

# GLOBAL FOOD JUSTICE

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This document outlines a proposed 5 year research program on Global Food Justice. This forms part of the University of Sheffield's Cross-Faculty Food Security research plan.

## 1. Research program

Public and political concerns over such issues as food price volatility, increased malnutrition and the effects of extreme weather shocks on food production have led to a growing body of academic work on 'food security' and 'resilience'. Such work is vital insofar as it seeks to protect the fundamental human interest in adequate nutrition. However, it is a key premise of this research project that realising an effective system of global food production will require more than an examination of how global food output and global nutritional needs can be boosted. What is required is a socially and politically *transformative* approach grounded in basic concerns of *justice*. The need for this novel justice-based approach is based on three core assumptions: first, that there are several compelling ethical goods at stake in food production (nutritional health, animal welfare, livelihood of food producers and environmental sustainability); second, that current food production models are global and integrated; and finally, that global institutions have a key role in the realisation of a just global food system. Four research questions follow from these assumptions:

1. As a matter of substantive justice, how ought we to balance the difficult tensions that exist between the ethical goods of nutritional health, animal welfare, livelihood and environmental sustainability in the global production and consumption of food?
2. By way of contrast, how are these ethical tensions currently balanced within existing global food production and consumption chains?
3. If key participants in food production and consumption were to deliberate upon these ethical goods, their meanings, and priority – then how would they suggest to balance these ethical goods?
4. What reforms are required in the existing governance architecture (from local to global levels) to realise global food justice? What factors may obstruct such reforms?

These research questions form a research project that will be pursued in two phases: a Pilot Study and the Main Project. The Pilot has two aims, with an overarching goal of securing funding for the Main Project. The first aim is to test our methodology and thereby produce a more robust methodology that will be used in the Main Project. The Pilot will focus on two food chains originating in Tanzania (coffee and beef). The subsequent Main Project will encompass four additional countries and eight food chains: UK (milk and wheat), Spain (fish and barley), Mexico (pork and sugarcane), and South Africa (chicken and maize). Stevenson will coordinate the Spain and Mexico cases; Brown will coordinate the UK and South Africa cases. It is hoped that four postdoctoral researchers will be employed for the Main Project (one per country case). Depending on which funding bodies accept our Main Project applications, it is hoped that two PhD projects will also be funded.

Our methodology involves six stages. Each phase of the project (i.e., Pilot Study and Main Project) will involve five stages; Stage 2 will only be conducted during the Pilot Study, and Stage 6 will only be conducted during the Main Project.

Stage 1 involves mapping the selected food chains in terms of the processes by which raw commodities are transformed into various consumable products. This mapping exercise will identify relevant geographical locations, actors, and practices. Identifying each part in the chain will allow us in the following stage to identify those 'nodes' where our four ethical goods are in tension. Although there has been past work on commodity value chains (the assignment of economic value), there is no existing commodity mapping that inserts ethical 'values' in the assessment of a value chain. Our approach is ground-breaking in the use of 'ethical audits' at nodal links within the value chain (normally only associated with economic value-added). Our Pilot Study will map the coffee and beef chains that commence in Tanzania and extend to a major trading partner (UK in the case of coffee, and neighbouring Kenya for beef).

Stage 2 involves identifying and elaborating upon the basic ethical goods that are engaged by food production – livelihood, nutrition, animal welfare and environmental sustainability – in order to work up substantive moral principles that food policies ought to conform to. But given the non-ideal conditions of global food production chains, and given the value of democratic participation, these principles are offered as the basis for reflection and debate rather than as a means to shortcut the political process. In other words, this process can be understood in terms of Adam Swift and Stuart White's notion of political theory as 'democratic underlabouring.'

Stage 3 entails fieldwork to develop more thorough accounts of the nodes identified in Stage 1 within the commodity chains where our ethical goods are in tension. We will conduct a series of focus groups with stakeholders to understand how tensions are experienced by affected people and to appreciate their distinct needs and interests. These stakeholders will be drawn together in homogenous settings along the value chains and will include farmers, retailers, consumers, animal welfare representatives, and others. The focus groups will provide an opportunity for the deliberative

prioritisation of values and injustices, storytelling, question-raising and other open-ended participatory techniques. Embedded in these activities is an innovative ‘participation-in-process’ as people can deliberate on how to represent their understandings of injustice and ethical value.

Stage 4 involves using material garnered from stages 2 and 3 to develop a set of scenarios for more justly balancing tensions between our ethical goods. This will first involve the reflective juxtaposing of our own minimalist principles produced in Stage 2 and the value narratives that emerge in Stage 3. It is expected that there will be commonalities, complementarities, syntheses, and incommensurabilities within this juxtaposing. Each scenario will reconcile the ethical goods in a different way, such that affected people can deliberate on the best account of global food justice.

Stage 5 involves establishing deliberative forums for stakeholders. In the Pilot Study this will involve one forum for representatives from across the coffee chain, and another for the beef chain. In the Main Project eight forums will be held (one for each value chain analysed). These will take stakeholders out of their homogenous settings to allow for engagement across stakeholders and their values. Within these forums the participants will deliberate on our scenarios with the objective of locating the most just scenario for balancing our four ethical goods. There exists extensive empirically- and theoretically-derived knowledge about the most effective ways for conducting forums to promote authentic and inclusive deliberation.

Stage 6 involves conducting an analysis of the existing governance architecture (from local to global levels) to identify necessary reforms for realising food justice as defined over the previous five stages. This stage of the project also advances the procedural dimension of global food justice because we are arguing that institutions ought to respond to public reason (i.e., they ought to be democratic). Here we will establish recommendations for bringing institutions into line with the demands of substantive as well as procedural justice as developed over the previous stages. We will also consider the material and ideational factors that may obstruct institutional and regulatory reform along the lines we propose.

## 2. Research team

**Dr Garrett Wallace Brown** is Reader in Political Theory and Global Ethics in the Department of Politics. His research expertise includes: global justice, global health governance, international relations, globalisation, international law, deliberative democracy, and issues lying at the interface between political theory and international relations. He has consulted for The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, the World Bank, and the ministries of health in Sweden, Lesotho, Russia and South Africa. **Dr Alasdair Cochrane** is Lecturer of Political Theory in the Department of Politics. His research expertise includes: animal ethics; environmental ethics; bioethics; human rights; and contemporary political theory. He is the author of two books and numerous articles on these topics. **Dr Hayley Stevenson** is Senior Lecturer in International Relations in the Department of Politics, and an ESRC Future Research Leader. Her research expertise includes global environmental politics and climate change, global governance, global civil society, and deliberative governance. She is the author of two books and numerous articles on these topics.

## 3. Impact strategy

Our methodology is designed so that a major impact of the project will be on the attitudes and values of stakeholders within the food chains. A key aspect of the deliberative forums is to foster debate and reflection upon the various ethical goods that are engaged by the production and consumption of food. The final stage of the Main Project will produce a set of recommendations for bringing institutions into line with the demands of substantive and procedural justice. It will do this in a unique way by presenting evidence generated by the interface between substantive ethical values and values-in-practice that pervade the nodes within food chains. We do not intend to limit ourselves to presently politically feasible recommendations but rather to be as radical as required to realise global food justice. This has implications for the potential impact of the research. We do not anticipate that our recommendations will be readily adopted by governments and international institutions. Instead, we anticipate that our research will inform public debate about the shortcomings in global food systems and drive democratic movements for transformation. This is because we anticipate that the shortcomings of global food systems will be complex and fundamentally entrenched. Global food justice will probably not be realised through mere policy reform but rather through systemic transformation.

During the research program, we will implement a set of impact-oriented activities to attract attention to the research and to begin to stimulate more informed public debate about injustices in food systems. We will hold a series of public lectures with leading thinkers in the field; these will be held in each of the case study countries during the Main Project. We will develop and host an interactive website that will introduce the public to our research, and invite feedback on what they consider are priorities in a system of food justice. At the completion of the Main Project we will hold an international workshop for policymakers in Sheffield to open up conversations about how policy could be more closely aligned with the requirements of global food justice. We will also disseminate the research through academic conferences in a range of relevant disciplines and sub-fields; publish co-authored articles in major international journals; and publish a co-authored book and an edited volume with major university presses.