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Call for Articles for a Special Issue - 2022

***Agricultural and Food Dilemmas
in Times of Crisis***

Guest Editors:

- Pierre Janin (geographer, senior researcher at IRD, Unité mixte de recherche *Développement et sociétés*, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne/Institut de recherche pour le développement)
- Delphine Acloque (geographer, associate researcher at CEDEJ, Cairo)
- Saker El Nour (sociologist, associate researcher at Unité mixte de recherche *Développement et sociétés*, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne/Institut de recherche pour le développement)

This call for articles addresses the question of “decision-making” in agriculture and food from the perspective of “dilemmas.” This multifaceted (technical, political, and ethical) issue is seldom addressed directly and is often referred to using various terms (alternatives, arbitrations, choices, disputes, etc.) (Bebbington and Bebbington, 2001). Crises are particularly subject to dilemmas due to the pressing need to take action (Burniaux, 1987), but also due to increased societal expectations.

Thinking About Dilemmas

The question of “decision-making” in a situation of uncertainty or imperfect information has been widely discussed in the global South from the angle of multiple recurring instabilities and vulnerabilities, in particular by development economists (Van Zyl and Coetzee, 1990) and agricultural or environmental economists (Janssen et al., 2012). Sociological perspectives that emphasize a critical analysis of actors’ rationality, strategy, and interest can help explain the complexity of decision making (Laflamme, 2012). At the same time, the notion of the “wicked problem” (Rittel and Weber, 1973), put forward in political science and management science, provides an interesting and robust theoretical framework: the solutions are intimately related to the very way in which the problem is set out.

In the domains of agriculture and food related to development studies, certain “problems” – setting a price, applying a standard, or setting a quota – can give rise to controversy. Such controversy can be resolved either through technical advances that settle the issue, through rather discretionary political arbitrations, or, more slowly, after public debates. The notion of the “wicked problem” has however seldom been used in the field of development studies, except for price policies (Amid, 2007; Bajracharya, 1983) or North-South inequalities (Courade and Delpeuch, 2002). “Problems” are considered in terms of challenges that are to be met through “performative” actions, via a set of innovations to be promoted

and disseminated, even though these technical options come with their share of environmental amenities, economic and social counter-effects (Finco and Doppler, 2010), and actionist dilemmas (to be, to do, to relate) (Fowler, 1995). The complex nature of agricultural and food challenges, at the crossroads of “the economy-nature-technology triad” (Espinosa-Cristia *et al.*, 2019), is increasingly taken into account. Many documents illustrate the numerous technical options and diverging prospective scenarios to produce food and feed the planet by 2030 or 2050 (van Dijk *et al.*, 2020). Other publications, which are more explicitly political, insist on the antagonistic nature of models and regulations within agricultural and food systems (Lang and Barling, 2012; Grochowska, 2014; Maye and Kirwan, 2013).

The “strategic dilemma” fits into this framework, but also has an additional dimension. In May 2008, the *Harvard Business Review* noted that developing a “strategy” is a “wicked problem” in itself. It implies that all the parameters are known, weighted, and mastered before any decision is made. Seldom is this the case for agricultural and food issues, despite the numerous international and national strategic and programmatic frameworks in most countries of the South. Governance reveals gaps (between intentions and reality), distortions (between models), frictions and struggles (between actors). Dilemmas are protean political objects: from the outset, a strong uncertainty-risk-decision nexus; poorly stabilized situations; multiple paths and options; a plurality of actors with different views, objectives, and interests; and unpredictable interactions between all these features. In the era of globalization, the notions of uncertain trajectories, bifurcations, and threshold effects add to the picture (Bessin, Bidart, and Grossetti, 2010). In the agricultural and food sector, crises with their constraints and their particular demands provide emblematic examples of dilemmas. Indeed, in situations of shortage, poverty, or conflict, options to choose from are often harrowing (Bickersteth, 1990; Schloms, 2005). In 2007-2008, governments faced crucial choices to regulate food markets (Lustig, 2012). This situation recurred with COVID-19 supply chain crisis, which has reactivated or reinforced dilemmas. Other examples will certainly emerge, due to the necessary adaptation and transformation of agricultural and food systems in response to climate change (Grin, Rotmans and Schot, 2010; Terragni *et al.*, 2009).

A Plurality of Food and Agricultural Dilemmas in the Global South

Models and their trajectories

Dilemmas can be analyzed through the paradigms and global orientations of food systems. Some models (still) favor socio-technical, productionist, and intensive systems (Boehlje & Bröring, 2011), while others resolutely promote an agriculture that engages in global transitions (agroecology and agroforestry) (Tonneau *et al.*, 2005). The adoption and dissemination of technical (genetically modified plants, agrofuels, etc.) or organizational innovations are key or decisive moments (Pingali *et al.*, 2008). Some models are organized around the food security paradigm, while others promote agricultural and food sovereignty. Some subscribe to public or citizen regulatory actions; others much less. Some value the connection to the market, while others put forward a local approach (foodshed) (Verstegen, 2020) or reemphasize food self-sufficiency (Janin, 2021).

Dilemmas can also emerge due to contradictions between the imperatives of profitability, sustainability, and equity (Wertheim-Heck *et al.*, 2019), between agricultural specialization and diversification, or even due to tensions between “commons” and “private resources” (Vivero Pol, 2013). The relationship between environmental conservation and agricultural development can also create tensions. At a time of recurrent systematic risks, is it better to make eaters feel secure or to give them satisfaction? In a globalized world, who is in control (Lang, 1999)?

Lastly, some food governance regimes are more favorable to achieving the standardized objectives of sustainable development (Veldhuizen *et al.*, 2020), while others think they must be anthropo-localized.

Political options and their effects

Dilemmas can also be approached through the lens of “options,” that is to say through all the instruments and tools that are in the service of public action or have been reappropriated by other groups of actors. These options differ according to objectives – injunctive and prescriptive, and sometimes contradictory (Mooij, 1999). They also vary according to standards or technical and legal regulations. These options come in turn with a set of short-term or long-term effects on societies and territories, whether expected or not, which can create other dilemmas. The latter are rarely addressed in a democratic way and they are more often tackled in a discretionary manner by the institutions involved, at the risk of their legitimacy being questioned and challenged.

Each “option” in agriculture and food comes with its share of questions and doubts (Janin, 2018): is it better to import at a lower cost or to promote national production (Mendez and Frias, 2018); to reconstitute national food reserves or seek to secure supply flows (Haug and Hella, 2013); to promote the emergence of entrepreneurs or to support small producers; to be effective or accountable to the target populations (Fowler, 1995); to satisfy consumer demands or to reassess the economic situation of producers; and to provide aid or to create the conditions for real empowerment (Poppendieck, 1994). Several “paths” seem to appear to find a way out of global agricultural and food crises, whether they are technical, redistributive, localist, or regulationist (Fraser et al., 2016).

Objectives of the Special Issue and Expected Contributions

Based on empirical studies of different geographical areas (the MENA region, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia, India, Oceania), this special issue will show that the notion of dilemmas allow a renewed and transdisciplinary approach to agricultural and food challenges in the global South.

More specifically, it will address the diversity of strategic dilemmas. These dilemmas concern a wide range of actors in positions of responsibility, working in the agricultural and food sector: public, private, or community institutions in charge of projects, programs, or policies, but also individuals in charge of decision-making.

These actors are most notably public institutions in charge of agricultural development, and food and nutritional security, from the international to the local levels: United Nations agencies, banks, technical ministries, public or parastatal companies and agencies. Projects or programs set up within the framework of a consortium of humanitarian and development NGOs are also concerned with dilemmas. Situations experienced by intermediate social actors (peasant groups, agricultural unions, cooperatives, associations, etc.) may also be considered. Likewise, submissions may concern foundations, companies, and individuals (craftsmen, traders, etc.), as long as the notion of dilemma is highlighted. However, submissions dedicated to dilemmas in the domestic sphere (household head or family head) or those encountered by eaters/consumers will be considered to be on the margin of the concerns of the Special Issue.

Each article in the Special Issue will share certain key characteristics :

- The articles will attempt to provide conceptual and contextual bases for the dilemma selected for the study.
- They will seek to highlight its origins and the factors leading to its construction (as well as to its possible reproduction).
- They will analyze its evolution and discuss its multifaceted effects.

- Finally, they will take into account the actors' discourses and positioning: is the dilemma dismissed and denied; addressed directly or bypassed; in the process of being reduced or overcome; and is it leading to claims or not?

Articles can be in French or in English.

Submission Guidelines

- Launching the call for articles: 30 November 2020
- Deadline for submission of summary*: 10 March 2021
- Response to authors: 29 March 2021
- Deadline for submission of full articles: 30 June 2021
- Internal review: July - October 2021
- Online submission process ([Scholar One Manuscripts](#) website) : 15 November 2021
- Journal peer review process: January - April 2022
- Publication: 2022

*Summary : 500 – 700 words

Articles: Between 7,000 and 9,000 words, including abstract, references, notes, tables, and appendixes. Book reviews should not exceed 1,000 words; review essays should not exceed 3,000 words.

Submissions should be directed to:

Pierre Janin (pierre.janin@ird.fr), Delphine Acloque (delphine.acloque@gmail.com), and Saker El Nour (sakerabdol@gmail.com)/

Article Style guide: You will find it [HERE](#)

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