Food systems and sustainability

Context and Issues of the Global South

Food systems are affected by the various issues surrounding climate change, biodiversity loss, declining natural resources, political instability, poverty, inequalities within and between countries, food and nutrition insecurity, and the high incidence of non-communicable diseases seen throughout the developing world. The SDGs were put in place to meet the new challenges posed if development is to be sustainable. More specifically, SDG 2 aims to eliminate hunger, ensure food security, combat malnutrition in all its forms, and promote sustainable agriculture. In addition, ensuring good quality food is available for all would help achieve one of the SDG 3 targets, to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases. Food systems are also at the interface of many other SDGs (1: No poverty; 5: Gender equality; 8: Decent work and economic growth; 10: Reduced inequalities; 12: Responsible consumption and production; 13: Climate action; 17: Partnerships for the goals) and must be redesigned by promoting sustainable consumption and production to meet major development issues. To align with sustainable development trajectories, experts recommend radical transformations in a number of key areas of human activity, including production and consumption patterns, urban development, energy, among others. These transformations can only happen through coordinated partnerships and actions between governments, public and private sectors, civil society, organisations and communities, plus the active commitment of populations involved.

Current practices and needs

The objectives of France’s international strategy for food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture, consistently with the recommendations of the global sustainable development report, are: (1) to strengthen global governance of food security and nutrition; (2) to develop sustainable agricultural and food systems; (3) to increase French action on nutrition; (4) to support the structuring of sustainable agri-food chains to boost the creation of decent jobs in rural areas; (5) to provide more food aid for vulnerable populations and improve their resilience to the causes of food insecurity.

Interdisciplinary research on food systems remains poorly developed in France. IRD has many skills and conducts research on populations’ health, changing lifestyles (urbanisation, more sedentary lifestyles, changes in diet), plant and animal health, and the health of ecosystems. The institute now wants to develop interdisciplinary research aimed at improving the sustainability of food systems, taking their complex nature into due account. It is consequently expected that future research in this field will (i) deliver better understanding of the conditions under which populations access good quality food according to products availability, the balance of power
between the various stakeholders in the food systems, and the orientation of the political mechanisms that underlie them; (ii) expand knowledge of the knowledge and capacities of populations to organise themselves; (iii) make it possible to understand the consequences of food system dysfunctions to develop and evaluate strategies to remedy them. In conjunction with other French institutions and partners in the global South and internationally, the ultimate aim will be better understanding of ensuring food and nutrition safety by taking into account specific local factors while preserving the environment, social equity, and developing growth and economic efficiency.

To support this food systems and sustainability research topic, the aim of recruiting a basic grade research associate is to strengthen and galvanise teams whose research combines approaches from experimental and human sciences in the fields of agriculture, food, nutrition and health in the global South, in order to inform the public policies governing these systems.

**Desired skills / abilities**

Skills in the fields of food systems, sustainable development; interdisciplinarity and international experience; capabilities in systems analysis, multi-criteria mapping, multi-agent modelling; ability to develop investigations using mixed and innovative methods.