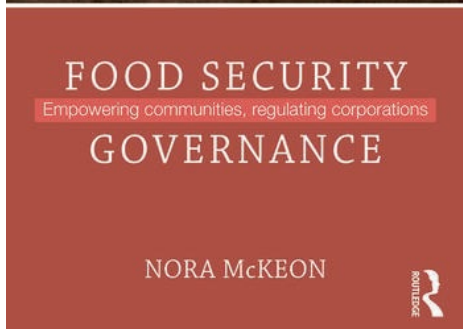


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## Food Security Governance: empowering communities, regulating corporations, by Nora McKeon

Less than one year after publishing "[The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition: a coup for corporate capital?](#)", Nora McKeon is back with a new book "[Food Security Governance: empowering communities, regulating corporations](#)" published by Routledge (2015, 246 p.).



Clearly positioning herself in the perspective of an activist who has fought for decades in favor of small farmers, McKeon starts by reviewing the history of food governance since the end of World War II and analyses events that spread over the last 70 years as a history *"of selling out public responsibility to markets and corporations"* (p.21).

Adopting McMichael's marxist "[Food Regime Analysis](#)" perspective, based on a comparative historical analysis of different modes of organisation of the global food system, McKeon argues that today the dominant food system is the *"corporate-led global food system"* characterized by an *"astounding concentration of the power of transnational agrifood corporations... [in the] provision of inputs, trade in agricultural commodities and food processing, and food retailing"*. This system rests on the ideas of *"modernity"*, *"progress"* and *"science"* and relies on the mechanisms of the *"market"*.

By analyzing a selection of statements made by representatives or advocates of this socially and environmentally unsustainable system, McKeon shows how the language used often hides unacceptable weaknesses in the reasoning followed by some of the apologists of this system who present it as the result of a *"natural"* - read inevitable - evolution of our food system. Despite intensified efforts by this dominant system to take over food production - through the now well documented process of land grabbing [\[read\]](#) - it is still family farming that is responsible for producing the bulk (around 70%) of our food.

McKeon stresses that, alongside this dominant system, there are alternative systems that are more sustainable, based on local food webs, that are now gaining importance but need to be supported, hence the clearly partisan stance she adopts in the book (p. 57). For these alternatives to flourish, there is a need, she argues, to change paradigm. In particular, productivity (and production) needs to be measured while taking into account its negative and positive externalities; the concept of food security needs to be revisited and enriched by those of food sovereignty and the right to food.

In Chapter 4, McKeon analyses the reactions to the food price crisis of 2007/2008 and the role it had in prompting the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS),

undertaken in 2009, which implied a strong participation of social movements and civil society. She considers that the reform of the CFS has been a major progress compared to the chaos that existed in the pre-crisis situation where public governance was more fragmented and where private initiatives (often dominated by multinationals) were of growing importance and influence.

While one may agree with her that the revival of the CFS, the formal involvement of civil society, particularly producer organisations, and the intellectual backing provided by the High-Level Panel of Experts, are definitely steps in the right direction, it must nevertheless be recognized that the CFS reform achieved much less than what was been hoped by many when it was launched. It is true that the CFS has become a major arena for discussion, but the status of the output of the work conducted in its framework is, in fact, only of an advisory nature and does not bind legally CFS members: the Committee generates ideas, norms and advice that may or may not be implemented by its members. It does not have the means to translate its results in action, much less even than the recently created Alliances (the G8's [New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition](#) or the [Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture](#)) which have resources but have been established outside of the existing global governance system and have no formal relationship with the CFS.

In the last three Chapters of the book, McKeon reviews several local governance mechanisms and reflects on how products of global governance (e.g. Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment, and others) could influence the local level. It is however not clear from the book how these two sets of processes (local and global) are to meet and interact, and at what level this interaction takes place. The national level, which is yet the main level of creation, promulgation and implementation of policies and norms is not sufficiently discussed, even though its role today remains essential. A major gap that would need to be filled by the author in future work.

As a consequence, the conclusion of the book and the recommendations it puts forwards remain, for many readers, a little too general.

Later this year, an open conference on [Global Sustainability and Local Foods](#) organized by the American University of Rome and in which McKeon will participate, will certainly be an opportunity to discuss these issues.

Despite this shortcoming, the book is extremely well documented and contains a wealth of references as well as information on events the occurrence of which, until now, were only known to a few insiders. This makes this book is a must-read for those who are interested in the history and the future of our food and agricultural system.

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Further readings:

- McKeon, N., [Food Security Governance: empowering communities, regulating corporations](#) , Routledge 2015 (246p)

Previous related articles on [www.hungerexplained.org](http://www.hungerexplained.org) :

- [The New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition: a coup for corporate capital? by N. McKeon](#), 2014
- [Global Sustainability and Local Foods](#), 2015