

BRIEFING NOTE ON MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES (MSI)

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FIAN
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 3

What are MSIs and where do they come from? 3

Human rights concerns about MSIs 5

Guiding questions to determine FIAN’s engagement with/in MSIs 9

Alternatives to MSIs 10

References 14

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, so-called ‘multi-stakeholder’ initiatives (MSI) have rapidly spread and consolidated in various policy domains around the world. At national level, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) have proliferated as key institutional arrangement for driving forward development projects. But what exactly are multi-stakeholder initiatives? Are they all the same? Are multi-stakeholder initiatives at international level and PPPs at national level two sides of the same coin? Why and how have they emerged? Is multi-stakeholderism a new form of governing? What are the impacts of multi-stakeholder initiatives on human rights? Do these initiatives undermine human rights, create institutional conflict of interests and drive states further away from their duty to fulfil their human rights obligations? Should FIAN engage with multi-stakeholder initiatives?

This paper intends to address these questions with the aim of providing guidance for FIAN International on whether, when and how to engage with multi-stakeholder initiatives. It also intends to identify alternatives to multi-stakeholderism and ways to overcome the state omission and lack of regulation and effective policy making in many areas of public concern that multi-stakeholderism allegedly is trying to address. This guidance will be based in particular on FIAN’s direct observation of two international multi-stakeholder initiatives: The International Land Coalition and the Scaling Up Nutrition ‘Movement’. FIAN’s experiences of multi-stakeholderism at national and local level have not been sufficiently systematized and analyzed yet. The briefing note therefore remains work in progress as we move in navigating this shifting ground. We invite all FIAN sections to share their experiences with MSIs / multi-actor platforms in their countries. Likewise, we would like to encourage everyone to also propose alternatives to multi-stakeholderism which are better equipped to truly contribute to the realization of human rights.

WHAT ARE MSIS AND WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

Multi-stakeholder initiatives, often also referred to as ‘partnerships’ or platforms, are initiatives that bring together a variety of actors (‘stakeholders’) that are identified as having a stake (i.e., an interest) in a certain issue and should therefore play a role in addressing it. ¹ The term ‘stakeholder’ covers both those who are directly affected by an issue (e.g., malnourished communities) as well as those who have an economic interest in it (e.g., companies producing nutrition products). Broadly speaking, MSIs bring together governments, civil society and private sector actors. Other common participants, more typically at the international and national scale, include UN agencies, philanthropies and private foundations, research institutes, and academia. The precise categories of actors, and where the boundaries between them are drawn vary.

Within the last two decades MSIs have become a widely accepted modality for addressing complex global policy challenges including in the area of food security and nutrition. A central element in the projected need for MSIs is the perceived inability of multilateral bodies – usually United Nations agencies set up, funded and governed by multiple governments -- to make any meaningful progress in finding solutions to these issues. It is argued that the complexities of today’s problems make it impossible to rely on a single actor – the State – alone and that everyone must work together to

¹Add info on transformation of stakeholder term

achieve change. Underlying this is an assumption that companies, in particular transnational corporations, have gained such power that one will only manage to achieve changes (including the improvement of poor company behavior) when they are invited to the table and become ‘part of the solution’.

Another important argument put forward by proponents of MSIs is that corporations are rich and MSIs provide an opportunity to tap into the vast human, material, and financial resources of the private sector and other non-state actors. They are presented as a way to mobilize, pool, and target shared resources of different actors that can complement public resources.² Importantly, MSIs are portrayed as more democratic forms of governance as they bring ‘everyone’ around the table. There is also a presumption of greater efficacy and efficiency due to the more informal and less bureaucratic nature of MSIs (compared to UN bodies).

While there are no clear-cut definitions of what constitutes an MSI one can roughly distinguish between different types of MSIs based on their structure and function. A key characteristic of MSIs – and distinction to other forms of participatory governance mechanisms – is that decision making is – at least in theory – a shared responsibility of the different actors who participate in a given MSI, rather than the exclusive prerogative of States. However, there is much confusion and often the term “MSI” is used loosely also by and with regard to multilateral (state-led) bodies that have participatory / consultative features.

An example of such is the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) (see Box 4). The CFS after its reform process in 2009 describes itself as multi-stakeholder platform, despite the fact that the CFS remains a multilateral body in that States continue to be the ones who take the decisions within the CFS. The CFS reform document clearly distinguishes between States as “members” of the CFS and other “participants”, namely civil society, private sector, UN agencies, and philanthropic institutions, among others. While the CFS is exemplary in its participatory nature and seeks to hear the views of all actors with a ‘stake’ in food security and nutrition, it is only the member States who take the decisions and can vote.

While some MSIs have a strong institutional link with or directly emanate from UN bodies, MSIs often seek to establish this link to enhance their legitimacy in global governance. Civil society participation is also often used as a way to legitimize an MSI and give it the appearance of inclusiveness. One needs to look very closely, however, at which CSOs are invited to participate in a given MSI, whom they represent, and to whom they are ultimately accountable. Similarly, “private sector” participation in UN bodies often reveals a narrow slice of the for-profit world, i.e. more typically representing corporations whose geographically diverse wealth extraction “circulates” looking for continuous accumulation. Typically excluded are small(er) businesses whose income is reinvested inside the community wherein the entrepreneurs reside. Further, some MSIs will also make it appear that it is States who are in the lead, while in reality it is only a few carefully selected State representatives (possibly even in a personal capacity) whose participation uncoincidentally aligns with a relatively exclusive selection of CSO and private sector stakeholders.

² E.g., in the context of the SDGs MSPs are considered: “important vehicles for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, particularly developing countries”. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdinaction>

The structural forms of MSIs are often fluid. One can distinguish between ‘big table’ models in which everyone sits around one table, either with equal or weighted decision making power. Presumed here is the equality between participants, who tend to be handpicked by a convener. Another format is that of multiple chambers or networks, in which each constituency / ‘stakeholder’ category organizes itself, with a joint governing council that may be elected by and/or advised by the chambers. There are also several MSIs that are attached to UN bodies or serve as parallel bodies to UN/multilateral processes.

With regards to the functions of MSIs, one can broadly distinguish between policy-oriented, project-oriented, and standard-setting MSIs.³

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS ABOUT MSIS

As mentioned above, MSIs are often portrayed as being more effective than multi-lateral bodies and achieving greater impacts. In reality though, there are few independent studies that look into and evaluate the impacts of MSIs – both with regard to their stated objectives and on human rights more broadly.⁴ Several important human rights concerns exist:

- **Illusion of inclusiveness and democratic governance**

A key feature of MSI’s is that they pretend to make governance more democratic by allowing for direct participation of ‘all stakeholders’. There are several problems with this argument.

Firstly, by placing everyone under the umbrella of ‘stakeholder’ crucial differences in the rights, interests, roles, responsibilities and legitimacy of the diverse actors become blurred. No distinction is made between “rights holders” and especially communities most affected by hunger and malnutrition, who have a legitimate right to participate in decisions which concern them / affect their lives, private corporations, which pursue economic interests and are accountable to their shareholders, and governments (“duty bearers”) who have been elected by their people to represent them, and have an obligation to act in the public interest.

Secondly, who defines who has a legitimate stake in an issue and should therefore play a role in solving it? Who defines who should be left out? It is critical to ask who is invited to participate in an MSI, whom they represent, and what their de facto say in decision making is. For example, it tends to be international NGOs that are invited to participate in MSIs, to then argue that civil society is part of the initiative. However, these NGOs are rarely the ones to present the critical issues / make radical proposals, nor do they represent the people affected by hunger and malnutrition (though they may claim to do so). Rather than being inclusive in the human rights sense, MSIs turn out to be fairly exclusive spaces for a few privileged to take decisions on behalf of the rest.

Thirdly, the claim that everyone is equal conceals important power imbalances between participants. It is unlikely that all those ‘around the table’ have equal power – especially where participation in an MSI is on a voluntary basis and depends on the resources (human and financial)

³ HLPE: (a) knowledge co-generation and capacity building; (b) advocacy; (c) standard-setting; (d) action; and (f) fundraising and resource mobilization. See pp. 52-64. GLECKMANN: (a) policy-oriented, (b) product and process-oriented (standard-setting), (c) and project oriented. See pp. 16-25.

⁴ HLPE 2018, p. 43

an organization is able to dedicate to its participation in the initiative. By failing to acknowledge and address existing power asymmetries between and within stakeholder categories, MSIs are likely to reproduce these asymmetries by giving de facto more voice to its powerful participants with more means to influence, including through the financial resources at their disposal, the direction of the initiative. Often MSIs are dominated by actors from the Global North, even where participants from the South are seemingly involved on an equal level, due to existing power imbalances.

- **Sidelining critical voices**

In deciding who is in and who is out, MSIs are an effective means for sidelining critical voices, while still pretending that all actors are around the table. Even when they are open for everyone to join, the organizations that disagree with their structure and way of functioning (e.g., corporate sector participation) are automatically left out, leaving the ‘civil society space’ to other more conform voices. Space for debate and constructive disagreement is effectively killed.

- **Enhancing access for companies to policy making & legitimizing their role in governance**

MSIs are important vehicles for industry to influence public policy decisions that may affect their profits, while white-washing themselves as doing something good. Through their participation they shift the debate towards solutions that benefit their interests, and away from those that would negatively affect their market and profit interests. The consensus-orientation found in MSIs (see below) ensures that only solutions that all stakeholders can agree to will be pursued.

MSIs legitimize the role of companies as players in global governance, and help them shift the image from being ‘part of the problem’ to being ‘part of the solution’. Often MSIs – and even those that would strictly speaking not qualify as such since States remain the sole decision makers – are referred to and promoted as models for what future governance should look like, and to underline the need to do things in a multi-stakeholder way.

The idea of MSIs as default mechanism for addressing global challenges, and the perceived need for all actors to have a seat at the table is already deeply engrained in many people’s thinking – including within UN, governments and civil society. It has become the norm to invite the private sector whenever civil society is invited. Other forms of truly participatory governance are not even thought of. Those voicing concerns about MSIs and the implications of too close relations with the corporate sector, are often sidelined, and accused of being outdated, ideology driven, and ‘anti-corporate’.

- **Narrowing of solutions, avoiding structural changes**

Consensus orientation inevitably leads to a narrowing of solutions to those everyone can agree on. While proponents of MSIs like to highlight the common interests that exist between different actors (as basis for collaboration), it is the differences and contested issues that actually matter. Proposals that address the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition and the underpinning inequalities and power relations are left out of the equation. Similarly, solutions that would entail regulations and possible reductions in corporate profits are replaced by more market-friendly interventions.

Governments can use their participation in MSIs – and the more narrow solutions promoted in this context – as pretext to show that they are “doing something” about the problem, while leaving the more complicated and conflictive issues aside.

While the objectives of MSIs often tend to be framed in broad terms, the solutions promoted in practice are often much more narrow (see Box 1).

- **Lack of transparency and erosion of accountability**

A central concern is the shift away from the relation between States as duty bearers and people as rights holders. In transferring public functions, including the development and implementation of public policies, to MSIs, lines of accountability between States and people become distorted. It is no longer the State that people can turn to for claiming their rights, or seeking accountability for the negative impacts of public policies and actions.

Who is to blame for the negative impacts resulting from misguided actions or recommendations of an MSI; or for the foregone impacts of promoting one strategy over another? What means do people have to hold an MSI accountable?

Rarely do MSIs have effective mechanisms in place to allow for complaints by affected communities. Moreover, the lack of transparency in internal decision making procedures and channels of influence makes it extremely difficult to attribute negative impacts to the actions and influence of an MSI, and allocate responsibility within a given initiative.

While MSIs often claim to be highly transparent, important issues such as how decisions are taken (who is particularly influential in these), especially in relation to disputed matters, are often obscure. Similarly, the influence of MSIs over the direction of public policies is often through informal channels, beyond the scrutiny of the public. Communities are rarely aware that a certain programme or action is influenced by / derives from a multi-stakeholder initiative, when these are carried out through the government or individual members of the initiative.

However, even if the attribution of a negative impact would be possible, the question would arise who within the MSI would be liable for it? In the case of SUN, for example, Lead Group members act in their personal capacity and carry no legal responsibility for the initiative.⁵

A common concept within MSIs is that of “mutual accountability” in which it is presumed that the various actors within an MSI hold each other accountable with regard to their commitments and the results achieved. In this context, there is a presumption that civil society functions as a “watch dog”, especially when it comes to corporate participation. But as mentioned previously, civil society does not necessarily equal critical voices and less those affected by hunger and malnutrition. The NGOs one is likely to find in MSIs are hand-picked, conform international NGOs that are more concerned about pleasing (potential) donors, including corporate funders, than the communities whom they claim to serve.

- **Fragmentation of global governance**

A common argument in favor of MSIs is that they contribute to reducing fragmentation in that they bring the various actors together and ensure that everyone pulls at the same string. Practice shows though that the proliferation of MSIs in the area of FSN has led to ever more fragmentation in governance with often multiple initiatives of different constellations appearing and competing with each other.

⁵ See SUN Lead Group Terms of Reference, available at: <http://ucx3x320eshgixppibt1rqg0.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/SUN-Movement-Lead-Group-TORs.pdf>

- **Monopolizing the private sector**

In global scale MSIs, it is the industrial scale, transnational corporations that monopolize the seat at the table for “the private sector.” They are characterized by their accumulated wealth and the dominance of their presence in lobbying governments and controlling markets and trade. The category “private sector” in international MSIs like the CFS effectively erases the profile and participation of small(er) private sector businesses including those of small holder food producers, processors, and their markets and who find their “home” with civil society.

As presently structured, a defining characteristic of those food and nutrition businesses that participate in the MSI’s “private sector” and those who do not is whether the business extracts wealth from a community or whether its earnings are reinvested in the geographic and social dimensions of their origin to foster a sustainable and adequate standard of living. A corporation is accountable to its shareholders; small(er) scale entrepreneurs are accountable to the community, who in a sense are their shareholders. A robust local and locally controlled food economy is a hallmark of food sovereignty and an indicator of the progressive realization of a human right to food and nutrition. Almost ironically, small(er) private entrepreneurs may be sheltered and given a co-governance voice through the civil society sector while ignored by a “private sector” monopolized by corporate actors.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE ENGAGEMENT WITH/IN MSIS

The below set of questions will help us better understand the objectives and particular characteristics of a certain MSI, and can orient us in our decision on whether or not to engage with / participate in it. It is very important for FIAN to make clear assessments of these spaces and of our capacity to influence their outcomes towards increased human rights accountability beforehand. While MSIs always provide the image of inclusiveness, it is crucial to assess more deeply who precisely is driving an initiative and who is invited to join, with what say. Similarly, while their objectives tend to be described in broad terms, the actual practice may be much more limited, possibly even contradictory to the stated objective, and one needs to look closely at what precisely the initiative and its members are promoting in practice. Ultimately, we need to decide whether our participation in a MSI does more good than harm, with harm including our presence being used to legitimize the space. What are the red lines for us?

A. Purpose of the initiative

- What is the stated purpose of the initiative? Is it in line with our objectives?
- Does the initiative actually do what it claims to do?

B. Composition and leadership

- Who initiated the initiative?
- Who participates in the initiative? What are the criteria for becoming a member? Are there any criteria for exclusion?
- Who leads the initiative? How and by whom are the leading members chosen? Which are the criteria for selection?
- How is “fair representation” and meaningful participation of groups most affected by hunger and malnutrition ensured? Do they play a significant role in the leadership structures?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of different members? Are they clearly defined? Is a difference made between States, private sector, civil society, and those affected?
- Who are the CSOs participating in the initiative (e.g., international, grassroots, service delivery, advocacy, human rights, etc.)? Who is the “private sector” that participates (e.g., small / local business, TNCs, companies that have commercial interests that conflict with the objectives of the initiative and/or the RtFN)?

C. Decision making

- What are the decision making structures in place? Who can participate in discussions, who takes the final decision? Are decisions taken by vote, or by consensus?
- How are groups most affected by hunger and malnutrition represented in decision making processes?
- Are there any mechanisms to identify and respond to power asymmetries between participants (e.g., between communities affected and international NGOs, or between CSOs and corporations)?
- Is there a system for dispute resolution? How are disagreements dealt with?

- Does the initiative acknowledge and adequately respond to potential conflict of interest risks that could undermine its public objectives and/or the realization of the RtFN)? For example, through its membership, decision making, or funding criteria?

D. Accountability

- Are the obligations towards people affected by the initiative (supposed beneficiaries and others) spelled out clearly? Who is accountable for actions of the initiative? What mechanisms for external accountability exist?
- Does the initiative replace, or erode existing accountability structures (for example, does it remove accountability from governments)?

E. Financing structure

- How and by whom is the initiative funded?
- What is the decision making process for the allocation of resources?
- How does the funding impact collective objectives, strategies and agendas?
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ALTERNATIVES TO MSIS

MSIs are promoted as alternatives to the multilateral system arguing that this system has failed. However, an analysis as to why the system has failed and in how far MSIs actually address the causes behind this failure is missing. For example, one major challenge faced by the UN and governments in responding to major crises such as eco-destruction, climate change, and malnutrition has been the growing power of corporations and their interference – direct or through governments – with public efforts. Bringing these very same actors “around the table”, while often presented as argument with view to a supposed inability to regulate (“control”) them, does not only fail in providing a meaningful alternative to regulations, but actually further increases their power and reduces governments’ ability to regulate them.

Rejecting multi-stakeholder models does not imply saying that the multi-lateral system has no deficiencies, or that governments always act in the public interest and for human rights. We know that this is not the case. So we need to think beyond the “either or” option that we are often presented with. The key lies in finding governance modalities which, yes, are more participatory, but in the true human rights sense. This means: that they must provide conditions for meaningful engagement of communities most affected by hunger and malnutrition, and put their voices, perspectives, and experiences first in the determination of public policy priorities, the implementation of public actions, and their monitoring and evaluation. While the voices of other actors may also be heard and used to inform public decisions, it is critical that they are considered at a different level from those of the communities directly affected and the organizations representing them / their interests; and that they are considered in light of the interests these actors represent. The corporate and transnational private sector should not be listened to as a party that is affected by or (necessarily) seeks to solve the problem of malnutrition at the local level, but as a party with an economic interest in extracting profit from communities experiencing (mal)nutrition and circulating that profit into capital available for further investment/extraction elsewhere.

Alternatives for more democratic and localized governance of food systems already exist, and one example are national and local food policy councils, such as the ones in Belgium or the Brazilian CONSEA (see Box 3). These, while bringing together different actors, ideally do so with clear recognition of their distinct roles. There is the need for the preeminent voice of the most marginalized rights holders and the primary obligation of the government to be lead public policy maker in collaboration with those rights holders and democratic popular mandates, all in the context of human rights frameworks and processes.

At the same time as enhancing the space for civil society participation in public policy making, an important aspect of addressing current governance challenges, lies in taking effective measures to protect the public policy space from corporate influence. MSIs are not the only means by which companies influence public decision making, and often our governments themselves are already “captured” by corporate interests and represent these at home and in multilateral spaces. So advocacy for more public participation must go hand in hand with advocacy to protect the public policy space through effective conflict of interest and other safeguards that ensure decision making is based on public and not private interests. That said, small(er) and more local private sector entrepreneurs tend to live and reinvest in the communities of their businesses. They sometimes straddle civil society and private sector roles and are, perhaps, differently positioned from corporate and international businesses in terms of the suitability of their participation in local policy development. A challenge then for alternatives to MSIs is how to develop a typology or gradient of private sector actors. Civil society representation in MSIs has already begun this kind of internal self-examination by e.g., splitting into different “camps” those actors from differently affected communities of rights holders; separating international from local or national NGOs; exposing NGO fronts for private corporate interests from public interest civil society organizations; respecting the unique operational strategies of social movements as opposed to registered non-governmental organizations. In the case of the CFS’ CSM, civil society representation is stratified and takes turns. Diversity in the private sector, however, has collapsed into a monopolistic transnational corporate identity. The challenge is to ask questions that can differentiate and democratize the private sector. There are standard questions such as, what is a company’s net worth and how many employees does it have? Other questions require greater transparency such as, what percentage of company income is taxed, what percent of ownership and management is local, does the company contribute to local or national food sovereignty? Surely neither operators of local fish market stalls nor Nestle corporate interests can survive bankruptcy. Both participate in food economies and systems. Both need customers, attempt to minimize costs, and are likely candidates for harboring conflicts of interest in MSIs. Only one, however, has the accumulating power to monopolize private sector identity and overwhelm government authority and its obligations to rights holders. How are critical private sector entrepreneurs in the food system sidelined and silenced? Where are the mechanisms for participatory balance in private sector representation in MSIs?

Box 1: The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Initiative

The Scaling up Nutrition ‘Movement’ brings together governments, UN agencies, donors, business and civil society in a “collective action to improve nutrition”. It was launched in 2010 and, to date, 61 countries have signed on to the initiative. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), as well as several bilateral donors and the EU are key funders of SUN.

SUN’s international Lead Group includes large transnational corporations and allows them direct influence on SUN’s policy direction. It also includes key advocates of technical, private sector- or market-driven solutions to malnutrition,

such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. While SUN claims to be government-led, only four (previously only two) of the current 26 Lead Group members represent SUN country governments.

A central premise in the establishment of SUN was the projected need to galvanize funds for nutrition through the building of consensus on ‘evidence based’ interventions. Following the lead of the BMGF-funded 2008 Lancet series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition, revised in 2013, the majority of SUN’s recommended interventions involve fortified products and nutrition supplements of some kind. This narrow approach stands in contrast to the broad objectives the initiative claims to pursue: to “end malnutrition in all its forms” and to ensure that “every child, adolescent, mother and family can realize their right to food and nutrition, reach their full potential and shape sustainable and prosperous societies”.⁶

A central element in SUN’s theory of change and countries’ commitment when joining SUN is the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms at country level. These platforms pave the way for private sector participation in countries’ policy making. At the same time they reduce the role of the government to that of a ‘facilitator’ of nutrition actions. While SUN claims to address conflicts of interest that arise from private sector participation, its COI tool creates conceptual confusion and is centered on transparency, trust, and dialogue, rather than on the effective prevention of undue influence by corporations on public policy making and resulting COI.

While SUN creates the illusion of a bottom-up inclusive movement, in reality the civil society that participates in SUN consists largely of international, service delivery-oriented NGOs, while critical voices and those of communities themselves are left out. There is no recognition of, nor attempt to balance power within and between SUN ‘stakeholder’ constituencies, nor mechanisms to solve internal disputes. The initiative does not have any accountability mechanism in place towards communities affected by malnutrition. At the same time the institutional changes promoted by SUN (shift towards MSPs) make it even harder for these communities to hold their governments accountable for negative or foregone impacts.

Countries join SUN without any democratic process or scrutiny with a simple letter of commitment from a high-level government representative. This is highly problematic given the profound institutional and policy changes promoted by the initiative.

In conclusion, SUN’s narrative of a country-led movement is quite distinct from the reality: an elite, top-down initiative with little democratic credentials. SUN effectively narrowed the space for nutrition discussions and sidelined critical voices. Its broad objective, framed in HR language, in practice translates into the promotion of narrow technical interventions targeting only immediate causes of malnutrition. The interventions promoted not only carry human rights risks, but also distract from the structural causes of malnutrition and measures to address these. Lastly, the initiative contributes to the erosion of accountability and further fragmentation in nutrition governance.

For more information see: FIAN International, IBFAN, SID (2019). When the SUN casts a shadow. The human rights risks of multi-stakeholder partnerships: the case of Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), available at:

https://www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow_Eng.pdf

Box 2: Food Policy Councils

Food policy councils can play an important function in the re-localization and democratization of food systems governance, especially in the context of globalization and corporate control over food systems. They are models of collaborative governance in which different government sectors and actors within the food system participate, and which attempt to overcome fragmentation between sectoral policies while fostering citizen participation in food systems governance. There is a huge diversity of Food Policy Councils and while having a huge potential for democratizing food systems governance and grounding it in local realities, this depends a lot on the precise characteristics of the particular initiative. Relevant factors include: composition and selection criteria (who participates); how power relations are addressed; conflicts of interest safeguards; institutionalization while maintaining independence from local authorities; and mechanisms to ensure advice from the councils is taken into account in government decisions.

A prominent example for democratic food systems governance, and model experience for several other countries, has been the Brazilian Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional (Consea). Re-created in 2003, CONSEA functioned as advisory body to the Presidency. Its members were composed of different social groups within civil society

⁶ SUN (2016), p. 6.

(two thirds) and representatives of government institutions (one third). The president of CONSEA was always a civil society representative, indicated by the civil society constituency and nominated by the Brazilian President. CONSEA played a central function as institutionalised space for social participation and direct influence of rights holders in the development, monitoring and evaluation of policies related to food security and nutrition. Its achievements include among others the inclusion of the right to food in the Brazilian Constitution, the strengthening of family farming and agroecology, and reduction of pesticides, the advancement of the regulatory agenda, and installation of public procurement programmes that procured food, for example for schools, from local small-scale food producers.

See: FIAN Belgium (2017). Food Policy Councils: Towards Democratic Governance of Food Systems? (https://www.fian.be/IMG/pdf/conseils_politique_alimentaire_uk_web.pdf)

For more information on CONSEA, see: <http://www4.planalto.gov.br/consea/>

Box 3: The Committee on World Food Security

The UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was reformed in 2009 in the context of the world food crisis (2007/2008). Among the core functions identified for the reformed CFS were the improvement of coordination between governments and other actors considered relevant for food security, as well as the promotion of policy convergence and coordination through the development of international guidelines and strategies on food security and nutrition, informed by country and regional experiences.

A central element in the reform process was the opening up of the intergovernmental body to the participation of other actors. These included civil society, UN agencies, regional financial institutions, agricultural research institutes, philanthropies, and the private sector. These actors now have the right to actively participate as “participants” in CFS policy discussions and submit proposals, while the “members” of the Committee, the 130 member States, retain exclusive decision making and voting rights.

A unique feature of the CFS lies in the autonomous organization of civil society through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM), and the priority role within the CSM of organizations and movements most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition. These are recognized as “the organizations of the rights-holders that are the subjects of their own development and also the most important contributors to food security and nutrition worldwide” . Participants within the CSM belong to 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless, women, youth, consumers, urban food insecure and NGOs. Governance mechanisms ensure balanced representation of these constituencies, as well as gender and geographical balance. This is also reflected in the daily practice of the CSM, for example, when selecting delegates and allocating funds to enable participation in CFS policy processes.

For more information, see: <http://www.csm4cfs.org/the-csm/>

We highly welcome readers to share their insights, reflections and experiences with MSP with FIAN International.

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