

The Private Sector's Great Takeover: How multi-stakeholderism threatens food systems, people & states

Gonzalo Berrón (CPTeam TNI)

- “great takeover” taken from WEF’s reset agenda, which took off after the crisis of 2008 and the intention is to redesign global governance in favour of multistakeholder model
- The weakest and poorest states will have the most to lose from this model, as well as the people
- First round of questions: what is the problem?

Harris Gleckman, Expert / TNI

- Let’s start at the domestic level. We want a vibrant state that reaches out to multiple constituencies to develop its programmes, and it has the tools to do this
- At the international level, we need an institution to develop ideas and carry out programmes, but we need clarity about obligations, responsibilities, liabilities
- When we shift from a government-centre system to a corporate-centred system we fundamentally change this
- The multi-stakeholder system avoids clarity of obligations, responsibilities and liabilities
- It also marginalizes the institutions we have build (FAO, CFS, etc.) and claims that others can solve the problems
- Many national ministries have been taken over by agribusiness
- UNFSS is a major effort towards corporate governance: diffuse and vague standards, vague selection of participants, and concentration of power on the corporate side
- We see a fundamental change in our vocabulary: from constituencies and citizens to stakeholders (it has not political historical precedence). It allows the organizers to choose who to include and who to exclude. We need to reassert the control of the vocabulary to counter this effort.

Sofia Monsalve/FIAN International

- TNI has looked at 103 multistakeholder initiatives – 26% of them are about food, ag and nutrition so we are in one of the preferred areas of multistakeholderism
- These include roundtables, e.g. on sustainable soy, etc.
- For trade and investment, there is hard law and treaties, WTO, etc.
- For social, labour and environmental issues we have these voluntary initiatives, no obligations, etc.
- FIAN has long experience with International Land Coalition, which is an embryonic approach for ms. It was CSO, with UN and World Bank and academics – no private sector. Involvement of WB has caused a lot of problems for farmers. ILC has never criticized the WB land policies.
- Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) is also very problematic. We have conducted a study on them and detailed the problems. Nutrition is going furthest in transforming the UN to multistakeholder bodies. SUN (TNCs and BBGF) turned into UN Nutrition. Now it’s not clear: is it ms or UN?
- UNFSS is another step in this process. You’ve all heard that the Summit process has no clear rules and business is running the show behind the scenes.
- We are trying to have a long-term approach, and to partner with UN agencies. But they are working more and more with the private sector, such as Crop Life.
- The summit machinery is huge.

- UNFSS is consolidating national dialogues as national ms, and want to link these with CFS. Their objective is not public policies, but data collection.
- UNFSS coalitions for action will be in charge of implementing the solutions that come out of the Summit. There is one on agroecology. It's basically saying that the UN was not able to have a plan on AE so we're now relegating it to a ms body. They are distorting the concept of AE.

Martin Drago, Friends of the Earth International

- MS is creeping into the UN and we have to understand how its growing and being pushed
- The main problem is that my approach is the fox sitting with the hens to decide how to eat them – it's an attack on representative democracy.
- This is happening in the UN but also at the national level.
- They are clever with words: claim they are opening up to participation, but we see an increase in fascism and authoritarianism throughout the world.
- They are using the UN to legitimize themselves; the UN is now at the service of the corporate narrative: companies are part of the solution.
- They are promoting conceptual frameworks to promote false solutions and false sustainability. There is a long history of this e.g. Rio+20, etc.
- This thinking creeps into political solutions. It's an old problem, but it's being institutionalized now.
- One major problem is that in civil society there's a lot of confusion. We are diverse. When you put this all together it means that social movements are a minority in these spaces.
- Companies used to lobby, but now they are at the decision table directly.

Claudio Schuftan, PHM

- The great take over by the private sector is visible in food but also health.
- Health is being privatized worldwide but most dramatically in India.
- Health insurance companies are making a killing in this process.
- Outcome: it is difficult to reverse what has happened because public services are under-funded, and the co-existence of private and public health services is for rich and poor, and poor and middle classes are spending a greater part of their income on health.
- Ms health arrangements are less prominent so far, but they will probably come. But it's true that ministries of health are being taken over by private companies rapidly.
- PHM has a thematic group on food and nutrition and its impact on health.
- We are facing the same enemies in health and in food. This is a political problem.

Tchenna Maso (MAB/LVC Global Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power, Stop Impunity and for Peoples' Sovereignty)

- TNCs are converting what is public into private
- They are building an architecture of impunity
- There are clear conflicts between people and TNCs on access to resources
- They want voluntary frameworks so they can justify their actions
- We need accountability mechanisms and fair tax systems
- LVC supports food sovereignty
- We are living a global crisis, and it's linked to privatization and the corporate capture of governance

Shalmali Guttal (Focus on the Global South)

- World Commission on Dams was an early ms process; ms was presented as a solution i.e. put the military and corporations and governments around the table with communities
- Our position was that they are not equal, and stakeholders are not rights holders
- WB defines corporations as stakeholders
- They take multilateral guidelines and discuss how to interpret them
- WEF is now pushing the ms agenda
- UNFSS is giving legitimacy for an escalation of corporate power
- We also see what is happening at the national level: militarism, authoritarianism and corporates.
- So what is our vision?

Harris Gleckman, Expert / TNI

- We need to change the framework for debate and discussion about global governance. We need to reassert the importance of responsibilities, liabilities, etc. and consequences of negative behaviour...this means challenging the idea of everything being voluntary
- And we need to realise that the vocabulary of inclusiveness was originally to open the door to those excluded by governments (women, etc.) – the idea was they they should represent their own voices. But that has been stolen to say we need to include the private sector, bankers, etc.
- We should push for conflicts of interest standards. No private company should also govern in their area of activity. This was done by WHO on tobacco. We need standards on who is allowed to participate in global governance.

Sofia Monsalve/FIAN International

- They tell us that “TNCs are a fundamental part of food systems so we must include them”. Now with a more acute food crisis due to covid, we see that people’s solidarity has provided solutions. So for the long-term, we should insist that food is not a commodity. We need to insist that food systems are a public and common good. Solidarity solutions are the solutions we need.
- We need resources. The privatization of the public sector has destroyed public resources. We need to join with movements for tax justice so that the public sector has funds again.
- We had to organize this counter-Summit because the Summit did not give us space to discuss these issues. But we need more dialogue like this at the local and national level.

Harris Gleckman, Expert / TNI;

- We need to look for cracks in the system: expectations of democracy which don’t exist at global level; popular power, which is ignored by media

Sofia Monsalve/FIAN International

- Popular audit of FAO, proposed by Mexican vice minister

Facilitators:

Gonzalo Berrón (CPTeam TNI) & Shalmali Guttal (Focus on the Global South)

Link shared the chat

More information and resources on the corporate capture of global governance:

<https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-corporate-capture-of-global-governance-and-what-we-are-doing-about-it>