

Recent trends in the global governance of food and nutrition security: policy implications for the EU

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The global governance of food security and nutrition (FSN) has been evolving rapidly over the last 10 years. While the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2008-2009 has been celebrated for its “exemplarity” with respect to inclusiveness and accountability, recent trends have led to a growing complexity and fragmentation of the governance regime for FSN. In such a context, this policy brief traces back the main changes that have occurred over the last years to draw their political implications for FSN-related EU policies.

The paper recalls the main aspects of the reform of the CFS. It then shows that despite it has been said to be “the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform dealing with FSN”, the current governance regime is still highly fragmented. FSN issues are discussed in many distinct arenas with little coordination. While fragmentation is viewed by some as a way to dissect problems into more manageable bits, we maintain that it encourages a kind of “forum shifting” that tends to privilege the best resourced actors and to multiply (political) approaches to FSN, and hence, risks impairing the input legitimacy of governance. This fragmentation is mainly linked to the existence of two types of arenas: multilateral ones and multistakeholder ones. This results in a loose control of the CFS over international policies & negotiations that impacts FSN. Against this backdrop, this policy brief concludes with two main recommendations for EU policies for FSN in global governance arenas for FSN.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- The EU should devote as much effort as possible to strengthen the role of the CFS to reaffirm its role of “THE foremost inclusive [...] platform dealing with FSN”, and more specifically:**
 - continue to support the evaluation process and the setting up of monitoring mechanisms for the CFS to better understand the capacity of the CFS’ recommendations to impact on domestic policies;
 - support the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure and the Principles for Responsible Investments in Agriculture and Food Systems, especially through capacity building in Southern countries exposed to land grabbing;
 - enhance relationships between the CFS and other multilateral arenas in which FSN-related issues are negotiated: SDG process, WTO, UNFCCC.
- The EU should contribute to strengthening the accountability framework of other political processes (both multilateral and multistakeholder ones) dealing with FSN through its support to:**
 - the definition of a clear normative framework, based on the human rights framework, which considers the implementation of a given project with respect to the long-term transformative pathway in which it is engaging.
 - the development of monitoring systems to assess, *ex-ante* and *ex-post* the impacts of any projects developed in the course of these processes.

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1. THE REFORM OF THE CFS AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF FSN

The CFS was created in 1974 as an intergovernmental forum to review food security policies. At that time, it was given the mandate to “coordinate a global approach to food security”. However, what was characterized as “food security” for the first time during the 1974 first World Food Summit¹ pertains to a set of different issues that were in the meanwhile handled by different institutions: agricultural production, human rights, food trade, economic development and humanitarian aid. The 2009 reform came at a time when the institutional setting surrounding these issues was changing: the Doha trade round was unable to move forward, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) underwent an external review which was to lead to important reorganizations, the World Bank’s 2008 *World Development Report* focused on agriculture, a topic largely ignored since its 1982 report, and the G8/G20 put food prices volatility on their agenda. In such a context, one of the key challenges of the reformed CFS was to bring all these institutions and concerns in one single room to treat them under the general heading of “food security”.

The reform resulted in three main changes. The first was the designation of the CFS as “the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform dealing with food security and nutrition”, which was clearly a formal success in terms of bringing more policy coherence in the governance regime for FSN. A second one was the creation of specific mechanisms to include actors besides state representatives: the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for civil society organizations and the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM) for organizations from the private sector. But not only did the reform create those mechanisms, it did also provide financial and logistical means to allow their effective functioning. The third major change was the creation of a science-policy interface, the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), in order for the CFS to make decisions on the basis of the best available evidence.

The reform was intended to be a two-phase process: the first phase (2009-2013) focused on policy coordination at a global level and support to countries and regions. The second phase—which was supposed to begin in early 2014, but has not yet really started—was envisioned to include increasing national and regional involvement of the CFS as a facilitating accountability mechanism which

promotes best practices with regard to global food security.

The reformed CFS has no power over individual States’ domestic strategies nor is it endowed with the prerogatives to produce public policies. Nevertheless, it has generated in five years a series of interesting outputs. It has first allowed to generate a common understanding of FSN-related issues thanks to the work of the HLPE and to create a “new” institutional culture centred on policy formulation for FSN. The increase legitimacy of civil society organizations (CSOs) at both global and domestic levels is another important output of the CFS reform. Lastly, the reformed CFS has produced two international non-binding norms that are to frame agricultural development and investments with respect to FSN issues, especially in Southern countries: the principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT).

While these achievements well demonstrate the successes of the CFS reform and its ability to foster policy dialogue on FSN, it has nevertheless not put an end to the previously existing fragmentation. On the one hand, the reformed CFS has been kept aside from negotiations that are part of other intergovernmental bodies’ mandate that strongly interact with FSN, such as agricultural and food trade or agricultural and rural development or, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals negotiation. On the other hand, multistakeholder platforms claiming to address FSN issues have been proliferating over the last 10 years with almost no control from the CFS.

2. MULTILATERAL PROCESSES IN THE GOVERNANCE OF FSN: OLD AND NEW

Over the last 10 years, several multilateral processes have been dealing with FSN issues with almost no or very few links with the CFS. Three of them are of particular importance: the G8/G20, the trade negotiation under the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) formulation process, which includes one SDG on “ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture”.

2.1. The G8/G20

The G8/G20 have become key players of the FSN governance landscape since the food price spikes crisis of 2008 and have made several decisive contributions to the regime evolution, albeit ambiguous with respect to the question of fragmentation. While the G8/G20 have regularly reasserted the need to work *under* the CFS supervision

1. Shaw, D. J. (2007). *World Food Security. A History since 1945*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 510 p.

or at least, *in accordance* with its principle, the global picture is a bit more complex. The Global Partnership for FSN, launched in 2008, is a case in point. Though it ultimately led to the adoption of the CFS reform project, it did so because of the pressure of CSOs who initially saw it as “a strategic move by wealthy countries and private interests to usurp power and legitimacy from a parallel process of reforming the UN Committee on World Food Security that was happening in consultation with CSOs and all UN member countries”.² But this is also true for other initiatives, such as the Aquila Food Security Initiative (2009). While it allocated 20 billions dollars to FSN projects in Southern countries, it did so without any link to the CFS, neither for monitoring nor for allocating these pledges. Both the final statement of the Pittsburgh G20³ and the launch of the New Alliance for Food and Nutrition Security in 2012 at the Camp David G8 are perhaps the most illustrative examples of the ambiguous role of the G8/G20 with respect to fragmentation. They indeed gave orientations that sensibly differ from the way in which the CFS consider agricultural development for FSN and the role of the private sector therein.

2.2. The question of agricultural trade negotiations

The role of international trade regulations in the structure of food regimes has long been acknowledged, at least for as long as food price volatility has existed. However, while this recognition should have led to give the FAO or the CFS a say in how food trade is to be regulated, the GATT and then the WTO have both been kept out of direct or indirect influence from UN agencies dedicated to FSN. The way in which agricultural trade has been regulated so far has hence more to do with the own objectives of each country involved in agricultural and food trade than with the overall aim of achieving global food security. Margulis⁴ has also well pointed out the divergent views of the WTO and the FAO/CFS with respect to the role of free trade for food security. For its part, the

WTO views free trade as a lever for enhancing food security; on the contrary UN agencies have repeatedly warned that trade liberalization could worsen food insecurity if countries negotiate away the capacity to curb the foreign dumping of subsidized food imports, which have the effect of displacing domestic food production and undermining food security.

While the HLPE report on food price volatility has argued for a greater involvement of the CFS itself in agricultural trade negotiations under the Doha round, this recommendation has fallen short of expectation.

2.3. The SDG formulation process

Last but not least, it can be noted that, as a UN committee and not an official agency, the CFS has not been formally consulted along the formulation process of the SDG, despite the fact that one out of the 17 SDGs is specifically focused on FSN and agricultural development: the SDG 2 on “ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture”. This has added an overarching goal and 4 associated targets for food security, which are to apply to all countries. As such, it is supposed to impact the way in which food security issues are to be framed in both international and national political arenas. The CFS not being associated to the process raises questions about whether the CFS is really, in the eyes of the SGUN itself, the foremost inclusive intergovernmental platform dealing with food security issues! Now that the SDGs have been adopted, the question of how they will be implemented remains and the role of the CFS in facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the SDG 2 has still to be clarified.

3. THE RISE AND PROLIFERATION OF MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS/PLATFORMS

Aside from these multilateral processes, the last 10 years have also been marked by the rise and the proliferation of so-called “multi-stakeholder initiatives”. “Multistakeholderism” and public-private partnerships include a variety of more or less institutionalized platforms that bring together government, business, civil society and international organizations (and researchers in some cases) with the declared aim of providing collective goods. The origin of the concept of multi-stakeholderism is to be found in the corporate business world. It entered the global governance landscape in the early 1990’s at the Rio conference and, most strongly, at the Rio+10 conference in Johannesburg with the launch of the so-called “Partnership for Sustainable Development”. What

2. Duncan, J. (2014). *The reformed Committee on World Food Security and the global governance of food security*. Thèse en Food Policy, City University London, London, 278 p.

3. “Our approach [to food security] is to use development assistance to explore synergies with private philanthropy and private sector actors”. The Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, Rabobank foundation, World Economic Forum and the Initiative for Global Development are listed as key partners.

4. Margulis, M. E. (2013). The regime complex for food security: Implications for the global hunger challenge. *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 19 (1), 53-67.

is new, however, is the growing role they have been given in an expanding range of sectors and especially in the field of FSN. While such platforms are very diverse, they are said to share a common set of features that make it possible to consider them under the same “heading”: they are generally voluntary instruments; open to participation by actors and organizations on the sole basis of their will to contribute; many of them lack clear rules, and their targets/goals are too often vaguely defined, though some exceptions may exist (as the Zero Hunger Challenge).⁵

Since 2002 and the creation of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), nearly ten similar platforms have been created. Each of them has specific aims, which often partly overlap between each other. According to many stakeholders, the development of these platforms is an answer to at least two needs: the need to strengthen cooperation between different stakeholders in a flexible, operational manner in order to translate blurred commitments into concrete actions; and the need to favour the involvement of private sector, which is more and more seen as key actors while private financial investment is seen as the main stumbling block to attain food security, especially in Africa. Interestingly, these platforms have indeed favoured pledges from numerous private sector stakeholders; if such pledges are turned into real actions, the transformative potential of multi-stakeholderism might thus be important.

However, these platforms have also three important features. First, from an institutional point of view, their functioning is totally disconnected from the CFS, which contributes to the growing fragmentation of the governance regime for FSN. Second, they often gather actors unequally resourced, and lack clear functioning rules allowing the least resourced stakeholders to voice their concerns. Many CSOs have reported that they experience difficulties in being heard within these platforms. Third, their accountability framework is often weak. Not only does it lack a clear normative framework against which to assess *ex-ante* and *ex-post* the impact of a given project, but it generally does not provide any monitoring mechanism, as it is the case for the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture.⁶

4. A SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES

While the existence of more than ten international platforms—multilateral and multistakeholder ones—pretending to combat food insecurity worldwide could be considered as an encouraging indication of the world’s commitment to end hunger, it does not go without certain difficulties as we have tried to demonstrate. We would like to conclude by pointing out more specifically two of them.

The first difficulty relates to the issue of inclusiveness of international processes. The reformed CFS has indeed been praised for being more inclusive than many other international platforms, offering a seat and a voice to civil society organizations and the private sector alike along with logistical and financial support. On the contrary, in most other international platforms dealing with FSN issues, the participation of non-state actors is either not possible (such as in the WTO or the G8/G20) or not sufficiently organized to ensure an effective participation, especially from civil society organizations (this is more particularly the case of multistakeholder platforms and even the SDG process). Besides, many stakeholders, including most civil society organizations, least developed countries or small private companies, simply do not have enough means (human, financial, logistical) to participate to all the platforms that currently exist. As such, they have no mean to have their concern heard therein.

A second set of difficulties lies in the existing of overlapping and conflicting rules/norms (both formal and informal) that emanate from these platforms. The ways in which food security issues are framed indeed differ significantly from one platform to the other, along with the solutions that are proposed, which raises at least the question of which platform is to rule over which others when competing interpretations and policy options are on the table. ■

5. Bäckstrand, K., Campe, S., Chan, S. et al. (2012). Transnational public-private partnerships. In: F. Biermann & P. Pattberg (Eds.), *Global environmental governance reconsidered*. pp. 123-148.

6. Aubert, P.-M., Brun, M. & Treyer, S. (2015). Ensuring Transparency and accountability of the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture in the perspective of COP21. *IDDRI Policy Brief, Agriculture* (03/15), 4.