



Global Governance for World Food Security:

A Scorecard Four Years After the Eruption of the “Food Crisis”

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1. A Window of Opportunity for Change

Food is the most basic of all human needs and collective food security governance has been with us since the dawn of human society. Failure to perform it effectively has inevitably engendered social unrest. The riots in capital cities around the world in late 2007 are reminiscent of the hungry crowds that threatened the life of Roman Emperor Claudius in AD 51 and the bread riots that helped to spark off the French Revolution in 1789. History and common sense tell us that a functioning food system is an indispensable pillar of a stable economy and a society capable of reproducing itself.

Food governance is an increasingly difficult task in a globalised world. On the one hand, it involves multiple layers of decision-making. The capacity of single households to ensure an adequate supply of food for its members is affected by developments from local to global. Increasingly, even nation states are losing control over the factors that determine the food security of their populations. The range of imponderables has widened from acts of God, like the droughts or locusts that appear in the earliest narratives of the human race, or coups by political or military powers, to the impalpable workings of globalised economic forces.

At the same time, food security governance has become increasingly complex. For most of the 20th century, it was mainly focused on issues of agricultural production. Today access and ecological concerns are understood to be equally relevant. Governance needs to consider not only how food is produced but also how it is processed, distributed, and consumed. Food governance has become a complex web of often overlapping or contradictory formal policies and regulations, complicated by unwritten rules and practices that are not subject to political oversight.

The governance of food security is a much-contested terrain. It is no coincidence that agriculture has been the stumbling block of the Doha Round of the WTO negotiations. Decisions that affect the food security of the population of a country will involve and alert many social forces: the state, businesses, and civil society. The outcome of negotiations is affected by the power relations among these groups and by the degree to which states manage to mediate in the common interest. Power relations are often very lopsided and government mediation is frequently insufficient.¹

Getting a better handle on the global governance of food, then, is by no means an easy task. However, without a doubt, now is the time to make the effort. Over the past three years, a series of interrelated crises has unmasked the systemic flaws in the current world food system and highlighted its tendency to reward a small club of privileged economic actors and their political allies. These very crises have opened up the political opportunity to reform the world governance of food security fundamentally. Let us look at some of the evidence that is accumulating in favour of a substantial and substantive change.

A better understanding of who are the hungry in the South

Global food output has expanded over the past fifty years, keeping up with population growth despite neo-Malthusian predictions from some quarters.² Although the productivist discourse is still very much with us, it is increasingly evident that the problem is not so much a technical one of producing more food as a political one of ensuring that food is available to those who need it. Moreover, we have a better idea of who those most in need are: The majority of the

¹ See Lang et al (2009: 9, 23). To further complicate matters, “objective” science and expertise often play a non-neutral supporting role.

² FAO (2002).

hungry are poor rural food producers³. This finding has dispelled the myth that there is a divide between the interests of producers and consumers. Thus, fighting hunger in the developing world has to begin with supporting smallholder food producers' capacity to feed their own families.

The North is far from exempt

At the same time, burgeoning problems of obesity and unsafe food are sensitising public opinion and policy-makers to the fact that there are problems with the food system in the North as well as in the South. Globally, more people suffer from over-weight and obesity than from hunger; diabetes type 2 kills some 3.8 million people a year⁴. Mad cow disease in the UK, salmonella in US eggs, and dioxin-affected Belgian chickens are just some of the recent examples of the food risks engendered by insufficiently and inappropriately regulated industrial food production and processing in the North.

Climate change, energy, and land grabbing

The food crisis does not travel unaccompanied. Climate change and the energy crisis have shown that a food system based on the intensive use of petrol products and chemicals is not sustainable. According to recent UNEP publications⁵ the conventional agriculture model that is strongly subsidised by both the European Common Agricultural Policy and the US Farm Bill accounts for 14% of the total annual greenhouse gas emissions. This is mostly due to use of nitrogen fertilisers derived from rarefying petrol. Yet, UNEP maintains, the agricultural sector could be largely carbon neutral by 2030 and produce enough food for a growing population if localised agro-ecologic systems proven to reduce emissions were widely adopted. In addition, the entire globalised distribution process of the world food system is dependent on being able to discount the energy and petrol cost of whisking food around the world. The rapine popularly termed "land grabbing" is converting large areas to the production of crops that are processed into agrifuels or food and exported to rich countries. In the process, local producers and pastoralists are frequently expelled.⁶

Price volatility – not a fleeting phenomenon

During 2008, many observers predicted that the food price peaks would simply melt away after enjoying their moment of stardom and cede the headlines to the next crisis. Now, on the contrary, it has become evident that price volatility is likely to be with us for the near future. Prices of major commodities soared in the last months of 2010, and the FAO Food Price Index for January 2011 was the highest (in both real and nominal terms) since the index began in 1990.⁷ The World Bank has predicted at least five more years of volatility⁸. The role that financial speculation on food commodities has played regarding food price volatility has shown that current regulatory mechanisms are unsatisfactory if not inexistent. The effects of volatility will continue to constitute a source of social unrest throughout the world, as the food riots in Mozambique in September 2010 demonstrated.

During the financial crisis, governments have transgressed against traditional policy precepts in order to save banks and financial institutions. There is every reason to hope that such exceptions to neo-liberal governance may also come into play for food – if only the stakes are high enough. Unaffordable food helped set off the popular revolts in the Maghreb. To such developments, no government can be indifferent, as President Sarkozy underlined during the French Presidency of the G20 and G8 in 2011.⁹ The window of opportunity is open.

³ See IFAD (2010) for a recent and well-documented discussion.

⁴ Lang et.al.(2009: 112), Nestle (2007: 7). Diabetes type 2 is the 6th leading cause of death in the US, affecting 8% of the population.

⁵ UNEP (2010). See also UNCTAD (2010) and FAO (2011).

⁶ Among a burgeoning literature, see De Schutter (2009d and 2011), GRAIN (2008b), Journal of Peasant Studies (2010).

⁷ FAO (2011a)

⁸ Guardian, 25 October 2010. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/oct/25/impending-global-food-crisis>.

Accessed on 6 March 2011.

⁹ Presidency of the French Republic (2011). <http://www.elysee.fr/president>. Accessed on 6 March 2011.

2. Where Are we Today and How Have we Gotten Here?

Reflection on current efforts to reform the global food governance can profit from a review of the experience of the past three decades.¹⁰ In this regard, it is useful to trace the evolution of three strongly interconnected factors: the institutions in which global decision-making has been exercised; the paradigms on which strategies and actions have been based; and the actors and interests that have played a significant role in governance. We can start our review midway through the 20th century since up until then food policy was the purview of institutions located essentially at the national or local level.¹¹

1940s-50s: A new multilateral architecture and a bottomless faith in science/technology

From an institutional viewpoint, 1944 was a watershed, witnessing the establishment of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) within the emerging UN system. The founding members of the FAO shared the objective of combating hunger but consensus broke down on the role of international institutions, especially where food security impinged on trade and what were seen to be “national interests”.¹² Of particular interest was the fate of the proposed World Food Board. This mechanism was championed by FAO’s first Director-General, Lord Boyd Orr, as a means to accomplish some of the governance functions that are recognised as crucial today: stabilising world agricultural prices, managing an international cereal reserve, and co-operating with the organisations responsible for agricultural development loans and international trade policy to ensure that the measures they took were coherent with food security. The World Food Board never got off the starting blocks as it was strongly opposed by the grain trade that had the backing of some powerful governments. After this, the FAO was pushed onto a more narrowly technical track, and Boyd Orr resigned. His parting shots - “food is more than a commodity” and “the world requires a food policy based on human needs” – are just as pertinent today as they were 60 years ago.¹³

The challenge of fighting hunger in the post World War II period was framed essentially as one of growing more food by using more science and technology.¹⁴ This was the era in which President Truman said in his inaugural speech: “Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge.” As for the actors, they were essentially governments, with the North dominating since much of the South was still under colonial rule. The state’s role in stabilising prices and ensuring food supplies through such mechanisms as commodity boards was acknowledged. Commodity traders had a strong lobby, scientists were playing an important role, and foundations were entering the scene with the beginnings of the Green Revolution¹⁵.

1960s-70s: Food governance crumbles in the face of a global crisis

The balance of power within the UN was upset in the early 1960s by the independence of a host of former colonies. The group of developing countries, the G77, established in 1964, championed a more equitable New International Economic Order with UNCTAD and the UN Center on Transnational Corporations¹⁶ as two new important institutions. Developing countries attached considerable importance to the FAO as an instrument that could help them valorise their agricultural commodities and achieve food security. Pulling in the opposite direction, the OECD countries reacted to a world food

¹⁰ See ETC (2009b: 3-6) and Lang et.al. (2009: 27-42) for historical reviews with somewhat different focuses.

¹¹ Although the League of Nations was already the venue of acrimonious pre-World War II debate about the co-existence of widespread malnutrition and global over-availability of food. McKeon (2009a:17).

¹² See McKeon (2009a: 17-18), FAO (1970: 11), Gustafson and Markie (2009: 181).

¹³ McKeon (2009a, 192), Cépède (1984).

¹⁴ Lang et.al (2009 : 27-29)

¹⁵ The Norman Borlaug – Rockefeller Foundation partnership got underway in 1944.

¹⁶ Established in 1974 and shut down in 1992 under pressure from the US and lobbying organizations like the International Chamber of Commerce.

crisis in the mid-1970s by dismantling the various functions the FAO exercised as the UN's "Ministry of Agriculture".¹⁷ The establishment, in 1971, of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) headquartered at the World Bank had already excised science from the UN system. The UN World Food Conference (1974) proposed the creation of a top-heavy policy body – the World Food Council – that was doomed to failure¹⁸ but nonetheless eroded the FAO's normative power. As for the financing of agriculture, it was hived off from the FAO and entrusted to the newly established International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Finally, the World Food Programme with its responsibilities for reacting to food emergencies, a strategic area for the US given its surplus production, was progressively separated from the FAO and established as an independent UN agency.

The optimistic post-war phase was shaken by the famines of the 1970s and the rise in the cost of oil. The growing body of neo-liberal advocates seized the occasion to argue that the world's food system was overly dependent on subsidies and states and that market liberalisation was the way forward. At the same time, on the production side the Green Revolution paradigm reached its apex. Governments continued to be the main actors in food governance, with the OECD/G77 opposition entering the scene. At the national level, the state still played a considerable role in regulating and supporting agriculture through mechanisms such as food stocks, supply management, and subsidies.¹⁹ Commercial interests became more powerful on the global scene: Agribusiness profited from the new Green Revolution seed varieties and related input packages thanks to corporation-promoted "advances" in protecting intellectual property rights.²⁰

1980s-2005: The triumph of globalisation and the free market...and the emergence of alternatives

In the period from the early 1980s on, international financial institutions have dominated the global governance of food. The structural adjustment regimes imposed onto debt-ridden developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund drastically curtailed the policy decision-making space of national governments, opened up the markets of developing countries, and cut back severely on state support to and regulation of agriculture. The creation of the WTO (1995) and the promulgation of global trade regulations did the rest.²¹ A corollary of these evolutions was the reduction of the "soft" policy space of the UN system, oriented more towards defending human rights and common goods than to finance and trade. The same period saw the multiplication of negotiation forums related to food security both within the UN family²² and outside. In this period, the G7/8 became a powerful and exclusive alternative forum for addressing world problems, one championed by its advocates as a more effective alternative to the cumbersome and argumentative UN.

The institutionalisation of structural adjustment and free trade went along with the neoliberal thesis that economic growth and global market integration constitute the infallible recipe for addressing all the world's ills, including food insecurity. Thus, the eradication of hunger was downplayed as a specific development objective, despite the declarations of the World Food Summits of 1996 and 2002.²³ The productionist paradigm continued to dominate, there was a rapid growth

¹⁷ ETC (2009b)

¹⁸ It was abolished in 1993.

¹⁹ However, urban bias – then as now – pushed the governments of developing countries to favour cheap food for the more unruly urban population over the interests of rural producers.

²⁰ The International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants entered into force in 1968. See Tansey and Rajotte (2008: 32-34)

²¹ On the impact of trade regulations see, among many others, Weis (2007: 128-160), FAO (2006:75-76), Third World Network (2006). It is worth noting that the inclusion of agriculture in the Uruguay round of trade negotiations was pushed by a few countries that have a strong comparative advantage in agriculture, including some emerging economies like Brazil. The negative impacts of structural adjustment on poverty and food security is the object of a voluminous literature and a reality recognized even by the World Bank (World Bank, 2007a:67).

²² For example, the multitude of conventions stemming from the 1992 Rio Conference.

²³ It took a determined effort led by FAO to get the "eradication of hunger" into the MDG 1.

of corporate ownership, and concentration and integration in the food system led to a disproportionate impact of corporations on global food policies.²⁴

At the same time, however, the sustainability of industrial agriculture was progressively called into question, and the negative consequences structural adjustment has on poverty and hunger became increasingly evident. Beginning in the mid-1990s numerous alternatives to the neoliberal, productionist paradigm arose. The right to food, food sovereignty, and agro-ecology were championed by civil society actors who entered the arena of global governance for the first time. The most politically significant among these were the rural social movements that mobilised in reaction to the devastating effects of neo-liberal policies on agricultural production and rural livelihoods.²⁵ The birth of the WTO gave an additional stimulus to networking among the primary victims of globalisation and liberalisation. The decision to set up La Via Campesina in 1993 was triggered by the Uruguay Round of the GATT and the realisation that “agricultural policies would henceforth be determined globally and it was essential for small farmers to be able to defend their interests at that level.”²⁶ The regional Network of West African Peasant and Agricultural Producers’ Organizations (ROPPA) was established in 2000 for similar reasons. Similar developments have taken place in other regions both in the Global South and in the North.²⁷

The civil society forums held in parallel to the two World Food Summits convened by FAO in 1996 and 2002 gave a strong impetus to the global networking of rural social movements. The organisers of these forums, unlike those of the NGO-dominated meetings that have accompanied other UN summits, made a deliberate effort to ensure that small food producers and indigenous peoples were in the majority by applying a quota system for delegates and mobilising resources to cover their travel costs. The principle of food sovereignty was introduced by La Via Campesina at the 1996 forum. By 2002, it had become the assembly’s battle cry. The Forum mandated the network that had emerged, the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC)²⁸, to carry forward the Action Agenda. It was based on four pillars: the right to food and food sovereignty; mainstreaming agro-ecological family farming; defending people’s access to and control of natural resources; and trade and food sovereignty. Five years later, in February 2007, an important global encounter on food sovereignty held in Mali brought together more than 500 delegates from local movements in all regions and deepened the common understanding of what food sovereignty means, what to fight for, and what to oppose.²⁹

²⁴ The TRIPS Agreement, adopted in 1994 as part of the Marrakesh Agreement, establishing the WTO, a key factor in stimulating corporate concentration and control of the food system. It was pushed by the US under pressure from a group of large corporate lobbyists, and against the wishes of the developing countries. Roffe (2008: 50-51). On corporate concentration and its impact see ETC (2008), McMichael (2005), MacMillan (2005), Clapp and Fuchs (2009).

²⁵ McKeon et al. (2004:14), McKeon (2011b)

²⁶ Interviews with VC leaders, reported in McKeon and Kalafatic (2009: 3). On Via Campesina see Desmarais (2007) and www.viacampesina.org.

²⁷ Edelman (2003).

²⁸ The IPC is an autonomous, self-managed global network of some 45 people’s movements and NGOs involved with at least 800 organizations throughout the world. Its membership includes constituency focal points (organizations representing small farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers), regional focal points, and thematic focal points (NGO networks with particular expertise on priority issues). It is not a centralized structure and does not claim to represent its members. It is rather a space for self-selected civil society organisations that support the food sovereignty agenda adopted at the 2002 forum.

²⁹ On the Nyéléni Conference see www.nyeleni.org, Mulvany (2007), McKeon(2009a:90-91), Pimbert (2009).

Six Pillars of Food Sovereignty³⁰

Focuses on Food for People, putting the right to food at the centre of food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries policies; *and rejects* the proposition that food is just another commodity or component for international agri-business.

Values Food Providers and respects their rights; *and rejects* those policies, actions and programmes that undervalue them, threaten their livelihoods and eliminate them.

Localises Food Systems, bringing food providers and consumers closer together; *and rejects* governance structures, agreements and practices that depend on and promote unsustainable and inequitable international trade and give power to remote and unaccountable corporations.

Puts Control Locally over territory, land, grazing, water, seeds, livestock and fish populations; *and rejects* the privatisation of natural resources through laws, commercial contracts and intellectual property rights regimes.

Builds Knowledge and Skills that conserve, develop and manage localised food production and harvesting systems; *and rejects* technologies that undermine, threaten or contaminate these, e.g. genetic engineering.

Works with Nature in diverse, agroecological production and harvesting methods that maximise ecosystem functions and improve resilience and adaptation, especially in the face of climate change; *and rejects* energy-intensive industrialised methods which damage the environment and contribute to global warming.

If the rural movements bothered to congregate around the FAO, it was because they felt it could constitute a politically interesting intergovernmental policy forum, an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO. There were several reasons for this: more democratic governance with universal membership and one country-one vote decisions; a specific focus on food and agriculture and a mission to eliminate hunger; a mandate that includes a strong normative role; and relative openness to engage with civil society and rural people's organisations. The IPC has proved to be an appropriate instrument for testing this hypothesis. Unlike the majority of civil society mechanisms established to interact with global policy forums, it is one in which social movements feel at home. Strongly rooted in rural and community movements in all regions, it has combined people's organisations political legitimacy and capacity to mobilise with the analytic and advocacy skills of NGOs. It has been careful to distinguish between the political role of people's movements and the supportive stance of NGOs, an issue to which people's organisations are highly sensitive. The IPC and its member rural social movements have invested considerable energy in opening up political space within the FAO. Since 2003, the IPC has facilitated the participation of over 2000 representatives of small food producers' organisations in FAO policy forums, championing the right to food, food sovereignty, and agro-ecological food production as an alternative to free trade and green revolution technology. The thematic advocacy work has been underpinned by an insistence on the recognition of civil society's right to autonomy and self-organisation.³¹

From 2005 on: Systemic failure exposed and the international community faces the food crisis

From 2005 on, three of the major agricultural institutions – IFAD, FAO, CGIAR – underwent external evaluations that exposed serious institutional failures.³² For its part, the World Bank, for the first time in 25 years, devoted its 2008 World Development Report to agriculture and development and thus admitted that it had made a strategic error in neglecting agriculture as a motor of growth.³³ The independent evaluation of the Bank's assistance to agriculture in Africa published the same year acknowledged the negative impacts of two decades of structural adjustment policies.³⁴ 2005 was also the

³⁰ Nyéleni (2007).

³¹ See McKeon (2009a: 50-120), McKeon and Kalafatic (2009: 17-18), www.foodsovereignty.org.

³² ETC (2009b).

³³ World Bank (2007b)

³⁴ World Bank (2007a:67)

year in which the WTO Doha Round ground to a halt on agricultural issues. The Food Aid Convention (FAC), due to expire in 2007, was under review with the aim to shift the emphasis from food as an instrument to the problems food assistance is expected to address.³⁵

In this atmosphere of institutional re-thinking, the eruption of the food crisis in late 2007-2008 unveiled a vacuum in global governance. In the absence of an authoritative and inclusive global body deliberating on food issues, decision-making in this vital field was being carried out - by default - by international institutions like the WTO and the World Bank for whom food security is hardly core business, by groups of the most powerful economies like the G8/G20, and by economic actors such as transnational corporations and financial speculators subject to no political oversight whatsoever. The food crisis sparked a range of international institutional initiatives, of which the most significant were the UN High Level Task Force on the Food Security Crisis (HLTF), the Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security (GPAFS), and the reform of the Committee on World Food Security.

In April 2008, the Secretary General of the UN established the HLTF, composed of secretariat heads and technical staff of 20 UN specialised agencies, funds and programmes, Bretton Woods institutions and relevant parts of the UN Secretariat, as well as the OECD. This initiative was welcomed by many who criticised the UN system's institutional dispersion and uncoordinated responses to global problems. In the words of the Secretary-General, the Task Force's objective was "to ensure that the UN system, international financial institutions and the WTO are ready to provide robust and consistent support to countries struggling to cope with food insecurity."³⁶ To this end, it produced, in July 2008, a Comprehensive Framework of Action on Food Security (CFA)³⁷. The HLTF is a technical initiative that does not entail any form of political oversight by member governments. There was, however, a danger that the existence of the CFA might be taken as an excuse to avoid negotiating a more political, intergovernmental and strategic commitment based on the critical reflection of the shortcomings seen during the past two decades.

In July 2008, the G8, under the leadership of France and Britain, proposed the creation of a Global Partnership on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (GPAFS) with three pillars: increased investment in agriculture; enhanced expertise brought to bear on food security issues; and a global policy forum whose location was left up in the air. In the eyes of its proponents, this proposal was justified by a lack of confidence in the capacity of the FAO to respond effectively to the crisis. In the eyes of many civil society actors, however, the underlying motivation was a desire on the part of G8 governments and private sector interests to bypass the multilateral UN multilateral family and strengthen their hold on the world's food system.³⁸ The GPAFS's promoters hoped to obtain endorsement for the Partnership at the High-Level Meeting on Food Security for All, convened in Madrid, in January 2009, by the Government of Spain with the support of the HLTF, the UN Secretary General, and the G8. This did not transpire due to strong opposition by the FAO, a number of G77 countries, and small food producer and civil society organisations. The Partnership's investment component was tabled again at the 2009 meeting of the G8. It was adopted in the form of the "L'Aquila Initiative" with pledges of \$ 20 billion of which, however, only some \$ 6 billion represented fresh funding.³⁹ Although the GPAFS has no real existence, it continues to crop up in UN resolutions with an ethereal longevity worthy of the "Parallel Campaign" that pervades Robert Musil's masterpiece, *The Man without Qualities*, without ever revealing its substance.

³⁵ Hoddinott and Cohen (2007).

³⁶ <http://www.un.org/issuesfood/taskforce/>. Accessed on 6 March 2011.

³⁷ Available at www.un.org/issues/food/taskforce/Documentation/CFA%20Web.pdf. Accessed on 6 March 2011. The CFA was revised in 2010.

³⁸ See discussion paper for working group on "Who Decides?" at the CSO Forum, "Peoples' Food Sovereignty Now!" held in parallel to the FAO World Summit on Food Security, 13-17 November 2009, available at <http://peoplesforum2009.foodsovereignty.org>. Accessed on 6 March 2011.

³⁹ A silo fund was not established, but some of the donors have come together to channel funds through a World Bank-administered Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP) which got underway in April 2010. By the time of the February 2011 AFSI meeting in Paris, only \$4.2 billion of the pledged resources had been disbursed.

The only international initiative with global significance was the audacious effort to transform the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) from an ineffectual talk shop into an authoritative policy forum.⁴⁰ The CFS bureau chair⁴¹ took the unusual step of opening up the reform process – which got underway in April 2009 – to all stakeholders. Here, organisations of smallholder food producers, along with some international NGOs, were able to interact with governments on an equal basis, and they made a fundamental contribution to the reform. The practice of posting written inputs introduced a strong element of transparency, while the regular face-to-face meetings provided a propitious opportunity for promoting mutual understanding between different actors. The fact that the IPC was speaking on behalf of smallholder food producers from around the world strengthened its positions, which were often the most cogent on the table. In the end, despite their diversity, the majority of participants came to feel a sense of ownership of the core proposal to the point that they resisted a last-minute effort by a few developed countries to downplay the political significance of the new forum. The final proposal, described in the following section, was adopted by acclamation on 17 October 2009 during the 35th Session of the CFS.

The food crisis and the concomitant focus on climate change has jolted dominant paradigms as well as the governance system. There is now widespread recognition that the world market has failed to ensure the food security of developing countries – particularly those whose governments succumbed to World Bank advice to sell their commodities on the world market and purchase “cheap” food in exchange – as well as of the need, instead, to promote smallholder food production for domestic consumption. Concepts that, over the past two decades, had been considered taboo or laughable are now being seriously considered: protection for the markets in developing countries; food reserves and supply management; agroecology as a climate-friendly approach to agricultural production.

Civil society and people’s movements promoting these alternatives have come into their own. Small food producer organisations’ networks are engaging governments and intergovernmental forums at national, regional, and global levels, and they are building alliances with other sectors of civil society. They have an impact on government policy⁴², and they have gaining accreditation and credibility in global institutions like the FAO and the IFAD⁴³. Locally, alternative food networks and fair trade movements are working at the community level where they promote agroecological production and food webs as an alternative to the industrial food chain.⁴⁴ The globalisation of civil society movements has facilitated the emergence of alternatives and brought pressure on governments. The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) study published in 2008⁴⁵ has provided significant scientific support for alternatives, although it is not receiving the recognition it merits.

⁴⁰ The Committee on World Food Security was established in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum for review and follow-up of policies concerning world food security. This body had the task to prepare and follow-up on the two World Food Summits of 1996 and 2002 and to negotiate the Voluntary Guidelines on the Application of the Right to Food at National Level. It had failed, however, to function as an effective policy forum.

⁴¹ The Permanent Representative of Argentina to the FAO, Maria del Carmen Squeff.

⁴² See, for example, the contribution of the Network of West African Peasant and Agricultural Producers’ Organizations (ROPPA) to the regional agricultural policy of ECOWAS and the negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union. In October 2010, the five sub-regional African farmers’ networks, ROPPA, PROPAC, EAFF, SACAU and UMAGRI, came together to form the Pan-African Farmers’ Organization (PAFO) to interact with the African Union and the New Economic Programme for African Development’s agriculture component, the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP). See McKeon (2009b).

⁴³ In addition to the developments within the FAO, at a global level the IFAD established a Farmers’ Forum in 2005 to further the involvement of farmer’s organisations concerning national strategies and programmes. See McKeon and Kalafatic (2009: 18-20).

⁴⁴ For a thoughtful and well documented assessment of the peasant food web as compared to the industrial food chain see ETC (2009a).

⁴⁵ The IAASTD was a four-year process involving 400 experts from all regions, sponsored by the World Bank, the FAO, UNEP, and UNDP. Its report, published in 2008, called for a fundamental paradigm shift in agricultural development and advocated strengthening agro-ecological science and practice. See www.agassessment.org.

At the same time, however, the backers of the agro-industrial global food system are trying to use the food and climate crises to their advantage by advocating solutions based on technology, capital, and the liberalisation of markets. It is reported that “the six largest agrochemical and seed corporations are filing sweeping, multi-genome patents in pursuit of exclusive monopoly over plant gene sequences that could lead to control of most of the world’s plant biomass...under the guise of developing “climate ready” crops.”⁴⁶

A major new entrant has been a foundation with unprecedented financial power to influence the agricultural development agenda. The Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation made its first grant in the field of agriculture in 2006. By the end of 2009, it had invested more than \$ 1.4 billion in promoting a “new green revolution,” a policy orientation determined by the Foundation’s co-chairs with no democratic oversight. In comparison, the FAO’s budget for the years 2010-2011 was \$ 1 billion – and the way it is expended is debated, approved, and monitored by its 192 member governments. The box below gives a recent example of the technology-led productionist paradigm by an academic who is associated with the Gates Foundation’s work on bio-fortified food crops in developing countries.

“What kind of farming is environmentally sustainable?”⁴⁷

Agricultural scientists often believe there will be less harm done to nature overall by highly capitalized and specialized high-yield farming systems employing the latest technology. Increasing the yield on lands already farmed would allow more of the remaining land to be saved for nature. Environmentalists invoke the damage done by modern farming, whereas agricultural scientists invoke the greater damage that would be done if the same production volume had to come from less productive low-yield farming systems.”

A thoughtful analysis of who wields power in the food system published a few years ago argued that the three most significant evolutions over the past few decades had been the hollowing out of the state by globalisation and devolution, the growing power of transnational corporations in the world food system accompanied by the prospect that “private global regulation” may weigh in more strongly than public regulation, and the emergence of new food movements presenting alternative visions of the food system.⁴⁸ The brief historical review we have conducted above corroborates this view. In the next section, we will elaborate on the major characteristics of today’s global governance of food – both negative and positive - that we need to take into account in reflecting on a better architecture.

3. What is Gone Wrong and What to Build On?

The food crisis has engendered an ample literature on the causes of the international community’s failure to take decisive action to eradicate hunger and ensure world food security. The diagnoses conflict on some important points, particularly regarding the relative weight assigned to technical and political factors. The review conducted in the preceding section highlights three major inter-related aspects of mal-governance that need to be addressed. First, the current architecture of food security governance is fragmented, incoherent, opaque, and unaccountable.⁴⁹ Secondly, it is

⁴⁶ ETC (2010).

⁴⁷ Paalberg (2010: 112). Questionable assumptions on which this argument is based include dividing agricultural scientists and environmentalists into two separate categories with unanimous and opposed views, equating low-tech farming systems with low yields, and taking it for granted that land not put under agricultural production will be “saved for nature”.

⁴⁸ MacMillan (2005 : 2-5).

⁴⁹ Summarising contributions to an electronic debate on global food governance hosted by the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition in May 2011, facilitator Andrew MacMillan had this to say: “we are faced with a crisis of confidence in the current conglomeration of global institutions. This is mainly because they have, through their technical assistance, financing, rules and regulations, and reliance on markets, promoted directions of agricultural development and trade that respond too much to global

strongly conditioned by the unregulated weight of private sector interests. Thirdly, the policies it proposes are an inadequate, if not counterproductive, response to the challenge of fighting hunger and malnutrition.

The Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO are strongly market-oriented and dominated by rich countries⁵⁰, while the current reform of the CGIAR has strengthened the role of its funders in determining the agricultural research agenda. The UN system agencies, on the other hand, are more inclusive and more balanced as regards the North and South. Institutions like the FAO, IFAD⁵¹ and the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food temper neo-liberal approaches with an emphasis on food security, rural poverty, and an outlook based on rights, but they wield less power than their Bretton Woods counterparts. To further embroil the scene, besides the big global food agencies⁵² there is a host of other international institutions and forums that influence food security directly or through aspects such as genetic resources for food and agriculture.⁵³ Agencies dealing with nutritional or health aspects of food security (WHO, UNICEF etc.) and with workers' rights (ILO) have not been sufficiently integrated into food security discussions.

The institutional fragmentation that began in the 1970s has thus been compounded, creating difficulties particularly for overburdened and under-resourced developing countries and civil society, while actors with better resources try to attain their objectives via "forum shifting"⁵⁴. UN member countries are also responsible for the multilateral confusion. Different ministries attend different global forums with different positions, and those responsible for food security tend to be less powerful than those dealing with finance and trade. Within the UN system itself, relations between the UN Headquarters and the Rome-based food agencies are far from transparent in terms of their respective responsibilities for global food governance. It can only be hoped that the reform of the Committee on World Food Security and co-ordination within the UN through the High Level Task Force will bring a measure of order into the current chaos.

The decision-making over policy issues regarding food security at global, regional, national, and local levels is a maze. The governments of developing countries have not regained their space to manoeuvre, particularly in areas related to trade, which they lost through structural adjustment. Despite the commitment by members of the donor community to support "country-owned programmes," many of them still apply under-the-table conditionalities⁵⁵. A short-term view of national political interests compounds the difficulties of defending the "global commons" and long-term public interests.

To further complicate matters, the web of global food governance includes components that are even more difficult to identify and to hold accountable than the diffuse institutional architecture outlined above. Over the past years, there has been a trend for states to act more indirectly by involving a range of non-state actors in service delivery and policies. A

corporate interests and western values rather than to the people on whose lives they impact through their actions. It has exposed nations to becoming increasingly dependent on each other for their food supplies, but, in so doing, made them vulnerable to global crises – whether related to finance, economics or climate change – that have not been of their own making." *Global Governance for Food Security: are the current arrangements fit for the job?* <http://km.fao.org/fsn/discussions/global-governance/en/>. Accessed on 7 September 2011.

⁵⁰ See Clapp and Cohen (2009:6).

⁵¹ Not a UN agency in the strict sense of the term, but closer in its mission to the other Rome-based agencies than to the family of multilateral banks.

⁵² Which von Braun (2010) identifies as FAO, WFP, IFAD, WB, CGIAR and WTO.

⁵³ These include the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Trade Organization-Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (WTO-TRIPS), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITGRFA) to name just a few. See Tansey and Rajotte (2008).

⁵⁴ Efforts by powerful economies to push through the "Singapore Issues", vetoed by developing countries in the WTO negotiations, in the context of bilateral free trade agreements are a well-known example of forum shifting.

⁵⁵ The tendency to equate "country-owned" with "government-owned" is worth underlining. Donors have a remarkable capacity to apply conditionalities whenever it suits their interests and to virtuously refrain from doing so when it is a question of urging national governments to respect their commitments to stakeholder involvement.

similar development has been the growth of governance through expert policy networks or epistemic communities that may be led by public sector technocrats or separated from government altogether. Well-positioned non-state groups, most often from the private sector, may use membership in such networks to bring their weight to bear in ways that escape political oversight.⁵⁶ The impact on food issues of private sector self-regulatory mechanisms along the food chain is just one example for the difficulty to enforce public policy control. It has become practically impossible to assign responsibility for decisions and their consequences.

Secondly, within this labyrinth of unaccountable governance private sector actors have carved out a significant unregulated space for themselves. Among all of the dysfunctions of the current food governance regime, this is the most harmful and outrageous⁵⁷. Horizontal and vertical integration has led to great corporate concentration – with major political consequences.⁵⁸ The annual turnover of the largest food companies exceeds the GDP of many developing countries, giving them considerably influence in international regulatory processes⁵⁹. Regulatory capacity has not kept pace with the global integration of markets⁶⁰, and corporations often play a key role in establishing the very rules that seek to govern their activities.⁶¹ In the absence of global regulation and accountable national governance, private sector corporations have almost untrammelled capacity to attain their objectives at country level to the detriment of citizens' rights and interests, as the current land grab phenomenon illustrates. Private sector forms of food governance that have emerged in the existing policy vacuum as well as "public-private partnerships" are no substitute for authoritative and accountable multilateral food governance. The emergence of financial speculation in food commodities has added a new twist to the impact the private sector has on food security. All of this is less the fault of the private sector, which is simply seeking to fulfill its mission of maximising the profits of its stockholders, as at that of governments, who are failing dismally to fulfil their mission of defending common interests and public goods.⁶²

The policies proposed by today's governance system are sorely in need of a complete overhaul. As our historical review has highlighted, the fact that the paradigm, which has piloted the world to today's compound crisis, is backed by a winning combination of economic and political interests makes it difficult to unseat.⁶³ "Policy decisions are, to a growing extent, a function of discursive contests over the framing of problems..." and corporate actors play an important role in this context⁶⁴, both through their direct lobbying and advertising and, indirectly, through the academic advocacy they fund.⁶⁵ The sectoral approach to food policy – as epitomised by the fragmented institutional governance – compounds the difficulties that policy makers face in trying to keep up with changes. Food security policy is still overly focussed on agriculture and food production, whereas power has shifted further down the food chain to the distribution sector and the

⁵⁶ Lang et al (2009: 75-77), McKeon (2009: 171-173). See also Utting (2011) for a discussion of how business power profits from the changing modes of governance under globalisation and liberalisation.

⁵⁷ See Grain (2008a and 2009) for facts and figures on the profits that many of the largest agrifood corporations have made from the food crisis.

⁵⁸ ETC (2008), Lang et.al. (2009: 164-169), MacMillan (2005 : 10-13), Clapp and Fuchs (2009).

⁵⁹ MacMillan (2005: 11).

⁶⁰ Clapp and Cohen (2009, 6-7). Ghosh (2010: 77-79) . ETC (2008).

⁶¹ Clapp and Fuchs (2009: 1). The Codex Alimentarius is just one example of forums in which TNCs attempt to shape regulations to their advantage (Weis 2007: 133).

⁶² See Gustafson and Markie (2009) for lessons from the FAO's experience. Some authors raise the question of whether or not common goods can be adequately defended under capitalism (Lang et.al. 2009: 7).

⁶³ Complicity between economic and political interests and supportive paradigms is, of course, a constant in history but the discursive power of corporations today is perhaps unprecedented.

⁶⁴ Clapp and Fuchs (2009, 10).

⁶⁵ The pro-biotech studies that the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, a Monsanto shareholder, are supporting in prestigious establishments like Harvard and Berkeley are one example of a phenomenon that is not always easily traceable.

multinational chains that dominate it.⁶⁶ Policy makers are also often blinded by their reluctance to question their understanding of the issues and to learn from local experience that shows that other approaches can work. Perhaps the most striking illustration is the continued negative image of smallholder family farming – and that despite the fact that it produces food for over 70% of the world's population – and of agro-ecology, despite demonstrations of its capacity to feed the world and nourish the environment.⁶⁷ Public policy desperately needs to be able to draw on new ways of gathering and assessing evidence, liberating science from the pursuit of technical fixes that ties it to commercial interests.

The heritage of the past decades, however, is not just negative. Several aspects, outlined below, could constitute building blocks of a better food governance system. None of them is unequivocal or self-sufficient. They need to be nurtured and crafted together with art into a framework for a comprehensive strategy for change.

The current questioning of strategies and institutions by the international community in reaction to the food crisis provides a significant political opportunity. However, attention is required to avoid exacerbating fault lines between the political, financial, and operational components of global food governance, in order to ensure that corporate or short-term national interests do not prevail, and to open up policy processes to new kinds of evidence.

The CFS reform establishes a space in which the causes of the failure, as outlined above, of global governance on food security can be addressed by all actors concerned.⁶⁸ However, it is only in its initial phase and needs support to fulfil its potential as an authoritative multi-stakeholder forum with normative oversight regarding all aspects of global food governance.

The Right to Food has steadily gained credence over the past decade. It constitutes an internationally recognised value and a legislative basis on which to build a more effective approach to the global governance of food security. However, it needs to become more than a “statement of principles,” a preamble of international documents; it has to become part of the operational paragraphs and be translated into national policy. It needs to be taken beyond institutional dimensions (participation, accountability, non-discrimination etc.) in order to influence the way sectoral policies are designed and implemented.⁶⁹

The current relative fluidity of governmental blocs is a political opportunity. Some G77 governments are strongly committed to food security governance and want to locate it within the UN system. Internal contradictions within this group tend to make its collective lobbying less effective than that of the OECD countries, but with the financial crisis cracks have opened in the OECD's commitment to neo-liberal policies. The growth of regional blocs and regional economic organisations potentially strengthens the weight of the South.

⁶⁶ Van Der Stichele and Bob Young (2009).

⁶⁷ The body of evidence is by now overwhelming and ranges from scientific inquiries to policy documents to public sensitisation and advocacy. See De Schutter (2010b), IAASTD (2009), Pretty et al. (2006), UNCTAD and UNEP (2008), UK Food Group (2010), Action Aid and Food First (2010), Utviklingsfondet (2010), ETC (2009a), FAO (2011b).

⁶⁸ See box on page 17 for information on the characteristics of the reformed CFS.

⁶⁹ See the website of the UN Special Rapporteur for the Right to Food (www.srfood.org) for a complete and updated account of developments in the sphere of the right to food. Major existing international “right to food” commitments include Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by G.A. Res. 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted on 16 December 1966, the General Comment No. 12 on the right to food adopted by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1999 and the Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security adopted by the 187 member governments of FAO in 2004.

Civil society organisations, small food producers in particular, are more able than ever to hold governments accountable and to make a significant contribution to food security governance. Unlike in 1974, today social movements and civil society are in a position to take advantage of the political opportunity the food crisis has opened up.

Asking the Right Questions is a Good Way to Start

“Adopting a human rights framework... may guide the redefinition of the policy priorities triggered by the current crisis. The question ‘for whose benefit?’ is at least as important as the question ‘how to produce more?’ “
Olivier De Schutter 2008b

“In looking at how rules affect people, the key words to look at are: who will bear the *risks* and who will get the *benefits* from changes, who is *empowered* or *disempowered*, and whose capacity to *control* is enhanced or reduced?”
Geoffrey Tansey 2008

“The European Union has protected its agriculture for 50 years. Why should Africa have to rush to open up its markets?”
Mamadou Cissokho 2009.

4. A Better Global Governance System for Food Security: Essential Characteristics and Architecture

Prerequisites for a better global governance system for food security

What aspects would a more legitimate global food governance system have to respect in order to overcome the obstacles that have blocked past efforts to fight hunger? To start off, it would need to be based on a set of basic values and principles. Values and principles answer the question: “Where do we want to head, what do we want to defend and respect – and why?” In this sense, they are a part, explicitly or implicitly, of all governance systems. For a start, values already enshrined in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in a range of international conventions will suffice: the right to food, equity within and among countries, defence of common goods for this generation and future ones, etc. These principles need to be progressively developed into operational terms and extended so that they apply to all actors involved in food security.⁷⁰

A better global governance system necessarily requires respect for an inclusive, legitimate, and democratic political process.⁷¹ A more legitimate global food governance system needs to be anchored in an international forum in which all governments can participate on an equal footing⁷² and which is open to all actors concerned. In particular, it has to afford meaningful participation by those most directly affected by food insecurity, who are also those in the front line of finding solutions. To do so it will have to advance light-years beyond the kind of window-dressing that has come to characterize

⁷⁰ This is one of the significant roles of the Global Strategic Framework that will be developed in the context of the Committee on World Food Security during 2011-2012.

⁷¹ Behind this apparently simple statement lies a hotly conducted debate about the relationship between legitimacy and inclusiveness from the classic texts of Weber and Habermas to contemporary authors like Scharpf (2003), Risse (2004), and Mayntz (2010). Without entering into this discussion, it can be noted that the value of inclusiveness as a basis for legitimacy is heightened where global governance is concerned because of the relative weakness of the latter’s institutional basis for legitimacy (due to its distance from people, its fragmentation, and the tenuousness of its electoral accountability) and of its normative basis (due to its manifest difficulties in defending human rights and common goods and disciplining rent-seeking).

⁷² This is not an issue of idealism but of logic and effectiveness. All parties agree that, in the first instance, responsibility for ensuring food security lies with national governments. It is difficult to understand how some governments can, at the same time, champion forms of decision-making impinging on developing countries conducted in forums like the G8/20.

a stodgy and complacent intergovernmental system. Drawing on a body of documented principles and practices⁷³, it needs to create a multilateral space in which social actors can influence decision-making processes that affect their lives.

A better global governance system has to be effective. It should be endowed with authority to adopt strategic guidelines and policy orientations on key issues and with the necessary accountability mechanisms to monitor and encourage or, over time, even enforce⁷⁴, their application by all actors. It needs to be able to establish coherent relations among the different components of the global governance system and ensure that their operations are legible and subject to democratic political oversight. This requirement is likely to be the most difficult to achieve. It can only evolve progressively and will depend in part on the degree to which the other essential characteristics are respected. Front-line responsibility for the CFS's effectiveness lies on the shoulders of its member governments, who have to ensure that they are represented in the Committee in an authoritative and coherent manner.⁷⁵

A better global governance system should be multisectoral and holistic in its purview. It should integrate nutrition, health, environment, trade, as well as agriculture within a framework that highlights political economy concerns. It should be able to access the full range of knowledge necessary to inform its decisions, including that of social actors. It needs to be able to acknowledge the ways in which evidence is framed by the questions asked and the assumptions made and by accepting to learn from experience.

A better global governance system needs to respect the principle of subsidiarity. It should build links between the different levels of governance and promote participation and accountability at all levels, from local food policy councils on up. It should provide support for action on a country level by social groups most affected and bring their rich experience to bear on global deliberations.⁷⁶

A proposed architecture and set of practices for a better global governance system

A better global system for the governance of food security cannot be invented at the drawing board or enforced by unilateral dictate. It is easier to identify its component pieces than to prescribe how they can be made to mesh in a virtuous manner. Bringing such a system into being will be a process over time, one that needs to be skilfully orchestrated by those most committed to it. A successful strategy will likely be to increase steadily the system's authority while avoiding unrealistic expectations and empowering change agents – civil society and social movements in particular – to ensure the process moves ahead.

At the centre of a better global governance system is the reformed multi-actor Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which potentially fulfils the characteristics listed above.

⁷³ McKeon (2009a) and McKeon and Kalafatic (2009).

⁷⁴ The issue of enforcement is a tricky one. The Security Council and the WTO are the two major international organisations that presently have the authority to apply sanctions to countries – and only countries, although the most serious offenders may be not countries but transnational private sector entities – that fail to respect the rules of the game. But there are other forms of enforcement, ranging from the soft “name and shame” that has often proved effective in the case of human rights offenders, to the myriad regulatory mechanisms that have been developed over the past few decades, to the conditionalities applied by powerful funders. Some aspects of the “right to food” are already judiciable, particularly at a national level.

⁷⁵ For example, governments should establish effective mechanisms to ensure coherent policies at a national level. The CFS Bureau plays a significant role in the reformed Committee and, thus far, representation from some regions has not been up to scratch.

⁷⁶ See Lang et al (2009: 88-94) for an interesting table illustrating relations among food policy actors, organisations and institutions at local, national (UK), regional (Europe), and global levels.

The Reform Document of the Committee on World Food Security – Some Important Features⁷⁷

- affirms the structural nature of the causes of the food crisis and acknowledges that the primary victims are small-holder food producers.
- defines the CFS as “the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform” for food security, unequivocally based in the UN system, with a mission based on defending the right to food.
- assigns it significant roles including negotiating a Global Strategic Framework for attaining food strategy and promoting accountability as well as policy convergence and programme co-ordination.
- recognises the principle of “subsidiarity” and emphasises the need to establish strong linkages between the CFS and inclusive policy forums at regional and country levels.
- plans activities throughout the year at various levels overseen by the CFS Bureau, aided by an advisory group composed of representatives of the non-state CFS participants.
- provides for a totally unprecedented level and quality of participation by non-state actors,⁷⁸ with particular attention to organisations representing small food producers and poor urban consumers. Recognises the right of civil society organisations to autonomously establish a global mechanism to facilitate their participation in the CFS.
- establishes a High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) to provide technical support for the work of the CFS, which recognises the value of “knowledge from social actors and practical application” alongside of that of academics and researchers.

On paper, there has never been anything even remotely like this in global food governance. The first session of the new CFS, in mid-October of 2010, proved that this forum can make a difference in practice as well. The CFS agenda – which civil society had helped draft – included some explosive policy issues. One of these was how to address food price volatility, the market dysfunction that sparked the 2007 food riots and is expected to stay with us throughout the foreseeable future. The defenders of free trade tried to limit the discussion to putting more effective safety nets in place that would attenuate the impact volatility has on vulnerable sectors of the population. The civil society delegates and allied governments, on the contrary, fought to open it up to include finding solutions to the causes of volatility, including financial speculation. The latter line won. The next session of the CFS, in October 2011, will be asked to consider a comprehensive proposal based on a High Level Panel of Experts study on “all of the causes and consequences of price volatility, including market distorting practices and links to financial markets”⁷⁹. The G20 has recognised the nascent authority of this new and more inclusive forum by indicating that, in 2011, the CFS’s debates would be taken into account in the G20’s own discussions on price volatility.

A second contentious issue was “land grabbing.” Here, too, two positions were head to head. Some of the G8 took the line that the surge in large-scale foreign investment in developing country’s agriculture, including the acquisition of land, was to be welcomed as a contribution to solving the food crisis since it would stimulate food production and the economy in general. All that needed was to “discipline” it with a code of conduct – the ‘Responsible Agricultural Investment’ (RAI) Principles, formulated in closed-door discussions by the World Bank and other multilateral institutions – which investors could voluntarily agree to. The supporters of the RAI Principles sought endorsement from the CFS 2010 plenary session. On the other side, the IPC network and other civil society organisations denounced the RAI Principles as a move to legitimise the corporate takeover of rural people’s land and expressed scepticism regarding virtuous corporate self-

⁷⁷ CFS (2009).

⁷⁸ The categories of non-state participants are: representatives of UN agencies and bodies with a specific mandate in the field of food security and nutrition, civil society, international agricultural research systems, international and regional financial institutions, and private sector associations and private philanthropic foundations.

⁷⁹ CFS (2010: para. 27 i).

regulation.⁸⁰ They supported a different route, guidelines concerning land tenure that the FAO had been developing over the previous two years in broad consultation with governments and civil society. The final decision went in favour of the civil society/social movement position. The CFS declined to endorse the RAI Principles and decided to make this issue the object of a process of consultation under the auspices of the CFS.⁸¹ It was agreed that the FAO land tenure guidelines would be negotiated in an intergovernmental working group open to the other CFS participants, and that it would be put before the next CFS session for adoption.⁸² As the head of a key delegation put it: “When this whole exercise got underway we felt the CFS was a lame duck. Now, it may not be a swan yet, but it certainly is up in the air and flying.”

The months following this initial session of the reformed CFS have been dedicated above all to the complex task of putting the new machinery into operation. It has been, and continues to be, an apprenticeship for all. What is certain is that the CFS has made important strides in being recognized as a significant forum. Big actors in food security who had snubbed the old CFS are back – agrifood corporations, the World Bank, powerful countries like the USA. Regions like Africa, which had tended to be passive, are making efforts to build up their presence. Disagreements on key issues are coming out into the open and are subject to debate which is tending to concentrate in a single policy forum, the CFS. This, in itself, is already a significant result. From an annual plenary meeting, the CFS is developing into a year-round process. Governments, non-state CFS participants and the secretariat – expanded beyond the FAO to include IFAD and the WFP – are engaged together in an on-the-job and often messy experiment in crafting a new approach to global political process. This involves constructing clearer relations between the technical and the political components of decision-making – which had tended to blur in the past⁸³. The technical basis for decision-making has evolved beyond the secretariat to include the High Level Panel of Experts, which is itself an experiment to extend the concept of research beyond academic sources of knowledge and to tolerate a diversity of views. On the political level participation has been broadened to include not just governments but other concerned actors as well. What that means in practice is still being determined.⁸⁴ Civil society has made an unprecedented input into drafting the papers that will form the basis of policy discussions on key issues such as price volatility and investment in agriculture at the coming CFS session.

The reformed CFS has gotten off to a good start – but it is only a start. In order to secure respect for its authority it needs to demonstrate that it is able to address controversial issues in a timely fashion and make decisions that could not be taken elsewhere. It should forge agreement on a global strategic framework for achieving food security as a tool for building accountability and for learning from experience, ensuring that the paradigms that guide action evolve in function of their impact on the ground. Policies and programmes concerning food security and the “right to food” should be formulated at national and regional levels through participatory processes.

⁸⁰ “Deciding who has rights over which land resources is essentially a political matter that involves conflicting interests and power relations. The RAI initiative’s framework of land and resource rights focuses on technical issues; it is essentially blind to politics”. Global Campaign on Agrarian Reform (2010). See also De Schutter (2009f) and, for an academic analysis of the RAI Principles, Borras and Franco (2010).

⁸¹ Independently of the merits or demerits of the RAI, the significance of this decision was to reject the attempt to use the CFS as a rubber stamp for initiatives and positions developed elsewhere, which would have closed the CFS’s career as a politically authoritative policy forum before it even got underway. See CFS 2010, para. 26 for the text of the resolution.

⁸² Some countries would have been happy to maintain the Voluntary Guidelines as a technical exercise. It was civil society and the social movements above all who insisted on investing this initiative with the political weight of a negotiated document.

⁸³ McKeon (2009a: 92-93, 95, 119)

⁸⁴ The CFS reform document indicates that the non-state actors participate on the same footing as member governments except that “voting and decision taking is the exclusive prerogative of Members”. (CFS:2009, para. 10). A tense moment during the negotiation of the Voluntary Guidelines in July 2011 provided an occasion to try to determine exactly when the shift from discussion to decision-taking takes place, a difficult call to make when the objective is to build consensus rather than to decide by voting. The answer in this case was that it was up to the chair to sense when a consensus has been crafted and to ask the members to confirm their agreement, at this point without further intervention on the part of other participants.

The CFS should progressively evolve into a forum whose policy guidance informs the operations of all other actors in world food security. As a first step, the CFS secretariat should fully integrate the three Rome-based food and agriculture agencies, the FAO, IFAD, and WFP.⁸⁵ Close and formalised working relations need to be established between the CFS and other key components of the UN system that work towards food security, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Nutrition concerns should be taken up through close collaboration with the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN)⁸⁶. The Food Aid Convention, reformed as the Food Assistance Convention, should be brought under the normative guidance of the CFS. Close and careful attention should be paid to make sure that the emerging global food governance system coheres with measures for global environmental governance under discussion in the context of the Rio+20 Conference scheduled to take place in June 2012.

Bringing CFS policy guidance to bear on the multilateral financial and trade institutions will be a more difficult task. The Bretton Woods Institutions (BWI) and the WTO have a powerful impact on food security, and their missions are less focused on food security than those of the UN family.⁸⁷ Ideally, trade regimes should progressively be subject to the right to food. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has provided detailed and lucid guidance regarding inconsistencies between trade regimes and the right to food, which current global governance mechanisms are failing to address.⁸⁸ He invites states to assess the impacts of trade agreements, in order to make sure that undertakings under the WTO framework or bilateral trade agreements do not run foul of the right to food. He recognises, however, that developing countries are often under pressure to accept trade agreements even if they are not in the interests of their populations. The CFS could provide support for them by instructing the High Level Panel of Experts to review of current global trade regulations adopted by governments in the context of both the World Trade Organization and bilateral trade agreements in order to ascertain their effects on food security and the right to food.

There has been no dearth of proposals to establish UN oversight regarding global financial issues, among them the 1998 UN Development Planning Committee's proposal for the creation of a World Financial Organization that would coordinate the regulation of financial markets.⁸⁹ Over the past few years, the financial speculation aimed at agriculture, a major contributing cause of the food crisis, has rendered the issue even more urgent. The problem, as is often the case, is not to figure out what to do but to drum up the political will to do it. The current focus on price volatility in the CFS provides an opportunity to address this important aspect of the international monetary system from a food security standpoint and with the direct participation of those most affected by its perverse effects.

⁸⁵ This process is already under way but needs to be pursued. Along with the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), they could constitute the nucleus of a coherent multilateral food system as suggested by the ETC Group in its proposal for a "New Roman Forum" (ETC 2009b).

⁸⁶ The 36th session of the CFS, the first meeting of the reformed Committee, decided to include the SCN among the members of the Advisory Group that works alongside the Bureau from one plenary session to another.

⁸⁷ See pp. 5-6 and footnote 21. The Cairns Group, defenders liberalised trade, has strongly and consistently opposed any attempt to shift discussion of agricultural trade issues from the WTO to the FAO, where they would be seen through the lens of food security. Achieving just such a forum shift has been one of the key objectives of the food sovereignty movement.

⁸⁸ In his analysis, trade liberalisation can constitute an obstacle to diversification, lock countries into development patterns that are not sustainable, and increase their vulnerability as a result of their dependence on international trade. At the micro-economic level, it contributes to reshaping the global food supply chain in a way that favours transnational corporations, whose freedom to act is enhanced at the same time as the regulatory tools available to states are being limited. Beyond the economic sphere, international trade in agricultural commodities has profound effects on the environment, on human health, and on nutrition, which are usually ignored in international trade discussions despite their close relationship to the right to food. De Schutter (2008a and 2009c). WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy takes issue with De Schutter's injunction to developing countries "to limit excessive reliance on international trade in the pursuit of food security" but in fact offers little more in the way of a counterproposal than a call to "each and every country to build robust safety nets for the world's poor." Lamy (2011).

⁸⁹ European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes (2008: 6)

A review of the implications for food security of different types of agricultural investment is overdue. It should provide normative guidance for multilateral banks, for targeted responses to food insecurity like the L'Aquila Initiative and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (GAFSP), for bilateral funders, and for the countries affected. Despite the fact that the food crisis revealed serious inadequacies within agricultural development and food security strategy, there is little evidence of adequate rethinking thus far. A 2010 World Bank paper on "post-crisis directions" for the World Bank Group continued to identify increased agricultural productivity, export crops, and world trade as priorities for agriculture and food security.⁹⁰

There seems to be near consensus that, in the context of increased investment in agriculture, support for smallholder food production is a priority.⁹¹ What kind of support is most appropriate, however, is still very much open to debate. Technological innovation, including biotechnology, and integration into large-scale industrial agriculture enterprises and global value chains top the lists of institutions like the World Bank and funders like the Gates Foundation and the Alliance for a Green Revolution for Africa (AGRA)⁹². In these programmes private sector enterprises tend to play the leading role, directly or through "public-private partnerships," and inadequate attention is being paid to the kinds of markets that are beneficial to smallholders and food security and to the need to strengthen smallholder producers' organisations so that they themselves can negotiate the terms of their participation.⁹³ The IAASTD report, on the other hand, points in the direction of support for agro-ecological family farming, building on indigenous knowledge, and production for domestic markets. The EU's strategic framework for promoting food security in developing countries, published in 2010, takes this line and focuses on "ecologically efficient agricultural intensification for smallholder farmers" that rely on traditional knowledge. For this, technologies have to be avoided "that are not sustainable or are incompatible with national capacities to regulate and manage risks." The EU further states its support for the CFS reform and highlights that it is very important that farmer organisations have a part in deciding on policies and programmes.⁹⁴ At the other end of the spectrum, the "New Vision for African Agriculture" programme, launched, in February 2011, by seventeen of the biggest agrifood transnational corporations at the World Economic Forum in Davos, makes no mention of smallholder farmers' organisations or of the CFS.⁹⁵ A contribution to clarity carried out under the auspices of the CFS with input from organizations of small producers themselves would be another timely contribution to the Global Strategic Framework.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ World Bank (2010).

⁹¹ See, for example, HLTF (2008: 9-11), World Bank (2008: 153-157); FAO (2009: paras. 19, 25, 27); G8 (2009: paras. 3 and 12).

⁹² One of the latest AGRA-supported ventures is the Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor of Tanzania in partnership with agribusiness transnationals like Unilever, Yara, Dupont, Monsanto, and Syngenta that aims to "provide opportunities for smallholder producers to engage in profitable agriculture... by incentivizing stronger linkages between smallholders and commercial agribusinesses, including 'hub and outgrower' schemes that allow smallholders in the vicinity of large-scale farms to access inputs, extension services, value-adding facilities and markets". (www.africancorridors.com).

⁹³ Indeed, some analysts have expressed concern that the promoters of corporate-controlled industrial agriculture are seeking to benefit from the food and climate crises through investment programmes that strengthen their capacity to introduce biotechnology in regions that have resisted it thus far and reduce the autonomy of smallholder producers, sometimes with the support of official aid programmes. This kind of strategy, termed bio-hegemony by Peter Newell (2009) with reference to the promotion of biotechnology in Argentina, is now being explored by researchers like Matthew Schnurr in African countries like Uganda.

⁹⁴ European Commission (2010: para. 4.1).

⁹⁵ <http://www.weforum.org/issues/agriculture-and-food-security?fo=1>. Accessed on 6 March 2011.

⁹⁶ A first step in this direction has been taken in the context of a study being carried out by the High Level Panel of Experts on land and agricultural investments and the discussions and decisions taken at October 2011 session of the CFS will provide further direction.

To achieve oversight of the operations of private sector companies regarding food security is a daunting task given their power and the present lack of global regulation. At the 2010 session, the private sector was largely absent from the reformed CFS. It needs to be brought into the room, but in doing so careful attention has to be paid to the very different forms and roles of private sector enterprises – from multinational corporations to farmer-controlled co-operatives – and of the part that agrifood transnationals and financial speculators play in fostering food insecurity.⁹⁷ One important move in this regard could be to re-establish a mechanism that monitors global corporate activity and technologies, a gap in the system since the closure of the UN Center on Transnational Corporations in 1992.⁹⁸ A study commissioned by the CFS on the impact of agrifood transnationals on food security could be a useful step in this direction.

A better global governance system will necessarily require the progressive enactment of a body of enforceable rules and practices able to effectively regulate the impact corporations and financial speculators have on food security.⁹⁹ The considerable work that has been done since the early 1990s on how to oblige corporations to internalise social and environmental costs needs to be put into practice. A review and reform of the intellectual property rights system in relation to food and agriculture should be undertaken in view of its role in reinforcing corporate concentration and hindering the development of smallholder agriculture.¹⁰⁰ The role of corporations and financial operators are important components of several policy issues on the current agenda of the CFS – governance of land and natural resource tenure, price volatility, and agricultural investment – and the October 2011 session of the CFS could be a significant step forward in this important area.

Global food governance outreach will require the support of the UN Secretary General. The Rome-based agencies should play the central role within a system-wide effort, and the disconnect between Rome and New York has to be overcome. The High Level Task Force can be particularly effective in co-ordinating the approaches and programmes of UN institutions at country level. The onus in the effort to promote a coherent approach is on UN member governments above all.

Progressive vertical articulation will be as important as horizontal global outreach. The CFS aims to realise the principle of subsidiarity by building links between inclusive multi-actor food policy forums at national, regional, and global levels. Over the next two years, it will be important to bring the CFS to the regions. The challenge will be to invert top-down policies and to bridge the gap between global policy pronouncements and change at the national and local level. Here, relatively little progress has been made during the first year of the new CFS, and civil society is likely to lead the way.

For this and many other reasons, civil society participation must be sustained and strengthened. One of the important victories that civil society won during the reform was the right to establish their own mechanism, in which organisations representing those most affected by food insecurity play the leading role.¹⁰¹ In the ten months following the adoption of

⁹⁷ This clarification has not yet been accomplished. A significant effort has been made to enhance private sector participation in 2011, but thus far the private sector presence is essentially limited to the transnational corporate sector.

⁹⁸ ETC (2008). UNCTAD (2006).

⁹⁹ De Schutter (2009e and 2010a). These could include regulations regarding antitrust, fair competition, user rights rules, strict liability regimes for those introducing new technologies (Tansey and Rajotte 2008:213), limitations on the confidentiality of corporation data (Lang and Heasman (2004:302), bans on entry of financial players into commodity futures markets (Ghosh 2010). In part this would involve generalising practices already in place in some parts of the system, as for example the precautionary principle developed in the Rio Declaration and applied in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety or the recognition of third party beneficiary interests in the multilateral system of access and benefit sharing (MLS) of the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (Halewood and Nnadozie 2008).

¹⁰⁰ See De Schutter (2008a). For discussions of the impact of the corporate industrial food chain on smallholder agriculture see, among many others, McMichael (2004 and 2005), De Schutter (2009e), Van Der Ploeg (2010) and McCullough et al (2008).

¹⁰¹ The 11 constituencies recognized in the CFS reform document are smallholder family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, herders/pastoralists, landless, urban poor, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, consumers, indigenous peoples, and NGOs. (CFS 2009: para. 11ii.).

the reform, the IPC and the NGOs that had participated most actively in the process facilitated the preparation of a document describing the objectives and functioning of the mechanism, with the involvement of civil society networks in all regions of the world. The resulting proposal was endorsed at the civil society forum held in Rome from 8 to 10 October 2010 and presented the following week to the first session of the reformed CFS, where government delegates acknowledged the quality of the work.¹⁰² Making the mechanism work in practice will require resources for regional outreach and sensitisation, for multi-lingual communication, and for civil society representatives to attend CFS meetings. The CFS reform document acknowledges this and commits member governments to addressing this issue.¹⁰³ The necessary support has been slow in coming¹⁰⁴, however, and many members of the Bureau still fail to understand how important it is to reach out to the organisations of smallholder food producers worldwide – and not just to the internet-savvy members of civil society that participate in electronic consultations.

Indeed, no reflection on better global food governance can conclude without dedicating the last word to social movements and civil society organisations. The decisive role that they have played in challenging inequitable systems and destructive paradigms and in proposing alternatives cannot be overstated. At the October 2010 CFS session, the decisions on key issues such as price volatility and land tenure were made in good part thanks to the determination of the civil society participants. At the end of the CFS session last October, towards the close of late night negotiations the head of a delegation not particularly enraptured with the positions of civil society participants took the floor to say that the strong presence of civil society had proven to be the most important aspect of the reform. “They call our bluff and say it like it is. We need them in the room.” Sustained civil society advocacy – with small food producers in the front line – will continue to be indispensable in order to create the necessary political will and contribute alternative experiences to an agenda of change.

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¹⁰² The Civil Society Mechanism document and the report of the civil society forum are available at the website created as an outreach and information tool for civil society worldwide: <http://cso4cfs.org>.

¹⁰³ CFS(2009, para. 50).

¹⁰⁴ Spain, Norway, and Germany are the only governments who have contributed thus far to the cost of civil society participation in the CFS, along with IFAD.

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