

“Food Systems Governance Mechanisms” Food systems Community of Practice meeting

“The question is: if you want to change outcomes of food systems, what and how to govern?”



Friday 13 December 2019, 9.30-12.00
AgriProFocus, Utrecht



Introduction

This meeting of the Dutch Community of Practice on food systems focused on the challenge of food systems governance. Participants gained insight into governance mechanisms in current food systems, and on what changes in governance systems are needed to move towards more sustainable food system outcomes.

Globally, a transformation of the food system is needed to achieve SDG2 and other SDGs. This implies that change needs to happen at various levels: the individual, community, company, national level, and at international institutions. The fact that these changes are needed in combination makes this transformation a very complex process. Who gets to decide what a future food system looks like and who will take the lead are key questions in this process. In this context, governance of transformations as well as governance of existing food systems is an important topic which has not yet received much attention so far.

The meeting addressed the following knowledge questions:

- What are key governance mechanisms that influence food system outcomes?
- What are the power dynamics in food systems governance? Who takes the lead, who has decision making capacity for the various parts of the system, whom else has influencing power? (and should that be improved, for SDG impact?)
- What works to foster behavioural change, in institutions, in companies, societies, systems?

Presentation Otto Hospes

[Please follow this link to view the PowerPoint presentation.](#)

Discussions on food systems often focus on outcomes such as health, however negative outcomes such as microplastics, the nitrogen crisis and forest fires can also be seen as the (undesired) outcomes of food systems. If we want to change these outcomes the question is what and how to govern in food systems. How to steer them using policies, institutions, politics and power.

Polly Ericksen was the first to conceptualize food systems, with a focus on natural systems and their properties. Her conceptualization helps us to understand the complexity and components of food systems as adaptive and self-regulating socio-ecological systems throughout the commodity chain from production to consumption. It also helps to see food systems as 'telecoupled systems'. This is a term from systems thinking describing natural and social systems that are linked over large distances, as is the case for processing and consumption in food systems. This makes it difficult to come up with policies to govern food systems: whose policies, institutions or politics will govern this space?

The framework by Ericksen also has some limitations. It does not show actors and institutions, nor politics in and over food systems. Furthermore conflicting values on food are hardly visible and connection or disconnection between (parts of) food systems are not discussed. When dealing with systems there is often the idea that all dots need to be connected, but perhaps at some point there is a need to disconnect. To elaborate on this and the previous, four aspects are important to consider:

First, who governs food systems (through policy, institutions, politics)? There are many actors: smallholders, ministries, NGOs, seed companies etc. All with different missions and values. As a response to the 2008/9 food crisis a group of scholars, policymakers and practitioners therefore proposed that a better coordinated, more integrated system is needed in the face of this fragmented institutional architecture. Such a system risks top down food policies however, with narrow goal-setting, siloed systems, lack of checks and balances or elite capture. Alternatives, to achieve 'smart' food systems governance are being put forward. These can look for synergies, collaboration and arrangements where agencies collaborate and find each other. This requires not just putting people and organizations together, but strengthening of governance capabilities: reflexivity, resilience, responsiveness, revitalization and the ability of rescaling. Emphasis here should be not on outcomes but on steering. Successes are small wins. Concrete steps that lead to major transformation or substantial change through a process approach.

Second, changing politics over and in food systems. Talking about smart governance is not enough since changing food systems is about politics. Not necessarily big, but also small: agenda setting, decision making, representation (who is affected and how can they be represented?) and accountability. So how do we transform these politics? Producers and consumers are at different and in distant places. Food systems are always part of other systems like commodity chains. How are boundaries defined and what values will prevail?

Third, conflicting values on food. Food insecurity is seen by some scholars as the result of conflicting values on food that form the basis for different discourses and institutions: as a commodity, as a human right, as an ecosystem service. The discourse of food sovereignty has elements of human rights and of ecosystem service. A typical organization representing food as a commodity is the WTO, while the Convention on Biological Diversity is typical for ecosystem service. As long as such conflicting values are not reconciled 'food system violence' (Eakin et al. 2010)) occurs: food insecurity, plastic soup, and other unwanted outcomes of food systems. Ways to address conflicting values are establishing or promoting organizations or systems that attempt to reconcile these values, such as the FAO World Food Committee, WFTO or ESCR network. Making business actors of global value chains agree on new rules of the game is another way. This could be done through targeted approaches like with Free Prior and Informed Consent, or due diligence acts like in France, which restricts the self-governance of companies. Crucial here is to identify what principle can lead to a change in the whole system.

Fourth, to connect or not to connect? Connecting different components and actors of complex food systems may lead to greater efficiency and policy integration but also to control and transfer of risks to politically and/or economically weaker parts of a food system. As such establishing connections may actually be a kiss of death, strangling local initiatives and action. . In a way food sovereignty initiatives at community level may serve to prevent control and negative connections with a larger 'system'. For instance by reshaping control of local food systems vis-à-vis municipalities, or through strengthening local food markets. Other ways to change food systems may be through ICT technologies for climate smart agriculture of smallholders, by establishing local producer-consumer food networks or by developing circular economies based on regenerative agriculture. So, when thinking about how to transform food systems we should consider that there are many different ways in which elements can be included or excluded to achieve change, and more importantly that seeking integration of small-scale systems with larger-scale (worldwide) systems (or global value chains) may not be to the benefit of the small-scale systems.

References

Eakin, H., et al. (2010). Food, violence and human rights. In: J. Ingram, P. Ericksen & D. Liverman (Eds.). Food security and global environmental change. London: Earthscan, pp. 245-271.

Discussion

- In relation to conflicting food systems values, establishing alternative systems of governance that reconcile these might conflict with an approach that makes business actors in global value chains agree on new rules of the game. There is not necessarily an incompatibility however, approaches may be connected, for instance when promoting the adoption of new principles such as FPIC. Different actors can work on different aspects of the system, but none can work on all, therefore coordination between change actors is needed.
- The pyramid model on food values reminds of the pyramid presented by Frederike Praasterink at [the last CoP meeting](#), which puts mental models at its base. This model was about consumers, which is another way to look at this. Thinking of demand we can think about changing consumer behaviour, like many NGOs promote. Changing ideas of consumers can lead to different consumption patterns which can lead to systems change. However costs are a big factor here.
- The suggestions for changing food systems governance systems were mainly at global level, however these could also be organized at national, local or district level. IDH and Hivos for instance have multi-stakeholder initiatives to change food systems governance at local level. For palm oil negotiations about licensing take place at district level, which makes engagement quite difficult because this is where it hurts. Like at the global level, agreement on procedures is needed. New powers, possibilities and risks are brought in when starting change processes, for instance in multi-stakeholder roundtables. At more local levels such initiatives face two main risks: local government officials killing the initiatives, or initiatives being too vague which makes it difficult to involve the right people.

- When speaking about coordination we must realize that large parts of the food system are coordinated by market mechanisms, not by human acts. So we should look to how we can change those behaviours. Looking from a governance perspective FPIC is one way to change the behaviour of companies but there are also market regulation or network co-regulation mechanisms. When thinking about such mechanisms it is important to try to see them from the local level, because that is where we are trying to improve outcomes.
- When talking about governance solutions at the global level, the UN food systems summit might be an opportunity to achieve progress on some of the issues discussed. However it could be compared to the World Food Committee of FAO, which is primarily member driven. A fear exists there to say things not approved by states, resulting in less political power. 'Arena shopping' is also a factor in these global fora, where states attempt to win their disputes by starting actions in different arenas such as the WTO. This may have repercussions for the use of the food systems concept: it is only unifying among certain audiences. To achieve transformation of food systems issues might need to be tackled by framing them differently: connecting food and climate, focusing on nutrition, generally connecting it to where the money and interest goes.

Breakout sessions

Case 1 - Wageningen University & Research

Framework to analyze power dynamics in food systems transitions

[Please follow this link to view the PowerPoint presentation.](#)

Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, together with other Wageningen University & Research (WUR) departments, is currently developing an analytical framework on power dynamics in food systems transitions in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. In 2020 the framework will be used in selected case studies. This is expected to generate an overview of lessons learned about the role of power dynamics in food systems transitions; insights in the barriers for change created by existing power relations; and action perspectives for selected stakeholders and the WUR on what could be done to ensure that longer term transition processes in the food domain adequately tackle unequal power relations (and possible set-backs). During the CoP meeting the initially developed "power scan", based on interviews and a literature review, were presented for validation and to determine and prioritise specific needs of different stakeholders.

In the framework power is approached as a more dynamic force than in dominant approaches: as the (in)capacity of actors to mobilize resources and institutions to achieve certain goals. The framework therefore aims to focus not only on the 'have and have nots' but to also explain how power (relations) can change. To do this it distinguishes between 'power over', 'power to', and 'power with'. The scan aims to identify power structures and actors that need to be engaged in processes for systems transition, looking at five elements: 1) the boundaries of the system, 2) structures and norms, 3) actors and networks, 4) politics and contestation, 5) outcomes.

Discussion

- Currently the framework is still a list of questions that does not yet give guidance on how to implement it practically. Organizing this through a workshop poses some challenges. How can a group of stakeholders identify power dynamics, in a way that is useable for policy? What stakeholders can be invited? It might be better to interview people separately from an empowerment perspective. Not all issues of power can be discussed in a workshop. Is a workshop the right format to identify hidden power? To get in-depth knowledge of a situation? This depends on who participates.
- Who is involved in this process determines its outcome. One option is to invite experts without a political agenda who are very close to smallholders. Another way is to organize the process as a dialogue with different actors over a longer period. Identifying who are important parties to include and preparing them to engage in such a process. Also, who are missing in this process? It is very hard to include the most vulnerable. And how do you ensure you respect the perspective of a local community?
- How boundaries are set is another important issue. The goal on the horizon will determine the entry points for system change which are identified. Currently this is addressed by a number of questions on these boundaries, the outcome determines who uses these: embassy, NGO or others. However,

different goals or users might need different questions, which is not yet addressed in the tool. In Ethiopia this was done some years ago at the embassy in a three day workshop which might be a good example for learning. However boundaries cannot be easily set for a system, the pragmatic way is to set fuzzy boundaries. But how to incorporate cross-boundary power like money flows, global value chains? Moreover, setting boundaries is exercising power.

- A trade-off might exist between the practicality or duration of this scan and its inclusiveness and comprehensiveness. It remains a question whether this is problematic. The purpose of a scan is to quickly give a tentative idea, awareness of the situation, based on which you can start a process. When you start to work, you will also start finding out more about how these power dynamics work in practice. It will be an improvement over current practice where this is hardly done at all.
- The framework currently does not mention identifying incentives and opportunities for different actors. This might also be relevant for settings where conflict and instability is an issue, where food systems have changed as a result of violence or crisis. At the moment it is not clear if it is adapted for these contexts.
- The definition of power used in the framework could focus more on how relations create power. 'Power with' focuses on how you can enable change through coalitions, but in its essence power of actors can also be something that is given by agreement of others. Looking at the transaction that takes place here can also give transformative insights.

Case 2 - ECDPM

Sustainable Agrifood System Strategies project in Kenya and Tanzania

[Please follow this link to view the PowerPoint presentation.](#)

Within the Sustainable Agrifood System Strategies project, research was conducted on food system governance around indigenous vegetables in Kenya and Tanzania. Together with stakeholders, relevant food system policies, food system actors, and political economy factors were mapped. The leading question was whether diversification, through promoting indigenous vegetables, could contribute to the sustainability of food systems in Nakuru, Kenya and Arusha, Tanzania. Based on the stakeholders' mapping, concrete pathways were charted to improve food system sustainability through better [stronger?] integration of indigenous vegetables.

The exercise also explored political feasibility, given different politico-economic factors and stakeholders involved. For example, consumption of indigenous vegetables could be promoted by a blending guidelines – such as blending the flour of the Kenya's staple ugali with indigenous vegetables.

Discussion /questions

- Participants started reflecting on the problem analysis and the opportunities expected from indigenous vegetables, asking for a clarification of what the concrete problem was based on which this research was done, asking how diversification could improve sustainability, and asking why indigenous vegetables were chosen as the key topic: is the assumption that they are a solution towards sustainability, or healthy diets?
- Dietary diversity is an interesting case for using a food systems lens. Other sectors might help solve the problem of the vegetable sector. For example: income diversity may lead to an increased demand for vegetables.
- Reflections followed on the added value of a food systems analysis. Does a food systems analysis help to address an issue or a problem? This was answered with the recommendation to have a proper understanding of the (local/regional) food system in order to tackle a problem or the issue, and do that with relevant stakeholders. Having this insight is considered necessary to address concrete issues that different stakeholders want/need to address jointly.
- There are two ways of looking at food systems: 1. a conceptual approach, analysing the whole food system and finding the weak spots ('top down'), 2. a problem-driven approach, starting with an issue or a specific problem and do a relevant analysis of the systemic factors influencing that issue if and when needed. During the discussion, it was recommended to find a good balance between these two approaches, as both have their merits and risks. E.g. the risk of the problem-driven analysis is a lack of

open mindedness. The risk of the conceptual approach is that it may not work concretely enough towards solutions and action.

- Alternatively, one may opt for progressive contextualization versus a (oneshot) systems analysis.
- Operationalizing the food system approach is a specific challenge.
- Particular issues that came up thereafter: How to marry the adaptive approach to funding/policy reality; how to integrate a political economy approach and make that actionable? A transdisciplinary approach is needed instead of starting from fixed frame (participation and ownership of stakeholders is important). FSA can help projects and programmes through coordination between funders and implementing organizations. The analysis can help unifying and coordination.
- For projects, a food system analysis provides better insight in what you are doing and what possible implications your interventions have on other factors of the system where you do not directly intervene. Also, it provides you with insight that you are part of a bigger system with your interventions.

Further reading

- <https://ecdpm.org/sustainable-agrifood-systems-strategies/>
- <https://ecdpm.org/publications/sustainable-food-systems-through-diversification-and-indigenous-vegetables/>
- <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/connecting-dots-sustainable-food-systems-kenya/>

Case 3 - Oxfam Novib

Advancing free, prior and informed consent in the practice of banks

Oxfam and partners use several methodologies to facilitate communities' voice in decision making related to their livelihoods. An example is the work with banks in view of putting their commitments on free prior informed consent (FPIC) into practice.

Several financial institutions support clients implementing agricultural investment projects in low- and middle-income countries, of which many involve land transactions with potential risks for local communities. Enhancing an improved community voice in these investments is considered an interesting example of improving food systems governance. The risks for local communities are many, for example land-related conflicts, oftentimes including gender discrimination; environmental destruction; and denying indigenous peoples' right to self-determination¹. The question is where people can go to if their human rights are at stake? Do they have a say in decision making, do they have access to justice?

The Dutch banking sector has signed a covenant which states their agreement to the FPIC principle. The 13 banks who have signed it are responsible to implement this where the International Finance Corporation Performance Standards or the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure require it². In practice, this means that Indigenous Communities have the right to give consent to an investment proposal, or not to consent. Oxfam advocates for the right of consent for affected communities as well. And it states banks have the contractual responsibility for any harmful effects in case they or their clients haven't followed the principles. If needed, those negatively affected by business activities and operations have access to a grievance mechanism.

Oxfam has developed and used a community engagement tool with its partners, which is meant to foster meaningful engagement between the community and the investors. It is an iterative approach. First, the communities need to be empowered to act, they start identifying their core issues, map their land and natural resources, learn how to negotiate, while making sure that they understand what is being promised by the agricultural investor. They agree on their own results indicators. Thereafter the negotiations between the investor and the community can take place, and the investment decisions should only become final when the community has provided consent.

The tool is written from the perspective of the community. For investing companies it may seem a huge time investment, but it could prevent conflicts in the community or even (extreme) violence, as well as the

¹ See page 5 of reference document 'Consent is everybody's business'

² <https://www.ser.nl/-/media/ser/downloads/overige-publicaties/2016/dutch-banking-sector-agreement.pdf>

prevention of human rights violations such as forced evictions and denied access to water. As public loans and finance involved, transparency is a requirement. Commercially sensitive information doesn't need to be disclosed, but there is enough information that can be shared transparently.

Discussion:

- It would be interesting to apply the tool at a bigger scale. What would happen if you did this for example for 150 communities in parallel? This has not yet been tried, but it is indeed necessary to scale the approach. As this is not rocket science, it will require the development of some creative mechanisms and work process to do this at different scales.
- Changes in the agri-food system, through a big investment or a reform process, often include a conflict of interest. Proposals tackling strong vested interests sometimes need a top-down process to make change happen.
- The International Finance Institutions need to be persuaded to use these principles. As for them, the cost of conflict can be substantial, preventing that is in their interest. In addition, the FPIC is already in their policies, so they need to take steps to address these challenges.
- If FPIC related tools are necessary, this might be seen as a failure of the rule of law. Why would one put responsibility for a proper process without harmful outcomes at the level of the community? If done bluntly, this could be a risk indeed. The point is to develop a due process in which investors and communities both engage, with independent facilitation. A particular aspect and risk in this context is that CSOs are underfunded; if the international community expects them to take their responsibility in this process, supporting communities for example, appropriate (financial) support is needed.
- Note that governments need to take responsibility too: in principle it is the duty of the state to respect the FPIC for Indigenous Peoples in their countries. And companies and banks should take their responsibility (not use non-acting by governments as an excuse, see Ruggy).
- Note that 'the community' shouldn't be idealised or simplified either. Leaders may be corrupt and intracommunity dynamics cannot be overlooked.
- Is there evidence of results achieved via these processes? The first evidence is available with partners of Oxfam. The case presented illustrates a series of small wins that together form transformative pathways. The process can influence change at the local level, in the relation community-investor, and it can also help changing bank's views and practice, as well as government practice.

References:

- Consent is everybody's business. Why banks need to act on free, prior and informed consent. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/consent-is-everybodys-business-why-banks-need-to-act-on-free-prior-and-informed-620854>
- Enabling voices, demanding rights. A guide to gender sensitive community engagement in large scale land based investment in agriculture <http://www.wocan.org/sites/default/files/gd-enabling-voices-demanding-rights-technical-250518-en.pdf>

Plenary discussion and conclusions

The meeting was wrapped up with a reflection from participants on what they take with them from the morning's discussion. Below are some of the key reflections.

- As researchers it is important to have analytical tools that enable really understanding power dynamics within the existing frameworks on food systems. How can we connect what is being done in food systems analysis to what has already been done by those working on governance in food security?
- A tension remains between academic rigour and applicability of tools in collaborative efforts of researchers and people on the ground. How can tools be designed that are academically rigorous but useable on the ground?
- One actor was not present in the discussions today: the private sector. The private sector plays a very important role in food systems, in what smallholders produce, in markets, in what people eat. This is something to consider for food systems approaches. (note: CoP meeting with private sector on food systems approach is foreseen first semester 2020)
- Two clear research questions are: 1) how to get Free Prior and Informed Consent from large number of communities? 2) How can governments promote this initiative in their regulations?

- Conflicting values within the food system are an interesting insight of today's discussions. Global food systems' governance do not really include the incentives to make actors behave differently. E.g. the FAO cannot 'bite'. Actors may need to be invited or pushed to be more critical and outspoken about the power of companies and cases where international agreements or covenants on human rights are not adhered to.
- The issue of power relations in food systems and where can you make a difference, was considered an interesting aspect of today's meeting. Even EKNs are part of power relations in a given context with their own bias. They exercise power by giving assignments. One challenge that remains is how to discuss power that is discursive and informal, and how to make this visible.
- Power analyses can help ministries and embassies better understand how things work and how they are involved in these processes, to see if this can help them achieve better impact. Such analyses might also be used for better donor coordination, and to bridge silos. A question that remains is when to analyse power with a programme in mind, and when to engage in this exercise without a programme in mind?
- It is clear that we know very little about power relationships. In Wageningen the starting point is the consumer, not following the Ericksen conceptual framework for food systems but that of the High Level Panel, focused on nutrition and health. However giving power to consumers so far has not worked to achieve change. We should look beyond agriculture and find less traditional allies to achieve change, such as doctors. There is a lot more money in health than there is in agriculture.
- We should not expect spatial or geographical boundaries to be boundaries for systems analysis. Boundaries should be fuzzy. Soft systems analysis should be revisited to move beyond this situation by defining a root definition of the problem, elaborating who wants to go where in a transition.

Participants list

Name	Organization
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