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Renewal through Participation in Global Food Security Governance: Implementing the International Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism to the Committee on World Food Security

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Abstract. The food commodity price rises from 2006 to 2008 engendered a period of political renewal and reform in the governance of global food security. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was designated as the main international forum dealing with food security and nutrition in 2009 as part of this reform. Through the CFS reform process, civil society organizations secured the right to co-ordinate autonomously their engagement in the Committee as official participants and are doing so through the International Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism (CSM). The CSM is an innovative institutional form designed to allow a broad range of civil society organizations from different regions of the world and from diverse constituencies, notably those who face food insecurity on a regular basis, to participate in global food security governance. The challenges and complexities of setting up and operationalizing the CSM are presented and illustrated. These findings are considered in the context of the longer-term move towards widening participation in global governance, with a particular focus on the trajectory of civil society participation in food security governance. The broad neo-liberal logic, or embedded neo-liberalism, that underpins contemporary world politics provides boundaries within which the innovative CSM is being given shape through the political agency of the participating civil society organizations. The study concludes by suggesting that while the Civil Society Mechanism faces some internal challenges, these are not insurmountable, and that the CSM represents an effective politicizing, engaging and connecting model for food-focused civil society organization entering into global governance.

Introduction

The rise of food prices in 2006 through to 2008 heightened awareness of food insecurity and gave fresh political momentum to addressing world food security at a time

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when the number of hungry people had risen to over one billion. This renewed political interest in food security led to a flood of international and multilateral meetings, a flurry of declarations and statements, expert panels, the creation of new programmes and the reformation of old ones. One notable trend in this revived phase of global food security governance was an attempt at widening and strengthening the participation and engagement of civil society actors in international food security decision-making.

In what follows, the recent reforms of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) – a forum in the United Nations System for review and follow-up of food security policies – are presented in the wider context of global governance and civil society participation. Inter-governmental agreement amongst the 127 member states that the CFS would become the main international forum dealing with food security and nutrition occurred in late 2009. A key element of the renewal of the CFS was the introduction of civil society organizations as official participants on the Committee. Civil society organizations achieved the right to facilitate their participation through an autonomous International Civil Society Mechanism (CSM). Their inclusion in the Committee and its activities presents opportunities for more meaningful and active engagement in the procedures and debates leading up to final decision-making in the CFS, while final voting authority remains with the nation states. The term 'civil society organizations' (CSOs) is used as an umbrella term to refer both to social movements and to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs are understood to be organizations that represent a specific issue or theme or the interests of certain social groups. Social movements are defined here as self-organized social actors with a shared identity that have come together to represent their own interests and – in the case of the CSM – are from the developing world and exist predominantly on the front line of food insecurity.

The reform of the CFS provides the opportunity for a detailed study of the challenges of widening participation in the international governance of food security and of turning political rhetoric into policy reality. Through its recent reform process, the CFS has supported new mechanisms and structures that are reshaping the way food security policy is debated and developed by changing who is engaged in the debate. By including civil society actors as official participants on the Committee, the CFS is championing a model of enhanced participation at the level of international policy-making, finding new ways to engage those civil society actors who have been located, previously, at the margins of official food security debates. The challenges of setting up, mobilizing and implementing workable procedures for the participation of a range of new constituencies in the CFS in meaningful ways are presented below.[1]

In the next section, global governance is conceptualized within a context of embedded neo-liberalism so as to mark the boundaries within which changes to the architecture of global food security governance are taking place. This framework allows scope for meaningful political agency that can shape the ways in which global governance is ordered at the international levels of policy direction. The widening of participation beyond nation states has been a longer-term feature of global governance as a conceptual approach to international politics. The application of this longer-term participatory move in global governance is detailed, particularly, in relation to the United Nations' institutions and to the governance of food security. In the case of the CFS, the widening of participation prior to 2009 is explained so as to provide a background to the more significant changes ushered in that year. The implemen-

tation of the CSM has not been an easy process. The complexities and challenges of this process are presented and include: finding methods for the co-ordination of the different voices; arriving at consensus positions; and balancing representation through participation.

Global Governance, Civil Society Participation and Food Security

Global governance emerged originally as a concept with a strong normative element as a means for moving beyond the self-interest of nation states, to engage wider societal actors in reaching co-operative solutions to shared global problems (Pattberg, 2006). The emergence of international regimes around environmental and conservation issues are examples of the growing co-operation evident in world politics over the second half of the twentieth century. However, within the global governance literature there is another approach that voices a strong critical perspective 'that analyses the current global governance debate as a hegemonic discourse' (Pattberg, 2006, p. 1), and asserts that global governance is in fact '*neoliberal* global governance, serving the freedom of capital to accumulate around the planet' (Overbeek, 2010, p. 702). Cerny describes this hegemonic discourse as one of 'embedded neoliberalism' which reflects not only an emerging neo-liberal consensus that has developed 'as market forces and transnational interpenetration constrain institutions and actors to behave in certain ways,' (Cerny, 2010, p. 148) but is also a political construction, given shape in the everyday world by political actors and interest groups seeking political legitimacy. Political agency still exists in this context but is often unable to move beyond neo-liberal terms of debate. Getting and maintaining the engagement of social movements in such bounded global governance processes and institutions are a key underlying tension facing the CSM.

The pursuit and maintenance of neo-liberal hegemony has been identified as a key motivating and rationalizing factor in world food security policy (McMichael, 2000; Busch and Bain, 2004; Peine and McMichael, 2005; Pechlaner and Otero, 2008; Lang et al., 2009; Lawrence et al., 2010). Since its introduction into global policy negotiations at the 1974 World Food Summit, food security policy has undergone a shift from global co-operation and increased production in the 1970s towards a focus on individual and household livelihoods throughout the 1980s (Sen, 1981; Maxwell, 1996; Maxwell and Slater, 2003; Mechlem, 2004; Shaw, 2007) and has been increasingly integrated into financial markets and international trading systems and rules in more recent decades (Wise and Murphy, 2012). The prevalence of neo-liberal approaches in the post-2007 food security policy responses is evident in the launch of donor and economic elite-led initiatives such as the G8's L'Aquila Food Security Initiative, which seeks to harmonize donor practices, encourages partnerships with vulnerable countries to implement food security plans, as well as to increase G8 commitments of financial and technical assistance (Prime Minister's Office Italy, 2012). The L'Aquila Initiative prompted the G20's request for the World Bank to act as trustee for the Global Agriculture Food Security Program (GAFSP) – a fund aimed at improving incomes and food security in the world's poorest countries through better co-ordinated public and private sector investment in agriculture (World Bank, 2012). The GAFSP has CSO advisors on its Steering Committee, reflecting the widening of participation in recent years. These initiatives, among others, emerged to fill an apparent leadership gap in the wake of the 2007 food price spikes. However, since this time, both the G8 and G20 have recognized, at least rhetorically, the UN's

Committee on World Food Security as the primary forum for policy discussion on food security at the global level.

Since its creation, the UN has promoted civil society participation in processes of dialogue, deliberation and mobilization (Cardoso, 2003; Willets, 2006). The participatory turn in global governance accelerated after the end of the cold war and with the launch of a series of World Summits and Conferences throughout the 1990s (e.g. World Food Summit, World Summit for Children, Rio Earth Summit, World Conference on Human Rights). At these meetings, citizens' organizations forwarded new ideas and proposals, negotiated, protested and exercised political pressure and, in doing so, created new public spaces (Cardoso, 2003). At this time, national-level NGOs started to emerge at the global level in greater numbers and sought to engage directly in inter-governmental deliberations and advocacy work. International NGOs who had been the main CSO actors in multilateral forums up to this point, also went through a process of transformation to better adapt to the new political climate by forming new global and transnational organizations (e.g., Oxfam, Third World Network, International Coalition for a Criminal Court). The private economic sector's representation was also strengthened during this time and their presence was much more marked (Hill, 2004).

Such engagement corresponded with a trend towards addressing multidimensional aspects of specific issues, illustrated by the themes of the World Summits (McKeon, 2009). These issues became sites where diverse actors with similar end goals came together to take advantage of lobbying opportunities, teach-ins and education, prototype global parliaments, trade fairs and media spectacles (Clark and Aydin, 2003, p. 4). Critics viewed this mix of activities as a medieval fair while others considered it as a corrective activity to the failings of traditional democratic institutions (Clark and Aydin, 2003, p. 4). Yet, they serve to illustrate the emerging collective power of civil society to shape the agenda and to influence policy-makers and public opinion on a global scale. As a response, discussion on a 'global civil society emerged' supported by the development and spread of new communication technologies and the increasingly global nature of problems (e.g., environment, women's rights, development). With this, and the increasingly globalized nature of politics, international meetings became increasingly politically important, prompting more NGOs to become involved and develop parallel NGO forums (for a review of this, see Clark and Aydin, 2003, p. 5). These trends also emerged in the international food security policy area. For example, the 1996 World Food Summit was mandated to encourage the participation of CSOs at national, regional and international levels in the Summit preparatory process. NGOs were invited to attend the World Food Summit as observers and to participate in an NGO meeting prior to the 22nd Session of the CFS. Over 800 people, representing more than 400 organizations attended the World Food Summit, and more than 100 CSO representatives participated as members of their government delegations (CFS, 1999, s. 5, p. 12). The World Food Summit Action Plan articulated the need for governments to work in partnership with 'all actors of civil society' (WFS, 1996, art. 14) to advance the plan and established that the CFS would be responsible for its monitoring and implementation. In the first CFS session after the World Food Summit, a discussion on broadened participation of civil society and other partners in the work on the CFS was added to the agenda (CFS, 1999, s. 5).

The rise of anti-globalization activism, made perhaps most evident through the protests co-ordinated in Seattle in 1999 against the WTO, shifting geo-politics, and

the spread of new communication technologies, also changed the way civil society operated. Civil society actors adopted new information and communication technologies to not only create global public opinions but also to share information, build networks and strategize at a global level. This began to define a new phase of the participatory turn, marked by the strengthening of like-minded coalitions of governments and civil society (e.g. International Criminal Court, Landmine Convention), as well as various forms of multi-stakeholder, private–public and public policy networks and partnerships (Hill, 2004).

In the 2000s the UN began a reform process under UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. One outcome was the naming of a Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations, which produced the 2004 Cardoso Report. The report proposed involving civil society organizations more regularly in the General Assembly, extending dialogue between civil society and the Security Council and the greater engagement of civil society organizations in UN field-work. The Panel also recommended that a special fund be established to help civil society organizations in developing countries work more effectively with the UN (Cardoso, 2004). To illustrate the shifts in participation outlined above, and to highlight some of the emerging tensions, we turn to the reformed Committee on World Food Security and the associated but autonomous International Civil Society Mechanism and review ways in which civil society actors are co-ordinating participation in global food security governance.

The Reform of the Committee on World Food Security and Modes of Participation

The CFS, established as a result of the food crisis of the 1970s upon recommendation from the 1974 World Food Conference, serves as the forum in the United Nations system for review and follow-up of policies concerning world food security, including food production and physical and economic access to food (Shaw, 2007; CFS, 2009a). Its original mandate included reviewing current and prospective demand, supply and stock position for basic food-stuffs; periodically evaluating the adequacy of current and prospective stock levels in exporting and importing countries; and reviewing steps taken by governments to implement the International Undertaking on World Food Security. Historically, however, the CFS has played a relatively minor role in international politics and was generally ineffective and inactive due to a lack of interest and buy-in from member states and an insufficient budget (Shaw, 2007).

In October 2009, at the 35th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the 127 member countries agreed to a wide-ranging reform with the aim of making the CFS the foremost inter-governmental and international platform dealing with food security and nutrition (CFS, 2009b). The renewal of the CFS took place amidst a wave of international activity organized under the banner of 'food security'. However, the seeds of reform had been planted well before.

A year after the World Food Summit, in an attempt to modernize the CFS's Terms of Reference and responding to changes in the institutional organization of the UN system,[2] the Committee amended its General Rules of the Organization. Under the amended rules, the members of the CFS remained those interested FAO or UN member states. However, reference was made to inviting 'relevant international organizations to participate in the work of the Committee and the preparation of meeting documents on matters within their respective mandates in collaboration with the

secretariat of the Committee' (CFS, 1997). At this time, CSOs attending the CFS had observer status, and their ability to engage in processes lay with the discretion of the Chair. Two years later, during the 25th Session (1999), the CFS made broadened participation of civil society and other partners a main agenda item. The background paper provided suggestions for broadening the participation of civil society organizations in the work of the CFS and the World Food Summit implementation process (CFS, 1999, s. 5). The proposals included enhanced information exchange, contributions to technical documents, participation in CFS meetings, and enhanced dialogue. It also provided possibilities for enhanced CSO engagement in the CFS, including having the Chair ask CSOs to appoint designated spokespersons to intervene in debates, grant CSOs the right to make one intervention per topic, and allow CSOs to present consolidated reports of their conclusions and findings on achievements and lessons learned.

CSOs were proving themselves to be useful allies to Committee members who, in the wake of the World Food Summit, had been tasked with monitoring the implementation of the resulting Plan of Action. This helped to pave the way for increased CSO participation in the Committee. Yet, beyond the role of observers, their engagement continued to be needs-based or subject to sympathetic Chairs. At the 32nd Session of the CFS, various stakeholders, including CSOs, were engaged in a dialogue on progress made towards attaining the World Food Summit Goals. At this point, some members of the CFS 'requested that options for continued engagement of multi-stakeholders in future years be discussed at the next Session of the CFS' (FAO, 2006, par. 31).

At the 33rd Session of the CFS (2007), the Secretariat provided background information on current practices of multi-stakeholder engagement and highlighted four potential options for their continued engagement including: interventions by observers, CSO reports on the World Food Summit Follow-Up to be presented at the CFS Sessions, multi-stakeholder dialogues with the Chair, and, Informal Panels (CFS, 2008/6, par. 3). The Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a document outlining these and other possible options to be discussed at the 34th Session of the CFS (CFS, 2007, par. 31). The resulting paper Participation of Civil Society/Non-Governmental Organizations (CSOs/NGOs) listed best practices adopted in other FAO bodies and a suggestion that they could be applied to the CFS. These included allowing CSOs to organize side events, seeking CSO input into documents, encouraging CSO caucusing, permitting CSO presence during the drafting of outcomesm, promoting direct dialogue between governments and CSOs, and formalizing and communicating procedures for engagement (CFS, 2008/6, par. 18). Principles of participation were also outlined along with specific measures to improve interactions between the CFS and CSOs. However, the actual reform process proved much more radical than the Secretariat had envisioned. Comparing the Secretariat's paper on participation to the results of the reform process, one member of the CFS Bureau noted:

> 'There is a background document with the options and proposals that were put forth by the secretariat for the reform of the CFS. That was like the options that would be possible goals to get at, at the end of the reform process. Look at those options. They are so petty, they are so small. And you see this is what they were trying to achieve with the reform' (Interview, Rome, October 2011).

He went on to explain how pleased he was that the reforms had managed to surpass these initial suggestions.

> 'This could have started as bad and ended as bad in the usual "let's say we change something to keep doing what we always did". But at some point, the Chair being who she was, and that Contact Group being created, things got out of hand for FAO itself. So this was the fascination of the process, because the reform that I thought usually would come up… business as usual… it got out of hand, in a good way, and developed into a much stronger version of the CFS' (Interview, Rome, October 2011).

The reform of the CFS involved eight months of negotiation between the Committee's Bureau and an interim Contact Group, which included civil society representatives. Thus, from the very start of this phase, civil society participated in the reform process. However, their engagement was based on at least three key factors: the broader and longer-term participatory turn that had already infiltrated the FAO and the Committee; a history of lobbying on the part of CSOs; and a sympathetic Chair. As one Diplomat involved in the Bureau at that time explained in an interview:

> 'In the beginning of 2009… the new chair of the CFS… got a mandate to reform but they didn't know where to go or what to do, and she called that meeting… to propose to countries to create the contact group for the reform of the CFS… And in the end people decided to compose this loose Contact Group that would include people from civil society, and then the precedent was set and this Contract Group moved things away from the usual bureaucracy of FAO.'

When asked why CSOs were involved in the first place in this reform phase, it was explained:

> 'I think it came personally from… the Chair, who has personal convictions about this. So, you could raise lots of points of order on this. How could we group them? Based on what selection procedure? What is entitled to develop here?… But she went ahead and invited the delegations that were more or less involved but without criteria. But at least they were there, and it happened' (Interview, Rome, October 2011).

The renewed CFS comprises member governments, participants (including civil society organizations), UN bodies, international financial and trade institutions, international agriculture research organizations, the private sector and philanthropic foundations, and observers. These actors make up the Plenary, which is, in turn, supported by several key bodies. The Bureau is the executive arm of the CFS and is responsible for its administration. It is made up of a chairperson and representation is based regionally with members drawn from 12 member countries: two from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East, and one from both North America and South-west Pacific. The Advisory Group assists the Bureau to advance the objectives of the CFS, particularly to ensure linkages with stakeholders at all levels to support two-way exchange of information. The Advisory Group is made from representatives from UN bodies as well as four civil society representatives, one representative from international agricultural research bodies, one representative for the private sector, and one representative from philanthropic bodies (see Figure 1). Presently, the private sector is lobbying to get an equal number of

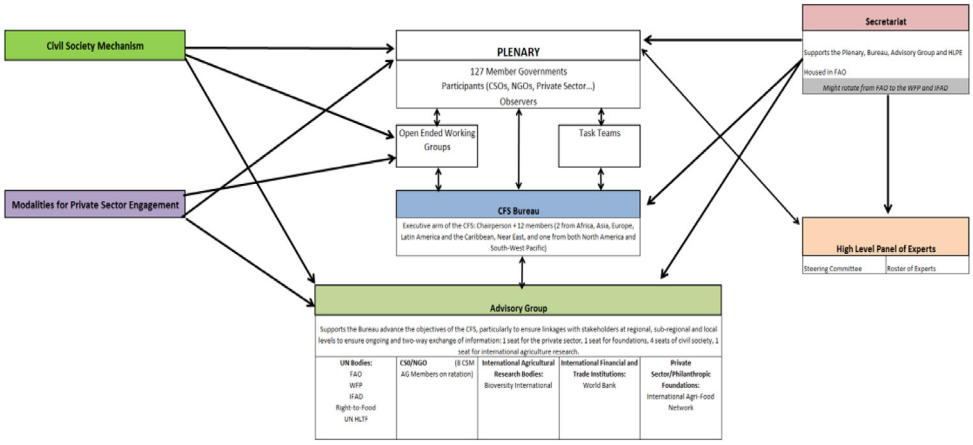

Figure 1. Structure of the Reformed Committee on World Food Security.
Source: Adapted from CFS, 2009a.

seats on the Advisory Group as civil society. Their attempts thus far have been unsuccessful.

Through the reform there has been a focus on intersessional activities, policy convergence and policy co-ordination, meaning that the CFS is to:

> '[p]rovide a platform for discussion and coordination to strengthen collaborative action among Governments, regional organizations, international organizations and agencies, NGOs, CSOs, food producers' organizations, private sector organizations, philanthropic organizations and other relevant stakeholders, in a manner that is in alignment with each country's specific context and needs' (CFS, 2009a, par. 5).

Central to the reform of the CFS has been the expansion of 'participation in CFS to ensure that voices of all relevant stakeholders are heard in the policy debate on food and agriculture' (CFS, 2009a, par. 2). Towards this end, through its reform, the CFS has sought to 'constitute the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings' (CFS, 2009a, par. 4). As such, it embodies a unique model for widening the participation of civil society organizations at the global level, offering potential solutions to many of the concerns surrounding global governance, notably inclusivity, legitimacy (McKeon, 2011), accountability, transparency, legitimacy and representation.

The CSO observers, and more latterly participants, to the CFS have been diverse. Since 2005, international NGOs such as Action Aid have been actively engaged in every session of the CFS. Large networks such as the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), the International Planning Committee for Food Security (IPC), and More and Better Campaign have been official observers and then participants in six of the past seven sessions of the CFS. Uncovering the participation of social movement actors in the CFS is a bit more complicated as they are often left off the official participant lists. This is because many participate as members of larger networks, like the IPC. Some larger movements have managed to gain accreditation

to the CFS. For example, members of La Via Campesina are listed in official CFS documents as having attended sessions in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2011, but their members have often attended as members of the IPC, which is similar for the World Forum of Fish Harvest and Fish Workers. Since the reform process, many new NGOs have been accredited as participants, including the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration (ETC), Practical Action, and the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. However, many of the social movements still do not have the necessary credentials or capacity to register as participants through the FAO accreditation process and consequently they gain accreditation through the Civil Society Mechanism. Thus many of the social movement actors, including youth movements, pastoralists, fisher-folk, urban poor, and indigenous peoples fail to appear on official participant lists but rather fall under the CSM (more information on the make-up of the CSM is provided below).

The CFS offers an official space where an increasingly diverse group of actors can congregate. These actors have, over time, been able to secure greater and more meaningful involvement in planning, research, debate and policy-making. CSOs, as we will show, have created a mechanism to ensure that this engagement is coordinated and that the social actors, who have traditionally been on the perimeter of these processes, are not just brought in, but are leading processes of engagement.

Another reason why many CSOs have invested in the process, over other initiatives, is that the CFS maintains the UN principle of one country–one vote, which CSOs argue presents the most democratic option at present for multilateral decision-making, especially when key stakeholders are able to participate in the agenda setting, in discussions, and in policy negotiations. Furthermore, that voting is reserved for countries and is not extended to other stakeholders, perhaps counter-intuitively, serves to enhance accountability. CSOs were encouraged by some delegations to request voting status within the Committee, but decided that states have the responsibility of ensuring food security and thus decision-making must be reserved for states. The role non-state participants is thus to provide guidance and policy recommendations and to monitor states once decisions have been made.

International Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism

Civil society participation in the CFS is managed through self-organized interaction. The reform document of the Committee on World Food Security invited civil society organizations to establish autonomously a global mechanism to facilitate their participation in the CFS (2009a). Several groups submitted proposals requesting leadership of the process but the successful proposal was one jointly written and submitted by the Governance Working Group of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), Oxfam and Action Aid International, with the support of a methodology group comprising reference people who had been involved in the reform process since the beginning.[3] Four drafts of the mechanism were circulated widely through established networks and made available online for input and comments. There was recognition of limitations to a fully consultative process given time, linguistic and financial restrictions; and the drafting committee sought to ensure transparency throughout the drafting process and consequently decisions taken on each comment were recorded and made publicly available online. The final draft was presented and approved at a consultation of civil society organizations in October 2010.

Through the CSM, CSOs have become involved in various aspects of the Committee on World Food Security, including as: members of the Advisory Group, CFS Task Teams and Open Ended Working Groups and, most obviously, in the CFS plenary discussions. In the CFS activities, the CSM has facilitated CSO proposals, suggestions and dissent, up to the point where nation states achieve consensus (or consensus minus one).

The Civil Society Mechanism builds on the extensive experience and networks of civil society organizations across a range of policy areas and from existing mechanisms for interaction between civil society including the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), the Farmers' Forum and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This history is not lost on those involved in the broader CFS process. At the first meeting of the Coordination Committee, one FAO representative acknowledged that:

> 'This meeting is historic, the fruit of many years of hard preparatory work, from social organizations comprized of many social groups and social movements and other movements who have been advocating and affecting change for many decades. The engagement of CSOs as participants in the CFS process builds on the collective experience of this group. Contributions to the World Food Summit, World Food Summit +5, development of the IPC, inception and adoption for the guidelines for the realization of the right to food' (Price, 2011).

This recognition of the history and knowledge of the process and actors involved has been fundamental to the ordering, structuring and functioning of the CSM over the first year of operation. At the same time, the CSM is an innovative mechanism that is adapting to the changing governance architecture of food security. As such, throughout the development and implementation of the CSM, there has been recognition that the process will not be perfect. What has been stressed is the need for transparency, to follow the established processes and to maximize communication (Civil Society Mechanism, 2010). Furthermore, the strategies of the civil society groups in the CFS provide instructive practices for other groups seeking to facilitate civil society engagement from a diverse membership in formal international policy institutions, where member states retain the key voting authority on final decision-making.

The CSM is open to all civil society organizations working on issues related to food security. It is made up of the general membership, a Coordination Committee, Working Groups[4] and a Secretariat. The Coordination Committee is up of 41 members from 11 constituencies and 17 subregions (see Table 1). These members are selected through processes established by representatives of the constituencies or subregions, in consultation with the CSO Advisory Group members (explained below). Small-scale farmers make up the largest constituency on the Coordination Committee as they represent the majority of hungry people in the world, as well as those who produce the largest proportion of the food in the world. Gender and geographic balance among the members on the Coordination Committee is a priority.

Key Challenges Facing the Civil Society Mechanism

The CSM presents a radical new mechanism for co-ordinating the effective participation of a diversity of actors in multilateral governance processes, but there have

Table 1. Constituencies and Regions within the CSM Coodination Committee.

Sub-Regions Total of 17 (1 member per sub-region)	
North America	South-east Asia
Central America and Caribbean	Central Asia
Andean Region	Oceania
Southern Cone	Southern Africa
Western Europe	West Africa
Eastern Europe	East Africa
West Asia	Central Africa
South Asia	North Africa
Pacifica	
Constituencies Total of 24 (2 members per constituency, small-holder farmers have 4)	
Agricultural and food workers	NGOs
Artisanal fisher-folk	Small-holder farmers
Consumers	Urban poor
Pastoralists	Women
Indigenous Peoples	Youth
Landless	

Source: Adapted from CFS (2010), with updated regions from communication with CSM Secretariat (May 2011).

been growing pains. In what follows, we present eight challenges faced by the CSM in its first two years of operation and highlight ways in which participants have sought to fix them. These challenges include: the initial primary focus on establishing structures and processes, leaving less time for work on content; establishing the Coordination Committee; balancing participation versus representation; addressing consensus while respecting diversity; establishing decision-making mechanisms and ensuring participants accepted shifts in the location of key decision-making in favour of efficiency; building trust amongst the different constituencies represented; overcoming language barriers; and, finally, ensuring the meaningful engagement of those most affected by food insecurity in these processes. These examples provide insight into the challenges raised by CSO participation in global food security governance but also serve to highlight how the diverse actors in food social movements co-ordinate and manage the expectations of their new status as official participants. This is not an exhaustive list of challenges. For example, the CSM also faces financial challenges, including raising enough money to finance the participation of civil society actors, and to support a small secretariat. We have sought to identify and focus upon challenges that the CSM has faced internally – allowing an understanding of how diverse civil society actors are collectively managing their participation in the Committee on World Food Security.

First, one challenge has been the initial focus on process and structure. Actors newly engaged in the CFS have identified the CSM's current focus on structure as restricting and have expressed this publically in CSM meetings. The CSM is a young and innovative mechanism and participants are conscious of the continuing need to develop, adapt and ameliorate its governance structure. However, the focus of CSM leadership on structure has led some participants to view it as dominating the agenda thus limiting the ability of the CSM to adequately address technical or political issues. As one participant, new to the process lamented during the 2011 consultation in advance of the 37th Session 'I feel like this is a waste of time. I came here to talk

about issues, about solutions, and they spent the whole meeting talking about how they will organize themselves. I don't have time for that.' (Interview, Rome, 2011).

One way the CFS has addressed these concerns is through the establishment of Working Groups. These groups were developed to promote cohesion between the work of the CFS and the CSM and to structure the work of the CSM. They are open to CSOs working on related topics. The CSM Working Groups aim to increase awareness and share information on related CFS processes, to provide a space for CSOs to dialogue on related issues, to ensure a space for CSOs to develop strong and well-articulated joint-positions, and to ensure CSO participants are present on the various CFS working groups and task teams.

Second, the development of the Coordination Committee has taken much longer than expected and, as the end of the second year approaches, 13 seats remain unfilled.[5] Reasons for this include lack of contacts or networks in specific regions and constituencies as well as failure of interested parties to undertake an appropriate selection process and to submit these processes to the Advisory Group members for approval. These challenges serve to highlight the difficulties of widening participation to include actors who previously stood outside the process or whose current struggles and focus are localized. Indeed, key groups that have been marginalized by, or worked outside of and/or against, these processes are now faced with the task of determining ways of moving into these circles (Peine and McMichael, 2005, p. 32). Central to this transitional process from outsiders to insiders is the development of trust, networks, new skills as well as working through issues of representation and legitimacy. At the same time, in other forums, and especially in local contexts, these actors continue to push and resist dominant governance structures, adding another layer of complexity.

One of the main functions of the Coordination Committee is to facilitate the participation of those in sub-regions and constituencies in the CFS. The Coordination Committee is not to be seen as a committee of people representing the views of their organization. Rather, they play a communicative and networking function: they are facilitators. This point has been very hard to convey to Coordination Committee members and others. NGO and CSO participants are politically, intellectually and emotionally tied to the positions of their organizations and to separate themselves from their values, as well as potential opportunities, and the mind-set of interest lobbying, is a real challenge. The Final Report of the Civil Society Consultation in advance of the 36th session (CSM, 2010, p. 8) tries to get at this point by stating:

> 'The Coordination Committee is the backbone of the CSM. One of the Coordination Committee's roles is to work hard to facilitate the participation of those in subregions and constituencies. In no way is the CC to be seen as a committee of people representing the views of their organization. Rather, they play a communicative and networking function.'

With respect to this, the CSM works to find points of agreement to forward united positions and statements that conform to the common good as agreed upon by way of deliberation and consensus by all participants. Second, the CSM accepts diversity, difference and disagreement. In instances where opinions differ, the various perspectives are presented as the CSM position.[6] At the same time, there is pressure to speak with a united voice. For example, at a plenary session of the 37th Session of the CFS (October 2011), the Chair encouraged civil society participants to speak with a unified voice. One government delegate noted that from his perspective, a united CSO

endorsement of a specific recommendation carries more weight than that of some member states. While there is recognition of the diversity of perspectives across civil society organizations represented at the CFS, there is also awareness of the political impact gained through united positions. Hence, CSOs, facilitated through the CSM, have worked to develop joint positions wherever possible. Arriving at a point of consensus often involves long discussions and processes of compromise on the part of all actors thereby moving them away from their original objectives. Chantal Mouffe (2000, p. 17) warns that often this process of consensus building can reflect 'a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power' and is a process that 'always entails some form of exclusion'. Thus, while these processes of deliberation and consensus building form a fundamental part of the CSM, and the UN decision-making process more broadly, they also inevitably result in a form of social exclusion where the ideas of some actors are left on the cutting room floor.

Coming to consensus has proved challenging not only for lack of shared approaches but also for lack of engagement. As noted above, the executive of the Civil Society Mechanism is a Coordination Committee with 41 members. A committee of that size, spanning the world, with varying levels of commitment, connectivity and three working languages has proven, not surprisingly, hard to manage, especially for a resource-poor Secretariat. Getting the Coordination Committee to come to consensus (note that in the structure of the CSM, silence is not taken as agreement) on issues in a timely fashion has meant frustration, delays and sometimes moving ahead without consensus as often the CSM is only given a few days to react to documents or prepare for meetings. Here again, the commitment to transparency and the development of strong relations of trust are key to the successful operation of the CSM.

In an attempt to address decision-making within the CSM, and responding to the challenges raised above, there has been a shift of power from the Coordination Committee to the Advisory Group members. It is the responsibility of these Advisory Group members to ensure that the views of civil society are heard and to facilitate two-way communication between the CSM and the CFS. With the launch of the CSM, it was decided that the four CSO Contact Group members, who had represented civil society throughout the CFS reform process, would become the interim CSO members on the CFS Advisory Group. These original CSO Advisory Group members were three male and one female representative from Le Réseau des organizations paysannes et de producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA), the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), Oxfam International, and the Mouvement International de la Jeunesse Agricole et Rurale Catholique (MIJARC). Under this arrangement they would serve for one year (2009–2010) and new focal points would be chosen from and by the Coordination Committee in 2011, once the Coordination Committee commenced its activities. However, at the Coordination Committee meeting in May 2011, it was decided that the CSO Advisory Group members would continue in their roles until October 2011. This was, in part, in recognition of their historic role in the process and because it was deemed important that the CSO Advisory Group members be able to work with the restrictions of limited time and resources, and be highly attuned to the politically sensitive nature of the work while maintaining a high degree of knowledge and political fluency. It also reflected challenges faced by the CSM in establishing the Coordination Committee. In turn, when the Northern NGO constituency Advisory Group member left their NGO to work for the CSM Secretariat the seat was filled by the female Southern

NGO Coordination Committee member providing more gender balance and Southern representation.

Whereas the first CSO Advisory Group members had legitimacy and trust based on their historical participation, in October 2011, eight new members were elected by and from the Coordination Committee for a period of two years on a rotational basis; with the acknowledgment that the eight CSO Advisory Group members will share responsibility and participate in the meetings. The newly elected Advisory Group members have legitimacy based on their being elected, however, they lack the historical experience and knowledge of their predecessors. They do represent a far more diverse set of interests (see Table 2) although, again, their function is not one of representation but rather facilitation.

With this diversity, language issues have come to the fore. While the previous CSO Advisory Group members were able to all work in a single language, this new group is having to work in three languages and with varying degrees of connectivity as some of the Advisory Group members live in areas where access to the Internet (the primary means of communication for the CSM) remains limited. For other CSO Advisory Group members, engaging in the work of the CSM during harvest periods is simply not possible. Despite these limitations, at their meetings in Rome in October 2011, the CSO Advisory Group members agreed to participate in one online meeting per month with more regular communication to be facilitated through email.

The CSO Advisory Group members, at least in practice, now exert a great deal of potential influence, because it is the group most likely to give final approval on focal point processes, on methodological issues and on key documents and positions. They also interact directly with the CFS, putting them at the junction of the CFS-CSM interface. Within an increasing participatory space, there is a political reality of having to make quick and informed decisions, which may undermine the deliberative goals of the CSM but which remain legitimate in so far as they have been given the authority to make these decisions through a deliberative process.

The linguistic challenges extend beyond spoken language to the ways in which different actors speak, and who they are speaking for. This is illustrated in the ten-

Table 2. Make-up of the Coordination Committee Advisory Group Members (as of April 2012).

Advisory Group Members 2010–2011	Advisory Group Members 2011–2013
NGO Coordination Committee Member (Oxfam then FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN)) (male then female)	Indigenous Coordination Committee Member (2011–2012) (male)
Small-scale Farmer Coordination Committee Member (male)	Fisher-folk Coordination Committee Member (2011–2012) (female)
IPC Representative (female)	Pastoralist Coordination Committee Member (2011–2012) (male)
Youth Coordination Committee Member (male)	2 Youth Coordination Committee Members (2011–2012 and 2012–2013) (male and female)
	Agricultural Workers Coordination Member (2012–2013) (female)
	Small-scale Farmer Coordination Committee Member (2012–2013) (male)
	Latin American Coordination Committee Member (2012–2013) (female)

Source: Adapted from the Civil Society Mechanism web site <http://cso4cfs.org/2011/10/31/elected-4-new-cso-members-to-the-cfs-advisory-group>, accessed 31 Oct. 2011.

sion between social movements and NGOs. During the selection of the new CSO Advisory Group members there was a great deal of concern raised that the members be from social movements and not NGOs. If the CSM was to help the CFS ensure that the voices of those most affected by food security were included in discussion, it was fundamental that the social movements be present. A key actor in the CSM suggested that there is a fault-line that is promoted by very reflexive, Western NGO actors who are extremely concerned about repeating 'neo-colonial' mistakes, but that in their concern, they end up reifying those relations of power (Interview, London, March 2011). Along these lines, while there is a desire on the part of NGOs to be involved at the executive level, there is also recognition of the political need for those positions to be filled by social movement actors so that the CSM can better represent those most affected by food insecurity and also to increase the legitimacy of CSM positions.

Finally, while enhanced participation of CSOs in the CFS is important in so far as it can expand the scope of debate and provide alternative approaches to achieving food security, there is a risk that the participatory nature can become 'overly cognitivist or rationalistic and thus insufficiently egalitarian' by favouring the 'educated and the dispassionate' and excluding 'the many ways that many people communicate reasons outside of argumentation and formal debate, such as testimony, rhetoric, symbolic disruption, storytelling and cultural- and gender-specific styles of communication' (Bohman, 1999, p. 410). These challenges are constantly addressed and evaluated within the CSM and attempts are made to build awareness and make space for different modes of communication. Where this becomes most problematic is through the interaction of the CSM with the CFS: the CFS is an established and formal governance space that operates under formal UN procedures. Thus, while the CFS is in favour of including those most affected by food security, the organization structure, financial mechanisms and the political culture have yet to fully adapt to facilitate their involvement. Yet, while there is a goal to engage those most affected by food insecurity, there is also realism: it will not always be possible to involve those most affected. This is despite the desire to allow the voices from the social movements to be expressed alongside the more established and NGOs participants.

The reform of the CFS and the implementation of the CSM marks a clear shift and expansion in understandings of participation and, as shown above, presents a whole new set of complexities and challenges that are being addressed, through a variety of means, as they present themselves. These challenges are facing networks that have been expanded to incorporate actors who have been committed predominantly to deconstructing and contesting the logic of embedded neo-liberalism as it appears in food security policy, most notably through the advancement of a food sovereignty framework. The awareness by these social movement actors of their position within the framework of embedded neo-liberalism was illustrated by a leader of a farmers movement in West Africa stated at the 37th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (October 2011) at a policy roundtable on food price volatility:

> 'Instead of responding to the causes of our poverty and of price volatility, we have seen whole catalogues of projects and programmes financed in the name of the agricultural sector, billions of dollars are mobilized every year, but the truth is that more than half of the peasant families in the majority of our countries do not have access to money to buy a plough, a couple of oxen, a cart, or a donkey' (Coulibaly, 2011).

The approach to food security programming and policy critiqued above exemplifies the deep entrenchment of neo-liberalism within twenty-first century 'institutional behaviour, political processes and understandings of socio economic "realities"' (Cerny, 2008, p. 3). As noted above, the food security programme and agriculture policies have been transformed by and within this process. The farmers movement leader from West Africa also gave a personal reflection upon the process of neo-liberalism and its impact:

> 'About thirty years ago I was in school and we were told that it was better to produce for external markets… We were then told that the state was inefficient and that more space had to be given to the private sector. At the same time, our states were forced to go even more into debt in order to re-establish macroeconomic equilibrium. We were told that any support to peasant agriculture – deemed to be non-performing – had to be cut… Then we were told to become competitive according to the criteria of international financial institutions, and that our states were not allowed to protect us any longer. All custom tariffs have been dismantled and our markets have been liberalized, food products produced elsewhere have started dumping into our markets at low prices, making us even more vulnerable to price volatility… However, none of these 'solutions' that have been imposed on us moved us out of poverty. Worse, we became even more vulnerable. It is within this context that peasant agriculture is being asked to perform' (Coulibaly, 2011).

Indeed, these farmers and peasants, pastoralists and fisher-folk, are faced with balancing their approach, their knowledge and their ideologies not only with other civil society actors, which has been the focus of this article, but with nation states, the private sector, international financial institutions and the UN, many of which serve to maintain and strengthen the logic of neo-liberalism.

Conclusions

In line with trends in globalization, systems of global governance have been making space for the enhanced participation of non-state actors, including civil society actors. Leading the formalization of this process is the UN Committee on World Food Security that has made civil society organizations official participants on the Committee. Faced with this new role, CSOs are developing a unique mechanism for engaging with the CFS and with each other. The Civil Society Mechanism is in early stages of development and faces many challenges but, as this article shows, actors are finding unique ways of addressing these problems as they arise.

The political and social playing-fields within which these changes are taking placed are defined by embedded neo-liberalism. The embedded nature of neo-liberalism establishes the main boundaries of logic and operation, but the theory posits that neo-liberal hegemony is ever-changing, always contested and thus in a constant state of flux. It thus represents a hard barrier – but not an impassable barrier – for actors seeking to challenge its logic. Whether formally 'outside' actors prove more successful in their pursuits to change the system from the inside, as they continue to work on the outside, remains to be seen.

By opening up participation on the CFS to civil society actors, new opportunities to challenge the logic of embedded neo-liberalism are being created. While this has

the potential to expand the terms of debate, understandings of the problems and the scope of solutions, which we deem to be positive, the challenge for the CSM, will be finding a way to balance insider status with outsider objectives.

How well the reformed CFS is able to put into practice the values and mechanisms it has developed and supported is an important test not only of the value of the Committee, but also of civil society participation in global policy-making processes, and global governance more broadly. Notably, how the CFS incorporates and manages the participation of civil society, and how civil society organization manage their participation and retain a meaningful sense of agency, will be a litmus test for claims to legitimacy in the face of challenges from donor-based and wealthy country-led initiatives that seek to maintain neo-liberal hegemony and continue to forward agro-industrial solutions.

Finally, beyond the CFS, the CSM represents an effective organizing model for food social movements engaging in global governance processes; it is a politicizing, engaging and connecting mechanism. It actively seeks out and supports the engagement of those 'most affected by food security' and provides opportunities to hear alternative voices perhaps more connected to the realities on the ground. Its structure can also be replicated at various levels to support regional, national, local engagement and across sectors.

Notes

1. This article draws upon interview data and field-work conducted through observation of the United Nation Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the International Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) between October 2010 and March 2012.
2. One such change was the replacement of the Committee on Food Aid Polices and Programmes by the Executive Board of the World Food Programme.
3. From interviews with staff at the CFS and FAO, we were told that the reason this proposal was chosen was because it extended beyond the interests of the co-ordinating organizations, had principles to ensure transparency and sought to be globally inclusive (May 2010). It was also the most sophisticated mechanism to be presented.
4. Working towards the 38th Session of the CFS (October 2012), Working Groups had been established on: land tenure; agricultural investment; the global strategic framework; gender; nutrition; price volatility; protracted crisis and conflict; monitoring and mapping; social protection; and climate change.
5. At the time of publication, the following positions remained unfilled: the two seats for the landless are not filled, the urban poor has one of two seats unfilled and the small-holder farmers have one of three seats empty. North Africa, Central Africa, South Africa, South-east Asia, Central Asia, Pacific and Oceania are also not filled but some do have focal points that are in the process of undergoing a legitimate selection process.
6. As a case in point, comments on the Zero Draft of the Global Strategic Framework were collected but given time restrictions and different opinions, the CSM submitted one paper containing the three different positions.

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