

Fostering Food Security: A Multidisciplinary Approach to EU Policies and Practices

RESEARCH DESIGN (draft – Feb 2025)

Overview

The FOSTER project aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the European Union's (EU) role in ensuring food security, both within its borders and through international cooperation. Recognizing the complex interplay of factors influencing food security, the project will adopt a multidisciplinary approach, drawing upon expertise in international law, political science, agricultural economics, human nutrition, and food chemistry.

Key objectives of the project include:

- **Critical Analysis of EU Food Security Policies:**
 - Conduct a comprehensive analysis of relevant EU and international legal instruments, policies, and programs related to food security, including those addressing domestic food production, food safety, food distribution, and consumer protection.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of these policies in achieving food security objectives, considering factors such as economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
 - Identify existing gaps, inconsistencies, and areas for improvement in the current EU food security framework.
- **Assessment of International Cooperation:**
 - Analyze the impact of EU cooperation and development policies on food security in developing countries, focusing on areas such as food aid, agricultural development, and support for sustainable food systems.
 - Evaluate the effectiveness of different approaches to international cooperation, such as technical assistance, capacity building, and financial support.
 - Identify best practices and lessons learned from EU-supported food security initiatives in developing countries.
- **Exploration of Innovative Solutions:**
 - Investigate the potential for transferring and adapting successful European food security models and innovations (e.g., short food supply chains, agroecology, community-supported agriculture) to developing country contexts.

- Assess the feasibility and sustainability of these models in different socio-economic and environmental settings.
- Develop policy recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of EU international cooperation in supporting food security in developing countries.
- Knowledge Dissemination and Stakeholder Engagement:
 - Promote knowledge exchange among researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders through workshops, conferences, and publications.
 - Disseminate research findings to relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public.

By addressing these key objectives, the FOSTER project will enhance understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to food security in the 21st century and will provide evidence-based recommendations to support more effective and sustainable EU policies and practices.

Research Questions

1. How effective are current EU policies in ensuring food security for all citizens, particularly vulnerable groups?
2. What are the key challenges and opportunities in transferring European food security models to developing countries?
3. How can interdisciplinary research contribute to more effective and sustainable food security policies?

Objectives

- To conduct a comprehensive analysis of EU food security policies and practices.
- To assess the impact of EU cooperation policies on food security in developing countries.
- To identify opportunities for improving EU food security policies and practices.
- To promote knowledge exchange between European and African researchers and policymakers.

Work Packages

WP2: Mapping the Current Landscape

Timeline: Q1-Q6 (November 2024 - February 2026)

The initial phase of the FOSTER Research project, spanning the first six quarters, will focus on building a solid foundation for understanding the current landscape of EU food security policies

and identifying key areas for improvement. This phase will involve a comprehensive literature review, data collection, and stakeholder engagement. The objective is twofold: first, to examine the EU's legal and policy framework on food security, covering both its internal policies and its external action, and situating it within the broader system of international law; second, to evaluate the situation of targeted African countries in terms of both food security (i.e. compliance with international nutritional guidelines, together with adequate levels of food availability and accessibility) and food safety (i.e. alignment with existing international standards, together with an adequate level of public awareness). To this end, the research will draw upon the most recent national data as well as a field survey (Deliverable 2.4), taking Rwanda as a case study representative of vulnerable extra-EU countries.

Key Objectives:

- **Develop a comprehensive understanding of EU food security policies:** This includes analyzing the relevant legal instruments, policies, and programs, both within the EU and in its external action.
- **Identify key challenges and opportunities:** The research will highlight the strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the current EU and international framework on food security.
- **Establish a network of partners:** Collaborations with European and African partners will be established to foster knowledge exchange and support future research.
- **Lay the groundwork for policy recommendations:** The outcomes of this phase will provide the basis for elaborating evidence-based policy recommendations in the subsequent stages of the project.

Specific Activities:

- **International Law & Politics UNIT:**
 - **Nicola Bergamaschi:** Examine and critically assess the legal framework of the EU's external action on food security, focusing on bilateral and multilateral agreements, trade policies, and development aid programs, especially in the context of the current EU relationships with the African Countries. Methodology: literature review and analysis of legal sources and documents.
 - **Ludovica Di Lullo:** Analyze the international legal framework governing food aid assistance through the lens of international humanitarian law, disaster law, and trade law. Methodology: literature review, analysis of legal sources, and examination of States' and international organizations' practice.
 - **Luca Romano:** Investigate the role of international law in addressing food security challenges, with a particular focus on the international protection of the right to food, environmental protection, and food sustainability. Methodology: literature review, analysis of legal sources, and examination of States' and international organizations' practice.
- **Constitutional and Comparative Public Law UNIT:**

- **Mario Mendillo:** Analyze the role of EU law in promoting sustainable food systems and addressing food insecurity within the EU, focusing on areas such as consumer protection, environmental law, and social rights. Methodology: literature review and analysis of legal sources and documents.
- **Agrifood and Agrarian Economics UNIT:**
 - **Michele Maccari:** Explore possible pathways of research in Rwanda and conduct a literature review on agricultural policies and their impact on food security, focusing on issues such as farm subsidies, market access, and the role of smallholder farmers. Analyze the potential for agroecological approaches to enhance food security and resilience in developing countries. Methodology: case studies and workshop discussions.
 - **Angelo Buttignol:** Analyze the role of small-scale rural agrifood industries in supporting rural development and in strengthening the livelihood assets of workers in least developed countries, including Rwanda. Assess the effectiveness of financial and technical support programs provided by international organizations in least developed countries. Methodology: literature review, case studies, workshop discussions, and survey implementation.
- **Human Nutrition & Food Chemistry UNIT:**
 - **Cinzia Franchini, Perla Degli Innocenti and Damiano Callegaro:** in charge of data collection and analysis about food security: Methodology: document analysis and survey implementation.
 - **Hilva Gjoni and Irene Picicci:** in charge of data collection and analysis about food safety. Methodology: document analysis and survey implementation.

Expected Outcomes:

- A comprehensive report on the current state of EU food security policies and practices.
- Identification of key gaps, challenges, and opportunities for improvement.
- A network of European and African partners.

WP3: Deepening the Analysis and Developing Solutions

Timeline: Q7-Q10 (March 2026 – February 2027)

The second phase of the FOSTER Research project aims to deepen the analysis of EU food security policies and develop practical recommendations in this area. This phase will involve a series of workshops with European and African partners to discuss the initial research outcomes and explore potential strategies and policy options. In this context, food security will be examined in both its internal and external dimensions. Internally, the focus will be on the legal

and policy frameworks related to reducing food waste and promoting sustainable consumption patterns within the EU. Furthermore, based on information gathered at national and local levels, evidence-based dietary recommendations and good food safety practices will be defined. These findings will provide a baseline to support policymakers in developing guidelines and best practices for Rwanda, thereby facilitating the adoption of a sustainable, healthy, and safe diet adapted to local living conditions. The insights gained can also serve as a transferable model for other vulnerable populations. On the external front, the objective is to assess the effectiveness of existing EU policies and practices in ensuring food security and sustainability at the international level. Against this background, the phenomenon of food weaponization will also be analyzed, with particular attention to its historical context, current practices, and implications for global food security. Building on this analysis, the research will develop strategies to mitigate its adverse impacts on vulnerable populations.

Key Objectives:

- **Assess the sustainability of current European food systems:** Evaluate the effectiveness of existing EU policies and practices in ensuring food security and sustainability.
- **Discuss the reformulation of EU intervention policies:** Explore ways to adapt EU policies to better address the needs of vulnerable populations in developing countries.
- **Promote knowledge exchange:** Facilitate dialogue and collaboration between European and African researchers and policymakers.

Specific Activities:

- **International Law & Politics UNIT:**
 - **Simone Papale:** Analyze the phenomenon of food weaponization, including its historical context, current practices, and the implications for global food security. Develop strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of food weaponization on vulnerable populations. Methodology: literature review and documentary research.
- **Constitutional and Comparative Public Law UNIT:**
 - **Chiara Cerbone:** Investigate the legal and policy frameworks related to food waste reduction and the promotion of sustainable consumption patterns within the EU, and explore their potential for adaptation in developing countries. Analyze the role of law in ensuring food security and preventing food waste in the context of international trade and development cooperation. Methodology: literature review and document analysis, conducted using a comparative approach.
- **Agrarian Economics UNIT:**
 - **Davide D'Ascoli:** Analyze the economic and social impacts of different food systems, including short food supply chains, organic agriculture, and agroecology. Explore the role of food systems in building resilience to climate change and other shocks. Methodology: case studies and workshop discussions.

- **Teresa Tugliani & Marianna Guareschi:** Analyze market trends, consumer behavior, and the role of innovation in improving food security and sustainability. Identify potential for developing country-specific interventions to promote sustainable food systems. Methodology: case studies and workshop discussions.
- **Human Nutrition & Food Chemistry UNIT:**
 - **Cinzia Franchini, Perla Degli Innocenti and Damiano Callegaro:** Provide recommendations related to a healthy diet. Methodology: state of the art summary and definition of the most appropriate solutions.
 - **Hilva Gjoni and Irene Picicci:** Provide good practices related to food safety management at household level. Methodology: state of the art summary and definition of the most appropriate solutions.

Expected Outcomes:

- A set of essays and contributions for improving EU food security policies and practices, including measures to address food weaponization and promote sustainable food systems.
- A framework for transferring best practices and innovations to developing countries, considering the specific needs and contexts of different regions.
- A series of case studies illustrating successful and unsuccessful interventions in food security.

Methodology

- **Document analysis:** Evaluation of the most recent food-related data of interest within a specific vulnerable country outside the EU.
- **Literature review:** Systematic review of academic literature, policy documents, and grey literature.
- **Case studies:** In-depth analysis of specific case studies to identify best practices and challenges.
- **Surveys:** Survey implementation among targeted populations to gather data on food behaviors and practices.
- **Workshops and conferences:** Facilitating knowledge exchange and collaboration among researchers and policymakers.