Chapter 47
Governance for Food Security: A Framework for Social Learning and Scenario Building

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ABSTRACT

Food security is one of the greatest challenges that characterises our times. One central argument in related conferences and symposia is the need to increase production for a growing population. However, major international organisations and other research institutions hold instead that food production exceeds current need and the reasons of food insecurity reside more in the complex concurrence and interdependence of poverty, access to food, local economic development and political and socioeconomic circumstances. Governance for sustainability is presented in this article as a process of multidisciplinary and participatory social learning about these interdependences, both general criteria and the context-based practices to which decision-makers are accountable. In order to reflect this approach a 'GAME' (Governance Assessment Matrix Exercise) methodology and framework is developed to inform more evidence-based and accountable decision making.

1. THE CHALLENGE OF FOOD SECURITY

The severity food security has been captured by the 2016 Global Hunger Index (GHI) (Grember at. al, 2016, Figure 1).

At the 2016 EU-AU-IIASA Evidence and Policy Event, held in September in Ispra, Italy, the UNESCO Assistant Director-General for the Natural Sciences Flavia Schlegel highlighted the two-fold challenge of food security and population growth and the consequent need to increase food production by 60%.

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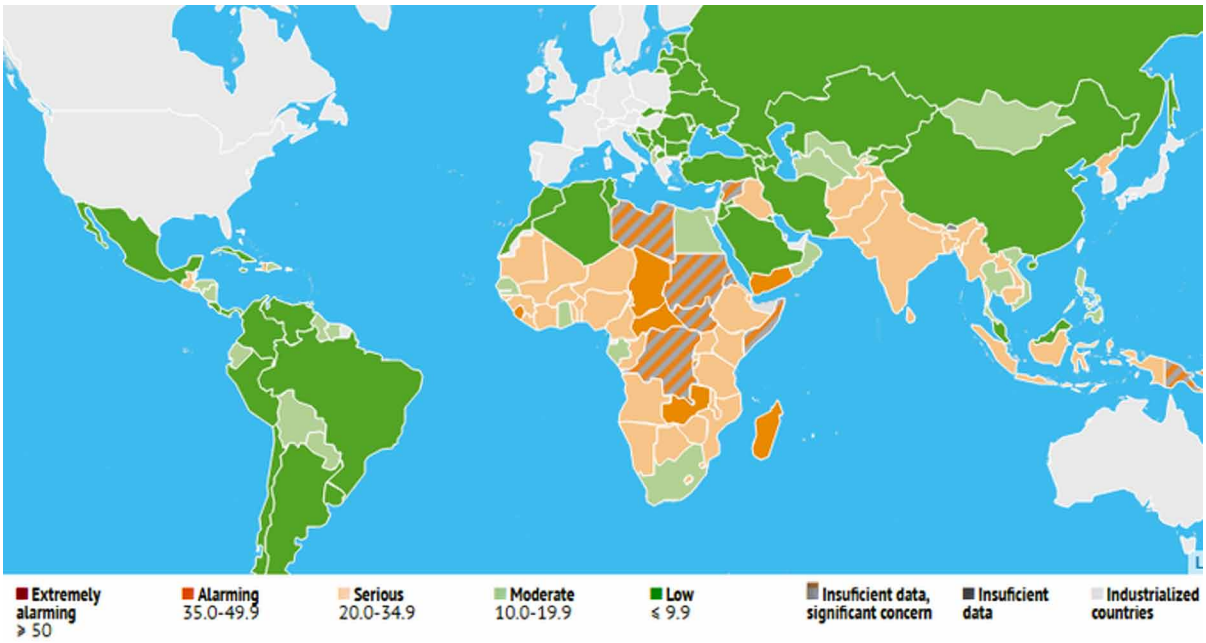
Figure 1. The 2016 Global Hunger Index (GHI) (source von Grember et. al., 2016)



In September of the same year Lassaad Lachaal, representative of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, reported how the food security is more of socio-economic issue than one of food production (Lachaal, 2016).

What can we learn about these experiences and the relationship between scientific evidence and policy? The issue is apparently under debate, which might lead us to suggest some hypothesise about the lack of:

- General scientific evidence about the food security issue;
- Knowledge about, or acknowledgement of, existing evidence including the possible co-existence of the dual problem perspectives in different contexts;
- A clear acknowledgement about the nature of the problem in the presence of increasing uncertainty; this leaves room for subjective value loadings or a concurrence of diverse political visions and/or interests (Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1990).

In such a situation, a deeper and more holistic analysis of the issue at hand seems a preferable approach for reducing the uncertainty that derives from perspectives that are affected by a number of factors, including cultural origin, educational background, political beliefs, personal interests and risk perceptions. Individual perceptions are different, and this diversity can represent a powerful way to approach more objective and evidence-based evaluations through participation and social learning.