



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD POLICY  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE



# Political Economy of Food Systems Transformation

*Pathways to Progress in a Polarized World*

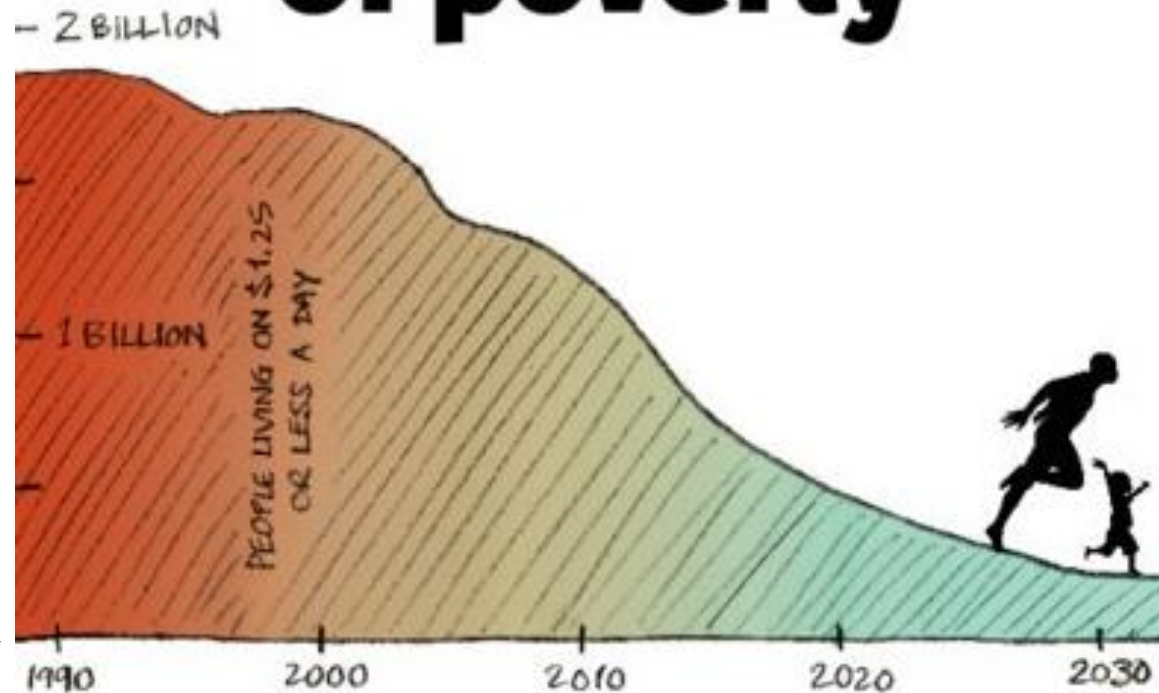
Johan Swinnen

May 2024, The Hague

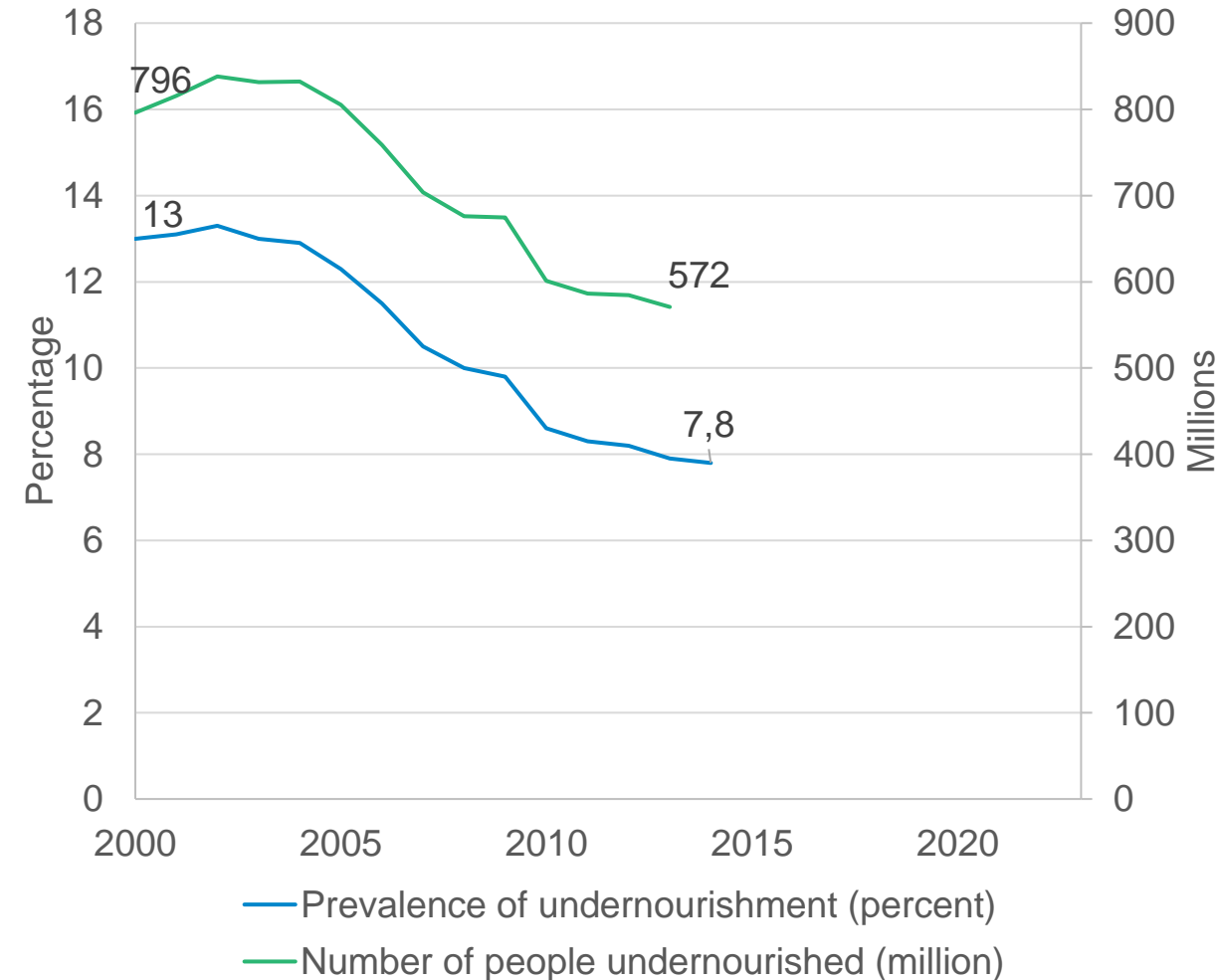
From June 2013 ...



# Towards the end of poverty



# Towards the end of hunger ...

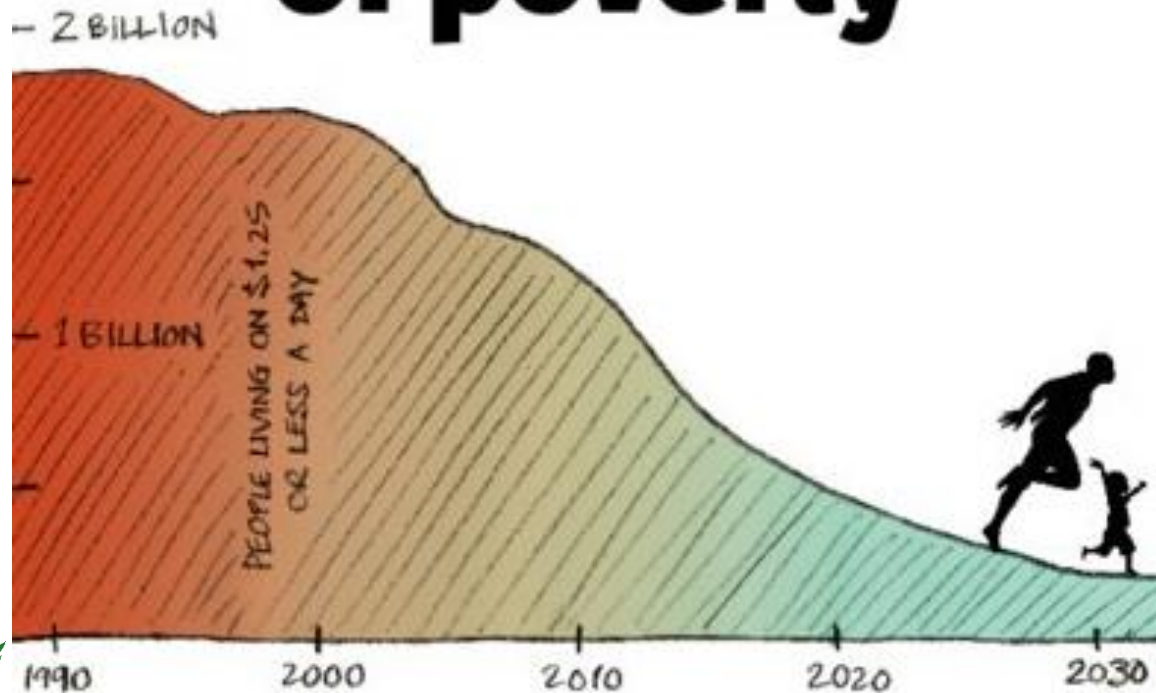




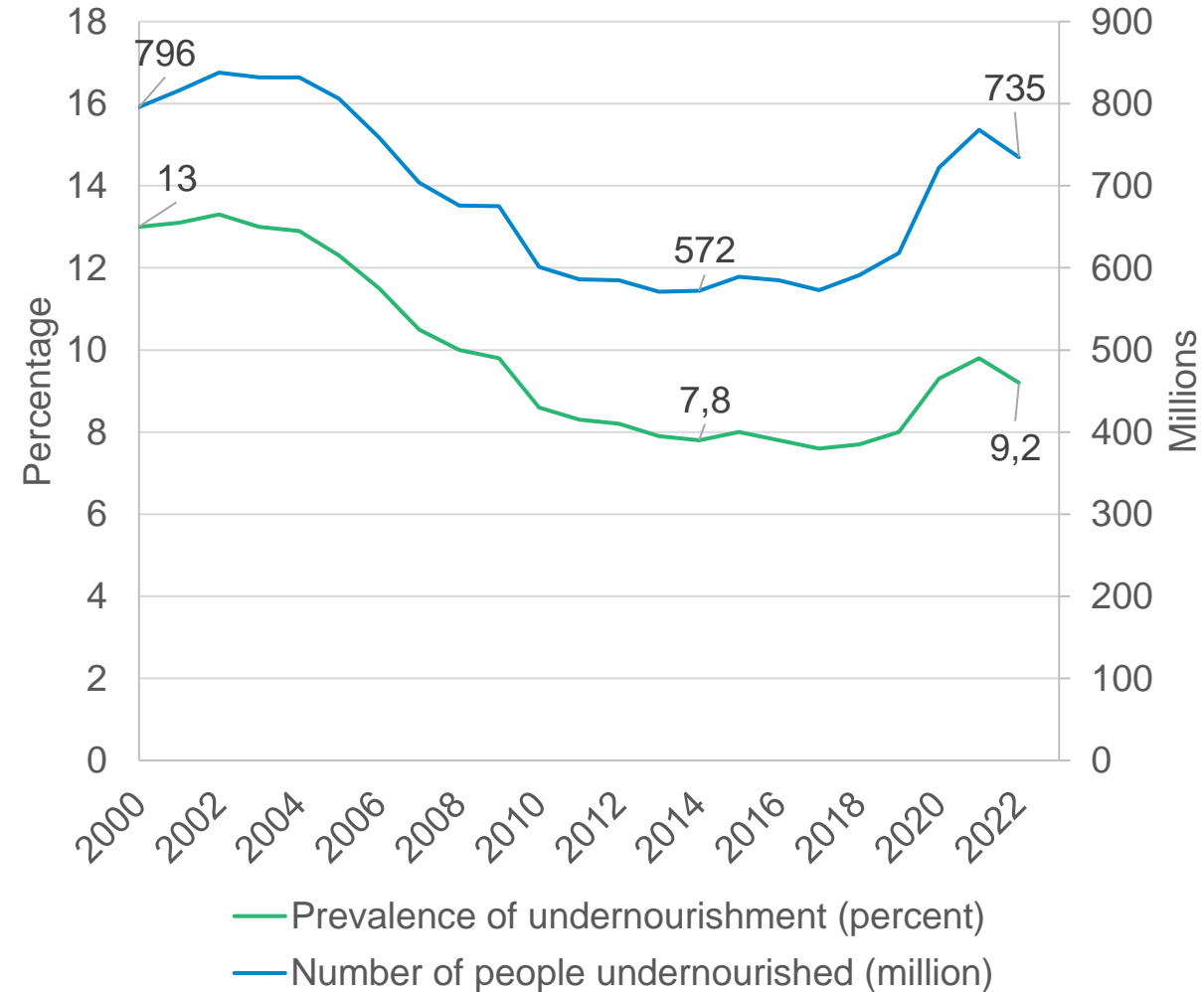
From June 2013 ...



# Towards the end of poverty

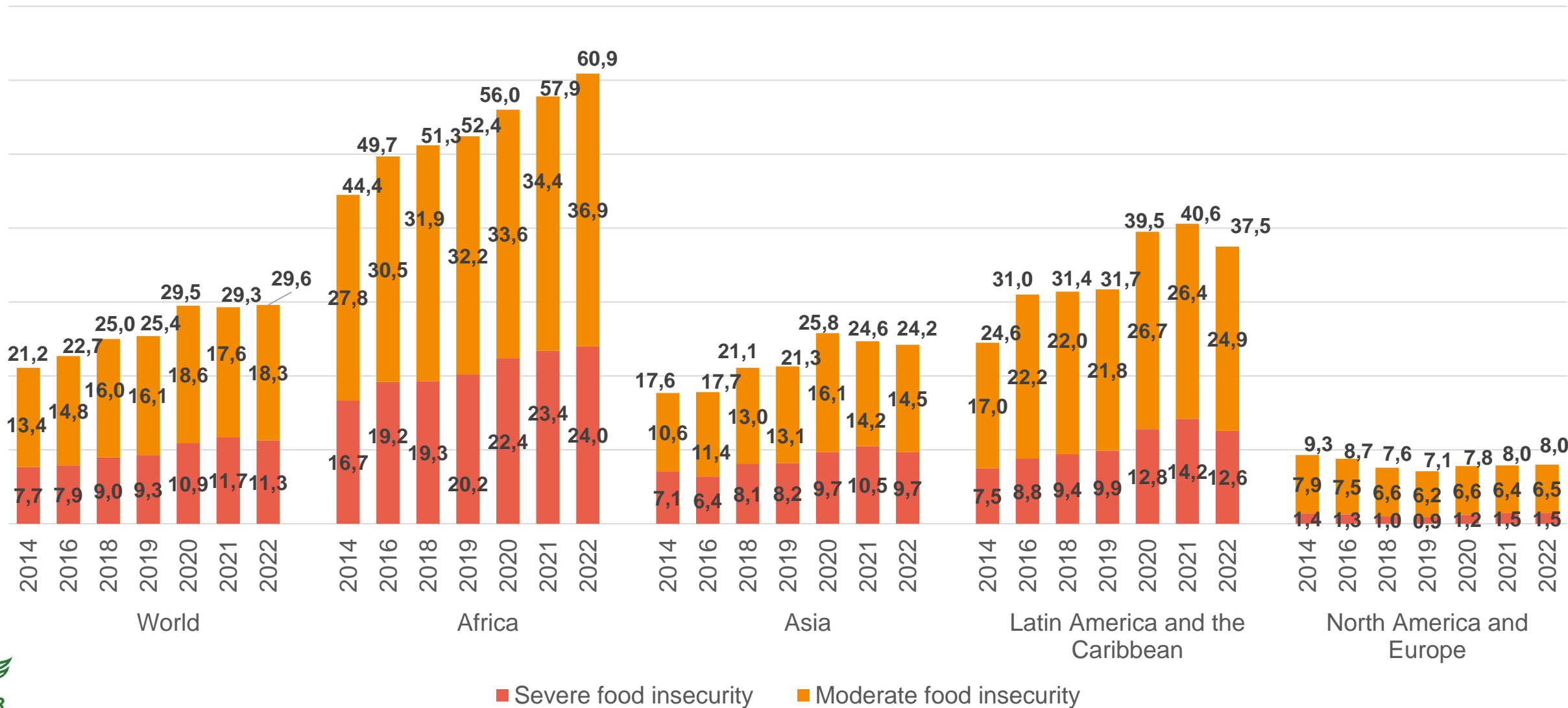


# Towards the end of hunger ... ?



# Regional differences in food security

Prevalence of severe and moderate food insecurity by region (%)



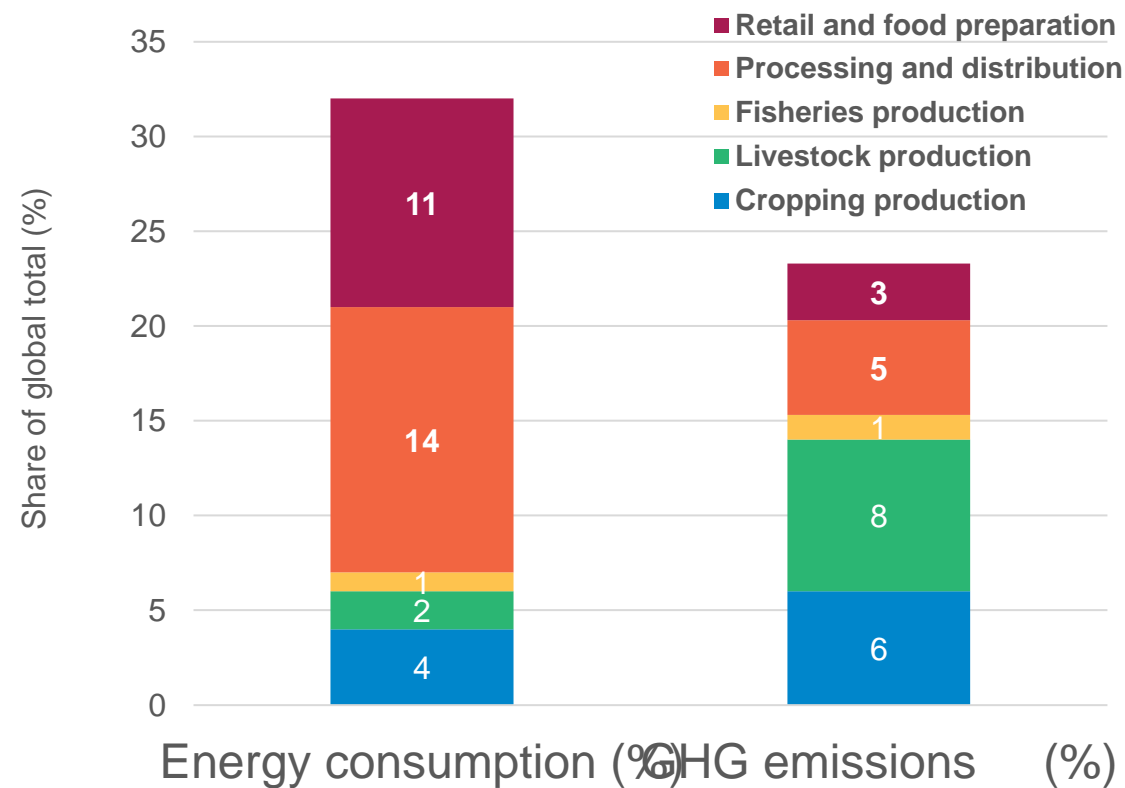
■ Severe food insecurity ■ Moderate food insecurity

# Malnutrition and Climate Change

The triple burden of **undernutrition**, **micronutrient deficiencies**, **obesity**

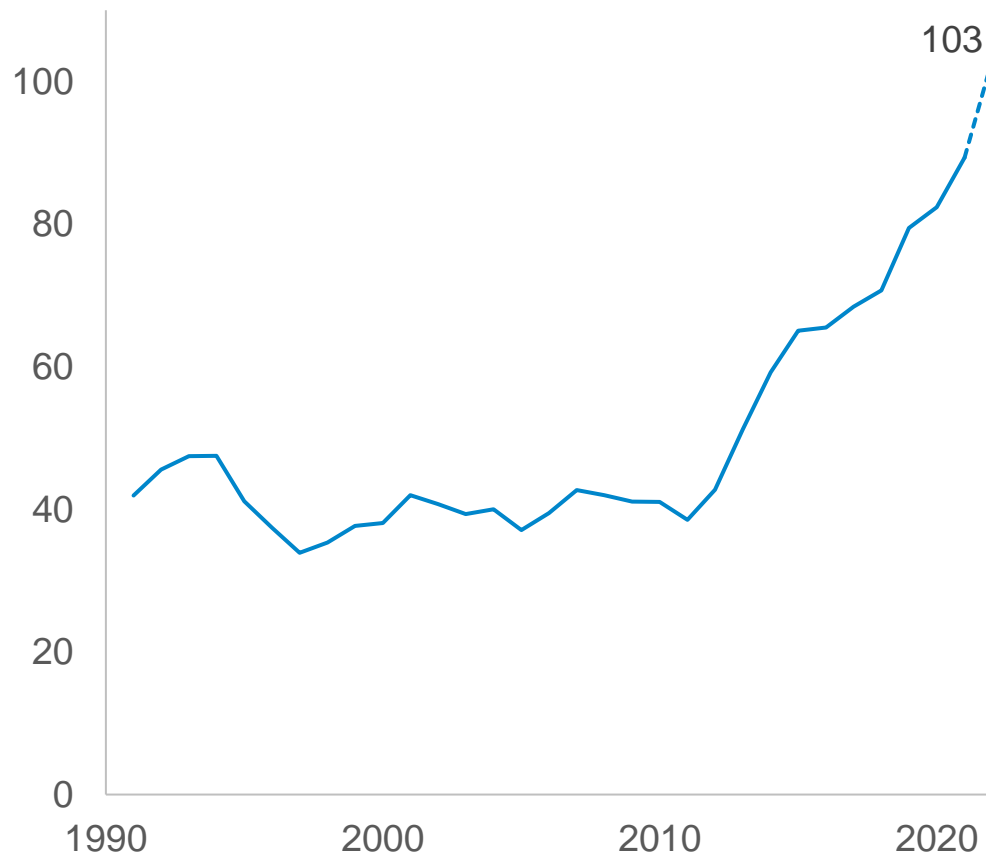
- **3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet**
- **2 billion people have micronutrient deficiencies**
- **2 billion people are overweight or obese**
- **A third of LMI countries face undernutrition and obesity**

The global food system consumes **>30% of energy** and produces **>20% of GHG emissions**

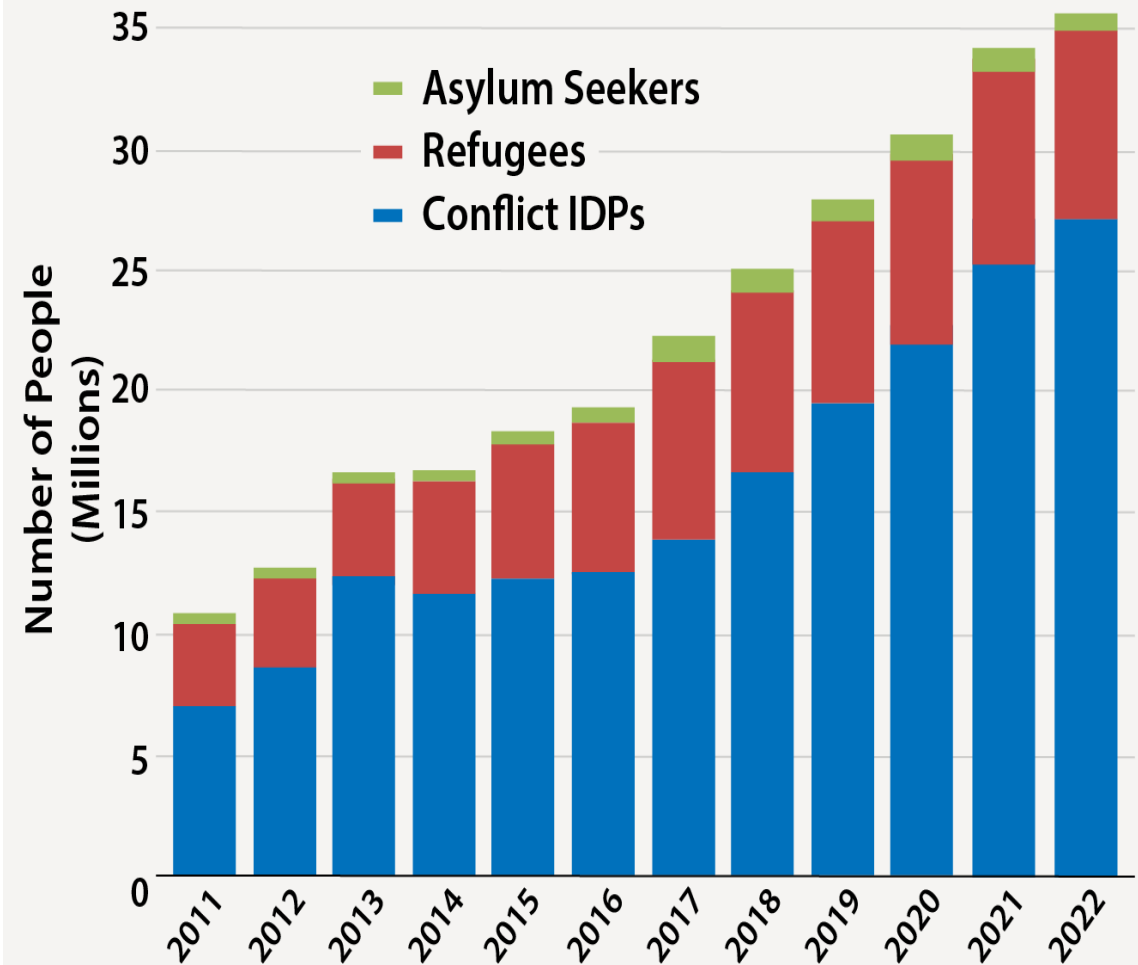


# Conflict, Migration and Food Security

## Forcibly displaced people worldwide (Millions)



## Forced Displacement Trends in Africa

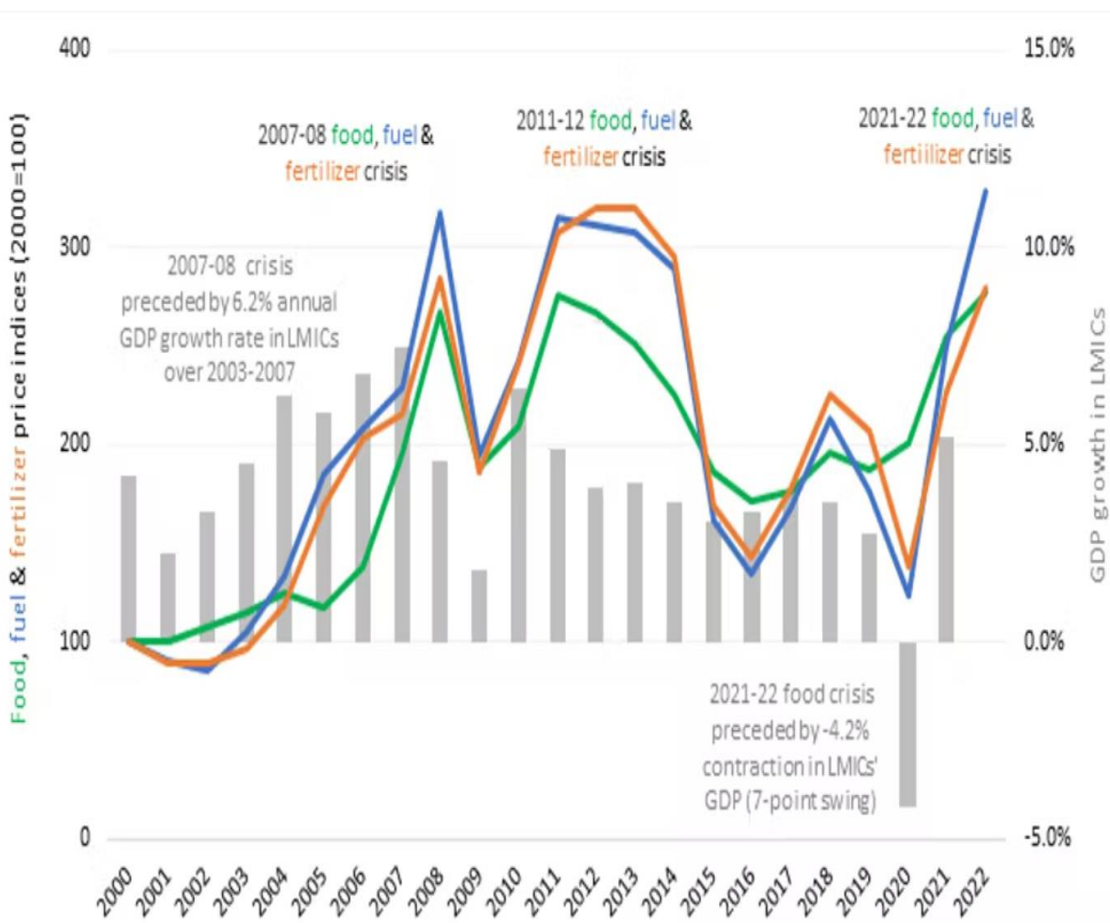


Data Source: UNHCR, IDMC



# Price shocks and volatility: “the new normal” ?

## Food, fertilizer, oil prices 2001-2022

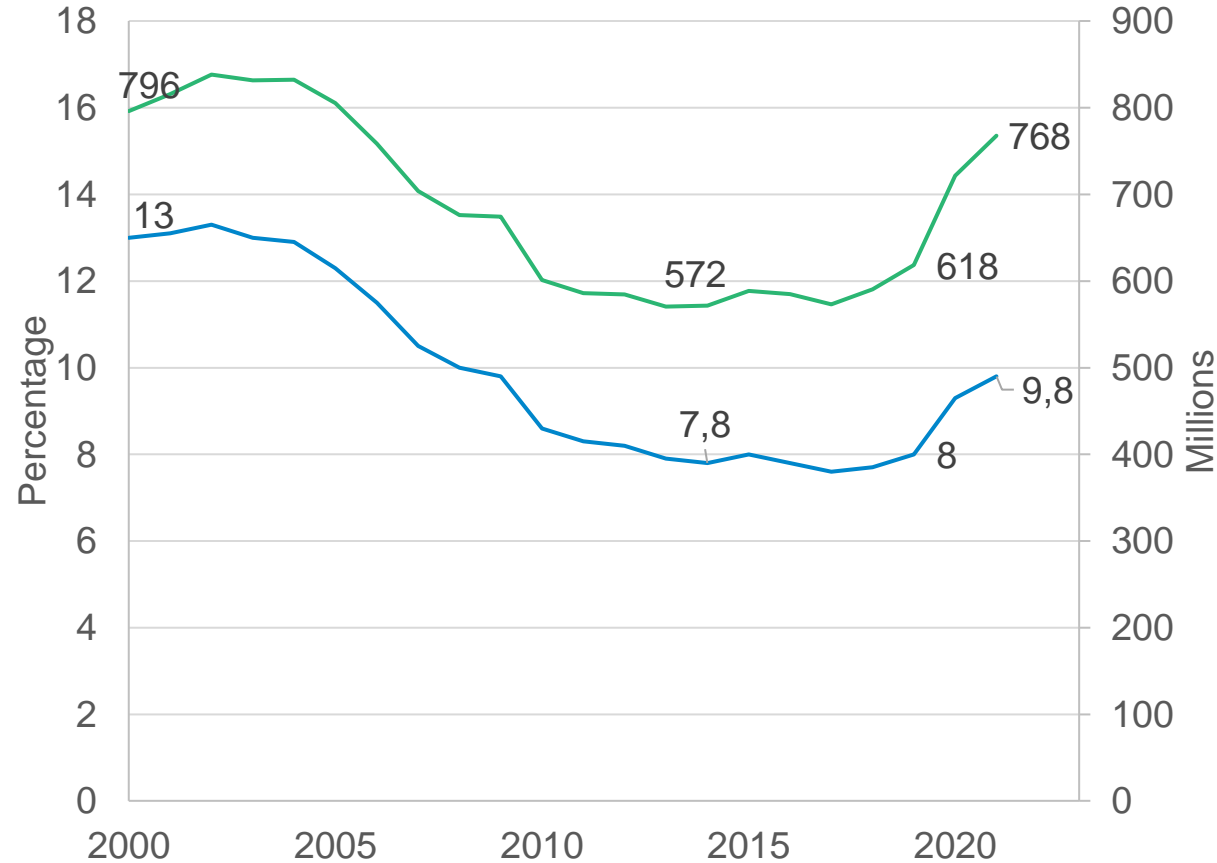


## Cereal Price Indexes (January 2021=100)



# The world is not on track to eliminate hunger ... and more challenges for food systems

Prevalence and number of undernourished worldwide



— Prevalence of undernourishment (percent)  
 — Number of people undernourished (million)





# Transformation Requires Investments, Innovations, and Reforms

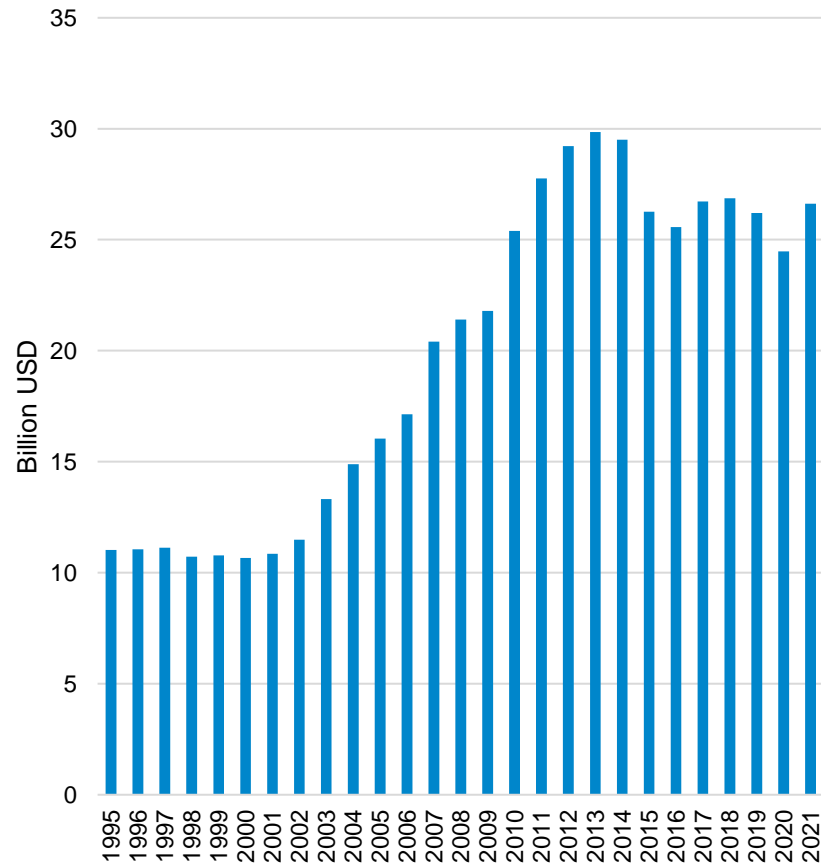


Today, many countries :

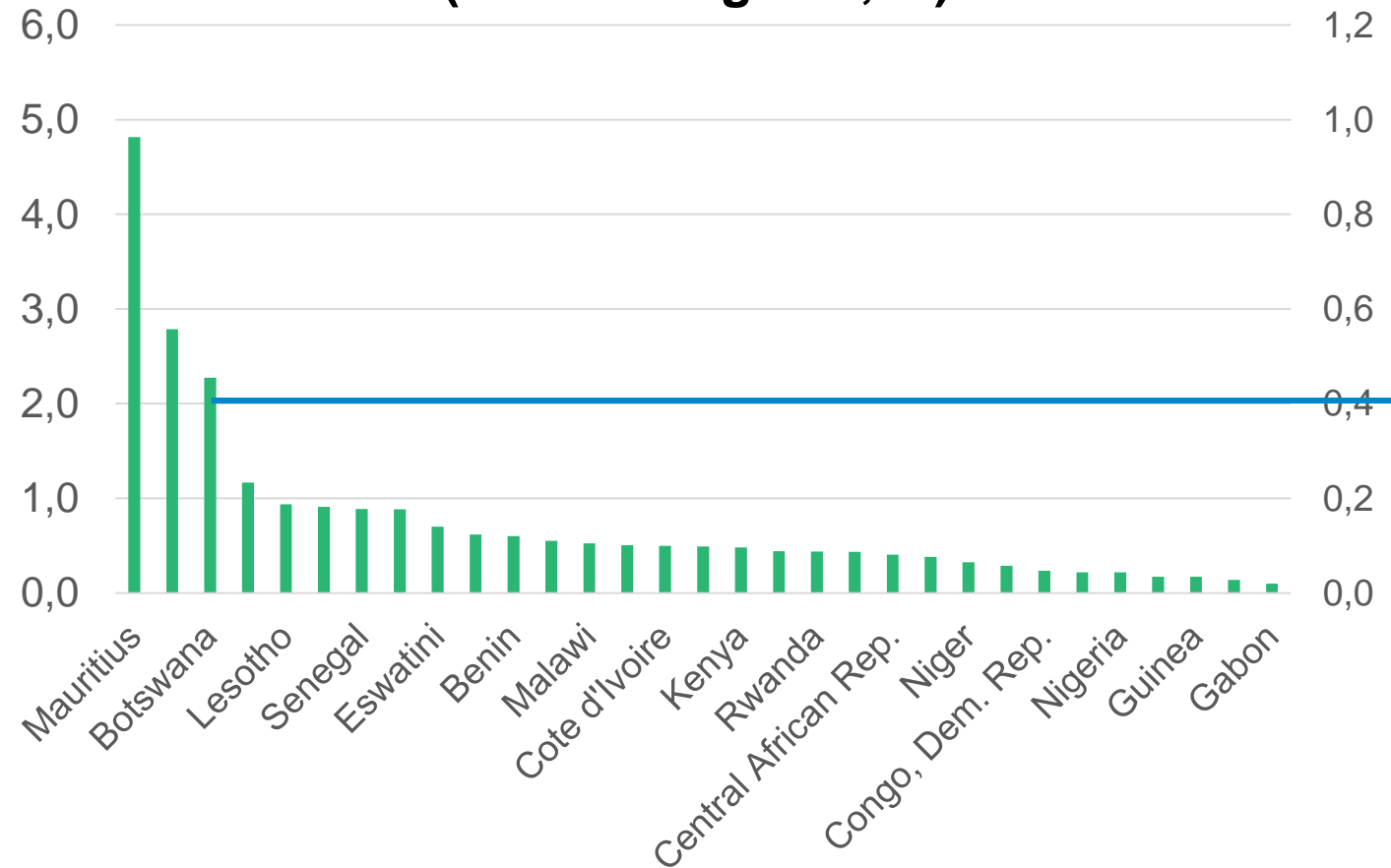
- **Do not invest** enough in R&D&I
- **Provide wrong incentives.** More than 800 billion US\$ are spent annually on agricultural subsidies globally, much in ways that constrain rather than stimulate transformation

# Investment in agricultural R&D for innovation and resilience

## Global public support to R&D and innovation

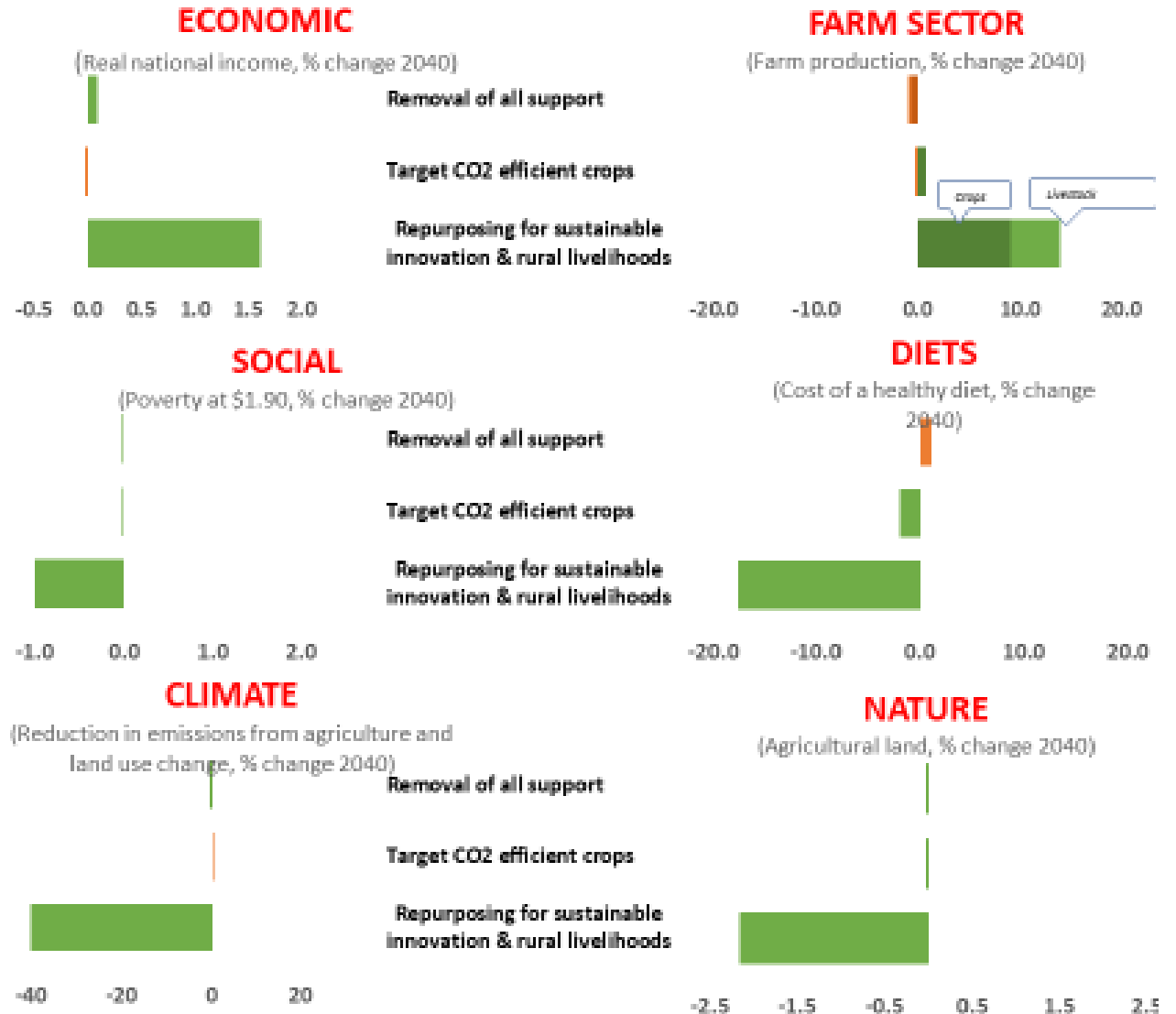


## Spending on Agricultural R&D in Africa (Share of AgGDP, %)



# Finance for Transformation: Repurposing agricultural subsidies

- Repurposing for sustainable innovation
- Potential win-win-win:
  - Lower GHG emissions and gains for nature
  - Better incomes
  - Less poverty & greater food security
  - More affordable healthy diets



# Is Significant Reform Globally Possible ?

## Some lessons from history

---



IFPRI

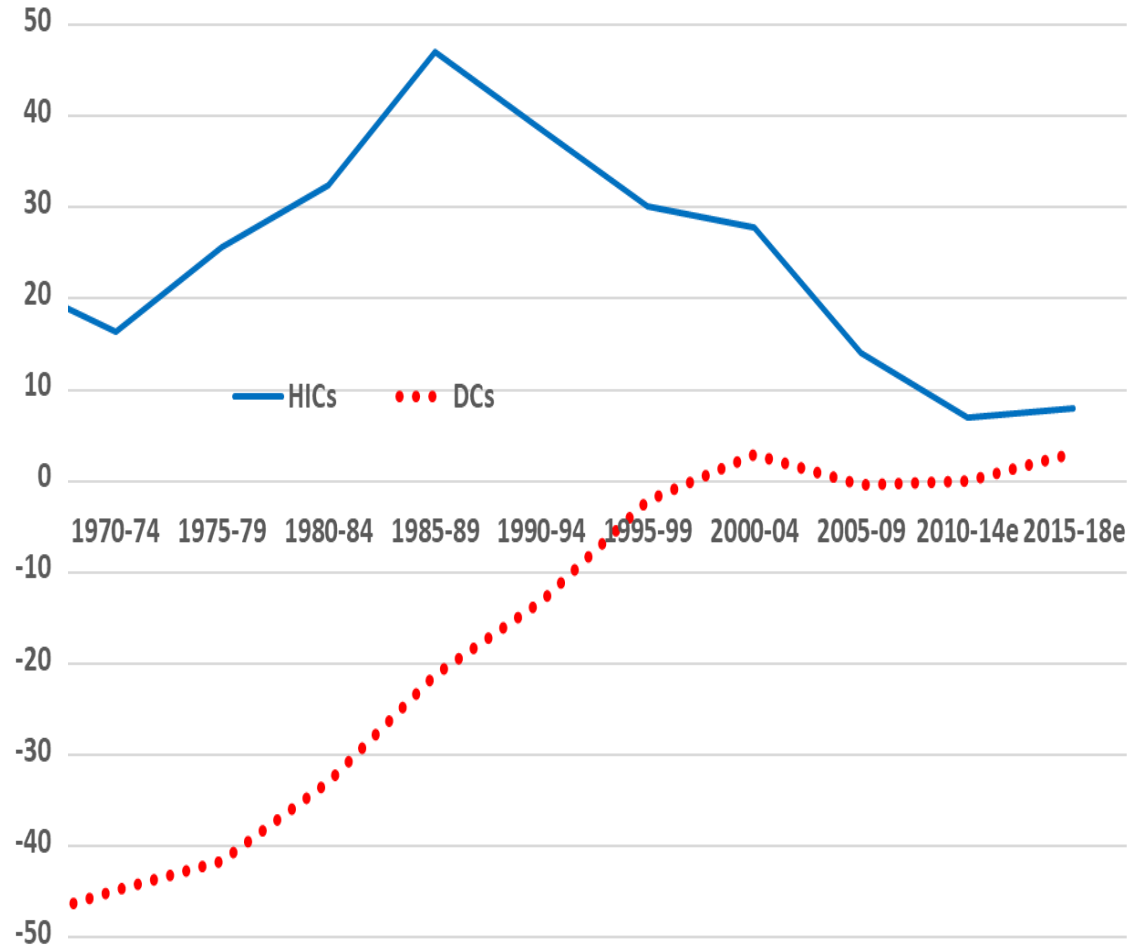


CGIAR

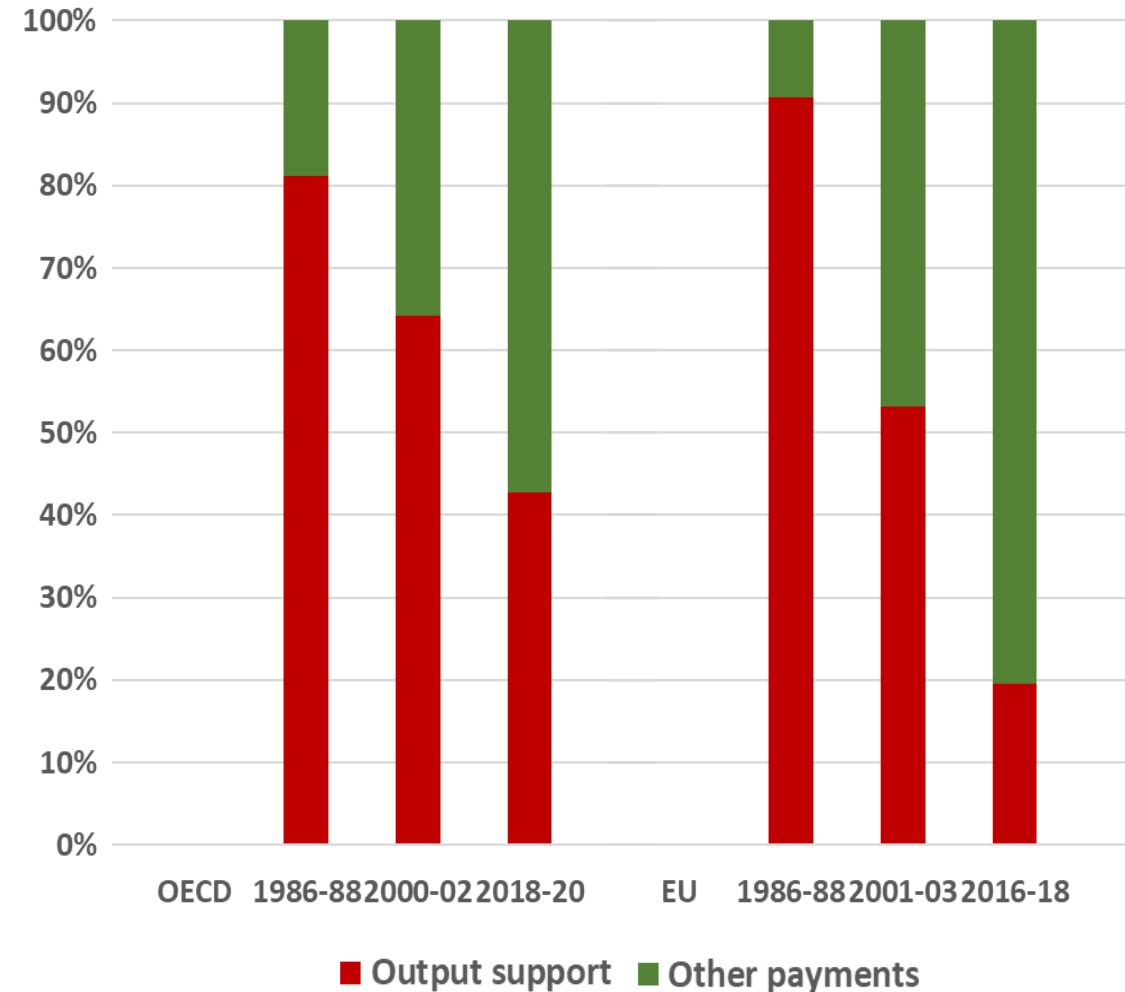


# Agricultural Taxes and Subsidies

From more to less distortions  
1970 - 2020



From more to less distortive  
policy instruments 1980 - 2020

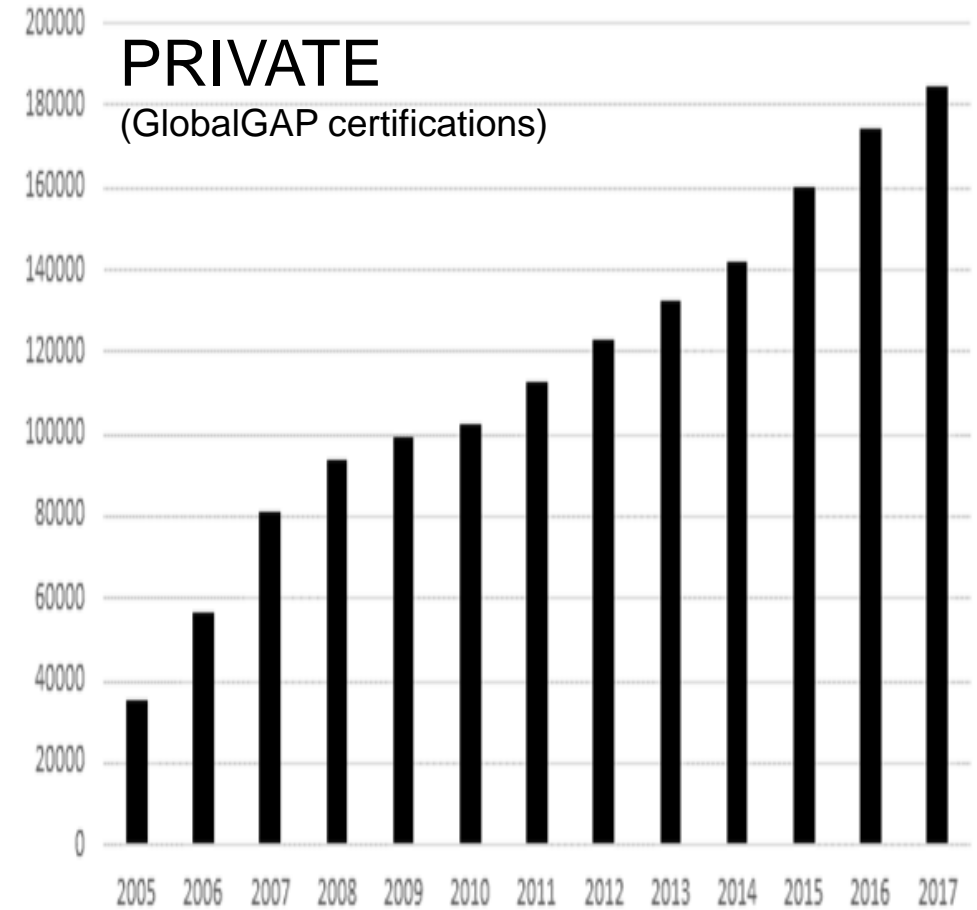
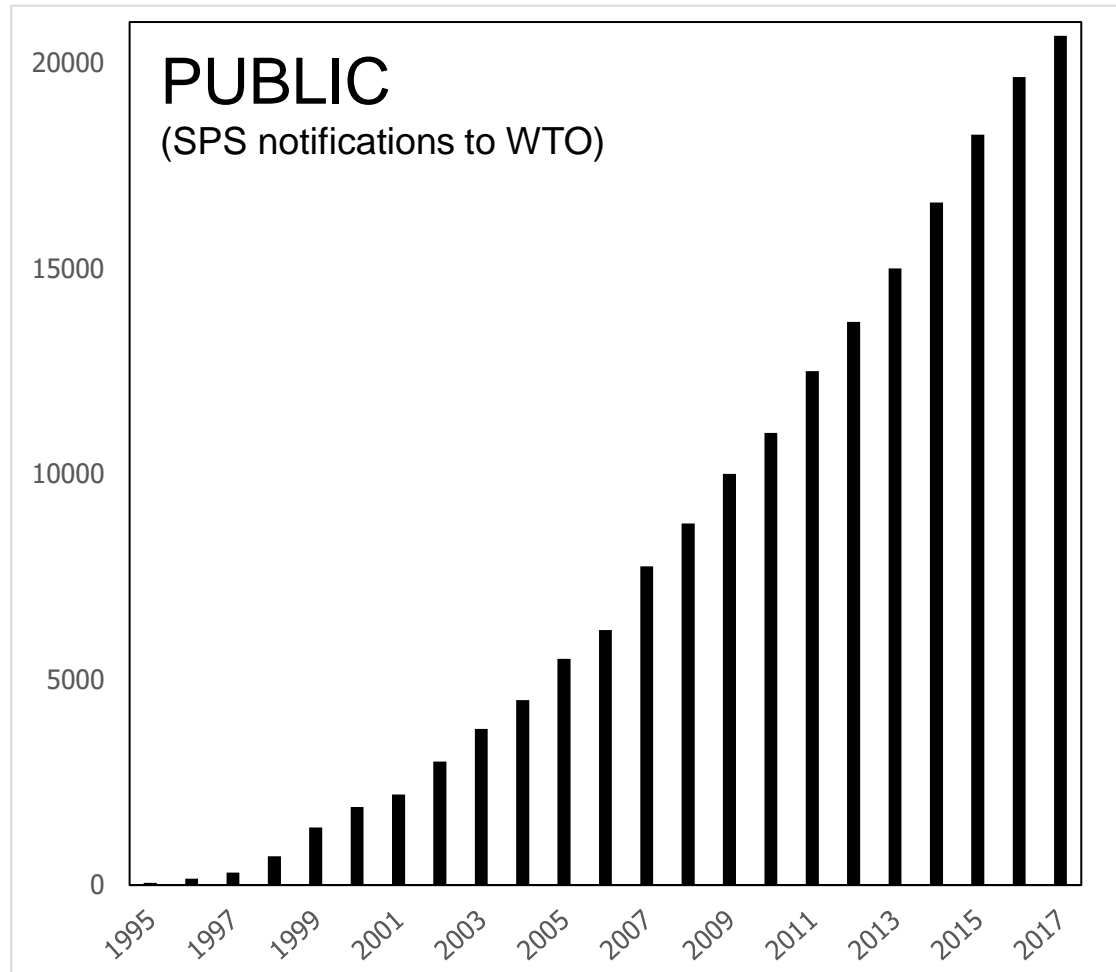


Source: Anderson et al; OECD



# Food Regulations

## Global growth of food standards 2000 - 2020



OXFORD

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY *of*  
**Food System  
Transformation**

*Pathways to Progress  
in a Polarized World*

EDITED BY  
DANIELLE  
RESNICK  
JOHAN  
SWINNEN



**From  
agricultural policy  
reform  
to  
food systems  
transformation**

- More objectives
- More policy instruments
- More trade-offs / synergies
- More actors
- More polarization
- More information / less knowledge ?
- ...
- More difficult to reform ?**

OXFORD

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY *of* Food System Transformation

*Pathways to Progress  
in a Polarized World*

EDITED BY  
DANIELLE  
RESNICK

JOHAN  
SWINNEN



## Some key political economy issues

- **Trade-offs** and win-wins are inherent in the challenges
  - **Complexity** of issues creates uncertainty
  - Important economic and political aspects
- The ability to reconcile trade-offs depends on whether there is conflict about **facts, interests or values**
- **Bundling** of innovations/strategies is important
  - for economic and political reasons
- Importance of **non-traditional coalitions**
  - Coalitions are always (more) complex
  - Vertical and horizontal coalitions in systems
  - Strategic policy design and framing



IFPRI



CGIAR



OXFORD

# THE POLITICAL ECONOMY *of* Food System Transformation

*Pathways to Progress  
in a Polarized World*

EDITED BY  
DANIELLE  
RESNICK  
JOHAN  
SWINNEN



## Some key political economy issues

- **Rational ignorance** continues despite falling information costs (opportunity costs and disutility from preference gaps) with social media contributing to **polarization**
- Crisis of **multilateralism** and growing prominence of **multi-stakeholderism**
  - Consensus decisions more fraught in multilateral bodies with pressures to transform them
  - Growing emphasis on stakeholder participation that does not obligate intergovernmental commitments or accountability (e.g. UNFSS 2021)
  - Intergovernmental decision-making clustering into regional and economic groups
- Impact of **shocks** can be either way: trigger reforms or constrain them
- Matching policy design and instruments with **administrative capacities** and **institutional** settings



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD POLICY  
RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE



**Thank you for your attention.**

**For more information, please visit:**

**[www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org)**

