*the definition [of food security] is slanted towards deprivation*.' (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

In responding to a question about whether, conceptually speaking, food security referred to overweight and obesity or not, the same respondent stated

> *I don't know, I really haven't thought about that much. I'd like to think more about that, I'd like to think more about urban food security, because that's a very different story, urban food security. And it's not something that I've ever worked in or got my head around. […] But I don't really know, I don't have experience. My gut feeling is no. When you say some overweight person is food insecure- just intuitively I can think about it, I can rationalize it, of course the person's food insecure, but intuitively, and how to move forward with that line of thinking, doesn't work well for me.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

[71] It is important to note that there is an element of research participant selection which may influence this particular finding. Within the UN system, obesity-related issues are grouped together under Non-Communicable Diseases, and thus, in broad mandate terms, fall within the remit of the World Health Organization. At the time the fieldwork was underway, WHO's portfolio on NCDs in Lao PDR focused entirely on medical and clinical aspects of NCDs, with limited linkages to the food security or nutrition sector. Even within the context of NCDs, the most public focus of WHO programming was on alcohol & tobacco control and road traffic accidents. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, WHO did not participate in any of the food security or nutrition national coordination mechanisms in place (described in Chapter 1), although it did subsequently join joint UN programming on maternal/child health (where again, obesity was not a focus of programming). As a consequence, efforts to identify a possible research participant in Vientiane with expertise on obesity/overweight policy issues were not successful, and no WHO personnel participated in the research. Nevertheless, given the WHO's portfolio in Lao PDR at the time, it would seem likely that this finding here would be consistent among WHO staff.

A different respondent suggested that if urban issues were to be included in food security, then a redefinition of the term would be required.

> *Unless we revise the definition of food security to look, to have a focus on the industrial aspect, on urbanization and to try and examine how we can ensure food security in those populations because of course you see examples of countries where populations have urbanized very rapidly where the urban poor are still very food insecure, because it doesn't solve the problem. You still have a lot of food insecure urban populations […] I don't know, I'm trying to think what [UN agency] would do. Cooking classes, I guess?* (**National UN Program Manager 1**)

Another regional respondent suggested that concerns over urban food security were not new, but because there was no clear role for development institutions that targeted vulnerable populations (and with vulnerability associated with remoteness and rurality (as described in chapter 2)), urban populations were not considered to be within the institutional purview of development institutions with food security and nutrition mandates. As both of the quotes below illustrate, respondents noted this issue has been on the policy agenda for many years, but has not been acted upon as it has not been seen to be a 'mandate' issue.

> *Like IFPRI, they do a lot of work on urban population with regards to nutrition, many years ago, at least 20 years ago they were already raising their arm that urban nutrition is an issue. I guess, what it means for [UN agency], to us, it poses a bit of a challenge, because we're supposed to work more on the hard-to-reach, most vulnerable, at-risk, where there's more disparity, which is more often in remote areas. So for us it would take an extra effort to make sure we do include them when we do our intervention because a lot of nutrition interventions happen in, not in urban areas*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 3**)

One respondent noted that especially in the Southeast Asian context, this was an issue which was overdue for consideration.

> *I personally I feel at the moment, and maybe it's just [UN Agency], and we are doing work about what does it mean for us in Asia over the next 20 years, but how much is being done about urbanization? How much is being done on the effects of rampant urbanization of malnutrition, poverty rates, food security? We are now looking into this, but we have certainly let it go by without looking at it significantly.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 4**)

Food Security as a symptom of Global Problems

Respondents derived their concerns about the proliferation of obesity not only based on professional judgement, but also on their personal experience of what they had seen in their own countries in both the Rich World and Global South. Some respondents saw the continued existence of food insecurity in all

its forms as symptomatic of a deeper global problem, of a capitalist ethos in which the need for economic growth outweighed spiritual, cultural, or environmental concerns.

> *Maybe it's our societal values, the amoral marketplace. Maybe that's the problem. We say 'well that's the market, it does what it wants, we don't hold it accountable for any moral values' It does what it wants and then we're stuck with the negative consequences. So there's a real moral dilemma to the thing. So we're missing the point, we're missing…what are we missing? I'd say we're missing the moral values behind, that's what's missing. And if you want to go one set further, related to that, if you say what's the biggest public health problem in the world, it's not food security and nutrition, it's peace, it's lack of war! If we put an end to war, all the money that was put into munitions, was translated into development money, that's like a trillion dollars a day. A day! And we just totally overlook that as an issue. If we dealt with that, all these moral, ethical values, my gosh, money's not a problem*. (**National UN Country Representative 4**)

In considering this point, respondents drew a connection between what they saw in their own countries (whether in Asia or elsewhere), between the experience of rich nations and that of developing nations, and between the importance of food as a commodity or foodstuff, and its role in culture and society, as more than just a source of nutrients.

> *I've heard the argument made by the Coca-Cola company that this is a status product, it's safe, and it's cheap enough for anybody in the world to afford, and it makes them feel good and maybe there's truth in that. The important point you're making here is that eating- the process of putting stuff in your mouth- is only partly to do with the need for food security and nutrition. There are so many other reasons why we eat, and that applies to us in the Western world, and maybe it's wrong for us to assume that that does not apply in a village in Laos: that all those other cultural status, human relationship things, whether it's relating to our children or the community, or to our vision of what life we want to lead, all of those things apply to food here as they do in Europe*. (**National Donor Policy Advisor 1**).

Where reflections included in Chapter 6 about the role expertise and institutions were suffused with cynicism about mandates being contingent on available funding, in considering food security as a moral issue, respondents' answers were tinged with anxiety and sadness about the unsustainability of the present global economic, social and moral trajectory.

> *Of course there has been a lot of malnutrition but I think also for policy, it's more and more recognized that over consumption, overeating, obesity, diabetes, and things like that are increasingly a problem, also in developing countries. And I've just read the Omnivore's Dilemma. If we can't change something in ourselves about how we can't change any type of goods, or look at our future, it's going to be patching up the problem, rather than finding different ways which are more healthy, more equitable, more sustainable.* (**National NGO Technical Advisor 1**)

'At the end of the day': what is food security?

In Chapter 2, food security was presented as both a formal, technically precise term, and a subjective, relativistic term defined in and by local context. In bring this chapter to a close, four different responses considering four different geographic scales and application of the term are presented, which all come to the same conclusion: food security is everything and nothing, everywhere and nowhere. It is, axiomatically and intrinsically, ambiguous. By contrast, one respondent suggests that conceptually, food security is sound: it is its interpretation which is problematic.

In institutional terms, food security was rarely the responsibility of any one individual, but was rather viewed as the collective result of the combined efforts of all: everyone's responsibility- and therefore no one's. This observation was offered in response to the question of how expertise is defined (Chapter 6), but is germane to the findings in this sub-section.

> *In fact, in the early days, FAO had food security officers, and then the Director General eventually said 'we have to take that job title away because everyone in FAO is a food security officer.' So it went from meaning something very specific to actually now, nobody in FAO is called a food security officer. That may not be correct, but in principle that's sort of what happened.* (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 1**)

At the national level, considering food security policy in Lao PDR, one respondent put is as

> *I don't think we know what we're talking about. We all have hunches and have seen some examples, but I don't think anyone has a clear idea how bad the situation is, or maybe not so bad at all*. (**National NGO Technical Advisor 1**)

Describing food security as a policy orphan, falling into the gap between the production-minded interests of agriculture and the clinical and curative interests of the health sector, another respondent concluded by saying '*At the end of the day, it should be everything. At the end of the day*.' (**National UN Country Representative 3**).

Considering food security at the individual level, one respondent proposed food security as the ability to get on with the rest of one's life, and crucially, to be able to stop thinking about food- a formulation perhaps akin to freedom *from* hunger (a formulation which dates back to 1945), which Isaiah Berlin described as a 'negative' freedom, as it defines an absence (in this case, hunger), rather than a presence (Berlin quoted in Carolan 2012, p. 294). But because of the plurality and diversity of human experience, there could be no consensus on the positive iteration of that freedom: food security. Because of the

negative formulation, the person asking the question could define what it meant, and what the correct answer would be.

> *If you have food to eat, you can think of other things. If you're hungry, you will think about food first. But you know, if you talk to ten people [about food sec], you will get ten different answers. Because it's very much based on their own experience, their perspective. So probably you will have to position yourself: if you want to do this, who are you, and what do you do? Because otherwise, you know, no answer is right or wrong.* (**Regional REC/IFI Technical Advisor 1**)

Finally, recalling that Chapter 1 indicated that technically precise definitions of food security coexisted in the discourse with more generalist applied usage, food security was described a fundamentally sound, if only it would be adhered to.

> *So as an aspirational goal for many countries, food security is a very viable concept. It often, as you may have found also, gets misinterpreted in many ways, and people don't look at the breadth of concept, the broad paradigm of food security, which is the four dimensions of availability, access, utilization and stability, and the strong linkages with nutrition. In many countries, developing countries in particular, it's still seen, as I understand it in Laos also, to be mainly associated with production of staples, rice, or maize in Africa. So it's often not seen in its broadness, as a complete concept*. (**Regional UN Technical Advisor 5**)

What is striking about this last quote is the recurrence of a narrative in global development discourse described in Chapter 3. For its advocates, food security as a concept *itself* is seen as sound, it is the interpretation thereof which is problematic. As described in Chapter 6, into this breach steps international expertise from global development institutions.

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings drawn from respondents' reflections on the overall utility of food security as a conceptual framework. In considering to this question, respondents provided a blend of personal and professional opinion, reflecting on food security at global, regional, national, and ultimately, individual levels.

Respondents returned a mixed verdict as to the overall utility, coherency and viability of food security as a conceptual framework. It remains inclusive and expansive, but issue such as obesity and urbanization, both key considerations in the Southeast Asian food security context, are incompletely treated, if at all. Through its continued emphasis on undernutrition, deprivation and rural populations, it retains a tacit but emphatic focus on availability and promotes productionism. It is understood as less a technically precise

conceptual framework than the combined result of efforts in 'more technical' sectors, and ultimately only as effective as its advocates' communication skills. It retains utility as a discreet means of discussing issues with high political sensitivity in ostensibly apolitical fora. While it is characterized as unmanageable and amorphous, its ubiquity underscores its immovability from the discourse- this is encapsulated by statements such as '*At the end of the day, it should be everything. At the end of the day'.* (**National UN Country Representative 3**). In this reading, food security is so all encompassing that it cannot be ignored- but is so wide ranging that it loses meaning.

In the Discussion section that follows, consideration will be given to the ongoing viability of the term in policy discourse, given its all-things-to-all-men depth and scope. That section will also examine whether the ongoing discussion over terms, definitions and supporting mandates, which appear to be a near-constant feature of food security, adds value or supplants policy actions it purports to promote. In other words, is promoting dialogue and multisectorality (as defined, largely, by the development sector) as it pertains to food enough?

Chapter 8: Discussion and Analysis:

With the research findings presented in Chapters 4-7 above, this chapter analyzes those data as a whole. Recalling that the research questions were set out as follows

1. How is food security policy mediated in Southeast Asia, specifically in Lao PDR (RQ1)?
2. What are the narratives in food security policy discourse in Lao PDR (RQ2)?
3. a) What is the role of international expertise in developing food security policy discourse (RQ3a)? b) How is the normative role of international institutions presented and applied in the local/specific context (RQ3b)?
4. Do practitioners of food security in Laos find food security a useful and valid policy framework? (RQ4)?

Chapter 4 identified core themes in food security policy at the regional level, emphasizing the centrality of economic growth as a policy mainstay, rising levels of urbanization, social and economic inequality and the nutrition transition. The importance of rice as a synoptic focus of policy across the region was highlighted in this regard. The chapter also presented issues in food security-adjacent fields such as control of natural resources (notably the Mekong basin), as an important locus for intra-governmental relations in the region, and discussed the evolving role of the regional intergovernmental body, ASEAN, as a site of regional policymaking. A synopsis of food security policy in the sub-region was presented, highlighting key food security policy issues in the sub-region for Thailand and Vietnam, as well as in Lao PDR itself.

With this geographic and thematic contextual analysis in place- Schmidt's 'nationally situated logics of communication'- Chapter 5 presented narratives in food security policy for Lao PDR emerging from application of a policy discourse analytic approach. Four narratives were identified, including modernization narrative, the smallholder agriculture narrative, and the nutrition narrative. The fourth narrative presenting food security *as* narrative, suggesting that food security was so closely identified with global development discourse as to be indivisible from it: food security functioned as a synecdoche for global normative approaches to development. For each of these narratives, a narrative matrix based on Candel (2014) was populated, indicating the key supporting institutions and authored texts, as well as the basic structure of the problem statements, proposed solutions and moral claims of each narrative.

Chapter 6 explored the role of expertise in the policy discourse, based on research data provided by those experts themselves. Research participants reflected on their roles as individuals and institutions they were employed by. Findings in this section emphasized the importance of perceptions of self-interest in

engaging on the discourse, parallels between expertise and coordination, and the roles of consultants in this process. Findings on the roles of institutions in establishing the discourse suggested a clear top-down structure with international donors at the apex, from which priorities were set and funding made available. The role of ASEAN as an institution was also considered, but was encapsulated as more of a potential than a reality at this stage.

Chapter 7 explored the continuing relevance of food security as a conceptual framework, based on interview data. Interview respondents described food security as unwieldly, overlarge, difficult to grasp conceptually and even more difficult to accurately measure. They described the focus on increasing production as axiomatic within the policy discourse. In considering the emerging food system challenges faced in Southeast Asia, respondents were uncertain to pessimistic as to what stimulus to action food security would bring to issues such as obesity and urban food insecurity, and saw little to no role for their institutions in addressing this issue.

In this chapter, analysis of those findings summarized above taken as a whole will be presented, considering how those issues identified in the chapters 1-2 of this thesis are reconciled with the findings of the research. The chapter closes with consideration of the last research question, and suggests how the dominant mode of discourse over food security can be transmuted into more of a food policy approach, giving greater consideration to social justice, traditions and culture, and environmental sustainability.

On Food Security in Southeast Asia (Research Question 1)

An overview of the general policy context in the sub-region as presented in Chapter 4 indicates that for regional governments, food security is defined broadly, as a stable and sufficient supply of basic foods. Its policy value is contingent on the extent to which it supports (or is perceived to support) other, higher-order economic and political priorities; social stability and preservation of the status quo is predicated on low and stable domestic rice prices (Timmer 1993). Much conventional policy consideration of food security begins and ends there.

Within the sub-region, food security policy is predicated on the assumption that food security is a positive consequence of ongoing economic growth. As one respondent put it, '*it seems that the government's theory of change is this: we will reduce poverty rates by ensuring that we use our resource base to increase our GDP. And we will attract FDI. And for sure poverty rates will fall, and it's been doing that*.' (**National Donor Program Manager 1**). In partial support of this, research respondents judged FDI as more valuable

and effective in alleviating poverty and improving food security than the development sector-led efforts they themselves were a part of. This pattern of growth has created the paradoxical situation described by Rigg (2006), where households in Laos PDR are simultaneously better off than they have ever been, and yet have higher food (and non-food) costs, and thus are more food insecure than when they had less money and produced for themselves.

The basic rationale of growth-led development (as Drèze and Sen (1989) describe it) is: the more income people have, the more they will use money to buy what food they need. This is, after all, how hundreds of millions of people worldwide get the food they eat every day. This logic is contingent on the availability of options for decently paid work, well stocked and accessible markets, and high quality, nutritious food available in those markets. This set of assumptions further presupposes that consumers will act in their own best nutritional interests, purchasing food that represents the best possible, nutritionally balanced, value for money- as interview respondents noted, the proliferation of cheap, highly processed, low-nutrient foods into rural Lao PDR belies that assumption.

If these conditions are met, then it would appear that policy makers have met their obligations to creating conditions whereby citizens can secure their food needs, thought either own-production, or market purchase. Food security thereafter- that is, at the household, or individual level- is therefore a matter of individual choices and decisions. This illustrates one of the codified structures in Southeast Asian food security policy: the state takes responsibility for (or dictates) the macroeconomic and social conditions which will permit individuals and households to be food secure- at the individual level it is a matter of behavior and choice. Crucially, the state determines what the best policy mix for setting those macro-level conditions will be- the example of Vietnam's stringent land allocation policy is instructive here, as is the setting of production targets for rice production across the region.

This policy orientation coexists with global normative discourse on food and nutrition security, which increasingly suggests that positive food security outcomes are decoupled from improved incomes at either national or household level (Deaton and Drèze 2009, Banerjee and Duflo 2011), and which proposes improving food security through sectoral level interventions (notably public health, but also agriculture, education, water/sanitation and so on). But there is no need for anyone to highlight this dissonance: as development sector supported efforts in the realm of public health, sanitation and education will not impinge on national economic ambitions, this is a non-issue. Food security is therefore simultaneously be about economic growth at the national-level, and sector-level efforts at the community and household level supported by international development institutions.

The logical lacunae of this policy orientation notwithstanding, it seems unlikely that the quest for economic growth will be dislodged from its position as the overriding national and regional policy core objective. This linkage goes unquestioned even as regional level engagement on food security increases- as one respondent put it, ASEAN's interest in food security is contingent on it promoting economic growth and thus, ASEAN's position in global trade talks (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 1**). Recalling research findings on 'technical vs. political' valuations of food security in the discourse, *political* food security- that is, how food security is defined, interpreted and applied in policy- will continue to be seen by regional governments as the result of sound macroeconomic policies which promote economic growth and social stability. This interpretation of the term will be most frequently applied at the state level, in the service of both agricultural goals (such as commercialization and export promotion) and other national prestige projects (such as hydropower and infrastructure development).

Recalling Cairney's observations (2012 p113) that the perpetuation of elite control of the state is a policy priority of the highest order, food security will remain firmly within the remit of the state because national food security is understood to uphold the status quo. Because economic performance is a fundamental outcome indicator for non-democratic states, and hungry populations are more likely to be politically restive, food security will remain tightly linked to national security, and thus the state. It is the status quo, not national food security *per se*, which is important to maintain; more than 30 years ago, in its landmark *Poverty and Hunger* report, The World Bank noted 'increasing food security is an objective of most governments because of its humanitarian, political (that is, strategic) and economic importance.' (World Bank 1986 p.40). This is consistent with Candel's (2014a) identification of framing devices for food security which fit prior ideological commitments- in this case, economic growth as the fulcrum of policy.

For Southeast Asian policy elites, global market volatility as seen in 2007-2009 bear out the rightness of this state interventionism, as the market appears to be unreliable, and impossible to predict or control. More specifically, food security is defined by rice. The moment that rice is implicated, food security metastasizes from a technical to a political issue.

The Ideology of Rice

Rice represents one of the defining paradoxes of food security policy in the region: while overall food security is expected to be a result growth-led development, *de facto* based on expanding private sector-engagement in freer regional markets, the commodity at the centre of the policy discourse, the symbolic and actual guarantor of food security, is far too important to be left to the market to regulate.

This thesis has emphasized the centrality of rice in food security policy discourse at the regional and national level. It remains the lifeblood of Southeast Asian food security policy, the policy core belief, well beyond Adam Smith's notion of a 'regulating commodity' (Smith 1776), around which economic systems can pivot: no other region of the world is so profoundly defined by a single staple food. As one respondent put it, '*Even though you do eat rice, you don't eat rice like they eat rice*.' (**Regional REC/IFI Policy Advisor 2**). It is difficult to overemphasize this point, especially for readers from non-Asian contexts: increasing production of rice is and will be the focus of food security policy, writ large and small, across the region for decades to come.

Per policy belief classifications introduced in Chapter 3, rice manifests ideological status in the national level policy discourse and is impervious to external questioning by international institutions. This despite evidence suggesting margins are too thin to be sustainable at either household or national levels, shifts in national eating habits, and/or excess supply at national, regional and global levels (Cornford 2006): evidence, other that rice production figures measured in millions of metric tonnes, are not pertinent to discourse on rice. The perception remains: a nation self-sufficient in rice is food secure: a nation reliant on imports is not. National policy promoting rice production is a bid for self-sufficiency and autonomy from one's neighbours, a hedge against future uncertainties in global markets, and a nationalist claim to state sovereignty.

While conceptual frameworks and operant definitions of food security can and do adjust to conform global normative use, the proscribed 'solution' for food security across the region remains overwhelmingly on rice (Dawe and Jaffee 2014). And that solution, nominally termed self-sufficiency (recalling Clapp's (2017) observations that this is very rarely defined), the singular focus is on volumes of rice, as much as possible. As one National Donor Program Manager (2) put it, '*I think there is something which is culturally deep here, […] maybe not very conscious, but a sort of panic: you must have LOTS of rice in the country. And then you're saved'* (**National Donor Program Manager 2**).

The centrality of rice in food security discourse supports both assumptions of growth-led development, and beliefs about food security being a function of availability: following this logic through, rice is sold and therefore builds the economy or, it is consumed, thereby boosting nutritional status. Thus, there is no evident downside to producing rice, cementing its status as an ideological core belief.

Changes in rice policy are acceptable only insofar as they increase the volume of rice produced, traded or consumed- and there are no upper thresholds for how high any of those could or should go. In this

manner, by adhering to the exigencies of national policy demands for evermore rice production, food security policy discourse reinforces the productionist assumption that food security = more food, and promotes increased commercialization of rice systems as the most efficient means to increase production. Once self-sufficiency, however defined, is beyond question (as is the case for Thailand and Vietnam), this logic is further applied in the pursuit of export promotion, as a contribution to the global 'feed the world' narrative predicated on expanded production of staple commodities (IPES-Food 2016)[72].

In policy terms, the importance of rice is not just agricultural or nutritional or economic, but is deeply cultural and mass psychological, analogous perhaps to freedom of expression or the right to vote in Western democratic traditions. As described in Chapter 4, in Southeast Asia, more than one thousand years ago, systematized rice production was the basis for settled civilization itself. Rice is not only food stuff, but it is a societal value system, one which does not respond to economic rationality, market signals and evidence-based policy. Food security policy discourse is expected to -and does- conform to the lodestone of Southeast Asian food security: food security= more rice.

Situating rice as an ideological pivot in the discourse can be read two ways- one on hand, because it requires increasing production, it suggests a drive towards increased industrialization and commercialization of agriculture, of more engagement and competition in global commodity markets. That said, simple economic theory suggests that if supply continues to increase, global prices will fall, which does beg the question how the export promotion can continue to be viable as an engine for national economic growth in the long term. On the other hand, by virtue of its tremendous diversity, rice resists commodification[73]. Consumption of particular varieties is tightly linked to cultural practice and identity, limiting the possibilities for export and market expansion. Thus, despite the fact it is globally traded, rice

[72] It is important to note that Southeast Asian rice exports are based on production of rice consumed in the region: no country cultivates rice varieties consumed exclusively outside the region, such as the basmati preferred in South Asia. It would suggest that national preferences trump the potential for export promotion into more diverse markets. In any case, the demand for rice imports from PR China and in more populous SE Asian net importers like Indonesia and the Philippines means that there is little pressure among SE Asian exporters to develop production systems catering exclusively to export markets for varietals not already consumed in the region.

[73] Davidson identifies a minimum of ten attributes by which rice is judged, including: botanical variety, country of origin, grain size and shape, stickiness, the combined value of stickiness/grain size/shape, colour, aroma, and extent of processing, culinary use and trade names. (Davidson 2006 p 665). Put more simply, basmati rice is simply unsuitable for sushi, and Arborio is not appropriate for joolof. While rice is processed for use as flour for noodles, pastry and more, it is proportionately less processed than other staple grains such as maize or wheat, which are extensively milled before consumption; rice thereby retains are more of its identity based on provenance much more than those grains. As a consequence, demand for rice is not uniform or constant, but is regionally specific, contingent on local preference, and sensitive to perceptions of *terroir*.

cannot be understood as an undifferentiated commodity, but rather as an overlapping sequence of subdivided domestic and regional markets, and situationally unique foodways.

The question is, what is being obscured by this synoptic focus on rice? There is evidence that the urban Southeast Asian diet, especially in urban areas, is increasingly convergent with global trends, with great deal more imports consumed than food security policy recognizes (Pingali 2007): globally branded fast food and grocery items, consisting of foods historically neither grown nor consumed in Southeast Asia including wheat and dairy (as well as sugar/confectionery and animal proteins), are ubiquitous across the sub-region. Data on the nutrition transition illustrates the adverse effects this dietary shift (and the commensurate shifts in lifestyles and behavior which accompany it), has had on public health.

Emphasizing the centrality of rice in food security policy belies the socio-cultural impact of modernization and globalization on the region's palate and consumption patterns. It ignores the rate of change underway, and further illustrates how urban populations are consistently exempted from food security policy, except insofar as they perceived to require endless supplies of cheap food, specifically rice. The perversity of this state of affairs is that while more complex understanding of food security in urban contexts is not included, rural populations are also inadequately serviced by the present policy mix: insisting on increasing rice production *uber alles* requires that the regions' smallholders continue producing a crop on which margins are already very thin, in a context when demand for cash incomes is rising. Moreover, it points to an emerging paradox in the discourse already experienced by smallholders in Thailand and Vietnam: how to reconcile the national policy requirement for ever increasing rice production when greater income can be secured through producing other crops, or getting out of agriculture altogether?

Narratives in Food Security Policy (Research Question 2)

In Chapter 5, four narratives were identified, based on analysis of authored and constructed texts around food security policy in Lao PDR. Those narratives included modernization, the smallholder narrative, the nutrition narrative and food security as development discourse.

The Modernization narrative

In this narrative, food security is a function of national economic growth, and is therefore a state-led national project. Growth-led development is presented as the engine for national prosperity, through

which GDP per capita will increase, which will in turn reduce poverty and with it, food insecurity. Economic growth will alleviate all societal ills, and promises salvation- economic growth itself is an ideological claim, which it is impossible to be against[74]. Food security, is (and will be), a knock-on effect of increased national economic growth. Given the resource base of Lao PDR, FDI in agriculture and natural resource exploitation is seen by government as the most efficient means to bring Lao PDR up to its own potential and regional standards. Efficiencies in agricultural production through increased commercialization and consolidation will in turn contribute to GDP growth, which will in turn improve food security, generating a virtuous cycle. As discussed above, at the centre of this narrative is rice. The rate of change proposed by this narrative is rapid and increasing, as decades of national isolation and inactivity are reversed.

Food security is used by government and its private sector partners as justification for prestige projects in the energy and infrastructure sector, even as evidence mounts that such projects may be contributing to increased levels of food insecurity (Fullbrook 2010). The focus on food availability and increased production fits well will the material conditional logic present in global food security discourse, which assumes that 'IF the population is increasing, THEN more food will be required'. This causality is replicated at national level by proponents of increased production via commercialization, industrialization and consolidation in agriculture. The synoptic focus on rice, while historically and culturally embedded in SE Asian and Lao policy systems, results in a narrowing of policy space available for consideration of other subjects.

As indicated in Chapter 3, ambiguity can contribute to the robustness of a narrative (Fischer 2003 p 113). Data from interviews reflects an extensive array of equivocation as to the pros and cons of this policy orientation, including concerns over: policy impacts at the level of production and consumption, tensions between economic growth vs. social development, national vs. household/community level requirements, and most interestingly, the future role of government in a national context where food security is increasingly a function of the markets, precisely *because* economic growth is happening. This generates a paradox in which: the government reserves its role as being the arbiter of national food security as a state issue, while encouraging investments in the name of national economic growth which can or do undercut those same citizens' ability to be food secure at household level (Fullbrook 2009).

The Smallholder narrative

[74] I am grateful to Claudio Shuftan for his insights on this point.

Where the modernization policy storyline sees economic growth powered by external market forces defining policy, the smallholder narrative sees history, tradition and culture providing a blueprint for a sustainable future. The smallholder narrative focuses on decisions and choices taken for and at the community (or household) level, suggesting that food security is indivisible from traditional smallholder livelihoods, which are under threat and requiring protection to be preserved. As with narrative 1, the rate of change is rapid and dramatic, with negative impacts on society, health and the environment. In this narrative, Lao PDR is a globally and regionally unique crucible of biodiversity, culture, language, ethnicity and tradition, with culture and environment intertwined with livelihoods[75]. In the regional context, the example of the Thai King's promotion of smallholder agriculture through the Sufficiency Economy model (described in Chapter 4) suggests a possible way forward for supporting rural livelihoods in a rapidly growing economy.

This rural cultural and biodiversity is valuable and worthy of protection in its own right, but also represents a long-established system of environmental stewardship and protection which is the best means of protecting the country's natural assets, and thus, securing its future. These traditions are not undemanding, requiring hard physical labour, exposure to multiple manmade and natural risks, high levels of deprivation, and poor access to goods and services. This legitimates and requires external intervention to support these populations, be it from government and/or development institutions. With government focused on national economic development, international development institutions (notably donors and NGOs) have a role to play in advocating for and supporting rural smallholders across the country.

With vulnerability linked to ethnicity and isolation, involving exposure to risks for which they have limited response capability, food security was described as attainable but fragile, underscoring the focus on rural smallholders rather than urban dwellers, on the basis that urban populations would be more able to endure shocks (**National UN Country Representative 3**).

> *A lot of households and health communities who are food secure at this very moment but if something happens, if there is a minor mishap as the household or the community level, there is bad weather conditions, anything, if there is a little shock then they are not anymore on a temporary basis…sometimes I run around through villages and I see what is happening around*

[75] Respondents acknowledged their own tendency to overstate the utopia of rural Lao lives- as one **NGO Country Director** (**1**) put it '*There is an assumption that there was a romantic past, that communities were all harmonized, that there were no conflicts in communities, but everyone lived this idealistic life based on hunting and gathering. Maybe that was the case, but I doubt it*.' See also the quote from **National Donor Policy Advisor 1** on upland rice in chapter 5.

> *them and I fear that, they are still food secure, but they will be rapidly decreasing. If you see how they access food, and you see how their diet looks like and you see the sources where they get their food, the sources that are decreasing, and access of households is, is getting limited, more and more limited* (**National Donor Policy Advisor 2**)

Although more than 45 percent of the population are non-ethnic Lao, this is an issue of broad-scale national interest, not just an issue for small numbers of scattered isolated tribes living at high altitudes. Even so, there is a distinct geography and spatial orientation to this narrative, with the uplands of Lao PDR the focus, 'assumed to be the centre stage of a 'downward spiral' of land degradation and poverty' (Lestrelin 2010 p. 428)[76].

Agricultural policy documents presented in chapter 1 explicitly promote the elimination of swidden agriculture as a matter of national policy. The valorizing of smallholders promoted in the smallholder narrative thus exemplifies a dissonance between the position of the national government and that of international development institutions inclined to promote the role of rural smallholders. By positing smallholder-led agriculture as a sustainable system, the smallholder narrative, sited specifically in the uplands, embodies a tension identified by Lestrelin (2010) between interpreting smallholding livelihood systems as sustainable, against a government position that presents it as an outmoded system which creates environmental degradation. As a 2016 report on uncontrolled use of toxic pesticides in Xieng Khouang province put it:

> [W]e need to stop seeing small farmers as the guilty party in the toxic landscape, just as they were demonized for practicing 'slash and burn'. Like farmers in most countries, smallholders in the uplands of Laos are changing their practices in response to economic opportunities that are created by a combination of global markets and government policy. These farmers are more likely to respond to incentives created by the private sector than to advice from development projects. Consequently, we need to find measures that involve changes in the behavior of companies and officials, rather than putting the burden for change solely on the shoulders of rural people.
>
> (LURAS 2016)

Perceiving rural households as traditional hunter/gathers and small-scale agriculturalists being exploited by external forces is an oversimplification- as research respondents pointed out, rural households were engaged in commercial labour in logging and extractive industries as well as being smallholders- it is not

[76] Uplands across Southeast Asia have been theorized as a site of both overt and discreet political resistance against the forces of centralizing national governments, most notably in Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed: an Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009). In this interpretation, decreasing the periphery's self-reliance while increasing the role of the 'centre', is consistent with Rigg's (2009 p.10) fourth scalar discourse for Lao PDR.

an either/or proposition. As Rigg et al elegantly put it (2016), Southeast Asian smallholders have proven to be a population which are difficult to quantify or interpret, concluding that 'paths of agrarian change in East Asia will not correspond neatly to what theory suggests, governments desire, or scholars divine.'

It is by no means clear that despite the rapid growth of cities, industry and the service sector, that rural to urban migration in Southeast Asia is a *fait accompli* or a one-way conduit. Smallholders across Southeast Asia have defied economic theory by *not* moving off the land, and despite the availability of off-farm employment, continuing to maintain a foothold in the countryside.

In their analysis, Rigg et al suggest that the persistence of smallholders is *because* of rural-urban migration, not in spite of it: rural Southeast Asian households are defined in this new context as pluriactive, combining on and off-farm incomes, receiving remittances while retaining their family's rural homes and land as a safety net, concluding 'livelihood security is coproduced in the factories and fields'- but that neither of these alone is enough to support the household. As they put it, policies examining agriculture in isolation, or smallholders as agricultural producers only is 'a recipe for misunderstanding.' (Rigg et al 2016).

The Nutrition Narrative

The third narrative identified in Lao PDR food security policy discourse is the nutrition narrative, in which food security is presented as a contributing factor to nutritional outcomes alongside access to water, sanitation, education, the role of women and more. In this narrative, contrary to the focus of narrative 1 on increased production, food availability is *not* seen as a major constraint in the national context. Greater attention is directed towards those non-food elements seen as holding the key to improving ongoing rates of chronic malnutrition.

By virtue of its more expansive perspective, nutrition's advocates therefore claim superiority over food security, bolstered by the reformulation of the term as food *and* nutrition security proposed by the CFS in 2012 (described in Chapter 1): Food security's conceptual remit is seen as incomplete and not far-reaching enough. Although it is nutrition data which 'proves' there is a food security issue in the country (specifically, the 40 percent chronic malnutrition rate), food security is seen as being only one of series of factors which contribute to nutrition.

Chronic malnutrition is included in the MDGs as a target of MDG1, it is therefore a policy issue for development institutions. In the nutrition narrative, food security can be solved by application of a

technically precise set of response options derived from global best practice which must be applied at national level. Insisting on (or in some cases, discovering) the problem, it presupposes the need for external interventions to address globally identified key indicators (e.g. stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, etc.).

In applied policy terms, this expanded policy forum for nutrition is resolved by being unequivocally prescriptive in terms of policy measures to be taken, with the blueprint laid out the by Lancet 13 priority interventions, reinforced by the UN-led global SUN movement and introduced in the Lao PDR context under the 2014 Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan. Research respondents were skeptical about the durability of this newfound attention on nutrition, and nutrition has a long history of grandstanding and tokenism, followed by waning interest as progress happens slowly (Pinstrup-Andersen 1993).

The elimination of malnutrition is presented as a loftier, more complex and elusive goal than ensuring food security. The elimination of malnutrition at the global level is seen as a moral absolute for the benefit of all humanity, and this is seen as being beyond debate, an ideological conviction of international development *par excellence*. In the terminology of policy beliefs, this represents the ideological core.

The perspective implicit in the base assumption of this narrative bears examination: it suggests a problem of such magnitude that it requires external intervention, from either government, development institutions, or both- it is not something that communities and households can address themselves. Second, it assumes a solution is clearly within reach, through the harmonized and comprehensive application of series of technical interventions across public health, education, water and sanitation, and so on- provided by the highly qualified global experts. Third, the attainment of this goal represents the apex outcome of series of efforts across policy sectors. And lastly, it is intrinsically necessary to address, because malnutrition cannot be allowed to continue.

Where Narratives 1 and 2 indicate rapid rates of change, in the nutrition narrative, the persistence and stagnation of high rates of chronic malnutrition is seen as evidence of slow progress, increasing inequality and uneven national development. Contradiction in the narrative emerges from the combination of a collective sense of urgency with the slow progress seen on this issue. Overcomplex institutional arrangements, new players in the sector, and fluctuating levels of government interest and understanding of nutrition are all seen as impeding progress.

In considering this narrative, the question becomes why is the greater inclusivity offered by a nutrition (or a food and nutrition security) framework be considered a more effective path to progress? With food security already critiqued as being so amorphous as to have lost all rigour as an organizing framework, how would an even *more* inclusive nutritional frame reconcile that critique? This consistent with a broader trend in development (with food security cited as an exemplar for this trend because of the difficulty in quantifying progress) identified by Rosenstock et al (2017) as 'more is more', in which bigger, more complex data is demanded on a more frequent basis, on the assumption that this will lead to better performance and results.

The major proponents of this narrative, all of the funding, and the overall conceptual approach are all international development actors, not Lao. To be certain, programming to improve nutrition in Lao PDR is done through and with government collaboration, but were that international funding and expertise to evaporate, the Lao 'commitment' would be demonstrated to be a tiny fraction of the whole. This goes to suggest that nutrition's priority is only as strong as the availability of external funding, as suggested by respondents in Chapter 5.

Food Security AS Development

Before examining this narrative in any greater detail, it should be acknowledged that this narrative may be a function of both observer and participant bias, what Chambers (2014 p33) describes as 'category as an artifact of the methodology'. With research participants drawn from the range of donors, UN, REC/IFIs and NGOs engaged on food security, the importance of such institutions (and thus, this narrative) in overall discourse may be exaggerated. This narrative is nevertheless included in the findings because of the frequency of mention and the importance attached to it by respondents themselves- as will be considered in the Discussion section of this thesis, food security's continued inclusion in the global development discourse has the effect of confirming the importance of the conceptual framework itself.

Unlike the previous three narratives, which situate food security within a larger policy trajectory- whether that is economic development, smallholder agriculture/rural development, and nutrition- this fourth narrative is inwardly focused, suggesting that food security is matter of better institutional arrangements (writ large and small) among and between stakeholder institutions in government and the development sector. In this narrative, food security was understood as part and parcel of the development policy package developing nations in the Global South were expected to conform to, with little to no

independent application outside of the development sector. Because of its multidisciplinary, multisectoral approach involving many stakeholders, food security was seen as an arena for multiple, simultaneous trends across global development discourse.

Consistent with the technocratic orientation of global development discourse, the nutrition narrative presumes that a solution is available, and that at national level, it is simply a question of addressing the impediments to implementation (such as poor coordination or weak data): positive outcomes will be the automatic result. The moral authority of global development discourse is demonstrated by the loftiness of the goals that have been set for humanity to attain: that the goals, or means to reach those goals may be flawed or incomplete is not considered in this narrative.

Food Security as Development narratives were characterized by three problem statements, which if addressed (collectively and individually), held the key to better food security: first, improved coordination and governance; second, the reconciling of technical and political requirements for food security policy and third, better data. The story line of this narrative pursues a material conditional logic whereby IF these issues were addressed THEN food security would result. This is consistent with Candel's analysis (2014), in which food security governance is seen as the cause of, and the solution to, food insecurity.

Candel (2014a) found that equating progress on food security with better 'governance' of food security is based on 'a narrow, normative and simplistic view of governance'. This was confirmed in the research context, with interviewees seeing positive gains as simply a matter of better coordination, better leadership ('searching for a champion'), or presenting better, more compelling evidence. In Lao PDR as it is everywhere, this appeal for 'better coordination' is constant across the development sector (Sachs 2005 p277). Focus was not on what is in place, but what ought to be, effectively presenting better governance as the *solution* to food security, furthering the 'more is more' trend described above, encouraging more participants to be involved, more topics to be considered within the rubric of the conceptual framework as a whole, and more data on everything.

By virtue of its inclusion in the global development agenda, this reading also gives food security forceful moral freight: it is to be addressed in the context of a unified global commitment to a better world premised on the alleviation of human suffering, part and parcel of a moral obligation of all states and peoples to work together to achieve. The global development effort, therefore, is the central metaphor, with food security as a subset within it. This generates the dynamic whereby food security as presented as symptom of broader poverty issues, or as the cause of poverty (Von Braun 1999).

Furthermore, it was perpetually contested because the successes in one arena (such as overall agricultural production) would be offset by shortcomings in another (such as high rates of chronic malnutrition): progress on food security could only be meaningful if there was progress in multiple sectors simultaneously. Equally, this ongoing 'debate' was a result of its inclusion on the development agenda: cyclical reinvention of terms and reorganization of coordinating arrangements are a recurring constant in development discourse (see Real 2010- cited in chapter 3). The rate of change in this narrative is at once slow and intractable, the result of entrenched issues in international development and government institutional architecture, and holds the possibility of immediate and rapid positive change, if the problem statements are addressed.

This narrative highlights a key distinction between food security policy discourse in in developing nations in the Global South from that of rich-world counterparts: the UK government may have a food security policy, but whatever it is, it will devise it by and for itself. In developing nations, such policy processes are defined and shaped by international development stakeholders. Thus food security is inextricably interlinked with the global development sector, a valuing which resonates with food security's profile in the MDGs, the SDGs, and the rhetoric of sustainable development (World Bank 2006). Food security is part and parcel of the externally imposed policy vocabulary developing nations must subscribe to in order to access development funding.

The Metanarrative

With the narratives identified, discourse analysis then turns to understanding how policy narratives can 'coexist at the same time.' (Fischer 2003 p. 173). In this manner, the metanarrative (or 'intertext') seeks to identify commonalities across and between storylines and counterstories, so as to better facilitate a more empirical basis for analysis based on those commonalities.

Fischer describes the hegemon as domination across economic, ideological, cultural, and political domains of society, with 'nodal points' around which the discourse is structured (Fischer 2003 p 78). Based on those narratives identified in the course of research, it is clear that economic growth, underpinned by increased agricultural production, specifically around the nodal point of rice, represents the dominant narrative in food security policy in Lao PDR and Southeast Asia.

As noted in Chapter 5, competing narratives intersect and engage with the hegemon. As the ideological core (increasing rice production) is 'seen but unnoticed', in Gubrium and Holstein's phase (2000 p 495),

the simultaneous coexistence of multiple narratives is supported by a conceptual model (food security) which promotes multiple interpretations within a single framework. Indeed, this coexistence offered as proof of the utility of the overall framework: it includes so many topics and has so many stakeholders that it *must* be valid. Contradictions between policy objectives or competing agendas are not highlighted or reconciled, but allowed to coexist without comment. Any policy process which devoted itself to only one of these narratives would be seen as narrow and incomplete.

Thus, none of these narrative threads exist alone, but are better considered as a skein of interwoven strands, for which proponents of one narrative compete for policy attention and priority over others. Irrespective of how compelling one narrative or another appears to be, what is striking is their collective coexistence and durability. Food security policy need not insist upon one or the other, but rather, in order to appear comprehensive, will claim to address all of these narratives at once, as in the Lao PDR Agricultural Development Strategy presented in Chapter 4.

Thematically, these narratives coalesce around the idea that food security is:

- A secondary outcome of macro-economic growth (regionalization and modernization),
- A question of individual political representation, economic and social empowerment, in which the individual is pitted against the diktat of the state (the smallholder narrative),
- Solvable by a series of globally derived public health interventions (the nutrition narrative), or
- Fixable by the better, more judicious management and application of existing resources and expertise (development narrative).

These narratives are consistent with models of transition Bennett et al (2016) identified across sustainable global change narratives: technology-led transition (the modernization narrative), transition driven by local adaptation (the smallholder narrative) and values change (the nutrition narrative.) Drivers informing these processes include socio-economic dynamics in the regional context, state-led policies, sector-level programming (particularly in public health), and household level decisionmaking.

This leaves crucial questions of agency and control unaddressed. Because food security is conceptually open and inclusive, and, as McKeon (2008 p.41) puts it, 'the *concept* of food security had nothing to say about where food should be produced, how and by whom, nor about who has the right to make these decisions,' [italics added]. Food security is therefore parsed in policy in the service of politically expediency, to a range of social, political and economic ends.

Across the set of narratives, there are points of debate and disagreement throughout. Is the rate of change too fast (smallholder narrative) not fast enough (regionalization and modernization), slow (nutrition) or unmoving (development narrative)? Is there cause for optimism (regionalization and modernization), pessimism (smallholder narrative), cynicism (development narrative) or uncertainty (nutrition)? Is it a crisis or not? Should it be a priority or not? And above all, what is to be done?

Strikingly, none of these narratives include food *itself* as a central focus. Recalling that narratives do not work unless they offer solutions, food security is seen as a result of the solutions proffered by these narratives: that is, economic growth will deliver food security, protecting rural livelihoods will ensure food security, and so on.

Paradoxically, as the ultimate goal of food security has been described as aspirational, a moving target, or possibly altogether unattainable, the policy narratives identified in this research are crafted with end points which those narratives can deliver by the advocates of that narrative, packaged as 'food security', thus confirming Bourdieu's 'pseudoconcept' (see chapter 2). In other words, the narrative implies the solution- whatever that narrative's solution may be, it is then presented as: food security. What is important to note here, and one of the strengths of the policy discourse analytic approach brings in identifying underlying narratives, is that contrary to the global rhetoric which places food security at the centre or apex of the conceptual model (see the WFP Lao PDR diagram in Chapter 1 and Shaw 2007 p384), policy at nation-state levels do not have food security as an top-tier objective; rather, it is a viewed as corollary result of policy efforts in other, higher priority policy arenas.

Some narratives are stronger than others, and narratives are only as robust as the actors supporting them. This research has identified national governments, donor agencies, UN institutions and NGOs as important advocates for narrative threads, with regional governance institutions as a potential player, not yet of significant importance in the Southeast Asian policy sphere. Even so, actors are presented as smaller than the narratives (and the policies themselves) themselves: they support and can contribute to the successful outcome of such policy, but ultimately it is out of their hands. Food security policy narratives are therefore indicative the what Postman describes as the 'agentic shift' (Postman 1992 p114), and of Easterly's observations on the importance of the passive voice in development discourse (Easterly 2013 p62) whereby responsibility for an outcome is no longer tied to any individual or institution, but is abstracted to a higher, vaguer level of responsibility and authority, where it appears to exist autonomously.

Institutions distance themselves from claiming agency over narratives for which the outcome is uncertain- given the elusiveness of food security as a goal, this is necessarily the case for food security policy. Institutional actors are quick to claim credit for positive gains, and equally quick to distance themselves from shortfalls. Undefined, unidentified external forces (whether in regional neighbours, national government, global markets, and/or disaster events) or vaguely defined internal factors (such as the lack of coordination, donor country priorities, and so on) are presented as exerting irresistible force on events, beyond the ability of any actor to influence. Food security is thus everyone's responsibility and no one's; as no one declares agency, no one can be held responsible for shortcomings against aspirational targets.

Where all narratives converge is in what is left unsaid. Food security may be a function of economics (regionalization and modernization), sustainable rural development (smallholder narrative), better public health (nutrition narrative), or better development efforts (development narrative), but what is never mentioned is politics. Politics, understood as the decisions taken by the government in place and how these decisions affect the lives of its people, is discreetly kept from view. With the inner workings of the LPRP and the Politburo shielded from public view in any case, this is particularly easy to do in the case of Lao PDR, but this is a valuation long since maintained in the development sector. In development parlance, the sterile, technocratic term 'governance' has been developed to refer to efficiency and effectiveness of government without reference to issues of justice, representation or empowerment, as these fall into what Higott describes as 'the too-hard box' (Higott quoted in McKeon 2009 p.170). Food security is subjectless, detached and apolitical, beyond the scope or control of any individual, institution or interests (Rossi 2004 p.4).

For nation-states uninterested in having running commentary on their affairs provided by international institutions, this is a preferred state of affairs. Taken together with the point above that food security is an issue for the state, and one in which politics (or governance) are not seen as relevant factors, another major distinctions between rich-word and developing world food security policy is exposed: the discourse does not facilitate, indeed rejects, consideration of political factors.

The role of Institutional and Individual Expertise in policy discourse (Research Questions 3a, 3b)

Taken in tandem, these two research questions explored the feedback loops between normative global food security discourse and the applied realities of policymaking at the nation-state level, and the role of expertise in brokering that exchange. In responding to this question, interview subjects were asked to

critically reflect how expertise was defined, how their contribution was valued, and how expertise as a category could be defined in the context of food security policy discourse[77].

In considering these two questions in parallel, the findings reveal points of divergence between individual agency and opinion versus institutional mandate and obligation. This allows for an exploration of policy discourse as a negotiated process, subject to interpretation and application at the level of practitioner (Laws and Hajer 2006 p411).

In considering the role of expertise on food security policy, this research considered the notion of epistemic knowledge communities, utilizing the elements such communities share to understand how expertise in the research context was structured. While certain elements identified by Haas (1992) were identified- voluntary participation, the importance of non-state actors, and knowledge-sharing and a sense of shared enterprise as a motivating factor- in other respects, the networks of expertise identified in this research did not always conform to what Haas proposed as commonalities for epistemic knowledge communities, specifically beliefs about causality, and notions of validity.

While there was broad consensus at the level of binary responses to questions about food security- that is, yes/no answers to basic questions such as 'food security is a problem'- there was little to no consensus as to the scope and severity of the issue, or indeed what the recommended course of policy action should be: in other words, how *much* of a problem it was. This translated to concerns over data quality, and a general sense of 'how well do we really know what's going on', described in Chapter 5. Some examples given included: chronic malnutrition rates comparable with Afghanistan- yet surely no obvious basis for comparison beyond that; environmentally damaging and socially disruptive Foreign Direct Investment which had nevertheless done more to alleviate poverty than development sector efforts.

These contradictions of the Lao PDR context were an ongoing matter of discussion, subject to extensive speculation, supported by an opaque political environment in which the national government says little definitive. As Pholsena and Banomyong (2006 p75) indicate, in Lao PDR data is 'owned' by the state, but interpretation and analysis thereof is undertaken by international expatriate experts, and contingent on

[77] There was a circuitous reflexivity to this, as it was explained to participants they had been selected for inclusion in the research based on their expertise. In consenting to participate, respondents tacitly acknowledged their own expertise and experience. In critiquing their own (and others') expertise, respondents demonstrated self-critical awareness of their own role in the discourse.

the prevailing institutional interests of their employer[78]. It is therefore these experts who are 'telling the story' of Lao PDR for an international policy audience. Rigg (2005 p.28) suggests that in the absence of a greater body of academic or popular literature on Lao PDR, narratives developed in development sector grey literature have an outsize influence on framing and perceptions of Lao PDR.

In terms of experts' perceptions of their participation in policy discourse, respondents situated themselves at the technical-analytical level, focusing on the design and implementation of aspects of specific programs over which they had direct responsibility. Concerns at contextual or systemic levels of discourse were largely contained within discussions of poor coordination or cooperation, including overcomplex coordination mechanisms. Issues raised about more systemic or ideological concerns to do with food security were voiced in the course of interviews, but were expressed as personal rather than professional opinions.

Per its global definitions, food security is intrinsically multidisciplinary: therefore a wide array of individuals with specific domains of expertise may be involved, with no single person able to master all of the relevant disciplines necessary. Expertise as it is applied to food security is seen as a technical interest and specialization in a related field first (that is in agriculture, nutrition, and so on), and thereafter, in food security. No one with discipline-specific expertise can speak to the wider picture, no individual has expertise in all relevant disciplines- this is the fragmentation described by Haas (1992). Very few research participants felt fluent and comfortable talking about food security with any degree of confidence, only too aware they do not have the full picture. Individuals who agreed to be interviewed were at pains to point out the limitations of their perspective, emphasizing how little they knew[79]. This was true even of people with food security explicitly in their job title and/or job description[80].

[78] According to Jerven, this is consistent with trends in the development sector as a whole: 'Development experts are now first and foremost interested in economics, not economies. This means that analysis is often not conducted by country analysts, and these data users are not able to readily evaluate whether the statistics cohere with economic realities' (Jerven 2013)

[79] Tetlock suggests 'a self-deprecating style of thinking' may be indicative of better performance among experts, noting that there is a 'curiously inverse relationship' between perceptions of worth and quality of work (Tetlock 2017). Humility, therefore, may be the mark of the real expert.

[80] An early finding from the interviews was a level of self-effacingness among respondents, who responded to the researcher's initial approach and thereafter in interviews with statements such as 'I don't consider myself an expert'- while nevertheless agreeing to participate. In discussion on this point with one key informant of longstanding acquaintance, it was suggested that this may have been indicative of selection bias on the part of the researcher, and was not necessarily reflective of a common trait among policy experts; as she put it, "you have to talk to the assholes as well." With this in mind, key informants were asked to recommend individuals to interview irrespective

The basis on which individuals considered food security at all was in its interlinkages to their main area of focus: very few people have food security squarely in their professional remit- for them, food security was more of a factor relevant to their main focus, be it rural development, nutrition, agricultural policy, and so on. As a consequence, there was a lack of certainty as to quite how important food security was or should be: the general awareness of urgency flagged by the 40 percent chronic malnutrition was not matched an intuitively obvious sense of what needed to be done. While expertise was effective in defining food security in its totality, it was less definitive in prompting the requisite action. Throughout fieldwork, there were few examples cited of a well-designed food security intervention that was working well.

Within the Lao PDR context, attributes contributing to an individual being identified by their peers as expert were a result of a sequence of personal value judgements, pivoting around a tripartite combination of factors:

- *Length of In-country experience and residency:* This was by-far the most important factor, irrespective even of linguistic ability and position, enhanced for the most part by residency in Lao PDR (rather than sporadic visits). Regional experience was of lesser but important value.
- *Linguistic fluency:* Verbal (or more rarely, written) literacy in Lao language was a strong asset
- *Position:* Reflective more of institutional mandate than national context, expertise was conferred on individuals by virtue of the job title, position, or employer. For instance, the FAO or WFP Country Representative would *de facto* be perceived as possessing a level of expertise of food security. However, their perceived overall fluency in context would be mitigated by the duration of service in country, and that individual's public deportment.

Secondary factors included:

- *Previous experience*: especially for consultants who had taken up multiple roles over many years, an individual's professional track record was generally public record, and was an important factor in perceptions of that individual's expertise. The more influential an individual had been in previous employment contributed to their present stature and reputation. This also tied into perceptions of diversity and versatility- the broader an individual's previous experience, the better their grasp on the overall context was assumed to be[81].
- *Network/approachability:* interpersonal skills and a wide range of professional contacts were seen of indicative of an individual's ability to collaborate, and their access of a wide range of

of their personal opinion of those individuals. This process of selecting what Merriam calls 'discrepant case analysis' (Merriam 2009 p219) resulted in the identification of a number of interviewees which acted as a partial corrective for this possible bias. Nevertheless, the finding that experts were quick to acknowledge the limitations of their expertise holds across the overall dataset.

[81] To a certain extent, this cut both ways- individuals who had worked extensively for either a single employer or within one sector only (such as nutrition), were seen as closely identified with the prevailing interests in that sector.

expertise. This was linked to judgement of personal likability and friendliness, which was considered an asset.

These conclusions are of a piece with Tetlock's elaborate modelling of expertise in political judgement, which found 'negligible relations between a) professional status, seniority and field of specialization and the key correspondence and coherence measures of good judgement; b) cognitive style and professional specialization or status' (Tetlock 2017). In the Lao PDR context, research respondents appear to have reached a similar conclusion based on their professional experience and self-perception.

Consistent with Germain and Ruiz (2008), academic qualifications (if publicly known) were of little to no importance in perceptions of expertise. Valuations of published documents were varied- documents individuals had contributed to may have been not officially authored by them (but rather presented with a government or institutional logo), were collaborative in nature, may have been poorly disseminated, edited extensively after the fact, or never published. Authorship was not a factor in perceptions in expertise; much more important was public engagement and fluency in professional settings (meetings, workshops, etc.) and interpersonal contact.

None of the factors listed above are indicative of technical proficiency, one way or other; indeed, as a function of fragmentation (Haas 1992), most observers did not feel qualified to pass judgement on anyone else's technical aptitude, hence (in part) the difficulty in identifying 'expertise'. Given the bland similarity of many job titles, it was not necessarily clear what someone else's job might entail, making it difficult to gauge their efficacy in situ. As a consequence, personal impressions, and positive professional/personal social interactions were given more weight than formal affiliation.

Nevertheless, within the 'cadre of consultants', as well as among passionate, engaged development institution staff, a core group of development professionals with a decades-long commitment to the future of Lao PDR exists, and operates as an *ad hoc* brain trust of immense value. The most obvious manifestation of this is the LaoFAB usergroup, which acts as a singularly unique online platform for discussion of rural and development in issues in Lao PDR.

Rather than a epistemic knowledge community *per se*, the role of expertise in context in Lao PDR is to be celebrated for the genuine dedication that the experts spoken to in the course of this research have for the sustainable development of the country. Individuals spoken to in the course of research evoked a profound attachment to the country and its peoples, and whether voicing concern or optimism, were committed to doing what they could: even if the 'solution' for food security was not instantly available,

experts had an abiding personal and emotional commitment in seeing progress to come to pass. Some had spent decades working towards that goal.

Research respondents thus turned the technocratic guise of expertise in food security on its head, emphasizing the importance of the softer skill-sets and personalities: expertise in food security was a matter of individual charisma, communication skills, facilitation and coordination, and information sharing, underpinned by a personal emotional engagement with the people and country. This is consistent with Fischer (2003 p144), which indicated that technocratic, empiricist modes of policy analysis omit the social construction of policy expertise, suggesting that trustworthiness, credibility and acceptability are factors as important as the evidence presented.

This emphasis on the 'softer' skill set- in which how to talk to people is as (or more) important that what is said- reached its zenith in descriptions of food security as an empty set, to be populated with sectoral specialists, only becoming 'food security' though the synthesis of these constituent components. Expertise in food security was thus the ability to facilitate constructive synthesis of sector specific expertise; which could only happen if the convenor could convince those experts to come together and collaborate, hence the value of those softer skills.

In such circumstances, who within which institutions were effective in 'expert' roles was a matter of personality: food security 'expertise' would be the act of bringing together the interested parties (the '90 percent' described on chapter 6), with the expectation that positive gains would result. Convening power was predicated on the assumption that the convenor themselves had no agenda *per se*, remaining apolitical and neutral. Put another way, technical specialization was thus defined by its sectoral narrowness- for example, agricultural experts were assumed to be less interested in water/sanitation or nutrition- whereas the advantage provided by food security was a broad, multisectoral platform. In so doing, food security indirectly competed with other multisectoral development platforms devised around themes such as rural development or poverty alleviation. Food security was often outpaced by these competing frameworks, which were often better funded.

In exploring the role of institutions in defining the discourse, an important dynamic amongst institutions was identified. The flow of actions was presented as therefore as: based on that donor's sense of priorities (backed up by funds available from a donor), and a development institution drafts a program. National government then partners with that institution, tacitly or explicitly adopting policy to fit the development outcome identified by the donor. The results and impact of a given policy or intervention are evaluated

based on indicators selected by the institutions themselves. Institutions confirm their relevance in context based on their ability to secure funding and government agreement.

As the theoretical scope of the term has expanded to consider additional areas outside the conventional/historical purview of food-related food security, the convening authority of those institutions with an established food mandate (such as FAO and WFP) is offset by the ascent of nutrition in the discourse, and their lack of subject-matter authority or experience on issues such as education, water, and women's rights. As a consequence, food security was described as falling between institutional stools, evoked as and when it was useful to do so, but constantly buffeted by a plurality of opinion.

This conceptual shifting sand accompanied or facilitated a fluidity of ownership and control among institutions ostensibly tasked with addressing food security: data from interviews saw this played out between Ministries of Health and Agriculture, but it was also similarly passed between UN agencies, notably FAO, IFAD and WFP, and with increasing frequency, situated (or bogged down) in multistakeholder efforts such as the SUN Movement. As the onus for the portfolio shifted between institutions, so too does the policy priorities, again favouring the predetermined area of focus of the 'coordinating' institution. Examples of this that occurred during the research period included the launch of the National Nutrition Strategy (2009) and subsequently, the launch of the SUN Network.

The role of such institutional expertise described during the research was largely circumscribed within the food security as development discourse among UN agencies, donors and designated government counterparts. Counterintuitively, this focus on coordination, described in the Food Security as Development narrative, reemphasizes the hegemonic status of global development institutions in defining and controlling the narrative: as Cornwell describes (2010 p8), calls for better coordination or harmonization can create cartels within the development sector which limit national government's leverage and insist on donor-defined agenda. Moreover, Habermas' communication theory (quoted in Standing 2010 p54) suggests that the assumption that there is greater scope of consensus and communication (that is, what is meant by 'coordination') emanates from those who already dominate the discourse: by calling for more coordination, institutions reinforce their own role in that process, underlining their own importance. Research respondents identified this, emphasizing that food security is first and foremost a matter of institutional and individual self-interest.

Recalling broader global discussion of the use of data for food security (described in Chapter 2 and Annex III) and in development more generally, the research indicated that debates over data are often proxy

discussions for control: indicators are not seen as neutral, but as 'owned' and operated by institutions. This is consistent with Fischer, who identifies self-interest as the primary determinant of behavior, stating 'No amount of data can convince someone to take a decision that someone is unwilling to make' (Fischer 2003 p111).

On ASEAN:

As described in Chapter 4, since the financial crisis of 2007-2009, ASEAN had taken an increasingly assertive role in regional engagement on food security, developing a Strategic Plan of Action, establishing a strategic rice reserve, and confirming food security as a strategic priority for the entire bloc.

ASEAN's role in regional food security policy was of interest to the present research because it suggested a new platform of governance engaged in food security policymaking at the regional level, with resonances at the global level, as in EU's role in European food policy. It suggested a potential evolution in definition and conceptual approach, such that a regionally specific Southern Asian interpretation of food security might be in the process of emerging. It was of further interest because, as described in Chapter 4, member state engagement with ASEAN is different in content and form from dealings with global development institutions; it was posited that this might therefore be a platform of increasing importance for ASEAN member states like Lao PDR. The possibility that an ASEAN approach to food security policy might act as a conceptual and institutional counterweight to the global normative approach to food security was too important a possibility to ignore.

While the research proceeded with a working hypothesis that a new platform of regional governance may have been emerging, the basis of the findings in this regard were partial and incomplete- the fact that the majority of research respondents were themselves unfamiliar with ASEAN's role (with only seven of 25 able to speak directly or indirectly to the issue) was significant in and of itself, but it went to underscore that regrettably, inclusion of ASEAN in the research model was of limited utility. Moreover, the overall thrust of the findings around ASEAN, such that it was pursuing donor-driven priorities based on funding and reputational benefit rather than crafting its own unique approach, indicated that the expectation that a new, regionally distinct model of food security emerging did not hold.

Food Security as Policy Framework (Research Question 4)

In considering the ongoing utility and relevance of food security in developing country contexts, respondents characterized the scope and scale of food security as: a blob, too broad, unmanageable, in the eye of the beholder, easily misinterpreted and most comprehensively, as 'it should be everything.'

Despite its attractiveness as an aspirational goal, it lacked organizing rigour because of the goal in question is so elusive. Its very 'everythingness' made it valuable to some respondents, who saw it as a means to introduce issues too otherwise politically sensitive into an apolitical and neutral forum.

Opinion was divided on the redefinition of the term as food *and nutrition* security. There was a sense of corrective equivalency in this newer term, of putting both food security and nutrition on the same, more equal footing; this provided a useful rebalancing, offsetting any sense of nutrition as a second-tier policy issue, a change described as long overdue. Some respondents felt this further diluted the utility of food security, whereas others suggested it had injected new energy in to the discourse. Indeed, if anything, nutrition was seen as a higher order priority than food security itself, with the perception of nutrition's predominance over food security based on the broad spectrum of topics that would be covered.

Whatever their views of the new term, respondents noted that the debate over the terminology had effectively *become* the discourse itself; and this did little to advance policy discussion of concrete policy measures required *in situ*. At the national level, the calibre and content of discourse was contingent on the skill and eloquence, and with what emphasis, food security was presented to policymaking national counterparts, inflected by intra-institutional competition and funding availability.

As to food security's continuing relevance to the SEAsian policy context, respondents highlighted the importance of the nutrition transition- of issues to do with overweight, obesity among all populations and food insecurity- for urban populations in Southeast Asia. As a result of the historical focus of food security on deprivation, food security policy attention was perceived as decades out of step, and was only just beginning to consider the urban ramifications. Respondents expressed concerns about the emergence of this phenomenon, but were uncertain what role (if any) they or their institutions had to play in this emerging arena.

This sense of a lack of role in urban food security and overnutrition is important because beyond the binary logic of government-side understanding of the term as food security= rice, food security was presented as an artifact of the development sector, inextricably linked with the global development project. So why does food security persist? Respondents' opinions varied, offering often cynical reasons for this, which amounted to individual and institutional self-interest, resonant with the 'moral hazard' the US Academies of Science describe (2012): institutions with mandates to engage on food security will craft the policy narrative to legitimate a role for themselves.

The failings or shortcomings of the existing systems notwithstanding, the consensus point emerging from research participants' feedback was: even if development effort are falling short of what they could be, they are better than the alternative- in this case, the globalized, capitalist economic growth model which puts commerce and profit above all. In other words, motive matters, and appealing to national government's obligations to their citizens beyond the pursuit of economic growth is a role the UN, donor governments and NGOs are uniquely placed to take up, especially in societies without democratic systems of political representation.

Situating the Findings

With the intention of this research being to explore how global normative approaches to food security are interpreted and applied at the level of nation states in the Global South, this research has identified a number of findings which are applicable to global discourse around food security. These findings go to suggest how the data contained in this thesis may be relevant in other policy contexts.

In addition to those findings of relevance at global level, by situating the food security policy discourse of Lao PDR in the regional and sub-regional context via comparative study with Thailand and Vietnam, and in considering how ASEAN is taking up a role in regional food security policy, additional findings go to illustrate the specificities of the SEAsian policy context, suggesting the regionally specific dimensions of the discourse. Finally, with Lao PDR as the unit of analysis, certain findings are applicable to that national policy context, and while not separate from the regional findings, may hold more resonance for Lao PDR than in other states in the region.

In considering those findings which are more generally applicable, it is worth noting that there are limits to generalizability: this research took place in a lower middle-income country free from conflict and largely free from major crisis during the research period. Findings contained herein may be of less relevance for policy discourse in countries facing more immediate, severe or prolonged food crises. Equally, the ambiguity which characterizes the Lao PDR food security policy discourse, which contributes to the lack of clarity as to the scope and severity of the problem and hence what to do about it, may be less accentuated in contexts where the causes of food insecurity are unequivocally clear; this would likely be the case in conflict or emergency situations. Nevertheless, with food insecure populations found in every country across the world, with more than 60 percent of food insecure populations found in lower-middle and middle-income countries, it is hoped that these findings will be of interest those contexts.

Among those findings which are of general relevance, this research has identified three major narratives in the policy discourse: food security as economic growth, the smallholder narrative, and nutrition narrative. These three narrative strands are consistent across global discourse, and as such are replicated in multiple contexts. In an FAO global report produced in February 2017, stated 'the core challenge is to produce more with less, while preserving and enhancing the livelihoods of small-scale and family farmers, and ensuring access to food by the most vulnerable' (FAO 2017). In one sentence, three of the narratives identified in the Lao policy discourse are elaborated at global level- modernization/productionism, small scale farmers and nutrition (with malnourished children being intrinsically vulnerable).

Equally important in understanding this set of narratives is the finding that for nation-states in the Global South, global commitments made in development sector contexts notwithstanding, food security policy is not a policy priority of the highest order; it is not an intrinsic goal, of value in and of itself, but is rather an instrumental objective, valuable insofar as how it supports other, more lofty goals, such as social order and the status quo. This goes to indicate the limits of national commitments made in global fora such as the United Nations.

Within the development sector itself, the findings of this research indicate that food security in developing nations in the Global South is inextricably linked to the global development project, and is an artifact of development discourse. It has suggested that at the level of national application, development institutions 'discover' mandates on topics related to food security- or claim agency over food security itself- based on perceptions of funding and prestige associated with the topic; this discovery is subject to the availability of donor funding, suggesting there is a pragmatism and tactical assessment that informs development institutions commitment on food security at the national level.

Notable also are findings on the role of expertise, as defined by such experts themselves- respondents expressed uncertainty and concern over both their roles in shaping the discourse, and the validity of the discourse itself, in that it wasn't clear that the discourse in practice was contributing to a clearer understanding of the problem and its best solution. Expertise was seen as conditioned by bureaucratic, financial and personal interests, independent of the national context; global institutional mandate was selectively interpreted to promote a central role for in the institution as resources became available. This inverts the assumption that expertise in food security is a technocratic enterprise, but is rather conditioned by circumstances in situ: indeed, research respondents suggested that how expertise presents itself is as important as what is says.

In calls for better governance, coordination, policy coherence and the like, food security policy discourse in Lao PDR is of a piece with global discourse: calls for more concerted, more collective efforts have been a recurrent component of global food security policy. Whether articulated as called for more and better political leadership, improved inclusion of data and 'technical' concerns in the policy process, or simply a higher level of policy attention, all such appeals have in common a central and pivotal role for global development institutions themselves- this is consistent with Habermas' observation (quoted in Standing 2010 p54) that calls for more consensus tend to benefit those institutions which frame the discussion: this goes to suggest that calls for more inclusive engagement on food security presuppose that those global gatekeeper institutions already playing a dominant role in shaping global discourse propose to maintain that placement.

This is most explicitly expressed in the research finding that for some respondents, food security as conceptual framework is perfectly viable, that it simply improperly or incompletely interpreted at national level. This certainty as to the 'rightness' of normative iterations of the term (and the supporting conceptual frameworks included in Chapter 2) effectively stifles inclusion in the discourse of any competing view which do not adhere to those models developed at global level. This reinforces a top-down approach, in which food security is defined at global level.

Based on respondents' reflections on their experience in SEAsia and elsewhere, this research demonstrates that among practitioners in food security related fields, there is deep concern over the absence of urban food insecurity and overweight/obesity concerns in food security policy discourse. The historical focus of food security, on rural deprivation and undernutrition, continues to hold considerable sway over the content of the discourse, leaving food security an incomplete fit with the food security contexts of middle income countries, wherein undernutrition coexists with overnutrition, where concerns over dietary quality coexist with issues of inadequate dietary intake. Despite occasional rhetorical declarations suggesting that overnutrition is a form of food insecurity, in practical terms there is little to no apparatus to meaningfully include that theme within the discourse, and limited interest from government counterparts to do so. With rare exceptions (such as Thailand), obesity and overweight are therefore excluded from the bulk of food security discourse, and are afforded less policy attention than will be required in future.

Next, within the sub-region of mainland SEAsia and within ASEAN more generally, this research has presented findings of relevance to consideration of food security policy within Southeast Asia. First, with rice presented as the ideological core of discourse, with policy relevance well beyond food security itself,

food security policy in Southeast Asia insists on the centrality of the state; this is of a piece with Timmer's observation that in Southeast Asia, 'food security is a public good, not a market good' (Timmer 2010).

Continued, extensive government interventions in rice markets remains the rule; the Economist (2017) describes the range and extent of government interventions in rice across the region which come at immense financial and logistical costs, but remains constant in Southeast Asian socio-political ideology: rice cannot be left to the markets. Changes in rice policy (let alone rice availability, or even *perceptions* of rice availability) are vitally important, high-stakes political issues.

As the policy discourse analytic methodology shows, what is important in policy narrative is not only what is described, but also what is ignored: in the SEAsian case, the policy emphasis on rice ensures that other topics of relevance to food security as kept on the periphery, presented as an issue of lesser consequence than rice itself. Moreover, as Pingali and others have demonstrated (Pingali 2007, Hawkes 2004, Issacs et al 2011), SEAsian diets are changing in ways which generally signal a move away from rice. This is not presently being well captured in the regional policy discourse.

As a final observation at the regional level, research findings indicate the limits of regional governance, in the form of ASEAN. Despite a regionally specific, consensus-driven mode of engagement, exceptional levels of access to policymakers and a wide-ranging mandate, ASEAN has struggled to find a durable role in regional level policymaking in food security. It has opted to be led and supported by existing donor country priorities and funding, thus replicating a set of institutional arrangements already in place at national level. Bilateral contact between member states on food security relevant issues remains limited and sporadic, reducing opportunities for member states to learn from each other's experience.

Within Lao PDR, but also writ larger across the sub-region, the research findings corroborate the work of Rigg et al (2016) in confirming that livelihoods among lower and middle income populations are not an either/or proposition between rural and urban households but are rather co-produced by engagement in both spheres simultaneously, even across and between states via formal and informal migration. As with global food security discourse about food security in the Global South, food security policymaking in Lao PDR tends to cleave to an outdated set of assumptions about rural and urban populations, about rural deprivation and food deficits, describing process in strictly quantitative terms, in increases in agricultural output, and reductions on malnutrition. This policy axis has not kept pace with the rate of change encountered in Lao PDR; a rate of change promoted, ironically, by the state itself in its drive for regional integration and FDI-led economic growth. This policy trajectory has not resulted in a binary exchange,

pitting the periphery against the centre, or the majority *Lao-loum* peoples against smaller ethnicities, but as research in findings suggest, have led to a series of complex trade-offs at household and community level, such that incomes are higher, and rural infrastructure is better than ever before, and yet, social indicators of process are stagnant. It is of critical importance that the Lao government recognize that that growth-led development, confirmed by GDP growth of six percent or higher for over a decade, does not equate to social equity.

Equally importantly, these findings indicate the willingness of the Lao state to adopt a food security and nutrition policy agenda lifted wholesale from the global normative approaches- development institutions in Vientiane have been heartened and invigorated by this, seeing it as evidence of the Lao government's commitment to the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda, and othersuch global initiatives. This may be the case, but it also underscore a lack of policy impetus and ingenuity from within the Lao state itself- it is easier to simply adopt (or appear to adopt) what is being requested, rather than come up with an indigenous vision. Because food security policy, its terminology, conceptual framing and policy implications are seen as imposed from without, its adoption by national policymakers and thus, its utility, is limited.

Policy Implications of the Research

This section considers how the findings of this research may be applied in global, regional and national policy contexts. With a methodological approach that explores the role of policy discourse in practice, this section proposes ways and means in which that discourse could be better translated into practice, in the service of the stated goal of food security, which is ultimately the elimination of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. In this regard, the current research continues an analytical path cut by Sen's *Poverty and Famines* (Sen 1981), but which has been the subject of debate since the foundation of the United Nations, if not long before. Since Sen's work, there has been the sense that getting the concept of food security right is vital to getting the response right. This section therefore considers what the concept is getting right, and what still needs to be done.

Elaborating on this, this research suggests that in broad terms, food security retains some merit as a conceptual construct: it requires a complex, nuanced understanding of a range of factors from food consumption through food access to non-food factors, such as education, water and sanitation, and so on, and therefore promotes the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in considering its composition. This in turn can lead to multistakeholder commitment and joint actions. While it remains difficult to quantify and track progress towards food security- a characteristic which in turn make it useful

policy cover for initiatives which need to appear socially beneficial- focusing on single indicators with complex chains of causality behind then (such as chronic malnutrition) opens the door to a fuller consideration of food security than straightforward measurements of available kilocalories.

As findings from interview data indicated, what is particularly valuable about food security, especially for non-state actors, is not what is discussed explicitly, but rather, what *else* can be discussed. Food security may be used by state governments as policy cover for predetermined policy directions in the name of national security, economic growth, and so on. But correspondingly, food security is used by actors outside the national-level hegemon, notably NGOs and politically insulated donor representations, to expand policy discourse into politically sensitive areas. For such actors, food security retains value not for what it addresses head-on, but rather for what can be safely discussed under its auspices, what Bourdieu describes as ideas 'smuggled in as self-evident' (Bourdieu 2010 p.90).

Food security also remains a motivational goal; there is an emotional rightness to the idea of ridding the world of hunger which compels action. In the grand ambitions of food security, as articulated in phrases such as Eliminating Malnutrition (SDG2) or the Zero Hunger Challenge, it seeks a goal which may be difficult (if not impossible) to reach, but as it demands ever-better efforts from policymakers and stakeholders if it is to be attained, can generate considerable interest and momentum. As Roberts puts it 'Hunger has always been an invitation to make a better world, and it remains so.' (Roberts 2008).

But what this research demonstrates is that while food security is a viable point of entry for policy discourse around food and nutrition, it is only an entry point; it holds lesser value as a stimulus to concrete achievement. All too often, it is assumed by its adherents at the global level that ridding the world of hunger is its own incentive, a spur to action which cannot be ignored. But policy making at national level in the Global South, as elsewhere, is beholden by a wide range of concerns and competing interests, in which context food security is not a top-tier consideration.

Food security may provide a useful framework for a multisectoral, collective approach to addressing issues of food insecurity and malnutrition; but it does not, simply by virtue of its mention, guarantee that action will be taken, or indeed that actions taken will be of the required kind. Elaborating the conceptual framework, and cogitating over what should or should not be included in the food security discourse, is not the same as taking decisions and implementing them. Fluency in the terminology of food security does not equate to momentum towards taking action. Waiting to have a plan for a comprehensive,

consolidated approach across multiple sectors prior to taking action has resulted in enormous, complicated policy planning documents which do little to ensure that action will indeed to be taken.

For global institutions and experts tasked with promoting food security at the national level, the implication of this finding is that introducing the conceptual framework, ensuring government counterparts' fluency with the contents of the framework, identifying and populating the datasets needed to measure it, and othersuch associated steps, represent one narrow, limited slice of what is required: put simply, talking about food security is not an end in and of itself.

Ultimately, food security is only of utility as a policy objective if what actions that are taken are known, reported upon and critically analyzed- despite the heavy emphasis on planning processes, far less is affected at the other end- as Leroux et al (2016) identified, very little is actually known about what is working in terms of external interventions on food security in northern Lao PDR, but the same could easily be said about the rest of the country as well. This then is the first policy recommendation of this research: rather than emphasizing the conceptual framing food security brings, governments and development institutions, need to understand the entire food policy context. This means looking beyond food security's framing, looking more at trade, private-sector, cultural and ecological factors, and more.

Next, as this research demonstrates, the power of narratives in policy is their conceptual tidiness, not their factual accuracy. Applying a structure which sets out a problem and then suggests a solution, or a cause and then an effect, is easy to grasp, but massively oversimplifies; food security is a complex interplay of issues at national, community and household level, and suggesting than easy answers are readily to hand is misleading. By defining food security as a *problem* at community, household or individual, policymakers demand a solution; this logic presupposes that because a solution has not emerged the food insecure populations in question, it therefore must be introduced from without, by external actors-either government, development institutions or others.

Changing practice to reverse this tendency will require efforts at better understanding of the food *secure*. In the rush to find a solution to food insecurity, little effort is expended on understanding what is working well in context, and therefore no reinforcement is provided to buttress those systems which are operational and effective. This reductive, problematized approach does not examine the local context in detail, and therefore misses the forest for the trees: in seeking to reduce chronic malnutrition rates, little is asked of those populations who are well nourished, or how they came to be so. Positive deviance,

therefore, is a great unknown. While this is certainly the case in Lao PDR, it is also so at the SEAsian level, and across the Global South.

This is a category level concern, and the cumulative absence of data in this regard must be addressed. Rather than insisting that there is a problem, and that that is where attention must focus, we must better understand what is working well, among populations *not* malnourished. Between the malnourished and the obese, there is everyone else: how can it be that we know nothing of this population in developing countries in the Global South, when this is where everyone should be? The recommendation here is that research aimed at understanding how those households and communities who are routinely meeting their needs are doing so.

Third, in applied use, food security at global, national or regional levels is retained by governments as a legitimizing argument for productionism, specifically increased agricultural production of staple grains. This valuation will not change, as long as nation-states maintain the assumption that increasing volumes of food in production is tantamount to domestic political stability or economic growth. In order for food security to be meaningfully reconceptualized for a global context in which humanity is living far beyond its planetary limits, it will need to be acknowledged that food availability (and by extension, agricultural production) is not and cannot be the most critical consideration. This has happened before now- at least at the rhetorical level- but with increasing production a mainstay of agricultural policy the world over, and with global discourse locked in to a logic of increasing global population= increased production of food, this is not readily dislodged from its position as a deep-core policy belief.

This is where development institutions' experts should provide more pointed guidance to states such as Lao PDR, promoting understandings of food security which foresee zero growth in agricultural production, offsetting this by reductions in food wastes, more sustainable diets, better environmental stewardship, and so on.

Ingrained resistance on this point should not be underestimated, but there is conclusive evidence to support this shift in perspective: as research from Berners-Lee et al (2018) indicates, availability is far less of a problem than how the food produced is used. Lappé (2012) suggests that food scarcity exists much more as a spectre than a real phenomenon. Research at the household level is also pertinent here- Banerjee and Duflo (2011), show that food insecurity in South Asia is not a function of availability, but rather, not everyone makes the most nutritionally profitable decisions for themselves every day, even if they are short of food: poor or food insecure households are no more (or less) rational than their rich

counterparts. Taken together, what this points to is the need for a revaluation of the importance of choice, writ both large and small, in determining food security, both at policy level and at the micro-level.

Downgrading the importance of availability will open up the possibility of understanding some of the more lateral linkages which impact food security. Especially in middle income contexts, positive gains on food security will only be attained by looking beyond the four pillar model, to consider the totality of factors impacting what is ultimately an outcome indicator, measured as food security or nutritional status at the individual or household level. Examples of this in Lao PDR include IFAD's support of adult literacy among illiterate women farmers (allowing them to organize, and thus increase their income and agricultural performance) and the appeal from NGOs in Vientiane in 2016 that effective food security policy needs must consider access to contraception for teenage girls, in order to reduce the number of malnourished children being born to mothers under the age of 18.

Fourth, food security has its limits. It may retain value as described above, but it cannot and does not consider every factor and every issue which results in less than optimum food consumption. This issue is at its most vexed on overweight/obesity concerns, where the detachment between global statements such as WHO's identification of overnutrition as a form or malnutrition and national level policy actions is vast- despite its ostensible inclusion within the framework of food security this issue is getting nothing like the policy attention it requires in the Global South (with rare exceptions such as Thailand).

Similarly, food insecurity in urban contexts, especially in huge cities like Ho Chi Minh or Bangkok, does not conform to established patterns of undernutrition, and data can be difficult to collect and analyze. Equivalent concerns could also be raised over integrating climate change into food security, and understanding the gendered implications of food security as lived experience. There needs to be better an admission from its advocates as to what food security does and does not do. Setting limits to what can and cannot be considered will have the advantage of moving beyond the discourse over terminology to action itself; and if those limits are set inaccurately, then there is scope to revisit those limits, but the important thing is to get beyond talking about it to getting on with it.

Within the regional governance context, this research suggests there is yet much in abeyance. Despite the potential role for ASEAN to take up as platform for developing a regionally specific interpretation and policy portfolio for food security, and the opportune timing presented by the launch of AEC, so far this has been found wanting. Even within the bloc itself, there is very little bilateral exchange between states,

meaning that the opportunity to learn from the prior experience, both positive and negative, of states like Malaysia or Thailand, is not taken up.

This is of particular interest because such exchanges would necessarily be two-way: states which have not yet become fully industrialized like Lao PDR and Cambodia are of particular interest for regaining biodiversity and smallholder-led livelihood systems in places where such things have already been severely depleted, as in the northeast of Thailand. ASEAN need not dictate the terms of such exchanges, but it can provide a neutral platform for sharing information and brokering open exchange of experiences between governments. This requires that ASEAN itself think beyond food security as an issue of commodities, global market position, and above all, rice. Leading by example in this regard would send an important signal to policymakers across the region.

Finally, within Lao PDR itself, this research suggests the need to renew this discourse that was begun in 2007 by WFP, and which cuts to the core of a central paradox of food security in Lao PDR: government positions itself as the custodian of food security and insists on its own necessity in that role, but then refuses to acknowledge that national policy decisions can and do have adverse impacts on food security. Both within the Lao government and its development sector partners, critical review and analysis of policy needs to be more than a proforma validation exercise. This needs to start with the basic assumption that food is a policy matter, one which goes beyond quantitative measures of agricultural production and malnutrition. And that further, central level decisions, have had impacts on food security, both positive and negative. What those decisions are, how/if they have been implemented, and how they have affected the food security status of the people of Lao PDR then becomes the central organizing question to be explored.

The difficulty of questioning policy in Lao PDR and the sensitivities surrounding such an approach cannot be overstated, and remain fraught. But with limited avenues open to Lao citizens themselves from engaging with government without the risk of retribution, it is incumbent upon the international development institutions, especially the United Nations, in Lao PDR to take up a more demanding and challenging role with the government of the Lao PDR. In order to do this, there is a need to move beyond the simple grafting of global 'best practice' onto the Lao PDR context, to better understand the cultures, histories and livelihood strategies of the nation's peoples. Such expertise does exist, but it is waiting to be heard- it is rarely mobilized in systematic or coherent form. Experts interviewed in this research have profound insights on how food security policies could be ameliorated, but have very limited space in which to freely and safely express such thoughts, much less be listened to.

As Easterly explores at length (2013), facilitating the pursuit of international development targets (or even individual indicators) should not come at the cost of ignoring uncomfortable political and social truths: at its most effective, food security is a point of entry for larger questions of sustainability, social justice and human rights. As Pritchard et al (2014) conclude, 'the food security question for India is: how can the substantive freedoms of the poor and undernourished be improved so that these segments of the population can better meet their food security needs.' At the level of nation-states, Sen's conclusions from 1981 remain incompletely understood: that food security, is not a question of food, but of policy.

Discussion

Since the mid-1970s, the phrase 'food security' has never been far from the top of global development agenda. It has undergone extensive redefinition and expansion, evolving from a synonym for increased production in the mid-1970s to a super-technical term comprising a range of food and non-food factors of expanding complexity by the 2000s. Its continued importance as an issue on the global policy agenda is confirmed by its inclusion in the 2030 Agenda as SDG 2, for which the overall goal presented as 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture'. Food security is pervasive throughout the 2030 Agenda, underscoring its ongoing status as a global development priority, and of the enduring persistence of undernutrition in all its forms as the centerpiece of global food security agenda.

Yet as this research has shown, the term in so relativistic, mutable, and manipulable that it has lost consistency and organizing structure. It is difficult to gauge and measure, and even more difficult to determine what the underlying causes may be. Multiple definitions coexist simultaneously coexist in unacknowledged contradiction. And no one is sure if it is attainable at all. In the context of research site in Lao PDR, questions persist over the scale and dimension of the problem- and how much of a problem it really is, or even if it's a problem at all. Traction on the issue is undercut by institutional maneuvering for mandate, for funding and control, among government and development institutions alike. While institutions lay claim to sectoral subsets perceived as 'theirs', food security as a whole is an institutional orphan.

One of the great attractions of food as a platform for discourse is its cross disciplinarity, its inclusiveness and its lack of dogma, and indeed, its mutability (Carolan 2012 p.313). What food security does well is insist that multiple domains be considered simultaneously, and that issues beyond a linear 'production ->

consumption' axis be considered. In facilitating the transition of the discourse from availability to access (Sen's great innovation) to utilization at household level, coupled with the recognition that food security at one scalar level does equate to that of the next, food security currently stands a nexus in its conceptual evolution, whereby nutrition security- and its focus on factors outside the realm of food security- is increasingly important. In a world of abundance, food security has to be about something greater than just the absence of malnutrition, and the solution cannot be producing more and more food. This can be read as a recognition that at planetary level, the discourse of scarcity no longer applies, if indeed it ever did (Lappé 2013).

Despite this inclusiveness, this expansive willingness to include in its remit a vast array of factors and stakeholders, there are limits to inclusivity, resulting in significant blind spots in the discourse. The shortcomings of the food security framework in considering issues of obesity and urbanization have been discussed at length in this paper, but similar quandaries exist on issues as complex and multivariate as climate change, social protection (or social welfare) and the role of women at every level. Has insisting on food security's centrality obscured the more important questions about root causes of food insecurity, power relations and social equity (IPES-Food 2016 p54)?

The trend towards inclusivity has the benefit of encouraging participation across a wide gamut of actors, but it fails to resolve the impasse this creates: as it become more complex and difficult to reconcile, it gives ample room to taking no action at all, on the basis that the evidence is as yet incomplete. This leads to policy inertia, implicitly favouring the continuation of the policy trajectory already in motion, thus, in turn, reinforcing the status quo.

At a secondary level, this complexity contributes to a sense of inadequate data as a central concern, and requires that the efforts of food security actors be spent coordinating and convening the relevant parties. Food security data is routinely collected and analyzed by global and national institutions which have a vested interest in the findings. The viability of the data and analysis are all too often 'confirmed' by the efficacy of the actions taken in response to that data. Although this is a logical leap (*post hoc ergo procter hoc*), it is grounded in pragmatic concerns: investment in measurement should yield usable information for policy and programming. This creates a burden of expectations that has obvious implications for data collection and analysis (Eele 1994). The validity of the data itself is only as strong as how much it stands up to question, who questions it, and how queries to the data are articulated (Barling 2012). At this stage, it is axiomatic that global, regional and national data is incomplete and of varying quality, which begs the

question when data will ever be adequate, and how such a threshold will be known when (and if) it is reached.

Measuring food security is only as useful as how the data is used. How data is applied to policy is in turn reliant on what resources are available to respond to what the findings suggest. Furthermore, it sidesteps the fact that in autocratic political systems, governments not answerable to the public, are able to act more or less at will, able to select or reject evidence as they see fit (Easterly 2013 p149). How then more refined measurement is of utility in such contexts is open to question.

For governments, food security's utility in policy lies in its confirmation that the state retains agency and control over food, and that 'securitizing' food is within its ambit. It is this use of 'security', conceptually slippery and prone to emotional reading, which leaves food security so open to interpretation. In an academic review of 'feed the world' narratives, Lappé (2013) notes that increased production remains the watchword of global food security narratives because 'what gets heard by the general public is a message of human hordes overrunning the world food supply, causing famine because of absolute shortage. It's scary.' In this reading, producing every more food to stave off massive social upheaval by the poor and hungry has a reflexive, intuitive logic.

Much more so than the word 'food', it is 'security' which situates food security squarely in the purview of the state: irrespective of the political system in place, security is generally agreed to be a responsibility of a state to its citizens; states unable to provide such security are described as failed. 'Securitizing' food opens the door to a food becoming a factor in national security. At a regional level, Southeast Asian governments' extensive involvement every stage of rice systems is a case in point.

Actions taken the name of security transcend ordinary politics or economics: effectively, nothing is more important. As Tolentino puts it, (2006) securitizing 'frames an issue as a special kind of politics, or as above politics, and can be seen as an extreme form of politicization'. National security can be evoked to effectively trump any and all other concerns. This has the effect of linking food security to the ideological policy core (preserving the status quo), but it also removes elements of it from public discussion, shifting it to a more secretive plane: for instance, data on current stocks of rice available for domestic consumption is closely held for precisely such reasons. It insulates policy actions from scrutiny and insists on the role of the state, and only the state: the private sector has little to no role in security matters.

In all but the most extreme emergencies, people make choices about what they eat and why. Despite the decades of effort invested in attempting to understand how to best to measure food insecurity, this

decision making is still poorly understood. Understanding why this may be is a hugely exciting field of enquiry, one which turns the logic of hunger as crisis on its head. For millions of food insecure people, food insecurity is perhaps a crisis, but it is also a daily reality, folded into the fabric of quotidian living. Emphasizing the crisis aspect has limited better understanding of the daily grind.

The challenge then becomes in convincing governments that food security for their populations is both desirable and deliverable. Broad rhetorical commitments notwithstanding, not all governments are convinced of this possibility. Much of the high-minded discussion of the importance of food security at the global level is returned to the pending tray when delegates return to their national capitals, alongside other aspirational goals like poverty alleviation. The potential economic benefits of a food secure population producing at peak capacity (usually presented as 'malnutrition represents an X reduction in overall GDP') do not outweigh the political risks and economic costs of delivering on food security.

Which then begs the question, can governments be obligated to make it possible for people to feed themselves? What instruments of governance, global, regional or local, exist for states which are not accountable to their own populations? De Waal has suggested that famine be classified as war crime, and governments and leaders be indicted by the ICC on that basis (De Waal 2017). Remote as that possibility may be, with existing development sector institutional architecture, predicated on cordial relations and collaboration with governments in power, does not have the power or interest to insist on hard choices; and as this research has shown, even if they did, there is no certainty that the course of action they would propose would be the right one.

Maybe there is a genuine need to get the understanding right- that the better we understand, the better hunger and food insecurity will be addressed. But there is a grimmer, more cynical possibility, which cuts to the technocratic heart of the global development project. Rist (2010 p20) observes that development itself (understood as 'a global promise of generalized happiness' in which 'the situation of poor people would be improved') has been perceived as a 'just and desirable' outcome which is consistent with 'the natural world order' to the point that any critique of the worthiness of development as a belief system was rendered null and void. The ideological core of development itself is in its own absolutist understanding of the rightness of its efforts. This resonates with the quote from Regional UN Technical Advisor 5 included in chapter 7, to the effect that there's nothing the matter with food security as a concept, it's just poorly interpreted at country level. This is consistent with critiques of the global development project which suggest it is a standardized process which gives short shrift to local context or empirical realities (Ferguson quoted in Jerven 2013).

Left unspoken as a narrative non-story is the possibility that all this work on conceptual approaches on food security, on developing ever more elaborate 'understanding' of a topic this fluid, is so much woolgathering among elites, a convoluted means to maintaining the status quo. Rhetorical platitudes to the contrary notwithstanding, is it possible that we, in the elites of the rich world, don't actually have that much of a problem with the continued existence of global hunger? Could it be that we are perfectly willing to permit a level of inequality and suffering for millions of people every day, so long as it doesn't affect us personally? Such once profoundly heretical thoughts are beginning to find utterance: 'The question is not, 'How will (or even can) we feed the world?' it is, more bluntly, 'Do we really want to?' (Roisin et al 2012b).

Ultimately, who is 'we', in this case? As Jacquet unpicks, in declaring food security a critical global issue, insisting that it is a) solvable, b) the time is now and, c) a world without hunger is the way things 'ought to be', the food insecure peoples and governments of developing nations in the Global South are told what to do, while those of us in the rich world, already food secure, are exempted from responsibility, having already attained this 'secure' status (Jacquet 2013).

This suggests something we would rather not believe about ourselves, that we are able to tolerate profound disconnects between our individual commitment to a morally sound existence, and social structures which perpetuate inequality (Lappé 2013). Perhaps our collective commitment to ridding the world of hunger is less solid than we thought. Maybe, despite the rhetoric of the UN, the development sector, regional or national governments, our collective willingness to meet our commitments to a fairer world is far less than we would like to admit. What if it turns out that the vision of a more just, more equitable world is not the stimulus to ourselves or others we would like to think it is?

Chapter 9: Conclusions and Reflections

This chapter discusses the value of the research, reflections on the research questions and methodology, the limitations of the work, recommendations for future study, and the researcher's final reflections.

Conclusions

None of what has come before is intended to belittle or sneer at the commitment and desire of dedicated individuals in Lao PDR, in Southeast Asia and at the global level, who work every day to address the fact that far too many people in their nation, in their region and on the planet do not have enough to eat. Their compassion and dedication are humbling. But this level of individual commitment does not translate into concerted action across and between institutions.

Rich-world nations with the resources and wherewithal to meet their populations' food needs have, the occasional blip of excitement notwithstanding, moved on from thinking of food security *per se* altogether. With food systems conjoined with global challenges around climate change, public health, trade and social justice, joined-up food policy, or food policy which considers a far wider range of issues has come to the fore. Food policy entails a reformulation of the basic problems to be addressed, including all aspects of supply chains (including production, transport, storage, wastage, and social/environmental externalities throughout), behavior and culture, and the environment as well as those foci of previous policy packages (such as nutrition and poverty). It proposes a model of policy making in which public health outcomes (that is, nutritional and morbidity outcomes- see chapter 2) are intertwined with outcomes in ecological sustainability, social justice, democracy and equity (Lang et al 2009 p46). The question becomes, how to support a transition in the Global South from food security to food policy?

Having relentlessly described in the preceding pages food security as hopelessly overladen, it surely would be the height of folly to suggest that a better policy approach would further *expand* the scope and depth of policy focus to include even more topics, indicators, actors and agenda. But this is the necessary next step. This is so because with the food security narrative so insistently on deprivation in rural areas, two groups of policy actors have been overlooked by policymakers from the discourse: the private sector, and citizens themselves. A meaningful transition to a food policy approach would require a fuller consideration of how all citizens are getting fed, not just those populations which are falling short- this would entail a revaluing of food systems as applying to all members of society; in turn this would loosen the grip of expertise on defining the discourse.

In the Global South as elsewhere, private sector actors (taken to include anyone outside government who has a role in getting food from farm to fork, from paddy to bowl) are the conduit through which most of a country's population is fed. Food security is concerned with those populations not adequately supported by market forces and government systems. Virtually nothing is known about populations who *are* meeting their food needs every day, and how they are doing it- this is especially true for urban populations. As research participants observed, like it or not, FDI had likely done more to bring down poverty in Lao PDR than any development effort. The first step in this reformulation of the policy narrative must acknowledge that the private sector- from petty traders at the roadside up to the multibillion dollar Thai food conglomerates operating in Lao PDR- and not the state is feeding the nation.

Governments must acknowledge that they does not, and cannot feed their populations directly, or by themselves. As has been presented in chapter 4, the state in Southeast Asia has long insisted on its centrality on food security, whether as reflection of the importance of rice, or a function of national security. This need not be questioned *per se*, but there are regional examples which may provide a viable way forward, while retaining rice as sacrosanct. The Thai program of subsidies may provide a potential example of how to square the circle: government sets prices for staples considered critical, including rice, cooking oil, sugar and cooking gas, but allows for more open trade in all other food stuffs. This assures that the fundamentals of the Thai diet are available, while allowing for markets to otherwise function normally. This suggests the possibility of the state both maintaining control and recognizing its limits effectively.

The second group of voices thus far absent from the discourse are ordinary citizens themselves- as much of the research of this thesis has proven, too much of the policy discourse around food policy is conducted among elites or elite-affiliated foreign experts. There are encouraging indications that food systems are becoming more receptive to public concerns in Lao PDR. In 2016, a directive was passed requiring that all packaged foods be labelled in Lao, as opposed to Chinese, Thai, English or other foreign languages, in recognition of consumers concerns over food safety and basic nutrition information.

These are incremental steps. While the emergence of the nutrition transition has accelerated the need for national and regional policy debates around food security including both over and undernutrition, if the objective is improving nutritional outcomes, this remains a long game. With a context evolving both rapidly and in multiple simultaneous directions, there is a need for policy discourse to be resist the urge to oversimplify narratives which will, in all probability, get more complicated. One of the reasons that stunting remains a daunting prospect and a frustrating indicator for policy actors, it is takes so long to

change: reversing the impacts of chronic insecurity is a long, difficult process. If narrative analysis helps all stakeholders to better understand where they are now and what they're saying is the solution, perhaps it clarifies what needs to happen next.

The question remains, in a formulation put to me by Tim Lang in conversation early in the research process, 'If not food security, how to capture what has been sought by the term?' More bluntly, many respondents expressed frustration or concern with the current state of food security discourse, asking 'what do YOU suggest?' My answers to this question are modest, and likely unsatisfactory to anyone anticipating that a simple solution is out there.

The ultimate objective of food security, of ridding the world of hunger and poor nourishment in all its forms, remains a good thing, and is worth fighting for. It is indeed right and just that we (whoever we are) might do all we can to rid the world of hunger. Food security remains a guiding light, as experts toiling in fields as disparate as soil science, breastfeeding, aquaculture, and trade policy do so in the hopes of building a more food secure world.

In practice, as we continue to fail to achieve that goal, more and more is added to what we must consider in the rubric of food security, in the hopes this will more completely address the problem. This results in the state of affairs this research describes: an overdetermined notion which, despite its capaciousness, *still* does not capture everything that needs to be considered, nor does it clarify.

This relentless conceptual tweaking has not reconciled food security with the major challenges of our time, such as climate change and the role of women in society, or even-more squarely within its remit- the Nutrition Transition, an urbanized world, and globalized food systems. Food security insists on a binary cause/effect logical flow (or, in policy narrative terms, a problem and a solution), in the face of complex contexts which resist such simplification: as research respondents pointed out, the modernization and economic growth narrative in Lao PDR may be deeply problematic, but has likely done more to alleviate extant levels of food insecurity and poverty than any global development effort. Borne on the back of integrated regional markets, food has never been as available in Lao PDR; but is more likely to be nutritionally vacant, draining household income as it demands to be purchased, as natural sources disappear from the forests and rivers. As Rigg et al (2016) explain, livelihoods in Southeast Asia are co-produced, in both the factory and the field, not in just one or the other. These are not causes and effects.

There is collective anxiety among experts interviewed on this point: food security does not seem to be up to the task, and yet there is no sense as to how it could be replaced. How do we get beyond the process of simply adding and adding to the conceptual mass?

It is exhausting pursuing a goal that seems to be forever receding into the distance. It is discouraging trying to create a freedom from hunger, when there are so many factors that can, individually or collectively, bring it on. There a lingering sense among those who have worked at practitioner level in this field, that we many not in fact, know what we're talking about- hence the 'I'm not an expert' humility presented in Chapter 6. But the question remains then, how to break this cycle of repetition, in which new iterations of concepts are trotted out in service of a new momentum, only to return to the same basic programmatic ideas, and the same narrow, bounded focus on rural deprivation?

One place to start may be in examining the counterfactuals, in order to better understand how to move beyond what is taken as ideological certainty. This is what is so compelling about Lappé's suggestion that scarcity, in global terms, does not exist (Lappé 2012): this cuts to the heart of the notion that food security needs must entails increased production. Following this logic though, how would food security policy be crafted in a context where food availability was NOT increasing, or even decreasing?

It seems counterintuitive that the question above is even worthy of the asking, but this is the precisely the point. Despite our collective efforts to address this question over 70 years, some of the most basic assumptions embedded in food security remain consistently unexamined. It is taken as read that there is a problem. And that there is a solution. This in and of itself is a narrative, elegant in its simplicity, made fast by its constancy over decades of repetition. But as Kahneman puts it, 'familiarity is not easily distinguished from truth' (Kahneman quoted in Martin 2017). Narratives exist because they tell a good story, not necessarily because they reflect the truth, or have anything meaningful to say.

This is perhaps the most valuable insight of this research- not so much that policy discourse is the site of multiple, competing and coexisting narratives in food security policy, but that these narratives themselves are so facile and pat. In addressing food security, we collectively appear committed to the notion that that a solution exists, and that an aspirational goal is absolutely attainable. To suggest otherwise is to permit ongoing suffering, indicative of a brutal disregard for our fellow men, women and children.

We would rather not consider that food security is messy, plural, difficult and hard to measure, and that it may be impossible to achieve. So the litany of why food security is not achieved persists: it is overdetermined, blighted by institutional jockeying, ignores as much as it includes, is prescriptive rather

than iterative, swerves around the political, insists on rural deprivation as the synoptic focus, and is subject to endless redefining of the definitions, frameworks, and measurements. But perhaps these are just symptoms of a larger ill. Without examining the ideological freight borne within the discourse, we do not see quite what is it we're suggesting is the solution, or ask ourselves why we come to be so absolutely certain of what we are proposing. Rather, we need to start by asking how we can know that those solutions we propose were possible and right- and then perhaps, better understand the difference between our collective reach and our grasp. It is not that we collectively lack commitment- but we do lack real answers, and that is because we are not asking the right questions: we are asking the questions we know how to ask.

Value of the Research

By virtue of the researcher's access to Lao PDR senior-level representatives within the UN, the donor community, NGOs and other food security stakeholders, this research represents a unique set of insights into divergences between institutional alignment and mandate, and personal experience. The anonymity and discretion afforded by the research process allowed for a frankness of exchange which could not and does not take place in public view. Research participants were candid, thoughtful and impassioned in their participation. This furthered the application of discourse analysis initiated by Candel (2014), by exploring policy as a negotiated process at the practitioner level.

In its analysis of the content of the food security policy narratives at national level, one of the key findings of the research has been that the ongoing, rolling redefinition of terms, definitions and frameworks are one of the hallmarks of food security as a conceptual whole, and have come to occupy a central role in the discourse: defining terms, the selection and analysis of indicators, and which topics to include under which rubric are not just elements of the discourse, they have *become* the discourse itself- this makes it a topic well matched to a policy analysis methodology which sees language itself as the basis from which ideas are constructed, explores the role of language, linguistic norms and narrative structure in policy. The research suggests that food security presents a more or less constant process of redefinition; that process of redefinition has been consistently expansive and inclusive, diluting the robustness of the term over time.

The situating of food security within a broader policy context is in and of itself of utility, as much research within food security tends to assume that food security is itself an obvious focus of policy, its importance

and centrality taken as a given. The metanarrative presented in this research indicates the instrumental status of food security in policy, whereby it was only as valuable as its contribution to a higher-order policy priority, be it economic growth, smallholder agriculture or nutritional status- despite its advocates' emphasis on the importance of food security, it remains a subordinate policy goal, not an intrinsic outcome.

By expanding Candel's document-based analysis (Candel 2014) to include constructed texts and the synthesis of narratives that emerge, this research supports the emerging body of knowledge on how global normative policy is interpreted and applied at the level of the nation state. Equally importantly, consistent with the policy discourse analytic approach, this research resituates food security policy as a product of political and economic continuum at the level at of the nation-state and region, suggesting it has both validity and consequence outside of the development sub-sector, and that it is subject to deep core and near core policy belief systems within both government and development sector institutions.

The recognition that policy discourse presents moral claims provides a dimension otherwise lacking to technocratic reviews of policy, which presuppose that policy is apolitical and sterile, in which, in Fischer's terms, review is kept at the technical-analytical level, in which policy documents are assessed on the validity of their own stipulated targets. Policy discourse suggests that policy itself is the stage for the manifestation of deeper beliefs and ambitions; this research has suggested that policy discourse around economic growth has been effectively amalgamated with culturally embedded demand for rice, such that one cannot exist without the other. It has suggested that discourse around governance, data and 'technical' issues in food security have become proxy sites for competing institutional control of resources and authority.

In terms of the research site, Southeast Asia in the second decade of the 21st century does not appear to be a location of major policy concerns about food security: the regional is a constellation of increasingly affluent, tech-forward economic powerhouses, both a market and manufacturing hub of major importance for global trade and commerce. In such a burgeoning context, food security concerns would appear to be swept up by the rising tide of economic growth, ever better market infrastructure, increasing household incomes, and cheaper and more plentiful food than ever before.

Limited research on food security has been conducted in Southeast Asia, and within that regional context, even less on Lao PDR. With nations in the region increasingly fitting a middle- income profile, and with the region a crucible for the double-burden/nutrition transition, this research is of utility in describing the

policy context for examining food security policy in lower-middle income and middle income countries, emphasizing how productionism and food insecurity as a deprivation-focused, rural issue continue to draw focus from broader interpretations of food security.

With the bulk of food security research conducted in humanitarian emergency contexts, and more complex food policy research underway in rich world contexts, this research sought to bridge a gap in the literature by applying a policy discourse approach to a topic generally addressed by more straightforward methodologies (such as policy reviews) developed within the development sector. It endeavored to bring academic rigour to a research context, topic area and political system which is rarely the focus of public policy research of any form.

For Lao PDR, this research represents a snapshot in time, covering the period 2009-2015, a period with coincided with the culmination of the Millennium Development Goals and the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and thus of concentrated policy attentions towards attaining those goals. But with development policies formulated, reformulated, or repackaged on a near-constant basis by both government and development institutions, and with little no critical analyses of previous policy process within Lao domestic or SE Asian academic circles, this research provides some historical record of the dynamics at work in national policy processes at that time. Within the development sector, previous policies are not necessarily reviewed in detail before 'new' initiatives are launched. This research may therefore be of some historical utility.

Finally, it is hoped that inasmuch as it is a cliché to describe Lao PDR as little-studied or unknown, that this research has increased awareness among readers who may not have been familiar with this fascinating and remarkable country. If this research has been presented well, some of what makes Lao PDR so wonderfully unique and worthy of study has come through in this thesis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Food security in urban contexts remains poorly understood in SE Asia and Asia as a whole, and is well deserving of additional study and consideration in the context of megacities like Bangkok, Jakarta and Ho Chi Minh-this is reflective of a larger research gap in global food policy: in 2017, IFPRI's annual *Global Food Policy Report* focused on food policy in urban contexts, highlighting this as a major concern (IFPRI 2017). But this does not pertain only to capitals; with millions of Asians living in medium sized towns and regional centres like Khon Kaen, Savannakhet and Pakse, there is also need not just to understand the metropolii,

but also to understand these medium-sized cities. In many developing nations, governance structures for cities (especially outside the capital) are ill defined, creating new and under researched sites and modes of urban food policy and food systems policy networks to emerge (Haysom 2015).

Secondly, overnutrition, overweight and obesity concerns are also due further consideration, especially as these are deeply mediated by national culture – perceptions and policy approaches may differ significantly one from nation to the next and may be worthy of comparative study. Third, as the AEC becomes a reality and Southeast Asia increasingly becomes a region of free movement of goods, people and services, there is need to better understand how social patterns are emerging within economic zones which may not conform to national borders, such as the northern Lao/Yunnan zone, Lao's Attapeu province and southern Vietnam, and the urban and peri-urban corridor of Vientiane/Udon Thani/Khon Kaen.

Reflections on Methodology

Because it so explicitly emphasizes the role of the researcher as interpreter, the policy discourse analytic method holds out great potential for policy analysis in nations for which policy processes are fluid, informal or opaque. Further, by exploring the role of language, and by considering the nexus of authored and constructed texts, the discourse analysis approach is well suited to examining policy contexts where there is a substantive disconnect between what exists on paper and what is implemented in practices.

Establishing the underlying narratives, and linking these to the policy belief systems within an overall political system can better explain the deeper motivations of political elites, as opposed to the more technocratic, technical-analytical level of analysis usually undertaken in developing nations in the Global South, whereby the success of a policy is evaluated based on its own stated targets and indicators, irrespective of the broader situational validity of the policy. Understanding what the narratives are facilitates an analysis of what ideological core belief they link to, and thus, provides insights into how change occurs. By insisting that the discourse itself bears scrutiny, the overall integrity of a policy system is examined. But as perhaps is clear, applying this analytical lens does not validate the claims of the narratives identified- it simply exposes them to public review and critique.

It is shared storylines, not shared knowledge, which support coalitions in policy (Hajer quoted in Fischer 2003 p107). 'Evidence' is adapted to meet the needs of the storyline, not the other way around. As Fischer has it, 'firmly held narratives manage time and again in suspending belief or critical judgement,

sustaining opposition or marshalling public support, even despite events that create doubts or put them into question' (Fischer 2003 p58). Therefore, perhaps the most valuable utility of the discourse analytic approach is that in identifying the narratives in play, it presents just how simplistic and reductive these narratives may be, and more importantly, how impossible they are to dislodge.

With this in mind, the ultimate utility of this approach comes in the interpreter's analysis of the validity of the narratives and overarching discourse (though which, reflexively, the interpreter herself defines and participates in the discourse). This is vital because simply because a narrative exists and is widely endorsed, does not make it-or even any part of it-correct. The problem definition, the causes, and the proposed solution may be all be erroneous, and yet, based on conventional wisdom (or perhaps, collective assumptions), the narrative may be accepted and endorsed. For example, this research has indicated that food security= rice is a 'non-story', in that it lacks the basic elements that make up a storyline, and yet simultaneously, this non-story is virtually impossible to dislodge and is the foundational basis for food security policy nationally and regionally. Narratives, once established, are changeable, but the core policy belief resists: food security discourse in Lao PDR will always require increased rice production and reduced chronic malnutrition- these are articles of faith at this point.

Further research in policy discourse would be well served by seeking to migrate some of the element of narrative theory from the humanities to public policy research. For instance, it has been established since the era of classical Greek theatre that narrative turns on conflict. Whereas discourse analysis has to date considered the identification of storylines, counterstories and metanarratives across and between the storylines, less attention has been focused on the internal structures of policy narratives. Gardner (2008, p 202) notes that both conflict and novelty are key to attracting interest to a narrative: how do such factors play out in a narrative statement such as 'the key challenge to food security in Lao PDR is the elimination of chronic malnutrition?' Exploring the extent to which effective policy narratives contain the elements of successful dramatic narratives, including conflict, suspense, surprise, or tragedy would go to indicate how to better make a set of policies that gain traction among policymakers and the public alike- the example of obesity may be instructive, whereby despite its massive social, economic and health costs, it lacks the intensity of public interest notable in tobacco or drug control discourse.

Despite the technocratic trappings of global development discourse, food security's stakeholders are in the business of telling and selling a compelling story, so as to promote positive gains on their priority goals. The lesson of this research, that trust, personal networks, communication skills and individual self-interest are drivers of that discourse, have been identified through application of this methodology.

Limitations of Research

Recognizing the policy dynamics of a land-locked country in a highly integrated region, this research developed a sub-regional analysis frame between Lao PDR and two of its neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam. In defining this sub-regional context, the exemption of PR China was a significant limitation, but given the gravitational force exerted by PR China, it was difficult to determine how to maintain an equitable balance of focus if PR China were to be included. Furthermore, despite the shared histories, social and political cultures between these Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam, given the range of human, economic and environmental factors to be considered- in other words, given the richness of Southeast Asian states in all their forms- comparative analyses of Asian states can only be partial, and should be treated with some caution (Rigg et al 2016). Southeast Asian scholars will likely find much to critique in these pages.

While the sub-regional contextual analysis proved to be invaluable in terms of elaborating the historical context and understanding of the interwoven historical trajectories of these nations (included in Chapter 4), this did not provide as broad as basis as hoped for comparison between policies in each nation. This is not to downplay the utility of this approach- indeed, respondents from ASEAN were especially supportive of this, underlining that this was something that ASEAN itself should do more of. However, with little to no meaningful food security policy developed on a bilateral basis between nations, and with the food systems and political economies of both Vietnam and Thailand vastly larger and more complex than that of their common neighbour, the basis for direct comparison was limited.

More critically for the research itself, very few participants felt experienced enough on all of those countries to be able to comment knowledgably on more than one country's policy. For many regional respondents, although they were based in Bangkok, Thailand served as an official base rather than a site of professional engagement, with the result that regional respondents were more unfamiliar with Thailand outside of Bangkok or Thai policy than might have been expected. While there was some familiarity with Thai or Vietnamese-supported initiatives within Lao PDR among national research participants, this did not generate enough data from constructed texts to elaborate the policy discourse analysis as it applied across national policies.

The basic narrative of the sub-regional policy mix fitted a straightforward storyline of supply and demand leading to economic growth, whereby Lao PDR supplied natural resources and raw materials to its more

advanced regional neighbours. The more complex throughput of policy processes between nations was not well represented in this research. In other words, it was not possible, beyond the researcher's own analysis, to determine what policy transfer at the bilateral, trilateral or ASEAN level was taking place.

More concisely, it was not possible to determine the extent to which policy processes in Vientiane are explicitly influenced to any degree by policies developed in Bangkok or Hanoi- as described in Chapter 4, the political history of the region would suggest Vientiane would be more attuned to policy signals from Hanoi on some issues (such as agricultural policy), and more cautious to those from Bangkok, although culturally attuned to Thailand and welcoming to inward Thai investment. The regional synoptic focus on rice notwithstanding, it was unclear the extent to which more granular understanding of policies which had resulted in positive gains for food security in Thailand and Vietnam (such as Vietnam's agricultural diversification policies, or Thai and Vietnamese nutrition policies) were familiar to Lao-based experts and policymakers, and if they were, how these were being adopted to the Lao context.

This reflects a gap in national policy processes across the region. National governments in mainland Southeast Asia are not in the habit of studying their neighbours choices before their making their own: this is why the management and governance of the region's greatest shared asset, the Mekong Basin, is so contested. This has ramifications for the ambitions of states at the regional level. National policy interests are developed based on national priorities, with scant public acknowledgement or recognition of relevant regional experiences.

This results in regional policy inconsistencies, whereby Lao PDR is moving into full industrialization and consolidation of agriculture, when at the same time, just over the river, northeastern Thailand is trying to reintroduce agroecological and organic practice to try to recover some semblance of biodiversity. As a professor at Khon Kaen University put it to me, 'The trouble with Laos is, they are competing for yesterday's market in tomorrow's world. The sad thing is, they haven't realized it yet.' There is a compelling need for national governments to better explore how they can benefit from the experience of their neighbours, acknowledging that doing so is no compromise to national sovereignty.

While the research proceeded with a working hypothesis that a new platform of regional governance may have been emerging at the ASEAN level, the basis of the findings in this regard were partial and incomplete- the fact that the majority of research respondents were themselves unfamiliar with ASEAN's role (with only seven of 25 able to speak directly or indirectly to the issue) was significant in and of itself, but it went to underscore that regrettably, inclusion of ASEAN in the research model was of limited utility.

Research was carried out only in one language, which limited the scope for findings on how global normative terms formulated in English are translated and applied in non-English policy contexts. Although beyond the scope of this research to address, interviewees' references to a 'double language' of policy between English and Lao, and comparisons of the technical terms of food security in Lao and Thai translation provided by experts fluent in both suggests this is a topic ripe for further consideration.

On considering Lao PDR as a research site, it is worth underscoring that while in many ways Lao PDR is open to external engagement, it remains a socially conservative, one-party state with strict limits on public discourse, press freedom and freedom of expression. There is little to no tolerance of dissent, and considerable sensitivity to criticism (or perceived criticism) of the People's Revolutionary Party's right to govern unopposed. The real and perceived threat and the use of punitive measures against individuals, (especially Lao citizens) seen as destabilizing the status quo is a reality of life in Lao PDR[82]. At a societal level, disagreement or argument are seen at a minimum as deeply impolite and inappropriate, as indeed is any questioning of authority.

This intolerance for dissent was made manifest in late 2013 when, based on an open letter she wrote to donors, the country representative of the Swiss NGO Helvetas was given 48 hours to leave the country. Two weeks later, the enforced disappearance of the director of a local NGO, Sombath Somphone, brought international attention and condemnation to Lao PDR, which endures to the present day (Economist 2013). In the abstract, these dispiriting events reinforced research interest in understanding the influence of non-state voices in policymaking processes, but also made clear the real risks that exist for outspoken Lao citizens.

With these factors in mind, Lao government representatives and Lao national staff of international organizations were exempted from this research. This was to ensure that even in an ostensibly benign research context, there would be no possibility of negative consequences for them personally or professionally as a result of any statement which could be interpreted in any way as critical of government, or the ruling Party. More prosaically, it was also a function of English language fluency. These factors notwithstanding, with the research interest on the normative role of international expertise in defining

[82] In 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association described his engagement with Lao civil society. 'My overriding impression from these individuals was the profound and all-encompassing fear that engulfed them. Their lack of trust was palpable. They did not want to talk to me with others present. They did not even want to be seen with me. I have never seen anything quite like it. These individuals were like islands– operating in apparent isolation, prevented from exercising their fundamental human right to connect with others who shared their concerns.' (Kiai 2016)

policy discourse, there was a sound internal logic to orienting the focus of this research on international experts themselves.

Even so, in a research process which focuses on Lao PDR, the absence of Lao voices is a matter of lasting regret. Fischer proposes the policy discourse analytic approach as expressly participatory, involving citizens as well as experts and policymakers, demystifying the role of experts and encouraging policy discussion outside of elite circles (Fischer 2003 p. 214). Recognizing that elite interviews run the risk of presenting hegemonic narratives as sacrosanct (Dryzek 2006), and further recognizing that many interviewees would come from institutions invested maintaining good working relations with the Government, (and more broadly, engaged in formal diplomatic modes of policy discourse as opposed to more progressive or radical modes of engagement) (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2001)), efforts were also made to solicit the opinions of interviewees from outside the prevailing international development institutional structures to the extent possible. This research was unable to accomplish Fischer's democratic ambitions in this regard.

Finally, policy processes in Lao PDR are opaque and discreet to the point of being unknowable. This necessitated a methodological approach which privileges the interpretation of the individual researcher, but requires acknowledgement that that is inherently limiting: other competing analyses of food security policy could and should exist, and should be encouraged. This opacity of process has required that the researcher make a series of value judgments as to what to include (validated though cross checking of the authored texts with key informants), what Fischer describes as 'interpretive reconstruction of the situational logic of the social action' (Fischer 2003 p.140). But also underscores the fact that much of what is presented as policy is designed and produced for a development audience, in English, for the purposes of securing donor funding. In Lao PDR as elsewhere, real decision making takes place behind closed doors, and is not open for public scrutiny. Those processes remain out of reach to researchers, and are likely to remain so. Policy analysis in Lao PDR therefore remains a question of what is possible, not what is necessary.

Final Reflections

In early 2016, the WFP office in Vientiane asked me to join a panel of experts undertaking a strategic review of food security policy in Lao PDR, emphasizing the potential scope for action on SDG2, the food security-related successor to MDG 1. The fact that Lao PDR had not attained the MDG on nutrition was a matter of political embarrassment, a 'loss of face' which the government would not repeat in the SDG era.

As part of that mission, I joined colleagues with expertise in social protection, gender, climate change and resilience in developing this review, completing our work in late 2016. In Vientiane in the early part of the year, I reconnected with a number of key informants I had interviewed, seeking an update on how food security policy had changed in the intervening years.

In the intervening years, policy matters continued apace. At the Tenth Party Congress in 2015, the Central Committee of the Lao People's Party reaffirmed its commitment to maintaining 7.5 percent annual GDP growth, in the service of graduating from LDC status by 2020 (Vientiane Times 2016)[83]. In the development sector, the EU had renewed its commitments to Lao PDR, to the tune of 500 million euros over the next five years (2016-2021), much of it oriented towards nutrition and agriculture. An additional six million dollars was made available for nutrition by a resurgent USAID, in advance of President Obama's maiden visit to Vientiane (VOA 2016). A new National Nutrition Forum was launched in November 2015, 'in light of Lao's unprecedented national commitment to reduce stunting' (NNC 2015). In late 2015, the Zero Hunger Challenge Roadmap was released, outlining a 2.06 billion USD plan to attain the ZHC, of which 1.5 billion USD would be put toward the Rice Action Plan (National Food Security and Commodity Development Committee 2015).

Discussing issues outside Vientiane, I heard of hydropower schemes in which the water held in hydropower reservoirs could not be used for village wells or irrigation because legally the water belonged to Thailand's state electricity company, EGAT. In Xieng Khouang province and elsewhere, the illegal and unrestricted use of paraquat, a highly toxic defoliant, was so widespread that its application now exceeded the volumes of Agent Orange dropped by US forces during the Indochina War (LURAS 2016). Agriculture and rural development stakeholders grumbled that the focus on nutrition had drawn so much attention that agriculture was no longer getting its due. Speaking to someone I spoken with in 2013, I was told that the problem with making any forward progress on food security was the absence of a 'complete narrative that ties everything together.' Without that, defining the problem and the solution would continue to be contested and shot through with institutional maneuvering. Efforts continued to focus on the planning and collaboration process itself, rather than on progressing towards a solution.

[83] In late 2015, it became evident that due in part to limited reduction in malnutrition rates, Lao PDR has failed to hit the 2020 deadline for LDC graduation. The Background Document to the 2015 Round Table Meeting discreetly reset the timeframe to 2024 stating, 'whilst theoretically possible, is not actually necessary and it may not be advantageous to graduate too soon'. (MPI 2015). Nevertheless, references to Lao PDR's graduation from LDC status remain a constant feature of government controlled media until 2018, when the Prime Minister confirmed that the 2020 target was out of reach (Vientiane Times 2018).

Cycles of debates continued turning. What evidence to trust, which data to apply, and how best to affect change: should efforts be targeted to of rural ethnic women in the uplands, or more populous periurban areas around Vientiane or Savannakhet (World Bank et al 2016)? Was food insecurity best understood as a single problem with a national solution, or as a nested series of provincial subsets, each with different causes, effects, and solutions? Conflicting expert opinion continued unrelentingly, revisiting questions posed by WFP more than a decade previously, the narratives unsettled and contested even in the absence of any new data or interpretation. And nobody thought that progress was either adequate or satisfactory.

The mission I was part of noted that declarations of the need for more coordination and a multisectoral approach had reached an apogee- with a national committee headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, there was almost no higher up the political structure for food security to ascend. It has already been given centre stage in the 8th NSEDP, at the 2015 Roundtable meeting, and in discussions of the SDGs themselves. With 'convergence' planning and implementation in place, and consensus agreement on the need for all stakeholders to work together more and better, there was, apparently, no grounds for disagreement. From 2015 onwards, food (and nutrition) security would have its day.

A dispiriting irony then, that all parties acknowledged (explicitly or discreetly) that all of the above was yet not translating into any lasting changes. Rates of stunting, while apparently reducing in all areas were still in the region of 35 percent. The sense of urgency and commitment to do something about it persisted. The crisis discourse, it seemed, had enough critical mass to sustain itself, even in the absence of any forward motion.

Meanwhile, in global discourse, narrative themes identified in Lao PDR continued to hold their positions in the firmament. In February 2017, the FAO released a report entitled *The Future of Food and Agriculture: Trends and Challenges* (FAO 2017). The report warned darkly of 'mankind's ability to feed itself in jeopardy', identifying 15 trends and 10 challenges affecting global food systems, including population growth, poverty and inequality alongside 'changes in international financing for development'. Challenges include ensuring sustainable agriculture, ending hunger, and 'addressing the need for coherent national and international governance.'(in other words, coordination), a list of factors (and the apparently equal weighting afforded each of factors listed) which resonates with narratives identified in this paper and Candel (2014).

The FAO report cited above is an example readily to hand, but it is consistent with the corpus of such reports, and there will, without doubt, be others like it in future. Those documents too will cite an

enormously large population number, likely in the 800 million- 1 billion range, restate a definition of the term (usually but not always an iteration of the 1996 WFS definition), invoke a sense of outrage, crisis and moral obligation, announce new initiatives, new funding, new institutional arrangements and technological solutions, and will unveil a suite of proposed interventions, which will simultaneously increase production, protect rural populations, and eliminate hunger and malnutrition. This (and more) will be achieved if a) money is provided (far more than is being provided now) and if b) all parties work together better. These are the *leitmotif* of food security discourse at the global level.

The question becomes, what is gained by this consistent repetition? Food security has been framed as a present and/or future crisis since Thomas Malthus, and the power of that narrative has shown no signs of abating. Research respondents pointed out that for all of the rebranding or launching of new initiatives to combat 'hunger' (short of famine, the most emotive term in the lexicon), and food insecurity, much of the contents contained therein amounted to ultimately more of the same. Food security discourse is entrenched in this narrative rut: that which conforms to this narrative is easily incorporated, but more complex approaches, such as the non-food factors insisted upon by the nutrition narrative, much less concerns over social justice or environmental sustainability, hover at the periphery. Narratives may be a compelling and appealing way to condense a vast array of issues into a tidy package, but they do not necessarily explain things very well. Narratives are compelling because they provide a satisfying beginning, middle and end- or in policy terms, a problem, a course of action, and a solution- but this does not mean any of those elements is indisputably correct.

At its own ideological core, food security cannot shake its associations with increasing volumes of food. This narrative is so tried and tested, so intuitively and emotionally correct (if people are hungry, more food *must* make sense), that is resists meaningful revision. Massive gains in agricultural productivity have not translated into food security. As Lappé puts it 'Despite vast waste and misuse, there's still enough for all. In the late 1990s, food production per capita was less than it is today, yet there were then roughly 150 million fewer hungry people' (Lappé 2013).

There is general acknowledgment that food security has to be about something greater than just the absence of malnutrition, and the solution has to be about more than producing more and more food. And yet, increased production remains firmly in the centre of the food security policy agenda. Food security's elision with the assumption that producing more food will be required become so much a part of its metaphoric freight that it goes without saying. The counterfactual in this instance would be to consider

policy statements on food security which proposed producing *less*, or focus on producing, processing and distributing food differently.

In the context of longer term, slow-onset changes to global food systems dawning in public health and environmental spheres, the institutional gatekeepers for food security are uncertain as to how to deal with the modern spectre of urbanized, fat, protein and sugar-rich food insecurity, hastily allowing that overweight and obesity represent forms of malnutrition (CFS 2012), but having little idea how to incorporate the implications of this transition into their thinking or policymaking process.

Mario Cuomo said, 'you campaign in poetry: you govern in prose'. This sums up the policy scissors of food security, between the lofty ideals of highest global moral endeavor on one hand, and the dozens of micro level decisions made every day in order to get food from field, river or market to mouths. Global normative policy rhetoric on food security soars, even as details as to how to achieve the ambitions are few, far between and usually, someone else's responsibility. This is why the conceptual framework and resulting discourse of food security has been consistently subject to reiteration and review: it's easier to reformulate the problem than it is to suggest what to do about it.

Annex I: Annotated Bibliography

Food and nutrition security policy documents for Lao PDR, 2009-2015:

What follows is an annotated bibliography of key documents related to food security policy in Lao PDR produced between 2009-2015. In developing this biography, a number of criteria were applied. First, in order to highlight the role of international institutions and their GoL counterparts, all documents were sourced from grey literature, omitting academic articles and books. Second, documents had to be expressly focused on food security, in whole or in part. Documents focusing on sector-specific issues or individual intervention strategies within agriculture or nutrition, such as contract farming, conservation agriculture, fisheries/aquaculture, hydropower, micronutrient fortification, governance of the Mekong and more general overviews of poverty were omitted. Given the importance of the MDGs and the NSEDP to food security policy, an exception was made for these documents, which have been included. Third, documents which were focused on single institutions only were omitted, such as the FAO Regional Strategy for Food Security 2010-2019. Internal documents, such as project proposals, annual reports, evaluations, and power point presentations have also be exempted, as have minutes of the Sector Working group(s) and Roundtable meetings. Documents on all of these topics and more are available via the LaoFAB Document Repository. Regional documents have been limited to those specifically referred to in the text of the thesis, or specifically pertinent to Lao PDR.

It is important to stress what is *not* included to indicate that there is a substantial ongoing body of work which informs and is informed by food security policy discourse. Were those excluded topics listed below *included* in this bibliography, its length would substantially expand.

All documents included here are available from the LaoFAB online document repository, and are listed in reverse chronological order (that is, newest first). Documents marked with an asterisk (*) indicate those documents for which the researcher was engaged in a professional capacity.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
Govt of Lao PDR Policy documents				
The Seventh Five-year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2011-2015)	MPI	2011	Foundation policy document for all aspects of economic development, poverty reduction, national development and international cooperation.	- Ensure continuation of national economic growth with security, peace and stability, and ensure GDP growth rate of at least 8 percent annually and GDP per capita to be at least USD 1,700. - Achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, […] create favourable conditions for graduating the country from LDC by 2020. - Ensure sustainability of development by emphasizing economic development with, cultural and social progress, preserving natural resources and protecting the environment. - Ensure political stability, peace and an orderly society.
Strategy for Agricultural Development 2011-2020	MAF	2010	Strategy document for all policy actions in agriculture sector	- Within context of NSEDP goal of LDC graduation by 2020, overall goals of AgDev 2020 Strategy are: - Gradual introduction and increased application of modernized lowland market-oriented agricultural production adapted to climate change and focused on smallholder farmers - Conservation of upland ecosystems, ensuring food security and improving the livelihoods of rural communities
National Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action 2010-2015	MoH	2009	Main policy document aimed at setting objectives, mapping, harmonize and	- Core policy document for all government and partner efforts aimed at reducing malnutrition. - Includes three strategic areas, and 10 objectives, 28 action areas. Total estimated budget 600 million USD.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
			coordinate all efforts in the nutrition sector.	
Joint UN/GoL Policy documents				
Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security Action Plan *(draft 13 Aug 2013)*	MAF MoH MoES IFAD UNICEF WFP	2013	UN/GoL Policy Collaboration Document, prioritizes interventions from NNS/NPoA for coordinated implementation across eight provinces.	- Plan emphasizes government funding, leadership and implementation, with 'UN Task Force' providing technical and planning support. - 25 nutrition specific and nutrition sensitive interventions proposed across eight provinces - +/- 40 process and outcome indicators listed.
The Millennium Development Goals Progress Report for the Lao PDR	GoL UN	2013	Summary of national progress towards meeting Millennium Development Goals: final report before 2015 MDG deadline	- MDG 1 (Eradicate Extreme Hunger and Poverty): Poverty rates have dropped by 40 percent since 1992/3, although rates in rural areas are twice that of the urban areas, with highest incidence in mountainous areas and upland villages. - Stunting prevalence remains at 44 percent, with rates of reductions of 1 percent p/a or less. - 25 percent of Lao population live under food poverty line, increased since 2002/3.
Accelerating Progress Towards the MDGs	GoL UN	2010	Summary of national progress towards meeting Millennium Development Goals	- MDG1 Target 2 (reduce hunger by half) reported as 'seriously off track'

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
Statistical Analyses and Assessments based on Primary data collection				
(includes both main reports and follow-up analyses conducted using national datasets)				
Lao Census of Agriculture 2010/11: Analysis of Selected Themes	MAF FAO SDC	2014	Main report of 2010/11 Census exercise. Benchmark national data: on composition and structure of farm households, land use, cropping patterns and agricultural performance, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries, and gender	- The share of agriculture in the overall economy has fallen but agricultural exports have grown. - Rural incomes has increased and poverty declined. - Despite increases in the absolute number of farm households and agricultural land area, urbanization and the shift into non-farm activities, have resulted in increases in non-farming households across the country.
Nutritional Status of Children, Food Consumption Diversity and Ethnicity in Lao PDR	University of Manchester IFAD	2014	Based on LSIS 2011 data, econometric analysis that explores linkages between livestock ownership and malnutrition, ethnicity and malnutrition	- Relationship between food security (measured by anthropometry), dietary diversity, land access and ethnicity all shown to be strong and consistent.
Risk and Vulnerability Survey 2012/13*	MAF FAO	2013	Analysis of qualitative and quantitative data on food security and nutrition status base on	- Malnutrition among CU5 remain high at 40 percent, one in four children underweight - Malnutrition found in all households, including richest quintile

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
	Australian Aid		ag census data and further sampling of 4,300 households.	- Strong relationship between malnutrition and access to sanitation, education: poorer access to sanitation and low educational attainment in mothers is consistent with high levels of malnutrition.
Women, Food and Land: RVS 2012/13 Qualitative Analysis *	MAF FAO Australian Aid CARE	2013	Qualitative analysis of role of gender in food and nutrition security (companion to RVS 2012/13 report)	- Higher malnutrition rates are linked to poorer village level infrastructure - Control of external support to villages (from govt or others) is largely controlled by men - Women in non-Lao speaking communities are particularly isolated - Own production identified as surest means to improving food security.
Lao Census of Agriculture 2010/11 Highlights	MAF (Ag Census Office)	2012	Overview of selected results of agriculture census	- 69 percent of Lao households are rural, although non-farm households have nearly doubled since 1999. - 30 percent of households engaged in market-oriented agriculture (from 6 percent in 1999). - 647,000 additional hectares brought under cultivation since 1999.
Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) 2011 - 12	MoH MPI (LSB) UNFPA UNICEF	2012	Multiple indicator cluster survey /Demographic and health survey Benchmark report for public health and nutrition data for Lao PDR, data source for reporting on MDG 1, 2, 4-7	- One in four children under the age of five years is moderately underweight (27 per cent) and 7 per cent are severely underweight - Nearly half of children (44 per cent) are moderately stunted (too short for their age) and 19 percent are severely stunted - 6 per cent of children are moderately wasted (too thin for their height), and 1 per cent are severely wasted (LSIS, p. 21)

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
Food Security in Lao PDR: A Trend Analysis*	FAO EU	2012	Trend analysis of quantitative food consumption data from LECS3 and LECS 4, applying FAO global indicators	- 22 percent of population consume less than minimum dietary requirements. - Daily dietary energy consumptions is rising, to 2,260 Kcal in 2007/08). - Overall daily expenditure on food has tripled between 2002/3-2007-8
FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission in Lao PDR*	FAO WFP	2011	At GoL request, evaluates 2010 rice crop, forecasts 2011 crop and assesses the overall food situation, import requirements and food aid needs. Previous such mission took place 10 years prior.	- Prevailing focus of report is on rice. - Aggregate production of rice estimated at three million tonnes per annum. - Increases in production of feedstock cash crops, notably maize for export reported. - Rice exports estimated at 30,000 MTs.
The Household of Lao PDR: Social and Economic Indicators Survey Results for LECS4 2007/8	MPI (LSB)	2009	Statistical analysis of expenditure and consumption quantitative data at household level, sample size of 8,300 hholds	- Household expenses on food: 22.7 percent - Consumption of own production: 23 percent (of total hhold income) - Rice consumption: 40 percent of total food expenses (i.e. of all hhold food expenditure, rice purchases make up 40 percent)
Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis	WFP	2007 (released 2009)	Food Security and Nutrition Assessment	- Every second child in the rural areas is chronically malnourished. - Rates of chronic malnutrition are unchanged over ten years (1997-2007). - Two thirds of the rural households have a livelihood portfolio that puts them at risk of becoming food insecure if shocks occur.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
			Based on nationwide sample of 4,000 rural households, explores linkages between national polices and food security, livelihoods and food security.	- The Sino-Tibetan ethnic groups are the most disadvantaged and food insecure, and live in the Northern Highlands and in the Central and Southern Highlands. - Access to wild meat and aquatic resources for animal-source protein is critical for ensuring food security for vulnerable groups.
Policy Reviews and Policy Briefs				
Lao PDR: Regional Agricultural Trade Environment Country Summary	USAID	2013	Agricultural Trade Assessment USAID developed tool which seeks to identify national and regional institutional and legal reforms to improve agricultural trade.	- Given the rapid rate of regional and global integration of trade (typified by WTO accession process), must now be followed by greater empowerment of private sector. - Policy orientation around food security remains focused on rice self-sufficiency.
Rice Policy Study	IRRI MAF WB FAO	2012	Comprehensive examination of trends in the rice sector, government strategy and private sector actions,	- Recommends that policy move towards framing food security as more than as the absence of rice shortages, but more general nutritional deficits. - Confirms that rice self-sufficiency has been achieved at national level, although substantial intra-provincial deficits remain. - Recommends a reorientation of policy away from increased productivity towards improving efficiencies in production and marketing

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
			domestic and international markets	-
Trends in the Agriculture and Natural Resource Management Sectors of the Lao PDR	SDC	2012	Desk review of agriculture and natural resources sector, developed as an input for SDC 2013- 2017 Mekong Strategy.	Five policy drivers in agriculture and natural resources identified: - 'Revolutionary' transformation of peasant to industrialized society - Resource exploitation in Lao PDR led by more powerful regional neighbours - Paternalism and patronage at all levels of Lao society - Resource curse around extractive industries and a lack of transparency around FDI - Increased information networks with lesser state control
Managing Land, Forests and Natural Resources: Growing in Equity or growing Inequity?	LIWG	2012	Summarizes trends in land, forests and natural resources, focusing on land management issues and concessions	- Proposes linkages between land access and Right to Adequate Food (per ICESCR) - Provides synopsis of legal frameworks around concessions, forests, land tenure, shifting cultivation - Calls for better development partner cooperation around models of human development which focus on quality of life and well-being (not GDP).
Country Technical Note on Indigenous Peoples' Issues: Lao PDR	IFAD AIPP	2012	Overview of ethnic groups, political, economic and social status	- Govt policy emphasizes national unity through consolidation and relocation of remote populations - Identifies specific rural ethnic populations as prone to food insecurity of particular interest to IFAD
Dynamics of Food Security	NUDP	2012	Synthesis and discussion of 12 studies of	- 24 trends across the literature are identified, including: commercialization has created both winners and losers, household food security is less reliant in

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
in the Uplands of Laos	NAFRI		agricultural commercialization and food security in uplands	rice and own-production than expected, access to land and forests is declining, and conflicts are more frequent.
Lao PDR: Responding to Rice Price Inflation	World Bank	2011	Explores 50 percent spikes in rice prices in 2010, and make recommendations to manage future rice volatility.	- Rice prices in in Lao PDR are likely to be a function of regional supply dynamics, but there is a lack of accurate regional information in this regard. - GoL policy responses to high rice prices have included (i) export restrictions, (ii) stockpiling, and (iii) price controls. Impact of these measures has been mixed.
Development in Lao PDR: The Food Security Paradox	SDC	2010	Reviews impact of current national policy trajectory on food security, offers multiple scenarios/projections for growth	- Food insecurity is a result of current policy directions, which are unfit for purpose in current context, and need to be reoriented to be more multisectoral and less reliant on GDP growth based on resource extraction.
Agriculture in Transition: The impact of agricultural commercialization on livelihoods and food access in the Lao PDR	WFP	2009	Review of impacts on food security resulting from increased commercialization of agriculture	- The range and depth of commercial agriculture's impact is poorly studied and understood, but is known to have both positive and negative implications. - Commercial agriculture is benefiting asset rich households, but not the rural poor - Restricting access to commons land (i.e. water and forests) limits ability of poorer populations to participate in expanded markets.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
Other (policy statements, study findings, mapping exercises)				
National Mapping Report on Agriculture, Nutrition and Gender	SNV	2014	Desk-based stakeholder mapping at national and subnational level for all three sectors	- No specific recommendations, general call for improved coordination.
Food and Nutrition Security Atlas of Lao PDR	WFP GIZ	2013	Analysis and map-based representations of household livelihood assets and strategies, contextual factors, shocks and hazards (Quantitative data only)	- Includes provincial level mapping, identifying six provinces which are identified as poor or very poor for food and nutrition security
Linking Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Nutrition: English Guidelines for Program Managers	CARE	2012	Practitioner's Guide to Linking Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Nutrition (LANN) approach	- Guide document for NGO developed and implemented approach to integrated approaches to ag/natural resources/nutrition/watsan programming at community level; example of 'convergence' approach at sub-national level
Food and Nutrition Security Working Glossary*	FAO EU	2012	Lao/English glossary of 150+ technical terms related to food and nutrition security	- Developed to address linguistic difficulties in translating technically precise terms (i.e. 'food consumption gap, overnutrition etc.) from English to Lao when specialized terms may not exist in Lao. - English and Lao terms offered on each page.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
So we don't forget…	SDC PADETC	2011	Comparative cultural Study Qualitative study of the centrality of food to Lao cultures and peoples, links to society and economy	- Overview of Lao cuisine's role as embodiment of culture, livelihood, for religious practices, medicine, and meal preparation practices. - Proposes that traditional patterns of interhousehold sharing may explain absence of acute malnutrition despite high prevalence of chronic malnutrition.
Understanding Food Security in Northern Laos: An analysis of household food security strategies in upland production systems	NAFRI SDC	2011	Study findings Household level survey of perceptions and strategies around food security	- Small sample size: 32 households across four villages. - Findings included: Own production is low and dropping, wild food consumption is dropping, and cash income from external employment is increasingly important
Submission for the 7th NSEDP (2011-2015) on the most appropriate ways to achieve robust growth with inclusiveness and equity in the Lao context"	INGO Network	2010	Policy Statement At request of GoL, INGOs provided concise recommendations to the 7th NSEDP drafting & consultative process	- Recommendations include: shifting focus from GDP growth to reducing inequalities, limiting FDI, promotion of smallholder-led agriculture, promotion of food sovereignty at national level, slowing the pace of concessions and resettlement, increased role for CSOs.
Finding the Linkages between Wildlife Management and	WCS USAID	2010	Study Findings	- Small sample size: 36 households, including two households in which all food consumed was weighted and measured in grammes over three months.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Observations
Household Food Consumption in the Uplands of Lao PDR			Micro-level case study of relationship between natural resource management and food insecurity in remote rural area	- 'Diets were observed to be highly rice-biased, low in calories and fat and mainly vegan, with insufficient intake of eggs or plant-based meat alternatives such beans, seeds or nuts'.(p. 46)
REACH Stocktaking Analysis Lao PDR	REACH Global Partnership (FAO, WHO, UNICEF, and WFP)	2009	Sector Overview Comprehensive quantitative data on nutrition in Lao PDR; precursor exercises to the Nutrition Strategy and Plan of Action	- Consists of situation analysis, provincial profiles, and stakeholder profiles per location and sector - No specific policy recommendations, functions more as a 'state of the sector' report
Fish, frogs and forest vegetables: Role of wild products in human nutrition and food security in Lao PDR	IUCN	2008	Study findings Results of study conducted in Saravan province on role and content of wild foods in household consumption.	- The value of Lao PDR's biodiversity (in both nutritional and economic terms) is consistently underestimated. - Biodiversity conservation is directly linked to food security in rural Lao PDR, specifically in the case of wild proteins (notably fish)

Regional Food Security Documents

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Issues and Observations
Policy documents				
ASEAN Integrated Food Security (AIFS) Framework and Strategic Plan of Action on food security in the ASEAN region (SPA-FS) 2009-2013	ASEAN	2009	Benchmark document agreed to by Heads of State which confirms 'food security as a matter of permanent and high priority'. (WB 20102 doc above CONFIRM)	- Key objective of SPA-FS is "to ensure long-term food security and to improve the livelihoods of farmers in the ASEAN region." - The SPA aims to: increase food production, reduce postharvest losses, promote trade, ensure food price stability, promote availability of and accessibility to agricultural inputs, and - Create regional food emergency relief arrangements. - Commodity focus is limited to rice, maize, soybean, sugar, and cassava.
ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve Agreement	ASEAN	2011	Signed by Ministers of Agriculture from all ASEAN member states, confirms the establishment of a strategic rice reserve for ASEAN	- Proposed volume of rice to be held 787, 000 MTs with capital investment of 4 million USD. - Contributions of China, Rep of Korea and Japan in both commodities and capital equivalent to +/- 80 percent of total requirements.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Issues and Observations
Regional Policy Reviews, Policy Briefs and Working Papers				
ASEAN: Regional Agricultural Trade Environment Country Summary	USAID	2013	Agricultural Trade Assessment USAID developed tool which seeks to identify national and regional institutional and legal reforms to improve agricultural trade.	- Food laws and policies in many ASEAN states focus on domestic self-sufficiency and concomitant import barriers. - Level of intragovernmental policy coordination around food security in ASEAN members is highly variable - Policy discussions around food security may involve agribusiness partners, but rarely SMEe or smallholders.
Regional Cooperation for Food Security: The Case of Emergency Rice Reserves in the ASEAN Plus Three	ADB	2011	Working Paper Evaluates the 2009 decision to establish a regional rice reserve, based on global experience with strategic food reserves.	- Functionality of emergency reserves is contingent on definition of 'emergency'- this discussion needs fuller elaboration in ASEAN context. - Significant technical, financial and institutional issues remain unresolved.
The Changing Role of Rice in Asia's Food Security	ADB	2010	Working Paper Reviews the changing role of rice in Asian economies and household consumption as levels of consumption declines, underscoring need for	- Food security in Asia conventionally understood as: stable rice prices for rice in major urban markets. - Rice is increasingly a food of the poor in Asia, as richer populations have more diverse options - 'Self-sufficiency in rice is a political strategy, not a poverty strategy.' (p.6)

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Issues and Observations
			greater stability in global and regional rice markets.	
Regional Food Security and Trade Policy in Southeast Asia	IISD	2010	Policy Brief Explore ASEAN's response to 2007-8 food crisis vs. member states' response, implications for greater integration in context of AEC.	- 'Food insecurity is a regional problem that could be best tackled through a regional approach' - Member state responses to crisis, notably Thailand and Vietnam, indicate that in food security policy, national interests trump regional concerns - There is a need to strengthen ASEAN mechanisms (including AFSIS, ASEAN SPA, and rice reserve) to improve regional responses to crisis.
Rethinking agriculture in the Greater Mekong Subregion: how to sustainably meet food needs, enhance ecosystem services and cope with climate change.	IWMI	2010	Working paper Overview of trends in agricultural production in SE Asia, with focus on resource usage, notably water.	- Agricultural production in the GMS is sufficient to facilitate exports, but this has come at significant environmental costs and with limited impact on poverty. - Greater efforts are needed to improve the sustainability of agriculture, including ecosystem protection, resilience vs. climate change, and mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.
Study Findings				
Shifting Cultivation Livelihood and Food Security	FAO AIPP IWGIA	2015	Case studies of sustainable livelihoods, food security, sustainable resource management and diversity conservation of and by indigenous peoples in	- 'Shifting cultivation was and still remains an […] indispensable form of land use in upland areas in Asia. […] It can continue to be managed sustainably from the viewpoints of both natural resource management and household food security under conditions of sufficient and legally recognized access to land.' (p.10) - In Lao PDR, Kmhmu people, faced with a lack of alternatives, continue to practice traditional methods in violation of govt policy.

Title	Institutional Authors	Year of Publication	Document Description	Key Issues and Observations
			seven Asian nations (including Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand)	
The Xayaburi Dam: Threatening Food Security in the Mekong	International Rivers	2012	Investigative assessment by anti-dam advocacy NGO	- Based on investigative findings, confirms declines in food security as Xayaburi construction site and negative implications for downstream populations in three countries. - Role of Mekong River in providing food security includes: fish, riverbank gardens, rice fields, livestock, forest products, and income.
Trusting Trade and the Private Sector for Food Security in Southeast Asia	WB	2012	Focuses on rice supply chains in five countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam) in wake of 2007-8 food crisis	- Food security policymaking has been predicated on idea of rice self-sufficiency. - Due to a number of factors (margins, policy context, market volumes) private sector engagement on rice has been less than in other commodities. - Proposes a redefining of food security at a more regional level, rejecting national self-sufficiency and promoting the role of the private sector, rather than that of government

Annex II: Querying Food Security: A Synopsis of alternative approaches to food and hunger

Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security.

(Via Campesina, 1996)

As a function of social and political shifts at the global, regional and national level, over the past two decades, alternative perspectives on the eradication of hunger have been come to contest or explicitly reject the food security approach.

Even so, as the quote above from Via Campesina indicates, there is continuum and interchange between the three concepts; from the Right to Food, to food sovereignty, through to food security. This section will explore those concepts, and will indicate that although there is wide consensus on the ultimate necessity of eradicating hunger from the face of the planet (the 'genuine food security' Via Campesina describes above), the ways and means of achieving this are deeply contested. Most importantly, these emerging concepts view food as a fundamental pivot to address social, economic and political injustice. Food sovereignty and the Right to Food repudiate the notion that food security can be understood essentially an index of nutrition, and argue instead that it is variously a measure of social and political empowerment as well as human rights. In this context, food is not just about food.

These newer approaches share some elements of food security, but propose significantly different methods towards achieving that goal. Food security itself has expanded, increasingly incorporating dimensions of access (including land tenure, access to natural resources, livelihoods, etc.) into its framework, but hunger, expressed in gross terms as the total number of hungry people in the world, has remained the constant focus, diluting the significance of a more expanded frame of reference. This creates a policy space for food sovereignty and the Right to Food. Both of these approaches represent what Cairney (2012 p191, 198) refers to as 'Schattschnieder mobilizations', the process through which policy monopolies are broken up, as conflicting evidence which supports multiple interpretations promotes public participation and engagement on policy issues. The result is an influx of new actors and voices into the policy process.

In the context of the present research, it is useful to include an overview of these concepts because they represent a shift in the dominance of food security as the prevailing lens through which to view hunger

and vulnerability among developing nations' populations. Nation states are assessing (and being assessed) not only their ability to meet the basal nutritional needs of their populations, but via food sovereignty and the Right to Food, *how* those requirements are being met: that is, how food is being grown, processed and consumed (Stock and Carolan 2012 p 131).

Of particular interest in the Lao PDR context was the extent to which these alternative approaches are understood, endorsed and applied at the national practitioner level, by government, UN, NGOs and others. During the research design phase, it was hypothesized that these emerging approaches would inform and modify food security policy discourse in Lao PDR. This hypothesis was not borne out, as understanding of these topics was at best partial and incomplete, and was in many cases viewed as altogether irrelevant. As a consequence, this line of enquiry was not pursued in the fieldwork, but the challenge posed by food sovereignty and the Right to Food to the hegemonic discourse of food security is pertinent to considerations of conceptual approaches to food security, and to the increased contestability of food security itself.

That said, at the research site, awareness and interest in these approaches at the national policy level conformed largely to global trends: food sovereignty was promoted within the international NGO sector (even if it was not well understood), while the Right to Food remains a more distant, elusive issue, heavily contingent on the national political system, 'rights-based approaches' being particularly problematic in autocratic states. This goes to explain some of the policy disconnects between national institutions 'participating' in global discourse around these issues, and the lack of application at the national level. In order to understand to properly situate these findings in the appropriate theoretical context, it is necessary to present the concepts themselves.

Food Sovereignty

Food security and food sovereignty share, if not the same birthday, then concurrent coming-out parties, with both concepts attaining prominence at the World Food Summit and the NGO Forum for Food Security events held in November 1996 in Rome[84]. Sharma (2011) indicates momentum around food sovereignty began with the inclusion of agriculture in the WTO in 1995, emerging as a vote of no-confidence of the neoliberal market paradigm, and those institutions and systems which endorsed the idea that open

[84] At the same time, important steps were taken in the development of the Right to Food approach, to be discussed in the next section of this Annex (McKeon 2009 p 37-40).

markets will lead to cheaper, more plentiful food for all. This explicitly political stance, and the network of NGOs, CSOs and social movements which advocate for food sovereignty mean that it is sometimes referred to as a 'social movement' (Lang et al 2009 p 287) 'an alternative civil society paradigm' or as 'a political principle rather than a policy guide' (McKeon 2009 p 62, 83).

Food sovereignty rejects food security as put forward in the World Food Summit Plan of Action because, as McKeon puts it, 'the concept of food security had nothing to say about where food should be produced, how and by whom, nor about who has the right to make these decisions.' (McKeon 2009 p.41). Furthermore, food security has little to say about modes of consumption, suggesting that more availability, and more access (and thus, unfettered free markets) are in the global best interest, thus ignoring the social and environmental impacts of global overconsumption (Wittman et al 2010).

The issue of access, food security's second pillar, is at the heart of both neoliberal market approaches and food sovereignty, but with very different implications in mind. Access, in the neoliberal free market model, tends to mean securing the ability to sell goods in existing markets, an arrangement which necessarily privileges those who have something to sell, and by extension, those with the wherewithal to make purchases. Opening up markets therefore refers to expanding the consumer base. Access in the food sovereignty context refers to productive resources: that is, land, water, inputs (with particular emphasis on seeds) and other natural resources required in order for rural populations to produce food for themselves (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p. 24). In this sense, access then is closer to Sen's (1981) notion of entitlements than it is to free market economics, and underscores a basic ethos of own production for own consumption.

Subsequent global statements on food sovereignty continued to insist on the theme of resistance to the neoliberal model, and its supporting institutions, especially the WTO and World Bank (People's Food Sovereignty Movement 2007, NGO/CSO Forum 2002). With the emphasis squarely on vulnerable populations, food sovereignty highlights the loss of control over the means of production by poor rural populations in the developing world. In order to regain control, the prevailing global forces of commerce and the associated political interests of developed world countries would need to be resisted or rejected (NGO/CSO Forum 2002). It is worth noting these key thematic and geographic foci: food sovereignty's initial focus was on access and control of production among rural poor in the Global South.

Food sovereignty does not propose a wholesale return to traditional cultural systems and values. Social and political participation and empowerment is fundamental to the food sovereignty approach: an ethnic

Akha household in northern Lao PDR is not intrinsically food sovereign because they grow indigenous rice varietals. Rather, it proposes the reinvigoration of traditions as a logical (or indeed the only) response to modes of commercial agriculture characterized by environmental degradation, social and economic disempowerment and unaccountable corporate interests (Bello 2009 p. 149)

In its simplest form, food sovereignty is about giving people the choice of what to produce, how to produce it. The NGO/CSO 2002 *Food Sovereignty: A Right for All* document states

> Food Sovereignty is **the RIGHT** of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food and land policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies. [emphasis original]

In 1996, the focus of food sovereignty was on the roles and responsibility of the nation-state, but by 2001, this understanding has been adjusted, elevating the role of civil society, placing the focus more emphatically on the community and household, in tacit recognition that national policy and individual rights may be divergent (McKeon 2009 39,54).

In subsequent forums, notably the Integrated Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty convened in 2002, four pillars or elements common to all interpretations of food sovereignty (which given the potential range of factors to be considered, are extensive and multiple- see Wittman et al 2010) were elaborated as:

- The Right to Food
- Access to Productive Resources.
- Mainstreaming Agroecological Approaches
- Trade and local markets (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p 24)

Of these four pillars, the Right to Food will be treated in some detail later in this chapter. Access refers to the household access to productive resources as described in previous paragraphs. Agroecology is a process of ecologically sustainable agriculture which will be discussed further below. In Windfuhr and Jonsen's formulation, what is meant by trade and local markets is less immediately clear, but is intended to prioritize local production of nutritious food for domestic consumption at the local and national level, and to offset international trade's distortions and damaging practices, such as export subsidies and dumping. Also, the inclusion of the Right to Food here also goes to suggest the nested complementarity of these different approaches.

Within these four pillars, food sovereignty is then supported by a number of key principles, or modes of applying the theory to practice, including:

1. **Self-sufficiency**: Nations, communities and households should prioritize meeting their own requirements rather than the demands of export markets.
2. **Self-determination of production and consumption**: Households have the right to decide for themselves their own patterns of consumption and production.
3. **Putting people first:** the basic welfare of good producers and consumers must come before corporate profits.
4. **Localizing food systems:** Food systems should be geared to producing culturally appropriate foods for the domestic market.
5. **Balancing Rural and Urban Needs:** There is a need to reverse inequalities between urban centres and the countryside, to redress the unequal power dynamic between richer urban and poorer rural populations.
6. **Land Reform:** The trend of increasing consolidation of land control in the hands of elites and corporations must be reversed, with renewed emphasis on collective ownership, commons, and community-led environmental stewardship.
7. **Smallholder-led production:** the basic mode of production should be small farmers, and cooperatives with prices determined with producer and consumer welfare alike in mind. International dumping of commodities should be rejected.
8. **No GMO or Industrial Agriculture:** These should be discouraged as corporate interests and business practices are divergent from the basic needs of people, and are environmentally unsustainable.
9. **Supporting Tradition:** The emphasis throughout should be on developing existing traditional practice, rather than on replacing them with externally focused, input and cost intensive 'modern' systems

(adapted from Bello 2009)

These key principles foresee a rebalancing of power and control within food systems. First, national interests should be put before global or transnational economic interests (points 1,3,4,6, 8). Secondly, locally specific context practices and traditions should be supported (points 2, 3, 4, 7, 9). Finally, the locus for control of food systems should rest with communities and households (points 2, 5, 7). As will be discussed in the commentary, one of the critiques of food security has been its lack of clarity in how to attain those goals set out in the 1996 WFS Plan of Action (Lee R. 2007 p5). It is worth considering the extent to which food sovereignty's principles form a clearer basis for practitioners and policymakers to work from.

In 2007, a global forum on food sovereignty was held in Nyeleni, Mali. The Nyeleni Declaration articulated the social progressiveness of the food sovereignty agenda, highlighting what was subsequently to become a signature issue for food sovereignty, the critical role of women in providing food, demanding 'recognition and respect of women's roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in

all decision making bodies' (Nyeleni 2007). This was reinforced at the Via Campesina Global Conference in 2008, in extensive statements on the centrality of women to the struggle for food sovereignty. At that 2008 meeting in Maputo, Mozambique, it was posited that if food sovereignty it to properly support the role of women, it must address a range of issues, including access to credit, land tenure, labour, domestic violence and food preparation and consumption (Patel 2009). Via Campesina also adjusted its internal structure to ensure gender parity at every level of the organization. (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010)

Food sovereignty is socially and politically progressive and radical, in that its intentions are not limited to material improvements in food production systems, but also in the structural context (Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011). That there has been interest among people in developed nations in applying food sovereignty's ideas to food systems indicates a widespread general sense of unease with the present food systems. Food sovereignty countermands food's status as a traded commodity, and seeks to rediscover the social connections which underpin food, and therefore, society as a whole (see Handy quoted in Wittman et al 2010 p. 4). By stressing the connections between eating (consuming) and producing, food sovereignty rejects the focus on deprivation that food security emphasizes. (Wittman 2010 et al p.5)

Food itself therefore is both the focus for sovereignty efforts, but also the totemic issue around which a more just and equitable series of social and economic mores can be put into place. Food sovereignty aims to move the discourse away from the technocratic language of food security, and to frame questions in moral terms, as 'right or wrong'. The struggle to achieve food security is presented as existential in nature, with the lives of hundreds of millions at stake. Commitment to food security is therefore ideological and comprehensive (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010). The table below indicates food sovereignty framing of the global food problem and food sovereignty's responses (Pimbert 2012). In its fullest expression, food sovereignty goes well beyond food security, listed here in ninth place as one of 21 sectors of importance.

Issue	Dominant Model	Food Sovereignty Model
Trade	Free trade in everything	Food and agriculture exempt from trade agreements
Production priority	Agroexports	Food for local markets
Crop prices	"What the market dictates" (leave intact mechanisms that enforce low prices)	Fair prices that cover costs of production and allow farmers and farmworkers a life with dignity

Market access	Access to foreign markets	Access to local markets; an end to the displacement of farmers from their own markets by agribusiness
Subsidies	While prohibited in the Third World, many subsidies are allowed in the US and Europe — but are paid only to the largest farmers	Subsidies that do not damage other countries (via dumping) are okay; i.e., grant subsidies only to family farmers, for direct marketing, price/income support, soil conservation, conversion to sustainable farming, research, etc.
Food	Chiefly a commodity; in practice, this means processed, contaminated food that is full of fat, sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and toxic residues	A human right: specifically, should be healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and locally produced
Being able to produce	An option for the economically efficient	A right of rural peoples
Hunger	Due to low productivity	A problem of access and distribution; due to poverty and inequality
Food security	Achieved by importing food from where it is cheapest	Greatest when food production is in the hands of the hungry, or when food is produced locally
Control over productive resources (land, water, forests)	Privatized	Local; community controlled
Access to land	Via the market	Via genuine agrarian reform; without access to land, the rest is meaningless
Seeds	A patentable commodity	A common heritage of humanity held in trust by rural communities and cultures; "no patents on life"
Rural credit and investment	From private banks and corporations	From the public sector; designed to support family agriculture
Dumping	Not an issue	Must be prohibited
Monopoly	Not an issue	The root of most problems; monopolies must be broken up
Overproduction	No such thing, by definition	Drives prices down and farmers into poverty; we need supply management policies for US and EU
Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)	The wave of the future	Bad for health and the environment; an unnecessary technology
Farming technology	Industrial, monoculture, chemical-intensive; uses GMOs	Agroecological, sustainable farming methods, no GMOs
Farmers	Anachronisms; the inefficient will disappear	Guardians of culture and crop germplasm; stewards of productive resources; repositories of knowledge; internal market and building block of broad-based, inclusive economic development
Urban consumers	Workers to be paid as little as possible	Need living wages

Another world (alternatives)	Not possible/not of interest	Possible and amply demonstrated

Figure II.i: Framing of the global food problem: food security vs. food sovereignty (Rosset 2003 in Pimbert 2012)

Koohafkahn et al (2011) and Altieri (2012) go even further beyond food sovereignty, complementing food with additional domains of sovereignty, including energy and productive sovereignty, to be realized at the household or community level. Energy sovereignty refers to using energy from ecologically sound, sustainable sources, and productive sovereignty refers to using agroecological approaches to locally available natural resources, in order to realize the first two sovereignties, food and energy (Koohafkahn et al 2011). Nine threshold indicators, three per domain, are also proposed. This once again illustrates the wide spectrum of sectors covered by food sovereignty, and its emphasis on food *per se* as being only part of the puzzle.

Despite its focus on rural populations in the developing world, food sovereignty's emphasis on powerlessness and lack of individual agency and control over food has resonated in the developed world as well, among citizens and communities who share those same concerns, in what Bello refers to as the 'deep crisis of globalization' (Bello 2009 p. 14). In this regard, the desire for socially and ecologically sound and sustainable food production and consumption is a shared global value for all communities. As will be discussed further below, this sets it apart from the technocratic, ostensibly apolitical normative approach of food security, which emphasizes the reduction or elimination of hunger, with limited attention on the social context of that change.

The Right to Food

Revisiting the quote in the preface of this section, Via Campesina (1996) declares that 'Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realized in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed'. The next pages consider the Right to Food, including its comprehensive scope and legalistic method it embodies. The relevance of these concepts to research on food security is that food security, food sovereignty, and the Right to Food coexist, both comfortably and otherwise, in shared conceptual space. These concepts have different constituents, and are indicative of an increasingly pluralistic food policy space, in which the hegemony of food security is increasingly under question. It is not uncommon to find statements to the effect that genuine or durable food security (for example) can only be realized when food sovereignty, and thus the Right to Food is established (Via Campesina 1996, FAO 2007 p18).

According to de Schutter (2013), 'The right to adequate food is a human right recognized under international law. It is realized "when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement." This right was first articulated in the 1948 Declaration of Universal Human Rights, expanded upon in the 1976 International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[85] . Following the 1996 World Food Summit, this right was clearly articulated by the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights General comment 12, which stated, 'the right of every man, woman and child alone and in community with others to have physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement in ways consistent with human dignity' (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p.30). In 2004, these definitions were expanded to a full set of guidelines for governments, entitled the *Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* (De Schutter 2013).

The inclusion of the Right to Food in an International Convention pertaining to, *inter alia*, social and cultural issues is particularly apropos, as the Right to Food situates food as a commonly held social and cultural good, necessary not only for physiological health, but also social integration and cultural participation (Riches 1999). As people (taken as broadly as one might for the moment) are stewards of their societies and cultures, it therefore follows that they should retain control of the food they need to sustain those societies and cultures.

As the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food puts it

> So the right to food is a method; it is a way of doing things, which is more bottom up than top down, more democratic than technocratic, and participatory rather than exclusive. But the right to food is also a set of legal entitlements, grounded in international law, and it imposes a number of clear obligations on States. States must respect the right to food; they must protect it from interference by private parties; and they must fulfill the right to food by appropriate policies. (De Schutter 2009).

Similar to food sovereignty, the Right to Food foregrounds participation. It claims a distinction from food security insofar as it suggests that rather than being a recipient of food security programming, households are active participants throughout the process. It suggests that realizing the Right to Food is a process which involves all of society, private and public sector, rich and poor, rural and urban alike. Even more,

[85] The ICSECR identifies four fundamental rights: housing, primary health care, education, and food (Van Esterik 1999 p4).

with the Right to Food a human right, and thus of relevance to all humanity, the Right to Food approach seeks to address demand side issues in developing countries, as increased commercial investment in agriculture to service the rich world's demand (especially for meat), as well as climate change put pressure on land and compromises smallholder agriculture in developing countries (De Schutter 2009).

The Right to Food is the expansion of a rights-based approach applied in other spheres (such as women's rights and children's rights), which stems from the basis that human rights are 'universal, indivisible and interrelated (FAO 2007 p7). Such an approach describes as an analytical tool, a process of implementation, and an outcome. The Special Representative proposes that, consistent with the conceptual model for food security, that the Right to Food has five dimensions: availability, accessibility, adequacy, sustainability and participation (Koohafkahn et al 2011). While the first two of these are shared with food security, the next three (adequacy, sustainability and participation) are much more complex, and require additional elaboration, attainable only through the realization of the seven terms described in the FAO diagram below (FAO 2007). This expands the scope of the Right to Food well beyond the four pillars of food security described in Chapter 2, as this diagram from FAO suggests.

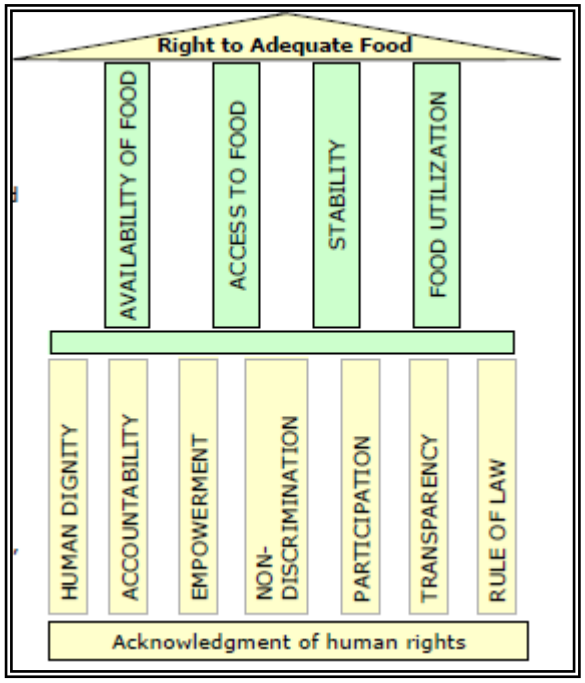


Figure II.ii: how the Right to Food supports Food Security (FAO 2007)

Each of the seven terms contained in the yellow boxes are technically precise, interlinked human rights terms. What this sequence makes clear is the explicitly political demands of the Right to Food, which address control over productive resources (land, water, seeds, markets, etc.), beyond food security's more

reactive focus on production and market access: in other words, the question is not so much way will be grown, but rather who will gain, and what will be lost (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p32, De Schutter 2013, p8).

As the framework in the FAO diagram illustrates, the Right to Food proposes an ambitious and far-ranging set of factors to consider. In recognition of this reality, states are encouraged to work towards 'progressive realization' of the Right to Food; in other words, gradual movement in the direction is possible, or even necessary (FAO 2007). Developed in 2004, *The Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security* propose six steps states should take to achieve this progressive realization, including

a) an enabling environment
b) suitable policies and strategies
c) a legal framework
d) adequate food which is safe and nutritious
e) knowledge of vulnerable populations
f) action in the event of an emergency.

(Lang et al 2009 p 282)

The only exception to this, per the ICESCR document is the freedom from hunger. However, as Van Esterik (1999 p2) examines, there is a significant difference between freedom from *hunger*, which would address the imminent biological needs of the individual, and the right to *adequate food*, which involves the five components mentioned above, and a wholly different level of commitment and effort.

The implication of these obligations is not that the state should take direct responsibility for feeding each individual itself, but rather that it should proactively develop a framework which allows its citizens to access food in a dignified and sustainable manner. It suggests that markets cannot be left to self-regulate, but that by emphasizing the responsibilities of the state, the Right to Food requires regulatory supervision by government and civil society of markets. Should the state not meet the obligations the Right to Food places on it, then recourse options should be established for those individuals not able to realize the Right to Food (FAO 2007 I, p.4). This then sets up a dynamic, or a potential dynamic to pit the individual against the state, should the state, or indeed any other party, be in violation of its obligations (Windfuhr and Jonsen 2005 p.29). As will be discussed in further detail below, this has meant that states with limited participatory systems in place may be reticent about adopting the Right to Food approach.

Discussion

This Annex provides an overview of the history and development of the concept of food sovereignty and the Right to Food. It suggests that food security's hegemonic position as the prevailing conceptual approach to addressing hunger and malnutrition has been challenged. Although proponents of food sovereignty and the Right to Food are expanding the discourse of food policy beyond production and consumption, these three concepts exist both in concert and contradiction.

All three concepts have at their core the elimination of hunger, but differ in the approach to attaining it. With similar language shared between the two concepts, Lee (2007) describes food security and food sovereignty as co-produced discourse. Neither sovereignty nor the Right to Food reject the overall goal of food security, but neither do these approaches accept food security's apolitical, technocratic neglect of issues of power, control, participation and sustainability. There is an ebb and flow between these three concepts, which hopefully has the effect of strengthening the overall discursive richness of food security (or food sovereignty or the Right to Food) in policy.

Much of the discourse around these three concepts has occurred at global levels, at the highest reaches of global governance. Within these confines, commitment for the attainment of a world free from hunger has been considerable, and as in the Right to Food, action to cement this has been taken with comparative alacrity. However, as Windfuhr and Jonsen (2005 p.44) note, delegations that represent national governments in international contexts are very rarely the same as those responsible for setting the domestic agenda. Participation in one level of discourse does not suggest whole of government endorsement. This leads to an important disconnect between international and 'local' (that is, national) policy.

Summarizing these three approaches, Windfuhr and Jonsen (2005 p.25) suggest that food security is a technical concept, the Right to Food a legal concept, and food sovereignty a political concept. This Annex suggests that while this classification is admirably concise and easy to swallow, there is important interplay between the three: the Right to Food is political to the point of toxicity in autocratic states. Food security, expressed as social stability underpinned by cheap food, is the basis for perpetuating control (see Shepherd 2012). Food Sovereignty suggests a level of empowerment for rural populations with huge potential social and economic implications.

Annex III: The Right Kind of Vagueness: Issues in Food Security Measurement

'Not everything that counts can be counted; not everything that can be counted, counts.'
(Albert Einstein, quoted in Jerven 2013)

This Annex derives its title from a wonderful quote from Sen (1981 p3), in which he suggests that there will always be a certain ambiguity to estimations of nutritional status and poverty, but that that this may not matter: 'The issue thus, is not whether nutritional standards are vague, but whether the vagueness is of the required kind.' Required, that is, to meaningfully and usefully identify and understand the needs of food insecure people in context, in order to generate a solution.

Irrespective of whether the term is understood negatively or positively (that is, as improved food security or reduced food insecurity), as an attainable target or a distant goal, a substantial body of academic and practitioner-led work on the measurement of food security has been developed. On the whole, nutritional outcomes are generally estimated based on approaches which include some or all of the following: genetics, metabolic and physiological mechanisms, economic development, technological change, cultural change, psycho-social factors, obesogenic environments, and the nutrition transition (Pearce S 2012).

Basic Measurement Approaches

This Annex is drawn extensively from deHaen et al's 2011 review of metrics applies for food insecurity and malnutrition, in which three frequently used approaches are reviewed, each of which approach the issue from a different geospatial level: nation-state, household and individual. Although multiple variations on these exist, deHaen et al's review suggests that these three are the common templates, onto which more complex techniques are overlaid. At the level of global food security and nutrition policy discourse, undernourishment and anthropometry tends to be more frequently referred to, whereas household level consumption data are more useful at the practitioner level at the national or sub-national level.

In the first instance, the measurement tools to be used are determined by the context; Jones et al (2013) suggest that 'the validity of a measurement tool is inseparable from the purpose for which it was intended.' In a rapid onset emergency situation, in which provision of support to meet immediate nutritional needs is the priority, rapid assessments may include basic anthropometry, and preliminary information on food production, access and livelihood systems (WFP 2005). Such situations generally fall under the rubric of humanitarian response, with a strong focus on life-saving interventions and are subject in very large part

to the exigencies of context. In keeping with the area of research focus, this Annex focuses more on the tools for assessing food security in non-emergency developing country contexts.

The FAO Undernourishment Indicator

Also known as the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU), this is a national level indicator, which estimates the total availability of kilocalories per capita in a given nation-state. Its methodology is reasonably simple, as the measures is derived from the total amount of food available collected into what is known as a Food Balance Sheet (including all production, imports, minus exports and post-harvest losses), divided by the demographic structure of the country (subdivided by age cohort). A third data, called the Coefficient of Variation, is used to indicate inequality in access to available calories[86]. As a result, the undernourishment indicator indicates the total available kcalories per capita per day (known as Dietary Energy Supply, or DES), and the Minimum Daily Energy Requirement (MDER), that is the amount of energy required for the population to live a sedentary (that is, minimum, not active) lifestyle. Undernourishment has been reported globally by the FAO since the 1960s, and is the basic indicator for the World Food Summit Target[87]. It does not measure actual consumption, but rather theoretically 'available' kilocalories.

Undernourishment does not capture short term changes in context (as in the case of disaster events or market volatility, or food shortages), and does not include micronutrients. There can significant time lags, of two to three years, before data is made public. Further, does not allow for sub-national disaggregation, that is, at the provincial level or below (Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2013 p.32). Beyond that, there is extensive debate over each of the three constituent indicators (DES, Coefficient of Variation and MDER) (deHaen 2011 p 762). The composition of the FBS themselves is also problematic, as FAO fills gaps in national level statistics with model based on past performance or similar countries, or other forms of estimates, a practice applied in 70 percent of African countries and 50 percent of Asia/Pacific countries (Hawkesworth et al 2010 p 6). In other words, it is based on data estimated derived from FAO modeling, rather than actual data provided by governments. Finally, it provides no information on causality, effectively failing to fulfill the explanatory function identified by Massett (2011 p.2).

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[86] This particular data is itself extensively contested, and its calculation is in a state of more or less constant review and revision- see (deHaen et al 2011 p.761, FAO 2012a p52, FAO and IFAD 2014 p46)

[87] Although the two phrases sound very similar, care should also be taken not to confuse undernourishment with under*weight*, which is a composite indicator based on stunted and wasted populations more than two standard deviations below the reference population, and is derived from direct anthropometric measurement. Both indicators are applied in measuring progress towards the MDGs. PoU is retained in the SDGs, but underweight has been replaced by an indicator including both +/- 2 SD from WHO standard growth charts, to capture both wasting and overweight.

Despite the extensive body of criticism around the undernourishment indicator (Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2013, Jones et al 2013), it remains in widespread use due to the fact it is comparatively well-established, which allows for trending and time series analysis. For countries which are food surplus, it also has advantages, as it bases its estimates on total calories available, rather than accessible or actually consumed. Finally, it allows for international comparability between nations, which is not always possible with more relativistic methods of measurement.

Household Budget Surveys or Food Consumption Surveys

These are surveys assess actual levels of consumption within households, based on reporting of expenditure, consumption, and overall household economic activity. Data on food consumption are usually based on recall periods of seven, 14 or 30 days. The proportional household spend on food is calculated against expenditure, which can focus on consumable items, or total household expenditures. Surveys also tend to include additional information on education, health care spending, and other factors of interest, thereby contextualizing food within the household's overall consumption context (Hawkesworth et al 2010 p.7). Household level surveys also allow for greater understanding of intra-household consumption patterns, and can be organized against actual demographic patterns, rather than national census data. This supports sub-national disaggregation, something the undernourishment measure cannot do. A prominent example of this mode of measurement is Save the Children's Household Food Economy Analysis Model.

The advantages of this model are counterbalanced by a number of factors which can make household surveys unwieldly. First, they are costly and time consuming, and where access to households can be difficult or dangerous, are prone to sample selections which privilege accessible areas over inaccessible (river valleys over mountain tops, for instance). Surveys capture a particular period in time only, and thus depending on the timing of data collection may reflect seasonal variation in consumption or expenditure patterns. Household surveys are also not a good way of collecting data on food consumed outside the home, limiting the viability of household surveys in urban contexts where meals may frequently be taken outside the house, a factor in the applicability of the approach in urban contexts. Because surveys are not standardized from one country to another, or one organization to another, there is little scope for comparability across datasets (deHaen et al 2011 p.5).

Finally, household surveys rely on self-reporting, rather than standardized measurement, and thus are subjective and contingent on household perceptions[88]. Deaton and Drèze (2009) conclude is that there can be no correlation between kilocalorie intake and self-reported dietary inadequacy.

Anthropometric Measurement

Anthropometric measurements is the most commonly used method for collection of food insecurity and malnutrition data at the individual level. Anthropometric data is collected among children under five, a population for which there is global consensus on growth standards, and which is most sensitive to physical manifestation of changes and/or vulnerability (de Haen et al 2011 p.6). Data is also frequently collected on women of child bearing age, generally estimated as 15-49, on the basis that this population tends to be more vulnerable, and often culturally responsible for maintaining the household, and thus functions a solid indicator over overall household health. Key data for children under five include wasting, stunting and underweight, collected based on weight and height data. Z-scores[89] from collected data are then compared against WHO international growth reference charts, providing information on acute (wasting) and chronic (stunting) malnutrition, the composite for which is underweight[90]. For women, BMI data are collected, as and with underweight, compared against global norms. Such data are routinely collected by national health surveillance systems, allowing for comparisons over time and relatively large data sets, and as a result anthropometry allows for global comparability (Massett 2011). Underweight and stunting were included in the MDGs as indicators 1.8 and 1.8a for target 1C, and stunting has been retained as an indicator for SDG 2.

[88] Coates et al. (2006) recount data from Bangladesh in which poorer households reported their diets as being inadequate because they could not afford the meat and fish they knew wealthier households were consuming, even though from a purely nutritional standpoint, their diet of lentils and rice was acceptable. Deaton and Drèze (2009 p.4) provide examples from India which indicate that self-reported hunger levels were higher in wealthier rice-producing states such as Kerala, and further, that household perceptions of dietary adequacy were contingent on how the question was phrased and translated ('did everyone get two square meals a day' in one survey and 'did everyone get enough to eat?' in another).

[89] The deviation of the value for an individual from the mean value of the reference value, divided by the standard deviation for the reference population. Can only be determined if the reference population is known and an assumption about 'normality' is made (FAO 2012b).

[90] Underweight, which indicates weight-for-age, is particularly problematic in obesogenic environments, such that at the population level overweight populations may 'mask' prevalence rates of thinner populations. At the individual level, stunting refers to inadequate dietary intake over time, whereas underweight is influenced by shorter-term consumption (Fukuda-Parr and Orr 2011 p.31). Hypothetically speaking, it is wholly possible for an individual to be stunted and *not* underweight, assuming they have been consuming their full requirement or more in the short-term. Underweight has been discontinued as an indicator for the SDGs.

Prevalence of malnutrition in a given population may have more to do with exposure to disease and poor sanitation than food intake (de Haen et al 2011 p.6). Anthropometric data do not, therefore, provide a clear-cut explanatory function (per Masset's formulation above). As with household surveys, sampling is reliant on accurate census data, which may not always be adequately up to date, given that population census exercises are generally only carried out once per decade, or even less frequently. Male adult and adolescent populations, and all elderly populations are not included, such that nutritional issues among those populations may not be well identified.

Finally, of emerging importance is the nutrition transition phenomenon, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, which involves the co-incidence of overnutrition and obesity with undernutrition within the same population. As anthropomorphic measurements are currently calibrated to emphasized negative z-scores (that is, below the mean), a stunted, overweight child would be coded as normal (de Haen et al 2011 p.5). At the population level, increased incidence of overweight may suggest improvements in overall levels of stunting, effectively masking the ongoing prevalence rate of stunting. De Haen et al (2011) summarize their findings as follows:

Criterion	**FAO approach (PoU)**	**Consumption Survey**	**Anthropometry**
Ability to draw a regular picture for total global, regional and national populations	++	-	+
Ability to draw a regular picture for special population groups at global level	-	-	++
Usefulness to assess inequality of food consumption within countries	--	++	--
Usefulness to assess consumption consistent with national supply and demand	++	-	--
Accuracy in terms of measuring the adequacy of food intake	+	++	--
Accuracy in terms of measuring and identifying determinants of nutritional status at a point in time	-	+	++

Accuracy in comparing nutritional status across space and over time	-	++	?
Ability to assess dietary diversity and micronutrient status	--	++	-
Ability to portray regional and socioeconomic heterogeneity within countries	--	++	++
Ability to portray seasonal variation	--	-	-
Ability to inform global governance	++	-	++
Usefulness to guide national policy decisions (e.g., targeting	--	+	++
Usefulness to simulate nutritional impacts of policies and shocks at country level	--	++	-

(+ and – signs indicate whether or not the approach is suitable. Double signs indicate very suitable or very unsuitable.)

Figure III.1: Comparative advantages of food security measurement methodologies (adapted from de Haen et al 2011)

In practice, serious food security measurement exercises will use a composite of the three data listed above, in order to generate as comprehensive a dataset as possible. At the global level, this 'dashboard' approach which uses a suite of indicators across multiple datasets is being applied in the global food security index supported by the Economist (http://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/), or the Global Hunger Index, developed by IFPRI, German Agro Action and Concern Worldwide (IFPRI 2015), and in a more elaborate process, in the Integrated Phase Classification described above.

Despite a gradual progression towards recognition of more qualitative measurements, and the development of more quantitative tools such as USAID's Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) and FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), the measurement of food security remains firmly quantitative. This masks the reality that despite ever more complex statistical modeling and analytical sophistication, indices of food insecurity are imprecise. Different methodologies provide wildly divergent results, so much so that that global estimates for chronic malnutrition are known to be inaccurate, but by how much or in what direction is open to speculation (de Haen et al. 2011). Anomalous data is not hard to find. In South Asia regionally, high rates of child undernutrition coexist with low under five mortality

rates (de Haen et al. 2011), a finding which is counterintuitive if not paradoxical. In India, despite increased GDP growth, both per capita kilocalorie consumption and share of household income on food are declining, even among populations already below the recommended minimum intake, and in spite of cheaper retail prices (Deaton and Drèze 2009)[91]. Entrenched assumptions about links between income and nutrition turns out to be less robust than expected, even as poverty lines are derived from the cost of basic food needs (National Academies 2012 p.44).

This Annex has focused on the technically derived processes through which food security is measured and quantified- but for every nation, there are iconic data which function as symbolic indicators of food security, irrespective of what methodology is used to reach them. Just as GDP growth data is used as shorthand for economic performance, across SE Asia, rice production data (and in the case of Thailand and Vietnam, rice *export* data) is used as proof positive of food security, up or down[92]. This goes to illustrate the paradoxical coexistence of food security as a phenomenon which can be rationally assessed and analyzed, with its irrational conceptual doppelgänger, determined by public perception and emotional response, in which food availability is tightly linked to perceptions of availability.

This point is worth emphasizing because whichever indicators are applied, are cited as definitive proof by non-specialist policy stakeholders (including politicians, development institution representatives, diplomats and the press) are taken as *prima facie* accurate. Eye-catching data, once accepted (i.e. one billion hungry), are exceptionally difficult to dislodge or replace; errors become canonical through constant repetition (Chambers 2014 p 37, p 56). Individual data can have an outsize influence on policy discourse, functioning as both a precis of the problem, and the benchmark against which progress is measured (i.e. what are we doing about the one billion?).

Measuring food security is not values-neutral. This is one of the fundamental paradoxes of food security: a common definition exists, a toolbox of analytical options is available, but should the tenor of political interest rise about a certain critical level, the technical details will cease to matter. As a result, what food

[91] In the US National Academies 2012 report (2012 p. 37), it is posited that the reason for the so-called Asian Enigma is likely to be strongly gendered, as women's nutrition, education, access to sanitation and social norms which privilege males form an environment which results in for chronic malnutrition for women and girls.

[92] Slayton (2010) gives the example of the 2009 announcement of 300,000 MTs of new rice imports as enough to calm Filipino markets and consumer anxiety in a way that ultimately contributed to stabilization of global rice prices and the end of the global food price crisis, despite the fact that the rice in question never materialized.

security might *mean* is wholly variable, and subject to political, economic and social influence. It seems fitting to give the last word to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

> By and large however, data on hunger and malnutrition often remain fragmentary or outdated, or based on questionable methodologies. Even where such data exist, they may be ignored or kept under wraps by policy-makers wanting to rely on a purported 'lack of solid facts' as an excuse for remaining passive. They must know nothing, in order to be allowed to do nothing.
>
> De Schutter (2009)

Annex IV: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title: **Competing Claims in a Changing World: An Interpretive Analysis of Food Security Discourse in Lao PDR**

Principal Investigators: Mr Jannie Armstrong, Dr David Barling

I agree to take part in the above City University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:

☐ Be interviewed by the researcher

☐ Allow the interview to be audio taped

☐ Make myself available for a further interview should that be required

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project and can withdraw at any stage without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Data Protection

This information will be held and processed only for the purposes of the research project titled above.

I agree for the interview to be tape recorded and I agree for verbatim quotations from the interview to be used in presentations, reports and other publications on the

understanding that no information that could identify me will be presented or published in any reports on the project, or to any other party.

I agree to City University recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Withdrawal from study:

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

I have received a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Interviewer	Signature	Date

Annex V: Guide Questions for Research Participants

Research Questions	**Interview Questions** The same base questions will used for each interview, but the questionnaire may differ slightly for each respondent, depending on the specific field of expertise of each participant. **About You:** Name: Address: E-Mail Address: Phone: Position/Area of Work:
1. Using Lao PDR as the case study, how is food security mediated in Southeast Asia?	**About Your Work:** - Describe how your work relates to food security, or what components are included in your portfolio (and how food security relates to those other elements). - Describe which other countries you have worked in related to food security. - What are the key objectives/ mandates of your organization vis a vis food security? How are these reflected in your work in Lao PDR? Conceptual Framework for Food Security: - Elaborate what their conceptual understanding of food security is, how/if this has changed over time, key strengths/weaknesses. - How have changes to international normative approaches to food security translated into policy at the national level? - What other frameworks or paradigms are you familiar with? How do these relate to your work? - How relevant to you find these conceptual frameworks to 'the situation on the ground'? Food Security in Southeast Asia: - In terms of national priorities, how is food security ranked? Is this adequate/appropriate? - What documents, policies, frameworks or theories guide your work? - Who are the key actors? - What are key policy drivers?

	- What issues are well represented? What issues are less well represented? - Is there a regional approach? Does this complement or contradict national approaches?
2. What are the key narratives in food security policy in Lao PDR?	- In your experience, is there conceptual consensus around food security? Is there agreement as to what the key factors and possible solutions are? - What do you understand to be the core drivers of policy in Lao PDR? - How are the key narratives being translated into policy responses? - What competing forces are influencing food security in Lao PDR? - Who are the key voices in this process? Who is well represented?
3. Who are the 'experts' in this process, and what do they contribute?	- Who are the 'experts' in this process, and what do they contribute? - What is the role of expertise? How does this link to international food security governance? - How does expertise contribute to policy action at the government level? At the Donor/UN/NGO level? (*as applicable*)?
4. Is food security a useful and valid policy framework for developing countries?	- Describe how food security can be conceptually and practically strengthened to support better policy outcomes in terms of reducing hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity - How well suited is food security and its governance apparatus (UN, govt, etc.) responding to the challenges of food insecurity? - How are emerging issues such as urbanization, climate change and the Nutrition Transition addressed by food security? *[this could be considered at a global, SE Asian, a more abstract/conceptual-level, or indeed all of the above! Please feel free to think broadly on this point.]*

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