

## 【Research Note】

### **The Challenges of a Multistakeholder Model Implementation in Global Food Security Governance: From the 2009 Committee on World Food Security Reform to the 2021 Food Systems Summit**

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## **Abstract**

In recent years the United Nations (UN) and its agencies have sought to enhance their efforts towards accomplishing goal number 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “Zero Hunger,” by increasing their collaboration with non-state actors. This approach has resulted in the establishment of multistakeholder platforms that intend to facilitate the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the private sector in global food security governance. The 2009 reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is one example that managed to earn the support of a wide range of non-state actors, including CSOs representing the interests of social groups vulnerable to food insecurity. However, the organization of the 2021 Food Systems Summit (FSS), the most recent multistakeholder project, was met with criticism and calls for a total boycott. This article explores key differences between both cases to explain factors that made the CFS after the 2009 reform a more successful platform than the 2021 FSS in gaining the support of civil society. Analyzing both cases also provides insights into transparency and accountability matters that could make multistakeholder governance and its practical application more workable given the challenging circumstances entailed by the participation of a plurality of actors.

**Keywords:** food security, multistakeholder partnership, civil society organizations, World Economic Forum, Committee on World Food Security

## **1. Introduction**

Scientific and technological advancements in the twentieth century improved food production in various regions, thus reducing the incidence of the famines that historically challenged the development of human groups. However, famines and hunger are still serious threats that states intend to prevent and tackle through cooperation. As a result, they have set up a network of international bodies focused on addressing food-related problems, among which the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the most well-known.

While eradicating hunger worldwide is a goal shared by all United Nations (UN) members, it is widely accepted that each state is primarily responsible for guaranteeing

food security at the domestic level. Nonetheless, civil society organizations (CSOs) representing social groups vulnerable to food insecurity believe that states' influence in domestic affairs is diminishing due to the expansion of the free market and neoliberal policies. Consequently, they have started international movements like La Via Campesina (The Peasant Way) that promote the adoption of alternative models to reduce food insecurity and hunger.

Since the 1990s CSOs and global business representatives have increasingly been allowed to take part in global food security governance, furthermore, the participation of non-state actors became more constant after the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2009. Despite some progress, the tension between CSOs and global business actors has risen in recent years due to the deepening ties between the latter and the UN.

## 2. Relevant Literature and Research Aim

When it comes to analyzing global food security governance its history allows us to understand the current state of the international bodies that seek to reduce hunger around the world. *World Food Security A History since 1945* by D. John Shaw is perhaps one of the most exhaustive books on the history of FAO, the CFS, and other related organizations. The book is a comprehensive study of their origins and development up to the first decade of the twenty-first century. In addition, Shaw's work covers the events and political decisions that influenced FAO's evolution up to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

There are different perspectives on the influence of domestic and international factors on food security. For example, Robert L. Paarlberg, a prominent author in the field of food security, in *Governance and Food Security in an Age of Globalization* presents domestic-level forces as the main cause of hunger in developing countries. While the author considers improving global governance desirable, he insists that the responsibility of nation-states has not decreased since governance shortcomings at the domestic level outweigh the forces of globalization as sources of food-related issues (Paarlberg 2002, pp.50-1). In contrast to Paarlberg's position, Jennifer Clapp, a political economist and specialist in food security and sustainability, has a more critical view of the effects of globalization and its relation to food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Some of Clapp's most relevant works focus on the role of private economic actors in food systems. Clapp provides different insights into the dominance of transnational corporations in the global food system and the increasing financialization of food caused by the deregulation of financial markets. In this regard Clapp, in *Food*, discusses how food systems became globalized, covering related themes like food financialization, and "commodification," that is the treatment of food as a consumable product over its condition as a source of nourishment, linking them to the 2007–2008 world food price crisis (Clapp 2012, p.17). *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance*, edited by Clapp and Doris Fuchs, delves into the influence of corporations in the agrifood system<sup>2</sup> and their role in the definition of the rules that control such systems (Clapp and Fuchs 2009, p.285). Clapp's work offers an overview of the sources of instability, many of which the controversial 2021 summit focused on food systems aims to address. Concerning food systems, Delgado, Murugani, and Tschunkert (2021) comprehensively examine their flaws, challenges, and links to food security. Moreover, they highlight the need to recognize and address the connection between food insecurity and violent conflict.

Ferrando (2022) critically assesses the FSS and the role of corporations in shaping the structure of food systems. For him, the 2021 meeting overlooks the root causes of the problems, perpetuates the dominant capitalist rhetoric, and as a result falls short of providing real solutions. Similarly, Canfield, Anderson, and McMichael (2021b) present a concise critical view of the private sector's participation and its implications on global governance. The authors (2021a) also provide the historical context of the 2021 FSS, its origins, and structure in detail, including the problematic aspects of its organization, and discuss the legitimacy of multistakeholder governance.

This paper takes a similar approach to examine the controversies surrounding the Summit and includes part of its background and main features. However, it aims to contribute to the discussions and studies about the Summit by focusing mainly on the non-state actor's point of view, particularly the opposing CSOs. The study compares their perspectives and concerns on both the multistakeholder initiative of the 2021 meeting and the 2009 reform of the CFS to discuss the aspects that made the latter more successful in earning their support. On the surface, opposition to the FSS could suggest that CSOs are unlikely to agree to participate in any platform or forum involving the private sector. Nonetheless, the case of the reformed CFS shows that CSOs had already agreed to take part in a platform that incorporated representatives of powerful agrifood corporations. Furthermore, they still regard this international body as legitimate and inclusive due to its balanced structure and more defined participation mechanisms. In addition, the paper includes and examines the CSOs' response following the FSS as the conflict has had a significant impact on the cooperation schemes between non-state actors and international organizations. Accordingly, the main research questions are: What made the 2009 CFS reform more successful than the 2021 FSS in achieving the acceptance and support of CSOs? What implications does CSOs' opposition have on the multistakeholder approach to the global governance of food security?

Qualitative research is employed for the analysis, it includes the consultation of primary sources such as the reports of international institutions (FAO, the CFS and its mechanisms, etc.), and international forums to examine the main features of the initiatives mentioned above. Primary sources also correspond to relevant reports, pamphlets, and institutional publications. These documents are used to explore the position of organizations representing the interests of groups vulnerable to food insecurity and participating in international bodies. Similarly, secondary sources, including articles and newspaper reports on the cases, support the analysis. The article begins with an introduction to basic concepts. The following section focuses on the changes global food security governance underwent during the 1990s, the CFS, and its reform. The final section centers on the 2021 FSS conflict and the crucial aspects that set its multistakeholder format apart from the reformed CFS followed by the implications of CSOs' growing opposition to multistakeholder governance.

### **3. Defining Global Food Security Governance, Food Systems, and Multistakeholder Governance**

In the area of global governance centered on addressing food issues it is possible to find different works on this topic referring to it as “global governance of food security,” “global food security governance” or simply “global food governance.” Since the 1970s improving food security<sup>3</sup> has been an important goal of the international organizations concerned with food, demonstrated by the priority given to this aim at the 1996 and 2009 World Food Summits. For this reason, the term food security will be used throughout this article. Contemporary global food security governance can be defined as a complex group of organizations, policies, and rules oriented toward achieving world food security at different scales (Margulis 2017, p.504). For FAO it is a mechanism that makes possible the debate, convergence of views, and coordination of actions to improve food security at global, regional, and national levels (FAO n.d.).

Food security is linked to the concept of food systems, defined as the range of actors, and their value-adding activities, that take part in the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products from agriculture, forestry, or fisheries (Nguyen 2018, p.1). A food system's central function is to get food from farmers to consumers via distributors and processors so that its principal outcome is the conditions of food security experienced by a specific population (Delgado et al. 2021, p.2). Flawed food systems influence food security in different ways. For example, with increasing prices the capacity of the poorest sectors of the population to afford nutritious food is hindered (WFP n.d.). Critics consider that the decreasing agency of local populations and systemic fragility are caused by the excessive influence of multinational corporations in global food systems (Davey 2022). Food systems are nowadays one of the main focuses of conferences and forums under the auspices of international bodies dealing with food security. In addition, the UN and its agencies have increasingly taken a multistakeholder approach to global governance in their struggle to address systemic fragility.

The multistakeholder approach to global governance is based on the premise that the collaboration and combined capacities of parties who may have a “stake” in a problem are required to reach solutions more effectively (Gleckman 2018, pp.19-20). This approach is also known as “multistakeholder governance” or “multistakeholderism” and its practical applications are generally referred to as multistakeholder projects, platforms, or partnerships. Non-state actors have increased their participation in global governance mainly through multistakeholder partnerships. These partnerships involve the cooperation of states, international organizations, and non-state actors (Martens, 2007, pp.7-8). Examples include joint projects for short-term collaborative efforts or strategic alliances in which platforms centered on specific social issues are started to support the common agenda and joint investments of participants (Hazelwood 2015, p.2). Cooperation between the UN, its specialized agencies, and non-state actors has become more frequent since the 1990s. For the UN multistakeholder partnerships are crucial to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN General Assembly 2015, p.27) because they facilitate the mobilization and sharing of financial resources, expertise, and knowledge, as stated in goal number 17 titled “Partnership for the Goals.” (UN, n.d.).

#### **4. The Reform of the CFS and the Increasing Participation of Non-state Actors in Global Food Security Governance**

This section introduces the changes that have facilitated non-state actors’ involvement in global food security governance in recent decades. The widespread hunger in some

regions that surged between the establishment of the CFS in 1974 and its 2009 reform evidenced the need to reevaluate the approaches undertaken by international organizations to address food insecurity. Examining the reform offers valuable insights into the changes that made the Committee's structure more inclusive, thus earning the trust of CSOs.

In 1974 the UN convened the World Food Conference (WFC) to address the effects of a serious worldwide food crisis (1972-1974) that had caused famine and soaring food prices. The WFC established the CFS and tasked it with a continuous review of current and prospective demand, supply, and stock position for basic foodstuffs (UN 1975, p.53). However, in the decades that followed, the committee's effectiveness in lowering food insecurity was viewed as lacking. Despite the renewed global efforts to address food issues after the WFC, hunger persisted in South Asia and other regions. Jacques Diouf, a Senegalese diplomat, was elected Director-General of FAO in November 1993. Diouf requested the organization of a World Food Summit (WFS), which was finally convened in Rome in 1996.

The 1996 Summit is relevant as it allowed CSOs connected to food and agriculture to formally participate. At the time many organizations took part in the meeting mainly through La Via Campesina, a large and diverse international movement of small and medium-sized farmers, peasants, indigenous people, food cooperatives, and migrant farmworkers founded in Belgium in 1993. It defines itself as an "autonomous, pluralist, multicultural movement, political in its demand for social justice and independent of any political party, economic or other types of affiliation" (La Via Campesina 2021, p.2). The movement surged in part as a response to the expansion of neoliberalism and free trade in the 1990s as stated in the 1993 Mons Declaration, one of its foundational documents. Its founding organizations came from nations with different levels of development, most from Latin America but also Norway, Poland, Zimbabwe, and the Philippines, among others. In the Declaration, signatories expressed concerns about the difficulties faced by rural populations, hunger, and the negative effects of the neoliberal policies promoted by international organizations and governments (La Via Campesina 1993, p.2).

At the Summit, the global movement called for the recognition of food as a human right and introduced the term "food sovereignty." This concept was envisioned as an alternative to FAO's definition of food security. La Via Campesina (1996 p.1) defines it as "the right each nation possesses to maintain and develop its capacity to produce basic foods in a way that respects cultural and productive diversity." The movement participates in the CFS's mechanism for civil society, explained in the following section, and its idea of promoting and achieving food sovereignty has become a significant aim for many peasant and Indigenous people's organizations belonging to the agrifood sector.

#### **4.1 The Redefinition of the CFS's Role in Global Food Security Governance**

The struggle of FAO to address food issues continued throughout the beginning of the twenty-first century. Between 2007 and 2008 the world faced a new global food crisis that caused a surge in agricultural commodity prices. This crisis prompted the organization by FAO of the World Summit on Food Security in 2009. At the Summit it was agreed that a reform of the CFS was necessary to increase its effectiveness and allow a more direct participation of the stakeholders who are particularly vulnerable to food

insecurity and malnutrition. The reformed Committee is a political UN platform, formed by 141 member states, that relies on a multistakeholder format to include relevant non-state actors and collectively shape decisions. Its main objectives entail international coordination and the promotion of policy convergence on global food security matters. The Committee also develops policy recommendations and guidance on food security and nutrition topics based on the shared experience of its participants (FAO 2022, p.1). Two mechanisms were instituted to support the multistakeholder format: the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) and the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM). Both mechanisms belong to the CFS Advisory Group (AG), which represents the main link between the executive branch of the CFS and stakeholders at different levels (CFS n.d.).

The CSIPM was founded in 2010 as the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM). Its main objective is to facilitate the participation of civil society in the policy processes of the CFS and promote the interests of vulnerable groups affected by food insecurity. These include small-scale farmers, consumers living in poverty, and Indigenous peoples, for whom the mechanism changed its name to CSIPM in 2018 to acknowledge their identity (CSIPM 2019, p.22). The Mechanism defines its member CSOs as non-state and not-for-profit actors, including small food producers, indigenous peoples' groups, civil organizations involved in food security and nutrition, etc. (CFS 2010, p.13).

The CSIPM is formed by organizations that belong to the 11 constituencies<sup>4</sup> in which it is divided and convenes an annual forum and its governing body is the Coordination Committee (CC). Members of the Committee, elected by the previously mentioned constituencies, are divided into policy working groups. The CSIPM Secretariat, one of these groups, has a permanent office at FAO headquarters in Rome. The CC oversees administrative decisions and ensures communication between the Mechanism and the CFS. It also considers accountability a priority so that each member submits reports on how they are carrying out their activities to facilitate the participation of their constituency or sub-region. (CSIPM 2016b, p.3).

On the other hand, the PSM's main objective is to facilitate the participation of private enterprises belonging to the agrifood value chain in the CFS. It includes farmers, input providers, cooperatives, processors, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and multinational food companies (IAFN 2014, p.2). The PSM promotes the interests of numerous agrifood sector associations and powerful global companies like Cargill, PepsiCo, and Nestlé. The Mechanism elects a focal point every two years, and it has selected the International Agri-Food Network (IAFN) as its representative at the CFS practically since its formation. The PSM coordinates consultation on policy issues through the IAFN Secretariat (IAFN 2024b, pp.1-2). The Network is responsible for identifying food security-related issues and elaborating the Mechanism's position papers (IAFN 2014, pp.1-2). Numerous multinational agrifood firms as well as national and international associations of small and medium-sized businesses are also represented by the IAFN members.

In sum, the CFS was reformed due to the weak performance of the institution in the decades preceding the 2007 food crisis. The reform was the first step towards making the Committee the central UN political platform dealing with the coordination of efforts on

food security and nutrition policies. Changes were made to give voice to non-state actors, mainly those vulnerable to food insecurity, and increase their participation in the global debates on food security. Different organizations ranging from small NGOs to large multinational corporations working in the fields of food, agriculture, and other related areas of the agrifood value chain are equally represented through the two mechanisms established after the reform. La Via Campesina actively participates in the CSIPM with other organizations and recognizes the value of having an inclusive space to discuss and address food insecurity. Nonetheless, members of this Mechanism have insisted since the reform that the CFS still faces several challenges that hinder the implementation of its decisions (CSIPM 2016a, p.7).

## 5. From the CFS Reform to the 2021 FSS Conflict

This section encompasses the controversial decisions taken by the UN Secretariat for the organization of the FSS and focuses on the factors that elicited CSOs' rejection. Considerations on the 2009 CFS reform are included and compared with recent developments to explain how concerns shared by CSOs were reignited after the announcement of the FSS, followed by the implications of the conflict for multistakeholder governance.

In October 2019 the UN Secretary-General António Guterres proposed a summit focused on food systems (FAO 2019). The FSS proposal included the implementation of a multistakeholder format to bring together different non-state actors. In this scheme, the UN Secretariat named the WEF as a key partner for the organization of the Summit. In response to the announcements, organized peasant and indigenous people's groups, scientists, and researchers criticized the partnership, while food sovereignty movement supporters called for a total boycott of the meeting (Mpofu and Garcia 2021).

The polemical collaboration between the UN Secretariat and the WEF for the organization of the FSS is part of their wider partnership signed in June 2019 (Canfield et al. 2021a, pp.184) and titled *Strategic Partnership Framework for the 2030 Agenda*. With this partnership, both organizations intend to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda by increasing their cooperation and exchanging knowledge, information, and expertise (WEF 2019a, pp.1-2). Threats to the food system and a lack of progress in addressing the global issues concerning food make it necessary to redefine part of the global governance mechanisms to overcome their shortcomings. Yet, overlooking factors such as accountability, and the calls to consider the negative effects of globalization could end up hindering the attempts to redefine them. The most recent decisions by the UN Secretariat have elicited criticism and questions, especially about the legitimacy of the privileged participation of the WEF. The WEF, a nonprofit foundation based in Switzerland, has actively promoted partnerships between the private sector and international governmental organizations through a multistakeholder model.

The WEF seeks the transformation of food systems through the close collaboration of companies, civil society, governments, and international organizations. For the WEF the leadership, support, and investments from the private sector are important to trigger that change (WEF 2020, pp.6-16). The WEF has similarly called for the redefinition of global governance and suggested a stakeholder paradigm analogous to the one included in the foundational ideals of the organization. In this paradigm, the business sector plays a crucial role (WEF 2010, pp.7-9,51). Nevertheless, the Forum intends to avoid presenting



an image of an elite looking to impose its view on the world. To do so it often provides ambiguous statements on how its proposals do not necessarily represent the position or views of the institution or its members. Garsten and Sörbom (2018, pp. 32-33, 68) define this as “discretionary governance,” which involves privacy, low degrees of hierarchy, and persuasive and indirect communicative strategies to influence and support its proposals. It also includes activities defined by an interplay of transparency and secrecy to maintain exclusivity and protect its members. Therefore, CSOs characterize the WEF as an organization lacking democratic legitimacy.

As stated by Koppell (2020, pp.31-2), dissatisfaction is a constant reality within global governance as influence disparities, normally part of organizational designs, are a source of conflict. Actors can end up complaining if not considered or feel unrepresented within the global rulemaking bodies; these critiques and shortcomings are defined as problems of accountability. Power differences between participants in global governance can have important implications and even if actors accept power differentials there are limits to their tolerance of inequality. CSOs, as is discussed in the following subsection, have voiced their concerns about power imbalances. Once the limits are surpassed participants will walk away despite the likelihood of benefits should they choose to stay. Accordingly, the legitimacy of organizations is linked to accountability, and overcoming these issues is fundamental for securing authority (Koppell 2020, p.63).

The naming of the WEF as a strategic partner in the FSS without granting CSOs alliances or their representatives a similar position could be regarded as an important source of dissatisfaction. Besides, the WEF’s preferential position in the FSS seems incompatible with the growing calls for more accountability and openness in global governance by CSOs. The intrinsic characteristics of the Forum increase CSOs’ distrust towards the private sector and project the image of an elite strengthening its position by being more active in global decision-making processes. This becomes more evident when compared to the reformed CFS as it includes clearer rules for the participation of the business sector in the platform through the PSM. Furthermore, the fact that the WEF has been advocating for a multistakeholder approach translates into CSOs’ association of this term with the imposition of corporate interests in global governance.

## 5.1 Reexamining CSOs’ views on the CFS reform and the FSS

In 2009 CSOs recognized pending challenges in the CFS, like power imbalances, but maintained high expectations. For them, it functioned as a platform where they could voice their concerns on the negative effects of neoliberal policies and put forward alternative ones. La Via Campesina and organizations connected to the movement still accept the premise that the reformed CFS is the “most inclusive UN body” and a space where they can actively take part in the discussions preceding the definition of intergovernmental decisions. Their strong support of the Committee’s model is expressed in a letter to the UN Secretary-General written in 2020, where signatory organizations defended the Committee and insisted on the termination of the WEF-UN partnership. Moreover, they argued that the CFS was already negotiating some of the points incorporated in the 2021 summit’s agenda, among them guidelines on food systems and nutrition (IPCFS 2020, p.2)

One of the main concerns of CSOs representing stakeholders vulnerable to food insecurity has been building alliances and a common vision to change the balance of



power within food systems (CSCWFS 2010, pp.7, 77). The 2009 reform gained CSOs' support as the establishment of an authoritative global policy forum became the first step towards achieving their vision. In it, CSOs would participate and voice their opinions on the same terms as the large multinational corporations represented through the PSM. In contrast, in the case of the 2021 summit, La Via Campesina criticized power imbalances, pointed at conflicts of interest, and accused the FSS of masking such inequalities and "undermining the existing institutions and multilateral bodies responsible for developing global policy frameworks for food and agriculture" (La Via Campesina 2021).

In this regard, it is important to acknowledge that multistakeholder partnerships present both opportunities, such as the combination of resources and capabilities of a wide range of public and private actors, and potential risks. For instance, power imbalances, exclusion of important stakeholders, and, in connection with the participation of the business sector, a lack of transparency and accountability if clear norms and rules for private economic actors' involvement are not defined (Hazelwood 2015, p.4). Addressing power imbalances has been a constant demand by CSOs since the discussions for the 2009 reform. They have also emphatically criticized the lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms regarding the organization of the FSS and its decision-making processes. Controversial aspects about this matter concern the Summit's dialogue systems, intended to permit popular participation. The lack of clarification about how the inputs generated at the dialogues would influence the activities of the Summit and its outcomes (Canfield et al. 2021b, p. 9) raised doubts about whether they would be taken into account. Mechanisms for transparency and accountability are similarly needed in multistakeholder partnerships to address the legitimacy problems that might arise with the diversity of actors taking part in them. In the case of the reformed CFS, efforts to increase transparency were included and implemented. For instance, all written inputs by delegations are posted in a common space, and face-to-face meetings are held regularly to promote the mutual understanding of the positions and visions of different actors (McKeon 2015, p.106).

The WEF's perspective on what is needed for changing food systems considers, among other elements, an innovation agenda and what it refers to as "incentives for change." These encompass market-based incentives, blended finance mechanisms, public fiscal incentives, grant capital, etc. (WEF 2019b). Critics believe the Forum's approach exaggerates the market's capacity for repairing the system. Consequently, there were concerns about the extent to which the WEF's vision would dominate the FSS focus. In this regard, some of the Summit's Action Tracks such as number two, which details the role of business mechanisms in influencing consumer behavior, were criticized for sidelining human rights considerations, overlooking the flaws of the free market, and ignoring social aspects like poverty and inequality (Fakhri 2021).

At the 2009 People's Food Sovereignty Forum, a meeting organized by CSOs parallel to the discussions over the reform, participants claimed that some developed nations were increasingly limiting the CFS and FAO's mandate to benefit agrifood multinational corporations. CSOs expressed distrust of global financial elites as they perceive them as players seeking to impose their agenda on global institutions and determine international food policy. The insistence on achieving equal representation at FAO's forums and platforms dealing with food security could address the perceived disparities caused by the

concentration of wealth and problems of transparency in decision-making and exchange of information (CSCWFS 2010, p. 44, 102). After all, it is possible that, if not planned carefully, multistakeholder platforms could create opportunities for global business actors, namely the WEF and multinational corporations, to influence policy in their favor. This situation worries social movements given that holding big corporations accountable is normally unlikely (Garsten and Sörbom 2018, pp.177-8). After 2021, the CSOs hardened their stance against the private sector, turning their distrust of global business actors into a direct rejection of the approach that had facilitated the participation of all non-state actors.

## 5.2 New Challenges for Multistakeholder Governance

The 2021 FSS represented a breaking point for organizations advocating food sovereignty, and to challenge it, the CSIPM set up the People's Autonomous Response to the UN FSS, an alternative platform. Members of this platform believe that states are increasingly transferring their regulatory power to the private sector through multistakeholderism (Food Systems 4 People 2023). A relevant consequence of the FSS conflict has been the increasingly negative perception of the multistakeholder approach to global food security governance and its deteriorating legitimacy among CSOs as a model to address the flaws in global food systems. In principle, under this scheme decision-making is shared on an equal footing among States, the private sector, and civil society, however, its opponents fear that in practice it is allowing corporations to consolidate their power in the UN system. The CSIPM's alternative platform rejects multistakeholder governance and characterizes it as a takeover of global governance by the business sector (CSIPM 2021, p.3). Even if FAO describes the CFS as a multistakeholder project the CSIPM, in its battle against multistakeholderism, differentiates the structure of the CFS from the Summit by defining the former as a "consultation platform" where decision-making rests ultimately on states. This shows an important narrative element that the CSIPM is trying to construct.

In contrast to the CFS, the FSS is not a formally established international body with a complex structure. Nonetheless, the formation of a Coordination Hub in 2022 to support the Summit's approach was perceived by the CSIPM as an attempt to institutionalize the FSS and its agenda. CSOs assure that the Coordination Hub, hosted by FAO, will slowly replace the CFS and allow the Summit to become a regular event. While it is not possible to conclude that the Coordination Hub will replace the CFS, establishing more international bodies could weaken the response of global governance organizations due to the fragmentation of efforts and the appearance of agencies with overlapping mandates. In this regard, the formation of an alternative platform by the CSIPM shows signs of increasing division.

The CSIPM actively condemns multistakeholder governance in its declarations and together with the alternative platform has dedicated position papers to denounce it. It appears that, besides promoting the right to food and food sovereignty, countering what they consider the takeover of global food security governance by financial elites and multinational corporations is becoming another crucial goal. This situation presents serious challenges to the inclusive strategy of FAO and the UN since CSOs and their

movements, whose participation is crucial to reducing global hunger, radicalize their views on the corporate sector as the source of systemic crisis and close the doors to any new form of cooperation.

These developments demonstrate the seriousness of the negative perception that the multistakeholder model has gained among CSOs further hindering its viability for continuing the redefinition of global food security governance. There is already no differentiation between individual multistakeholder schemes or projects and the wider multistakeholder approach to global governance to which they belong in their criticism. The conflict has also started to erode the trust of some CSOs in the UN. They accuse the organization of allowing corporate influence in global governance due to its interest in benefiting from the economic resources provided by powerful actors from the business sector (Food Systems 4 People 2023, p.3).

Claims by social groups vulnerable to food insecurity highlight the importance of discussing representation issues. Partnerships in global governance that include multiple stakeholders are sometimes envisioned to address governance deficits for sustainable development regarding participation. Nonetheless, it might prove beneficial to critically examine if, in practice, all the relevant actors that have a stake in the partnership's outcomes are being considered enough, as suggested by Long et al. (2022, pp.29-30). Martens Jens (2007, p.6) posits that these partnerships have produced a sort of crossroads in international politics. One path leads to an undemocratic “elite multilateralism” in which exclusive clubs take control of global policy. The other leads to a “multilateralism of solidarity” with the active involvement of civil society and a sufficiently regulated interaction with the private sector.

To achieve more inclusive forms of global governance in the food security field it is necessary to ensure that the concerns and proposals of CSOs are considered from the beginning. Including these organizations at the earliest stages of planning and involving them in the agenda-setting of forums linked to the FSS could be beneficial for regaining their support in future initiatives. This would also reduce the likelihood of imbalances concerning the participation of the private sector and civil society. The CFS is one of the few international bodies in this area of governance perceived as legitimate by a large sector of the CSOs thus its inclusion in the organization of follow-up forums and mechanisms is crucial to regaining civil society's trust. The CFS represents an opportunity to reestablish the links between civil society and private economic actors. It already possesses a well-defined structure that facilitates the exchange of information among its members and the participation of non-state actor representatives takes place under conditions of equality. Besides, involving the CFS reassures CSOs that this inclusive platform will not be replaced with a new organization.

The existence of platforms with relatively similar objectives and formats could further fragment and weaken global efforts dealing with hunger and other food security issues. For these reasons incorporating the subsequent FSS initiatives into the CFS may, in addition to increasing CSOs' support, prevent overlapping responsibilities among different international bodies. This situation had already been deemed problematic during the 1990s. Establishing independent mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of initiatives in addition to a public report system could help to address transparency and accountability concerns.

## 6. Conclusions

The increasing participation of non-state actors in the global governance of food security has been facilitated by multistakeholder projects like the reformed CFS and the 2021 FSS. However, a multistakeholder approach to this area of global governance entails challenges resulting from the contrasting visions of non-state actors on the causes of food systems instability and food insecurity. The organization and planning of such projects require a deeper look at the calls by civil society for more transparency and accountability mechanisms to increase their legitimacy and functionality.

The CFS reform gained CSOs' support as the Committee allowed civil society to participate on equal terms with powerful private economic actors, namely big agrifood corporations supporting the mechanism for the private sector. As a result, CSOs also expected that the platform would be the first step to guarantee more accountability in global food security governance. The mechanism for civil society in the CFS provided them with a formal structure that facilitates their direct participation in the discussions at an authoritative global policy forum. In contrast, the FSS's multistakeholder approach appears to mirror the power imbalances protested by CSOs by granting a privileged position to the WEF and other private economic actors. Similarly, a lack of transparency mechanisms for the Summit's organization undermined the perception of it as legitimate among civil society. These considerations highlight the functionality of the CFS's structure as an inclusive platform in global food security governance.

After the 2021 summit, CSOs, with the support of the CSIPM, have hardened their stance against the governance structure summit. This has resulted in a fragmentation of the efforts that seek to reduce hunger and food insecurity. Their perception of multistakeholder governance has deteriorated to the point where the term is mostly associated with a corporate takeover of global governance. This situation could hinder the prospects for making the global governance of food security more effective through multistakeholder platforms as CSOs in the agrifood sector show signs of growing distrust towards the UN and its agencies.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Defined by FAO as the lack of regular access to enough safe and nutritious food. This situation prevents people from attaining normal growth and development and an active and healthy life (FAO 2023).

<sup>2</sup> While the concept of food system refers to the different activities and actors involved in the production, processing, distribution, and disposal, among other activities, of food products (Nguyen 2018, p.1), the term “agrifood system” is a broader concept that includes non-food agricultural commodities, for instance, fiber crops like cotton.

<sup>3</sup> Condition “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Smallholder farmers, Pastoralists/Herders, Fisherfolk, Indigenous Peoples, Consumers, Urban Food Insecure, Agricultural and Food Workers, Women, Youth, Landless, NGOs.

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