



Special Issue: Mapping the Global Food Landscape

Section X

Global food governance in an era of crisis

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There have been multiple and significant changes in the global food landscape when it comes to governance. The 2008 Global Food Crisis heightened attention to and action for food security; this is reflected in the expanding food security agenda across the United Nations system, the World Bank and the Group of Eight (G8) and Group of Twenty (G20) clubs of states. Similarly, there has been expansion of new modes of governing the global food system, ranging from transnational certification schemes for agrofuels and food commodities to voluntary guidelines on land tenure. The two articles in this section provide timely analysis of the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which is a global forum that has taken on greater centrality in the global governance of food and that features a diverse set of state and non-state actors involved in the agenda-setting, policy-making, and decision-making process.

Nora McKeon, who as an insider has participated in and observed the evolution of the CFS, offers a critical stocktaking. She observes that the CFS has performed extremely well in terms of including the voices of those most affected by food insecurity, namely small farmers and peasants from the global South, and demonstrated receptivity to multiple forms of knowledge and lived experience. This clearly distinguishes the CFS from other forums where knowledge is exclusively based on the knowledge and analyses of scientific “experts.” However, McKeon questions whether the current model of consensus-based approach to multistakeholder decision-making, which provides private actors and organizations such as the World Bank a voice equal to the food insecure in policy deliberations, leads to insufficient ambition for

meaningful social change. Jessica Duncan explores the extent to which the CFS offers an instructive model for what is known as “reflexive governance” and the extent to which the linkage between food security and environmental sustainability can be deepened at the CFS. Duncan notes that although the CFS ranks high on most indicators of reflexive governance, however, environmental sustainability is not a driver of the committee’s work. This suggests that transforming the CFS to fully integrate an ecological dimension at the core of its agenda will require further opening up of the institution to a wider constellation of actors and forms of knowledge.

Michelle Metzger’s synthesis paper of the workshop discussion identifies a number of trends in global food governance. The existence of the CFS points towards an opening of global spaces for food governance. This opening up is occurring at the political level in terms of the participation of new actors that is based on lived experiences and forms of knowledge that have not been traditionally included in global governance. As a result, the CFS is fostering new governance practices that are not commonly found elsewhere in multilateral organizations. Metzger observes that there are important lessons to draw from the CFS, not only in terms of identifying ways to improve its performance, but also for exporting the innovative, inclusive, and participatory governance model to other global governance spaces.