



# Food Governance Community of Practice<sup>1</sup>

## The Promises and Pitfalls of Multi-Stakeholder Food Governance

Monday 4th October 2021, 14.00-16.00, Zoom meeting

### Record of Meeting

You can watch a video recording of the meeting [here](#) and see a participant list [here](#).<sup>2</sup>

**Welcome and Introduction** - Florian Kroll (University of the Western Cape)

You can access the infographic on the food system that Flo showed [here](#). There are certain societal problems that are complicated in a way that makes them difficult to govern. Multi-stakeholder (MS) processes are proposed as a way to find workable solutions. But there is a risk of co-optation of MS processes by powerful interests. There are also questions of legitimacy and the fabrication of consensus using these MS processes as a cover to enable further consolidation of incumbent power and evasion of deeply democratic food systems transitions.

### Presentations

*Gareth Haysom (UCT, African Centre for Cities)*

You can see a copy of Gareth's Presentation [here](#) and a copy of his paper [here](#).

Gareth showed us a time line from 1960s to present of how global narratives, processes and discourses have shifted. Sustainability and agency are forming a part of this shift after the High

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<sup>1</sup> *The Community of Practice (CoP) is a collaborative learning space connecting a group of people who are concerned about the way that food is governed. We aim to interact regularly, build networks, share information and to develop new knowledge that we can take into our individual practice as well as inform wider decision making. Our members are farmers, traders, government officials, civil society organisation representatives and practitioners. Ultimately we are orientated towards promoting transition to a sustainable and just food system. The CoP meetings are open to all and anyone who regularly attends and actively contributes is considered a member of the CoP.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Community of Practice (CoP) has since its inception in 2017 distributed a participant list with email details for each participant in order to encourage communication and collaboration amongst CoP members. If you wish for your email address to not be included, please let us know by emailing [camilla.adelle@up.ac.za](mailto:camilla.adelle@up.ac.za)*

Level Panel report recently introduced these as dimensions of Food Security. Often a response to MS at a global scale comes from the 'Alternative food movement'. Gareth showed us a table of positions, arguments and ideologies that have developed in these spaces over time. The differences between these positions creates tension in MS processes. Food Policy Councils are often proposed as processes for bringing together different stakeholders. These are very popular in the global north but will they work for us in the South? They try to co-produce a change agenda but they come with risks and limitations. They are often political in nature, embedded in social relations and assumptions and professional incentive structures that undermine a very clean and clear process. Also running underneath all of these processes are questions of power.

There are many different types of power: structural power; bureaucratic power, political power, legal power, hidden power, ideological power. Power issues makes it even more difficult to engage. Given the history and inequality in South Africa, are these MS processes possible? We need to find ways to do this but perhaps not in the guise that they are in the global north. Rather than try to work towards consensus we need to find ways to embrace difference. Differences needs to become a device through which common positions can be discovered where spaces are created for the realisation of different positions. Embracing difference is useful: 1) to assist in identifying key positions that different actors hold; 2) it allows for recognition of non-negotiables; 3) it shows where (despite holding different views) stakeholders are working towards a common goal. Gareth presented a map of different groupings of positions within the alternative food movements e.g. justice focus, green focus, spatial focus etc. Its helpful to ask people to identify where they sit in this and to engage with difference in this way. He then outlined a project in which he had used this as a tool with which to engage to identify an area in which the different stakeholders could engage. This is discussed further in his paper.

*Chantell Witten (University of the Free State, SACSoWACH)*

You can access a copy of Chantell's presentation [here](#).

We should focus on is common agendas. For us children are central in terms of health and also social development and they will bring the best return on investment if we put our efforts there. If the common agenda is children we need to be focused on a child centred food system. It will be inter-sectoral in nature. This includes the health care facilities, schools and ECDs, shops and restaurants, the agro-food industry social protection and humanitarian relief. In this child centred approach the entry point of the food system is breast feeding. Why do this? We have a double burden of malnutrition in South Africa (stunting and obesity) both related to poor child feeding practices. Our target is to try to increase breast feeding by 50% by 2025. We are a long way off.

There is an international code to protect and promote the practice of breast feeding in 1981. Governments were urged to adopt the code and monitor its implementation. In December 2012 Regulation 991 was gazetted to guide industry and health care professionals on the promotion of food stuffs relating to children. They were developed with industry input. The regulation speaks specifically about the labelling of products so that mothers are not encouraged to buy these foods through health claims, humanised graphics, free gifts or other marketing strategies that companies use to undermine mothers making more healthy food choices. The regulation (R991) also tries to limit endorsement by association as well. So how do we work with multi-stakeholder groups? If

we can increase the literacy of civil society and consumers into the regulations and the tactics of the companies then we can stop this kind of wolf in sheep's clothing activity of the food industry.

*Ralph Hamann (UCT Graduate School of Business)*

You can access a copy of Ralph's presentation [here](#).

Can dialogue among stakeholders work? Can we circumvent co-optation by powerful actors? Yes but only a 'deep' version of dialogue that is difficult to pull off. Dialogue is motherhood and apple pie, who would not want to dialogue or engage in collaborative governance. But at the same time there is critique of dialogue and the pursuit of consensus. When and how might dialogue lead to institutional change and social innovation? We looked at the [Southern African Food Lab](#), which aims to facilitate dialogue between different stakeholders including those with different interests. They have employed different methods to facilitate dialogues such as learning journeys (visits to different parts of the food systems with dialogue with different stakeholders). We looked at 7 dialogue processes that were generally between 1-3 years long and analysed whether there were institutional outcomes. 4 out of 7 we thought did generate some generative shifts. We focused on enabling conditions.

The first enabling condition was 'problem framing complexity': if framed too high then people get over whelmed and disengage. Too low and people thought it could be worked out through competitive basis with no collaboration. Just right problem framing complexity made the problem seem tractable but required dialogue to solve. The second enabling condition was 'enabling momentum' where the value of the interactions was demonstrated early on. Dimensions of institutional agency is needed for generative dialogue: Actorhood - so that participants did not represent their organisation but developed 'whole person' actorhood (i.e. corporate manager but also passionate about the environment so not only one thing). Epistemic Orientation: analogic – participants recognized the need to access and share knowledge from diverse participants. Interaction dynamics: Participants developed a posture of inclusion and exploration of other's ideas. Dialogue that is focused on consensus-seeking is 'shallow' because it likely entrenches power imbalances. We rather advance a 'strong' version of dialogue that: celebrates diversity and tensions; seeks a demanding encounter between participants based on whole person actorhood, analogic epistemic orientation, and inquiry focused interactions dynamics; offers optimism for the efficiency of dialogue but also caution on the difficulties of its achievement.

### ***Panel***

*Andrew Boraine (Economic Development Partnership)*

Richard Senate published a book in 2012 'Together' in which he talks about the skills for complex cooperation and the difference between dialogics – the skills of listening where people become more aware and dialectics – the skill of arguing (i.e. the opposite). William Isaacs writes about the politics of dialogue – a collective, open minded and reflexive search for meaning. Discussion means break apart and debate means to beat down. Paolo Freire said leaders who do not act dialogically but insist on imposing their decision, do not organise people they dominate them.

Our partnering approach has developed from a complex systems thinking where no one stakeholder can solve the problem. E.g. stunting has been with us for decades so it's a persistent problem. What is the desired change, why and for who? The High Level Panel of experts have included this aspect of agency to food security which includes empowerment of people to take action to improve their own wellbeing. So how do we include ordinary people in shaping policy and improving the food system? When attempting change its important to do a systems analysis including an analysis of where the power lies and the relationships between actors and particularly the relationship between the top down authorising environment and the bottom up mobilising environment. We need dialogue both at the grassroots and at a strategic level and to look at how these two things work together. Partnering is a means to an end such as improving food systems governance etc and partnering is sometimes not possible or desirable. Its context specific.

What are the elements of a partnering approach: shared vision, common agenda and joint action. It can never be a quest for consensus. We sometimes spend too much time trying to get everyone to shared visions when in fact there are multiple visions and why not? Its democratic. We need to move swiftly on to how do we get to a common agenda? How did we work affirmatively with difference? Systems are often characterised by deep levels of mistrust between stakeholders including of the process itself. I think the agenda of child centre food systems is a good common agenda and all the actors described on the slide do not have a shared vision but they can have a shared agenda. This is embracing dissonance.

There have to be limits and lines drawn in a partnership process. For example companies that try to break and get around R991 do not make good partners. There has to be shared values such as accountability, collaborative behaviours and a commitment to information and knowledge sharing. Partnering works best when it begins to focus on specific themes at various scales and when there is a whole of government approach. How do we change the top down authorising environment to enable the bottom up mobilising environment. None of this matters if people don't see change. Otherwise these processes are just a smoke screen for preserving the status quo. So we need a deep dialogue that leads to action. Moving quickly from dialogue to action builds trust quicker.

*Lori Lake (Children's Institute)*

I want to encourage us to reflect a bit more critically on our own practice. I am talking about the conflicts of interest within us as individuals and specifically the ties that bind us to our funders and the relationship of trust that we hold as advocates for child health. It's a conflict of interest between private interests and public responsibilities. E.g. conflicts of sponsorship of academic conferences or research which might risk compromise our integrity as professionals. While we talk about state capture sometimes we are blind to how these issues play out in our own spheres in academia and civil society. You can see this when companies like Nestle deliberately seek out thought leaders in academia and civil society who have high peer credibility with the intention to retain and reward those that endorse the company's positions. Despite our best intentions reviews have shown that sponsorship leads academics to consciously or unconsciously bias their research. It doesn't necessarily mean there is corruption it can be unconscious but its hard to tell the difference sometimes. There is also a danger of perceived conflicts of interest which can also damage our reputation. We need to build awareness of this issue of conflicts of interest amongst citizens so that the issue is out in the open. Sanctions are also an option, yet to date its not been

that clear to date that the sanctions for R991 have been enforced or if they had an impact (considering we are dealing with multi-billion dollar companies).

### Questions and General Discussion

Ralph – Lori’s points are important. Self-censorship is something we see in relation to funding from certain corporations. There is a tendency to avoid awkwardness in these circumstances.

Flo- David Sanders was strongly opposed to including companies in these stakeholder forum as he saw them as only engaging to increase their advantage and position.

Chantell – if we have something which cannot be challenged such as child centred it helps. As academics we must be sensitive about power dynamics and even as academics have power over communities and we must actively reflect on who is not in our circles. We need to use our power to endorse the grassroots initiatives.

Helena Wagener – I have been involved in the professionalisation of dialogue. This has been pursued with an organisation in the US with very specific methods. Dialogue is a loosely used word but to use it successfully requires a level of professionalism and skills. You can access the paper by William Isaacs dropped into the chat by Helena Wagener ‘*What is Professionalism in Dialogue?*’ [here](#).

Julien Rumbelow- the dichotomy between ‘seeking consensus vs celebrating difference’ requires design led thinking which says all ideas are welcome and then we seek to implement agreed actions somehow. Sometimes stakeholders should be left out of the conversation. A lot of what this forum has been grappling with over the last few years is tackled in the design literature. We need to invest in the design of the process.

Kurt Ackerman – The kind of dialogue that we in the Food Dialogues are trying to encourage is not consensus making but diversifying the voices that are participating in the debate. And while there are some power dynamics there is an assumption that if we can get a diversity of voices then there is a benefit to that even from those that are widely heard. We try not to give any one a privileged position in the dialogues and we are conscious of these dynamics to the extent that we can be. We are open to critique on how we are doing these. This year we brought a corporate partners on board for the first time (Solve at the water front). We have found the process of engaging with them very interesting and has led us to think about what bringing in a corporate means for the process.

Gareth – The creation of slow violence that the food system represents lies within a system that has been designed for a particular purpose that lies way outside of our current food system. Its rests with our economic system , our extractive industry and a view on labour that goes so far back that we need to redesign but on whose concept of redesign? In my experience there is never really one pathway. How do we croque our way together? A book by Tom Slater talks about the deliberate creation of ignorance? How much ignorance is being embedding in the food system in order to avoid shifting the system? There are people in the system deliberately trying to distort the truth. Who do we include in the conversations, whose design and innovation.

Scott- The not so safe spaces are where the power of white men can be identified so who is controlling? Who speaks for the group? And who should keep quiet?

### Wrap up

We would be grateful for any feedback you have on this meeting and suggestions for future meetings by filling in this short [google form](#). The next Community of Practice meeting will take place on 10<sup>th</sup> November 10.00-12.00 and will focus on agroecological transitions and what this means at a local and provincial level.