

Babu, Suresh Chandra

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## Policy process and food price crisis: A framework for analysis and lessons from country studies

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## WIDER Working Paper No. 2013/070

### **Policy process and food price crisis**

#### A framework for analysis and lessons from country studies

Suresh Chandra Babu\*

July 2013

#### **Abstract**

During the recent food crisis, developing countries responded with a wide variety of policy responses to protect their population. Understanding the policy-making process in developing countries is important to know why such policy responses are made and how various actors and players shape up and influence the policy decision-making. In this paper we develop a framework for analysing the policy process in developing countries and apply it to study the food policy process during the food price crisis in selected countries. A synthesis of policy process analysis in 14 developing countries indicate that policy responses may differ depending on the nature and magnitude of roles of various types of actors and players in the policy process. Political institutions and organizational infrastructure for policy consultations, strategic analysis, knowledge management and monitoring, and timely warning of food crisis and its impact can determine the policy process and its outcomes. Several lessons for improving the policy process are derived from the country studies.

Keywords: policy process, food crisis, analytical framework, case studies, lessons  
JEL classification: P48, Q18, R38, Z18

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\*International Food Policy Research Institute, email: s.babu@cgiar.org

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*www.wider.unu.edu*

*publications@wider.unu.edu*

UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER)  
Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

Typescript prepared by Lisa Winkler at UNU-WIDER.

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## 1 Introduction

The recent food price crisis brought forward a discussion on how countries design and implement food policies (FAO, WFP, and IFAD 2012; IFPRI 2012). Policy responses to the crises depended on several factors, including the rate and extent to which price fluctuations transfer from international markets to domestic markets; the vulnerability of the country to the vagaries of food prices; pressure to act from opposition parties, development partners, and producer and consumer groups; the capacity of the actors in the policy process; and the evidence generated by the research community on the potential and real effects of increasing food prices. Identifying and understanding how these factors contribute to the policy process is critical for preparing policy makers to better face food price crises in the future.<sup>1</sup>

The recent food price crisis and the responses of the policy makers in developing countries provide an unprecedented opportunity to analyse the policy processes in these countries, with particular regard to the individual and organizational capacity in the policy process and the political and socio-economic context in which the policies are developed. Studying the political realities policy makers face in policy design and programme interventions can help place the policy outcomes in proper perspective. Further, understanding the institutional and governing environment in which policies are made can help to identify opportunities that enhance roles and contributions of various actors and players to the policy-making process. In addition, given the limited research on the policy-making process in developing countries in general, an analysis of the food policy-making processes in countries in various stages of development and operating under diverse political environment can add to the broader literature on policy processes.

A comparative study of policy processes in developing countries in the context of the food price crisis is important for several reasons. First, understanding the nature of policy-making and the roles that various actors play in the policy process can help in designing interventions to address future food crises. Second, food policy-making in developing countries during a crisis period provides an opportunity to study the similarities and differences in policy processes with respect to their responsiveness. Third, studying the food policy process aids in developing a framework to understand the policy process in developing countries in general. Fourth, insights from the knowledge gaps and the capacity gaps that developing countries face could help in designing interventions that strengthen the policy process to better respond to a food policy crisis. Finally, the lessons learned from the policy process in one country could be useful for another country with a similar political and socio-economic environment to address food policy challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use the theories of policy processes as an investigative tool to understand how various actors and players shape up and influence the policy decision-making (Sabatier 2007). There is a large volume of literature on the political economy of policy-making that looks at how policy makers balance sound economic policy-making with political realities (Meier 1991; also see Watson 2013). While studies of political economy of policy-making often use policy process theories (Birner et al. 2011), main stream political economy analysis addresses issues such as the measures of protection, modelling political games among the actors, and the role of political institutions (Rausser and Swinnen 2010; Bates and Block 2010 ). This paper focuses on the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the policy process during the time of food price crisis and complements two other synthesis papers by Bryan (2013) on the typology of policy responses and by Baltzer (2013) on the nature and magnitude of food price transmission from international to local markets.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section reviews the policy process literature and its relevancy to developing countries and Section 3 introduces a framework to analyse the policy process in developing countries in the context of the food price crisis. Using this framework, Section 4 provides an analysis of the policy process in country studies in the context of policy-making during the food price crisis. Lessons from the analysis of the policy processes are presented in Section 5. Section 6 concludes.

## **2 Policy process in the context of food crisis—a review of literature**

How does policy-making in times of crisis differ from policy-making in times of relative calm? Who are the players and actors in the policy process? What triggers the policy process? How is the policy process conducted and what roles do different players play in the policy process? These questions have been of interest to policy scientists for a long time and have garnered increased interest in developed countries in the last 30 years.

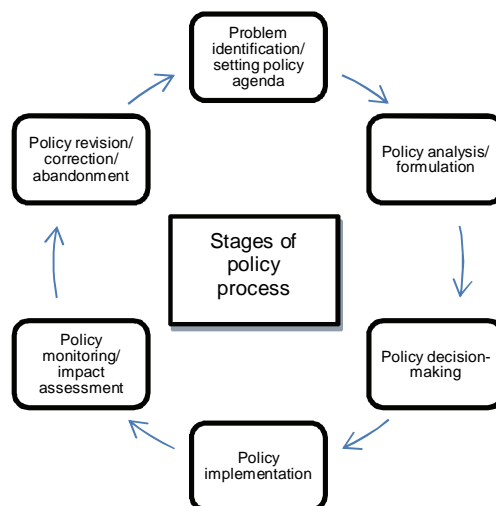
We briefly review some of the archetypical models of policy processes in the context of food policy-making in developing countries. Appendix table 1 presents an overview of selected policy process models and their characteristics, used under normal circumstances and under crisis situations. A key tenet explored in this paper is that given a certain degree of political openness, does the policy process differ according to the context and time available for decision-making? For example, policy-making during a crisis may involve overnight decisions with little or no open consultation while the release of genetically modified crops may involve protracted debate and discussion over several years.<sup>2</sup> We look first to the linear model for answers, then to the interactive model and the multiple stream model, followed by the institutional development and rational choice model, policy learning and diffusion model, advocacy coalition framework, and lastly, the policy entrepreneurship model.

At its simplest, the policy process can be thought of as six stages that occur in a sequential fashion (Figure 1). This linear model suggests that the policy process commences with problem identification or the setting of a policy agenda, moving from stage to stage until the policy is either abandoned, effectively ending the policy process, or there is recognition that the policy must be revised, and the process repeats.

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<sup>2</sup> Political openness may vary within democracies and within authoritarian regimes. Broad grouping of the countries such as democracies and dictatorships will not be sufficient for a fuller understanding for the policy processes.

Figure 1: The stages of the policy process



Source: author's compilation.

The linear model suggests that the policy process is a simple, sequential process (Nakamura 1987), but this is seldom the case in reality. In most situations only a partial adoption of this model (involving the four stages beginning with problem identification to policy implementation in Figure 1) is realized. Further due to lack of follow through in terms of monitoring, impact assessment, and policy learning renders the linear model invalid in reality. The linear model has also been criticized for its inability to trace causality, for being top-down, for the lack of attention to the iterative process of policy-making, and for ignoring multiple levels of policy-making (Sabatier 2007). It also fails to account for political economy factors.

Even so, a partial adoption of the linear model may be seen in developing countries' policy-making when there is an urgent policy problem, for example when responding to a food price crisis, or when there is a clear need for a policy solution and any quick help from the government would result in at least a marginal change over the current situation acceptable to a majority of the stakeholder groups. For example, the recent food policy-making processes in countries such as Ethiopia and Nigeria seem to have followed the selected stages of linear models at least partially.<sup>3</sup>

In most cases, however, policy processes are more complex and non-linear than as shown in Figure 1. According to Sabatier (2007), they involve a plethora of stakeholders and interest groups who have differing understandings of the problem and alternative approaches to solving it. The interactive policy process model is an improvement over the linear model in that it

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<sup>3</sup> For example, recent efforts in establishing the Agricultural Transformation Agency in Ethiopia and the development of the Agricultural Transformation Agenda in Nigeria could be categorized only as a partial adoption of the linear model of policy process. They are partial in the sense that only the first four stages of the policy process are followed and that too with limited analysis and evidence. The later stages such as policy monitoring, impact assessment, and the policy learning and revisions are not taken seriously. For these reasons the linear model is not fully valid in reality.

recognizes that there are multiple policy choices and that several actors and stakeholders interact to shape the debates and dialogues that result in multiple policy outcomes (Stone 2002; Omamo 2004). The advantage of this model is that it encourages broad participation and helps determine how policy debates affect the policy process.

The multiple stream approach to the policy process identifies three streams—problems, policies, and politics—which operate together (Kingdon 1984). In the first stream, problems are recognized and defined depending on the way policies are formulated and as political events unfold. The second stream identifies policy alternatives whether or not they are solutions to recognized problems or are affected by political considerations. In the third stream, political events move along their own trajectories, whether or not they are related to problems or policy proposals. In this model, entrepreneurial policy makers influence policy by making connections across the three streams. If the entrepreneurs are successful, policy solutions emerge. Under the multiple streams model of policy process, policy-making entails collective decision-making under conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty, which makes it an appealing policy process model (Zahariadis 2003). However, an application of this model to the developing country context could be limited by the lack of policy entrepreneurs in the countries who have the ability to bring the three streams of the policy process together.

Court and Young (2006) developed a similar framework with multiple dimensions, but looked at different aspects of the policy process: context (politics and institutions), evidence (credibility and communication), and links (influence and legitimacy). From a review of more than 50 case studies of research policy linkages, they found that context influenced the extent to which research results were used in policy-making, that generated evidence was used more frequently when it was accompanied with clearly communicated possible solutions, and that the links between researchers and policy makers were important, particularly informal links, but the extent and ways in which trust, legitimacy, openness, and formality affected the links remained unclear.

The institutional development and rational choice model expounded by Ostrom and her associates has an important place in the context of collective action in policy and programme design related to natural resource management (Ostrom 2011). Using self-governing institutions as its focal points, this approach identifies policy-making venues according to the policy actors involved, the policy action needed, the policy context, and the policy arena in which the policy process evolves. The research community and other stakeholders can develop effective strategies and understand the policy institutional framework within which they are operating, using this institutional development framework (Ostrom 1986).

Policy learning and diffusion models focus on how countries faced with similar policy challenges learn from each other. Volden et al, (2008) show how learning from the results of the political process in other countries can influence the beliefs of policy makers with regards to the implications of policies that are currently under discussion. The evidence generated by domestic think tanks and the results garnered from global, regional, and other national policy research organizations could play a key role in policy learning and the diffusion of specific lessons in their own countries. Such cross-country evidence can support the policy makers and determine the policy agenda.

Policy processes in developing countries, as in many advanced countries, are gradual processes in which policy changes occur incrementally (Baumgartner and Jones 1993). Slow policy

processes are explored through the advocacy coalition framework (Birner et al. 2011), which recognizes the need for a timespan of at least a decade to see policy change occur. Developed initially by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993) this framework explains policy change through the development of coalitions of different policy actors with shared beliefs that are homogenous and stable over time. These beliefs could be the result of policy shocks and policy learning that initially occurred from a policy change. Major policy changes (or policy reforms) occur when several coalitions find common ground. Non-political stakeholders can play effective roles in this process by generating evidence and advocating for their cause to sway public opinion and hence the beliefs of the policy players.

In summary, the above review of literature indicates that while there may be no one model that fits squarely with the policy process of a developing country, a combination of models can help describe the nature of the policy process and how various actors and players position themselves to play meaningful roles in the realm of policy-making. In the context of the food price crisis, as will be seen in the following sections, several elements of these models are useful to describe the nature of the policy process. In order to help the analysis of key characteristics of the policy process, we develop a conceptual framework that brings various elements discussed in the above review of literature.

### **3 A framework for studying food policy processes in developing countries**

Applications of the policy process models to study the policy phenomenon are limited in developing countries. Studies that use well-established models tend to identify the most applicable model to study a policy process when, in reality policy processes may follow combinations of elements of several policy processes. Figure 2 presents a stylized framework by combining elements from the various policy process models reviewed in the previous section. The process is initiated when policy issues are identified either from global, regional, or country level food security goals (ellipse 1) or from research projects (square 2). Local problem identification and priority setting in terms of national agricultural and food security strategies and priorities based on the interplay of global agendas, national policy challenges, and country level priorities is given in ellipse 1, in the top left corner of Figure 2.

All developing countries use research and analysis to some degree to design their national and sectoral strategies. Depending on the country's domestic capacity, external technical assistance may be used for research and analysis. In the last 20 years, however, the development of policy research organizations in several developing countries has resulted in local policy research capacity supporting the policy process.<sup>4</sup> The policy research and analysis cycle, which contributes context, ideas, and evidence to the policy process, is given in Box 2 in Figure 2. The link between the research and policy processes again varies depending on the nature of the political and administrative processes, the socio-economic context and the culture of decision-making. These cross-cutting factors also influence the political process itself, which also depends

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<sup>4</sup> With the recognition that technical assistance by donors to policy development has not resulted in local capacity, the 1990s saw the establishment of policy think tanks in most of the African countries. Initiated with the support of UNDP and the World Bank, these policy think tanks became one of the sources of local capacity for policy analysis and research, although their capacity to produce high quality research going beyond consultancy reports still remains a challenge.



on the level of involvement of various internal and external influences on the policy process as seen in Box 2 in Figure 2.

Policy learning and the diffusion of policy lessons from geographical regions and from international policy networks play increasingly important roles in the policy process. These lessons move through several pathways. Public servants and policy makers learn from the national and global debates in which they participate; researchers and analysts participate in their professional associations both locally and internationally; and civil society organizations (CSOs) are increasingly connected to international NGOs and aid agencies which communicate best practices and lessons learned on the issues and problems they deal with. The extent to which a policy problem is identified through a global agenda setting or research depends on the political leadership at the country level. Policy issue identification also depends on the level of influence of donors on the country policy process and the amount of internal pressure from opposition parties. These internal and external pressures are crucial determinants of how the political and policy processes operate for a particular issue. These elements are depicted in ellipse 3 in Figure 2 and are arguably the most important from a political economy perspective. Recognizing the linkages between policy learning and diffusion, and research and evidence generation is important for understanding how new ideas are formed, tested, and evaluated. This aspect of the policy process is depicted in Box 4 in Figure 2.

Translating evidence of policy alternatives and strategies into implementable programmes requires institutional capacity to formulate and monitor the rules and regulations that govern the public sector, private sector, and CSOs in a country. Institutional analysis thus becomes critical to explain why different levels of institutional development result in policy outcomes of differing quality. Similar to the institutional development framework, the rational choice policy process model focuses on understanding the linkages and relationships between bureaucratic figures and the legislature. National assemblies are becoming increasingly responsive to emerging problems and with the provision of relevant information on policy choices, could be effective in driving policy outcomes (Babu and Ergeneman 2005; Ostrom 2010). The institutional analysis and development aspects of the policy process are given in Box 5 in Figure 2.

The advocacy coalition model of the policy process assumes actors with similar objectives and similar stakes in the policy process collude to strengthen their position in the policy debate. Actors and players form advocacy groups and engage in the policy process to advance their goals and objectives. They may interact with local institutions, borrow ideas from research, and learn from their own policy and political processes, as shown by Box 6 in Figure 2.

Strengthening institutional capacity to develop and alter rules and their interpretation can help in modifying policy outcomes (see Boxes 1, 2, 5, and 7 in Figure 2). Policy outcomes in developing countries are increasingly influenced by various internal players who collaborate with each other to promote specific policy pathways. A wide range of players, actors, and institutions with a common ideology and belief system can advocate for a specific set of policy options (Sabatier and Weibles 2007). However, subgroups of these actors may compete for different policy outcomes and understanding their differences could explain the adoption of particular policies within a certain political environment (see Boxes 2, 6, 7, and 8 in Figure 2).

While the strength of advocacy coalitions depends on the policy problem at hand, complementing them, or at times replacing them, with policy entrepreneurs who can better

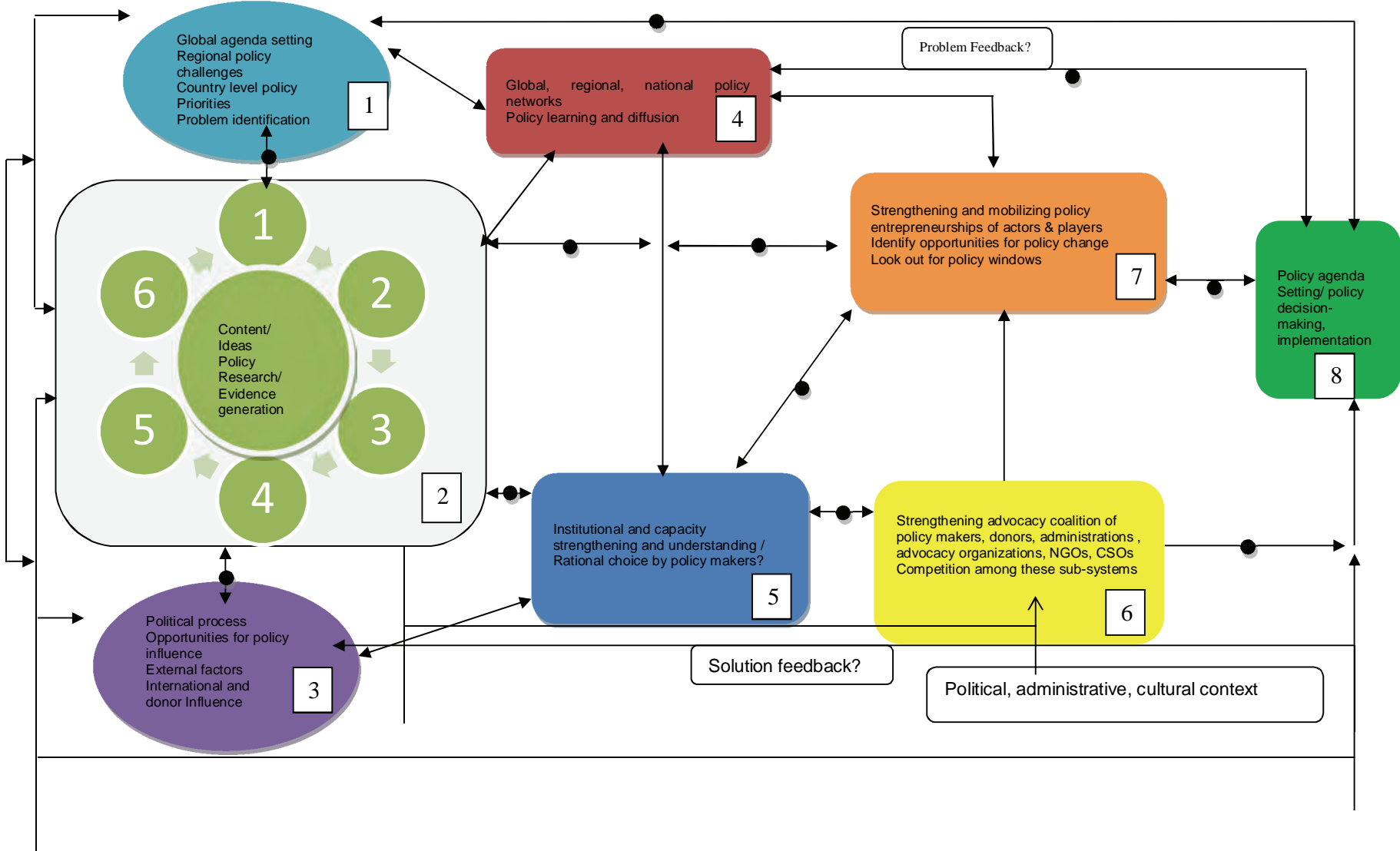
mobilize their cause and identify policy windows, can aid in advancing their policy agenda. Policy entrepreneurs are also influenced by local institutional arrangements and policy lessons learned from other sectors and countries that face similar policy challenges, as shown by Box 7 in Figure 2.

The policy entrepreneurship model relies on the strengthening and mobilization of key policy leaders and supplying them with adequate information. Policy entrepreneurs often wait for policy windows to open (Maxwell 2006). The food price crisis opened such windows in many developing countries, although due to a lack of collective policy leadership within the food system in general as well as among policy makers in government ministries responsible for food security, it is unclear how effectively these opportunities were used to achieve food security (see Boxes 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8 in Figure 2). Specific policy options are chosen by policy makers based on how successful political leaders were previously. Learning from peers who operate under similar political systems characterizes the policy diffusion framework. In Figure 2, Boxes 1, 2, 4, 7, and 8 jointly illustrate the policy diffusion framework. Lessons from policy adoption and implementation suggest solutions to the actors and players in various stages of the policy process. Finally, the policy or set of policies agreed upon and implemented are seen in Box 8.

In summary, the stylized framework presented above, attempts to capture various aspects of the policy process in developing countries, since no one individual framework or model could fully explain policy-making given the wide range of policy-making processes. It should be noted that, while the application of these frameworks is still new, even in developed countries, very little effort has been made to understand their implications in the context of development policy-making in developing countries. The applicability of this framework, partially or fully, to food policy-making will differ depending on the nature and extent of the crisis and on the country context.

In the next section we apply the framework to analyse the policy processes and their outcomes in the case study countries. One way to apply the framework is to identify country archetypes and examine whether they followed similar policy process in responding to the food crisis. Alternatively, one can identify specific policy outcomes such as export bans vs. enhancing social safety nets and analyse whether they are generated by similar policy processes. In what follows we combine these two approaches to identify the most important factors that contribute to variations in policy-making processes to derive lessons for future policy-making.

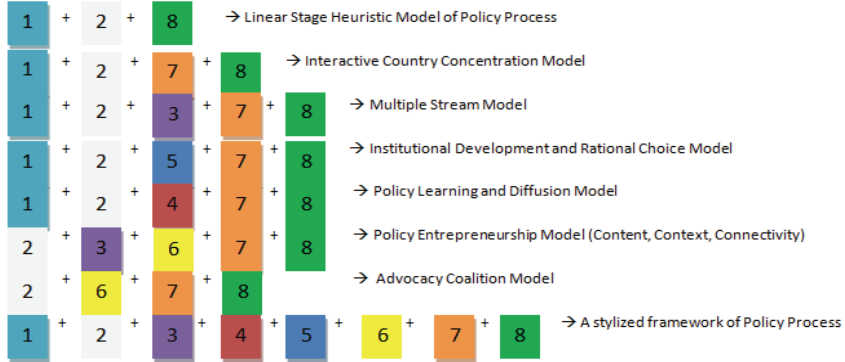
Figure 2: A stylized framework of policy process in developing countries



● Nodes of Policy dialogue and communication



are, respectively the stages of Policy Research Cycle: Identification of Problems and Priorities, Research Program Development, Research Study Design, Data Collection, Processing and Analysis, Preparation of Research Outputs and Publications, and Dissemination for Policy Impact



Source: author's compilation.

## **4 Synthesis of the policy processes in country studies**

The policy process theories reviewed above identify different pathways that countries take to develop and implement policies. They help to locate various sub-systems of interest to study the policy process and can be useful to identify areas that could be improved to facilitate food policy decision-making such as political openness, information access, and the negotiation skills of actors and players. How did the country studies fare with respect to these characteristics? To what extent was the policy process influenced by these characteristics? How can these characteristics be modified to improve the performance of the policy process to better respond to food crises in the future? Answers to these questions could be useful to enhance the efficiency of the policy process.

In order to understand the policy process during the food price crisis, we look at the triggers of policy responses, country responses, the key actors and players in the policy process, and their approaches toward policy-making.

### **4.1 Policy triggers**

Several domestic and external factors triggered policy responses to the food price crisis in the country studies. One of the major policy triggers in was the widespread understanding that there was a rise of international food prices. Price transmission differed (Baltzer 2013). Food exporters such as India, China, and Vietnam with food security concerns reacted strongly and quickly to stop or slow their exports, mainly in response to actual or potential criticism they might have faced internally. Policy reactions to the international food price increase were also significant in countries that were not seriously affected by it. This was the case for African countries including Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, and Malawi mainly due to pressure from civil society and consumer groups to act. The fear of these groups taking to the streets, which has implications for the stability of the governments, moved governments towards quick responses to the food price crisis. In Nigeria's National Assembly, food-related CSOs were more redoubtable than members of the opposition parties. Thus, at least in some of the countries, internal domestic factors influencing policy decision-making seem to be more influential on policy outcomes than external factors. Finally, countries such as Brazil and South Africa that traded more freely made little effort on the domestic front to respond to increasing international prices.

### **4.2 Policy responses**

Policy responses varied depending on the type of policy process, existing policies, and available resources at their disposal. Developing country governments chose responses that ranged from increasing incentives for production to market interventions, such as export bans and import tariffs (Bryan 2013). On the supply side, countries provided incentives, usually through subsidies for the adoption of modern technologies, such as fertilizer and seeds. This was the case in Malawi, which strengthened a pre-existing fertilizer subsidy programme. Countries such as China, India, Kenya, Senegal, and Zambia used input subsidy programmes to help farmers increase their production levels. In order to maintain sufficient supply in domestic food markets, countries resorted to export bans, import tariffs, or both. To reduce the pressures of domestic price increases on consumers, some countries, including China, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, released

stocks of food reserves in the market to stabilize prices. Countries that were chronically vulnerable to food deficits relied on food aid to meet the increased market demand for food. Policy learning and diffusion occurred among the countries. For example, Vietnam has been following and implementing similar policy measures as China; South Asian countries closely watched, and responded to policy actions of India; and South Africa's policy moves on food trade affected policy discussions in several southern African countries.

Protecting vulnerable populations through safety nets was a key intervention that was further strengthened during the food price crisis. Countries such as China, Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Senegal, South Africa, and Zambia reinforced their public support for social programmes to protect their poor and food insecure populations. Targeted food distribution through food for work and cash transfer through guaranteed employment programmes helped to ease the burden of the high food prices on the poor in India and Bangladesh. Open market sales to poor consumers in selected localities seemed to be a quick response to reduce the pressure from opposition parties (for example, rice in Bangladesh and pulses in India).

Watson (2013) provides a complete treatment of policy responses announced by the governments and reported by the media. Each government faced a different set of domestic pressures that pushed them to act in a timely manner. In democratic countries, such as India and Bangladesh the rise in domestic food prices following the global food price increase forced governments to act or respond in ways to avoid criticism from the opposition or from the media. Authoritarian regimes such as China and Vietnam acted pro-actively to avoid any political instability and addressed the concerns of various stakeholders even though they were not engaged in any formal consultations. In open democracies such as Nigeria and Zambia the food price increases were met by riots in the streets by consumers and other disenfranchised groups. This resulted in further debate in some national assemblies on the food price increase and actions followed.

Policy processes differed depending on the nature and level of decentralization. In large countries such as India and China, policies made at the central level took time to permeate to decentralized levels, whereas in small countries such as Malawi and Senegal, policies were only made at one level. In India for example, the state governments allocated additional resources to protect their vulnerable population. Although politically motivated to a large extent states like Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu provided rice for Rs. 1 per kilogramme (US\$0.02/kg). Policy processes also differed depending on the trade orientation of the countries. Openly trading countries like Brazil and South Africa did not have much to decide as the private sector may already be functioning sufficiently well to import food to take advantage of domestic price increases or export surplus food. Closed economies such as Bangladesh and India on the other hand, often needed to change policies to meet their development goals (Balzter 2013). Institutional development and capacity for facilitating policy debate and dialogue could accelerate or delay the policy-making process. The latter mostly applied to long-term policies. However, some policy changes had to be made so quickly, that in many countries, there was not much debate. Export bans, for example, were quickly agreed upon due to their populist nature. Countries with well-established social safety nets needed to make small changes to their policy course to protect their citizens. The cases of Brazil and South Africa in this volume illustrate this well.

### **4.3 Key actors and players in the policy process**

Policy processes were influenced by the types of participants and their ability to raise issues openly. In countries like China, Vietnam, and Ethiopia, ruling parties, their committees, state councils and government ministries were key players in designing intervention policies. In countries where political institutions permitted open discussion, such as Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, India, and Bangladesh key actors and players in the policy process included members of national assemblies, policy advisors, the private sector, consumer groups, national and international NGOs, farmer associations, and development partners. In Bangladesh, opposition parties and their policy advisors were quick to point out weaknesses in the proposed food security and safety net programmes. (Watson 2013).

The roles of the stakeholders in the policy process were influenced, for the most part, by the severity of the problem, the willingness of the government to listen to them, and their perceived influence on policy outcomes. Some actors of the policy process, particularly the media, private sector, and CSOs tended to raise their voices early on, depending on how they or their constituencies were affected by the price increases. How policy makers responded to these voices depended to a greater extent on the power and influence of these entities in the policy process. In Senegal, for example, the vocal complaints from the consumer and producer groups forced President Wade to act (Resnick 2013). Public data availability of international food prices and the corresponding local trends helped some country governments determine if the concerns raised by these entities were true. As a result, policy debates in countries like India and Bangladesh focused on the causes of the price increases.

### **4.4 Political institutions**

Political institutions provide a broad structural framework for understanding how countries respond to a food price crisis. Institutional arrangements and the functioning of political institutions may offer explanations to the structure of policy processes in some countries (Bates and Block 2010). The extent of a society's involvement in policy debates and the use of evidence in such debates may also explain the nature of the policy process. The media also helps to gauge the level of tolerance of government functionaries for open debate and dialogue on policy problems.

At the policy-making level, the nature of the political system has a profound influence on the choice of policy instruments and the speed of the policy process in responding to a food crisis. Democratic governments with strong opposition parties in their national assemblies tend to act on the food price crisis with a sense of accountability, even if they may not choose the first best policy that satisfies all the stakeholder groups (Watson 2013). For example, India reacted with an export ban mainly due to pressure from opposition parties who blamed the government for allowing cereal exports while the country's population faced higher food prices. The Vietnamese government, on the other hand, responded with a similar intervention, but it turned out to not be necessary. Vietnamese policy makers later apologized to the cabinet committee explaining that the decision for the export ban on rice was based on incorrect calculations (Ngan 2011). Due to the absence of a functional opposition, the government was not held accountable for its error.

#### **4.5 Formal organizational units with a food security mandate**

The existence of formal institutional structures with food security mandates, such as food security units or food policy units within the government, helped to speed up the policy process because of their linkages to policy makers at different levels. For example, the food security units in the Office of the President in Kenya and in the Ministry of Economic Development took leadership to convene policy dialogues and brought information for policy-making. The quality of their human resources and the organizational effectiveness to contribute to information generation and to monitoring and evaluation, as well as their ties with the policy leaders helped hastening the debate and decision-making the policy process.

In implementing policy responses, governance arrangements, and administrative structures and procedures played crucial roles. Supervisory and regulatory mechanisms were important for providing feedback to the policy process on interventions. Without such feedback, policy implementation tends to operate in a veil of ignorance. For example, although the Malawi government imposed an export ban on maize following the food price increase, it had no way of knowing how much maize remained in the country due to this ban because of the weak administrative capacity to monitor the informal trade between traders in Malawi and neighbouring countries such as Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. In contrast, when India imposed an export ban on rice, due to strict border control, the policy affected the flow of rice into Bangladesh's markets, which had significant implications on the deliberations and intervention strategies contemplated by policy makers in Bangladesh.

#### **4.6 The role of the private sector and civil society organizations**

An active presence of the private sector in the policy process makes a difference in a country's response to a food crisis. The confidence that the private sector has in government policy is critical for its effective involvement in the food and input markets. Further, in countries where the private sector is asked about its potential challenges and is supported by the government through short-term credit, the implementation of market interventions becomes more effective. In Bangladesh, for example, the private sector has become an effective partner of the government to import the food needed to supply the domestic market. In China, the private sector that exported fertilizer was affected by the restriction of fertilizer export. However, domestic support to farmers helped the private sector to gain from such interventions. Thus irrespective of whether a country is market economy or centrally planned, successful policy-making in the food sector needs to involve regular consultation with the private sector to enable them to function effectively and profitably.

In response to the food crisis, Nigeria implemented a massive support programme to increase fertilizer use. The implementation of this programme largely involved the private sector for the importation and transportation of the fertilizer. Regular consultations with the private sector has helped the government policy makers to gain a better understanding of the challenges the private sector faces and to address them through interventions as necessary, such as improving customs processes (personal communication with officials of the Fertilizer Department, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria). CSOs also play a vital role in food policy debates when they are allowed to participate. For example, in Malawi, the federation of NGOs



with a food security mandate raised common voice towards the food security of people in vulnerable areas. In Nigeria the network of food security NGOs meets with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development on a regular basis. In many developing countries, the emergence of food security CSOs during the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers has helped to cement their participation in food and agriculture policy processes.

In countries with strong CSOs, the CSO-contributed information on the causes and consequences of a food crisis has shaped the policy debates. For example, in India the CSOs engaged in the 'right to food' movement were highly critical of the government during the food price crisis and this further strengthened their position in the policy process. However, the capacity of CSOs to meaningfully contribute to the policy development process is still limited in many countries.

#### **4.7 Food security committees and taskforces**

In addition to the food security units that operate within government ministries, governments in several countries such as Kenya and Malawi relied on the recommendations of special task forces or committees to guide their policy decisions. These taskforces are normally convened by the government food security units described above, but not always. For example, in Kenya, the National Food Security Committee in the President's Office played a key role in working with the Kenya Food Security Steering Group in the provision of information to the policy process. In addition, Kenya's Inter-ministerial Committee on Drought and Food Security convened regularly to discuss the food security situation in the country. A similar committee, the Vulnerability Assessment Committee, exists in Malawi within the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development. This committee regularly monitors the country's food security situation. The commitment of the country's government to its food security goals and the existence of food security strategies and policy statements provide a good point of departure for discussions during the policy process. The political commitment of leaders to address food security problems also contributed to focused deliberations in the policy process. The formation of special committees and taskforces also helped to quiet the opposition and to buy time, particularly when the committee was composed of respected food policy researchers and advisors.

#### **4.8 The role of academic researchers and think tanks**

Academic researchers in universities and think tanks were a key source of evidence on policy alternatives in countries such as India, China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. However, some countries used these research groups more effectively than others. Policy makers in some countries relied mostly on confidential discussions with researchers from think tanks to generate information that supported their policy options. For example, Indian policy makers regularly consulted the National Centre for Agricultural Economics and Policy Research (NCAP) for their inputs on policy issues. These reports, however, are not published but shared as policy notes to policy makers (personal communication with researchers of NCAP). Similarly, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) was often called upon by Bangladesh's Ministry of Commerce to guide its policy-making process (personal communication with researchers of BIDS).

In Vietnam, however, the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (IPSARD) was heavily relied upon to support the policy direction preferred by the Ministry of Agriculture but the advice given by IPSARD was not fully based on independent analysis (personal communication with researchers of IPSARD). This experience generated serious discussion among IPSARD's researchers on how to make IPSARD independent of the Ministry of Agriculture in order to play a more effective role in providing evidence on policy alternatives, in the way that the Chinese Center for Agricultural Policy does in China. Think tanks in African countries seemed to have played limited roles in the policy process compared to their Asian counterparts. The Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI), the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), the Agricultural Policy Research Unit (APRU) in Malawi, the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), and the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI) in Zambia played some role in contributing to the policy process, directly or indirectly. However, gross capacity limitations, lack of funding, and a low level of trust of the government continues to limit the role of think tanks in food policy processes in much of Africa.

#### **4.9 Presence of food security monitoring systems**

Countries that have active food security and nutrition monitoring systems seem to have responded to food crisis more quickly than others. For example, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) in many southern African counties made food price data continuously available to policy makers through monthly newsletters. However, two major challenges in such externally-driven monitoring systems are the sharing of data with government institutions and departments and the low level of trust that policy makers have in the information generated by these monitoring systems. In cases where the vulnerability assessments are conducted jointly with government departments, as was the case in Kenya, the reports were more readily accepted in the policy process and were useful in identifying targeted areas for intervention. One major insight from this experience is that unless local systems for food security and nutrition monitoring are strengthened, information for designing interventions to protect the poor and the vulnerable may not be effectively used in the policy-making process.

### **5 Lessons from the country studies**

Twelve lessons can be drawn from the analysis of the policy processes discussed above.

1. *Crisis vs. non-crisis policy process:* policy processes are, in general, different during a crisis period compared to a period of relative calm. Due to time limitations and pressure to act, policy makers tend to make decisions with minimal consultation during a crisis period relying mostly on policy advice from a close circle of advisors. In the long run, however, there is evidence of more inclusive decision-making, particularly in more open democracies.
2. *Political institutions and policy consultations:* the nature of the political institutions in a country determines the extent of consultation and stakeholder participation. Short-run policy outcomes could be similar even if the nature of the political system and the source of pressure to act vary. This is true even among some authoritarian regimes. Country-

specific analysis is needed to explore the differences between the policy processes under similar political regimes.

3. *Gaining recognition and access to the policy process:* the advocacy coalition model was visible in some countries during the food price crisis. The crisis presented an opportunity for several organizations to become more active and vocal by working together to achieve food security goals. In some countries, food security-oriented CSOs gained importance and acceptance by policy makers when it was realized that their input was particularly constructive.
4. *The policy process as collective action:* policy processes can be seen as processes of collective action when actors and players take pro-active roles to find their niche within the system. Yet collective action does not necessarily improve the effectiveness of the policy process.<sup>5</sup> Participants who oppose policy solutions proposed by policy makers may make the process less effective. Thus, political incentives can encourage policy makers to actively engage specific policy actors in the policy process. This also reflects on the choice of members to the task forces and committees organized to address food price crises. Capacity for collective action is a challenge in countries when access to information and evidence varies among entities.
5. *Crisis as an opportunity for long-term strategy development:* the multiple-streams framework of the policy process was seen in several countries where the food price crisis brought a window of opportunity for various food and agricultural problems to be brought forward by different groups including adaptation to climate change, natural resource degradation, and opening up local food market chains for foreign investment. The crisis also pulled together various groups of policy proponents and raised differing views on potential solutions. However, it is not clear if countries used this opportunity effectively to develop long-term strategies to achieve food security.
6. *Formation of stronger coalitions:* in some countries the food price crisis provided an opportunity for the formation of advocacy coalitions. In Nigeria, for example, the agro-processors and millers came together to seek concessions for their operations even though they were competitors. Similarly, NGOs working toward food security came together to form a united network.
7. *Involvement in long-term policy dialogues with increased legitimacy:* continuous engagement of key actors that were involved in the policy process during the crisis period could aid in designing long-term interventions. In Nigeria, for example, a recent consultation with the food security CSOs showed that the CSOs that brought the increasing food prices to the attention of the government formed a coalition of food security NGOs and consulted at both the state and federal level (FMARD 2010). Thus the

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<sup>5</sup> Effectiveness of the policy process may be an important goal in itself for policy makers who seek to engage a wide range of actors and players to develop policy alternatives. It measures if the actual policy outcomes are in line with the desired or optimal policy outcome (from the perspective of the benevolent social planner). Better and more informed collective action by stakeholders by no means guarantees the desired outcome for all, as their expectations will differ. Nevertheless, coming together and working together on a policy problem makes future inclusiveness in policy-making more likely and enhances the quality of debate and dialogue in the present.

food crisis provided an opportunity for the CSOs to become more prominent and reinforce their legitimacy and participation in future policy dialogues.

8. *Improved communication among stakeholders:* the interactive model of the policy process was observed in countries where policy consultations brought various stakeholder groups together. This was more evident in open and democratic countries than in authoritarian regimes where interactive processes of policy-making remain limited to the ruling parties and the councils appointed by them. The food price crisis mobilized key players to work together by increasing their communication and interactions. At the same time, the challenges that CSOs and private sector organizations faced in addressing the food crisis emerged during these discussions and through increased interaction, were forced to improve their communication skills, especially with other players of the policy process.
9. *Implementation challenges:* many of the discussions, policy dialogues, and consultations that took place during the food crisis period focused not only on the policy options that the government was considering, but also on the challenges that it will face in implementing the policies. These interactions highlighted capacity challenges at all levels—the system level, organizational level, and individual level.
10. *Role and independence of research organizations in the policy process:* while research and academic organizations were consulted in countries such as India, China, and Vietnam, these organizations belonged to, and were funded by their respective governments. The level of independence in evidence generation differed between countries. In some more democratic countries, policy makers, researchers, and bureaucrats worked well together to achieve their goals and objectives; however, these discussions were mostly internal and resembled the institutional rational choice model in that the relationships between the government, think tanks, and political leaders were driven by a specific set of institutional rules.
11. *Strengthening the capacity of actors and players in the policy process:* in some of the countries, CSOs are allowed to play meaningful roles in the policy process, but are grossly constrained by a lack of capacity to do so. Strengthening the capacity of CSOs to identify the problem *and* to develop local solutions by analysing their data is a first step to increasing their effectiveness in the policy process. The media has played a significant role in several countries to highlight the problem of increasing food prices and their effects on poor households. However, the quality of reporting and information sources could be improved by strengthening the capacity of the journalists and increasing their access to research-based evidence.
12. *Role of monitoring systems:* regular information on the status of food insecurity and the vulnerability of households in different geographical areas of a country is a crucial ingredient in policy-making. Yet even where there are functioning data collection systems, much of the collected data is not processed in time, only a portion of what is processed is analysed, and only a portion of what is analysed is used in the policy process. Improving the capacity of the taskforces and parliamentary committees to effectively demand information will improve the quality of the policy debate. Finally,

enhancing implementation capacity to translate policy and programme interventions and to receive feedback on the impact of the implemented interventions is crucial for the policy process.

## 6 Concluding remarks

In this paper an attempt is made to understand the policy-making processes that were followed when developing responses to the recent food price crisis to draw lessons for improving and strengthening these processes to better face such crises in the future. After reviewing the broader literature on the frameworks, theories, and models of policy processes, we developed a combined framework that could be applied to food policy-making in developing countries. Following several rounds of cross-country discussions and analyses of country level policy-making, we identified the nature of policy processes in selected countries. A key lesson learned is that strengthening the role of various players and actors and empowering them by increasing their capacity for research, analysis, communication, and advocacy, their participation in food policy-making processes can be enhanced. However, their participation is conditional on the nature of the political institutions in the country. A broader insight from the review of the policy processes is that, not one theory alone can fully explain the food policy-making process. A combination of theories is at work in any particular country. Identifying the most important actors as well as their roles is crucial to improve policy-making processes. Policy processes are affected by various factors depending on the political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts of the countries. Understanding the nature and magnitude of these factors will help in devising strategies that could help development partners and policy makers to guide the development of open, transparent, and effective policy processes that can result in better policy outcomes.

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Appendix table 1: Models of policy process—A summary of their characteristics and use

Policy process models and principle authors	Disciplinary approach	Description of policy process	Major assumptions of the model	Use of models for food policy-making	
				Under normal circumstances	Under crisis situation
Classical linear model (Nakamura 1987)	Political science/policy studies	Decision makers seek and use information generated by research/analysis in policy-making	Demand for evidence exists; information supplied is based on analysis; information is used in policy-making	To defend and support government's stand on various policy issues, particularly when existing policies are challenged by actors of the policy process	Quick policy decisions are made in close consultation with groups and institutions funded by or supported by the government
Interactive model of policy process (Stone 2002; Stone et al. 2001)	Policy science/policy entrepreneurship/policy research-linkages	Several actors and stakeholders interact and debate policy options that could result in variety of policy outcomes	Government is open to debate and dialogue; actors and players are well informed about policy problems; allows better ownership by the stakeholders	Long-term and medium-term strategies such as poverty reduction strategies and agricultural development strategies often involve multiple stakeholders and organized interaction	Not preferred in situations requiring quick policy decisions; prolonged debates can increase cost and reduce benefits of policy interventions
Multiple stream approach (Kingdon 1984)	Political science	Three streams of problem, policies, and politics operate together to produce policy outcomes	Policy solution depends on presence of all three streams; policy entrepreneurs are assumed to play key role in connecting the problems to policies bringing political realities into consideration	Specific food policy interventions such as food subsidies and social safety nets/often depend on a group or groups of individuals bringing problem and policies together in the context of specific political conditions	Food price crisis provided opportunity to NGO's in some countries to highlight the problems of food security and enter policy arena. For example, 'Right to Food' advocacies used food price crisis to strengthen their case both in India and Nigeria



Institutional development and rational choice model (Ostrom 1986; Ostrom 2011)	Institutional development/collective action	Policy and intervention programmes can be developed in response to a crisis situation at the local community level	Self-governing institutions exist and the players are capacitated to identify solutions after analysis of the problem	Food-based interventions in drought prone communities; management of irrigation systems, community forest resources, and land and water resources	During crisis period policy solutions often emerge at the macro level; village level food reserves to protect the vulnerable group during lean seasons; local price volatility will involve policy responses at the community or district levels
Policy learning and diffusion model (Berry and Berry 1992); (Gilardi 2010); (Baumgartner and Jones 1993)	Political science	Policy makers learn from policy solutions developed by neighbouring districts, states, regions, or countries and adapt them to their situations	Policy makers have access to knowledge base on what worked in similar policy situations in other settings	Long-term policy development such as national agricultural investment plans and opposition to GMOs in selected African countries are some example of use of policy learning and diffusion model	During the food crisis period, politically motivated decision by some countries to ban export of food grains gathered momentum with other countries following similar policy paths
Advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993)	Policy science	People/ groups of people with similar ideology could form coalitions to promote specific policy agenda	Policy makers can be persuaded through advocacy; policy process environment allows for coalition formation	Role of CSOs and NGOs that work towards poverty alleviation come together with one voice to develop poverty reduction strategies; federations of farmers' organizations have been effective in forming advocacy coalitions	Network of NGOs working food security areas come together to advocate for policies to reduce food prices. Some of them jointly took to streets to get the attention of policy makers.

Source: author's compilation.