



3/28/2024

A Critical Analysis of Youth Participation in Multistakeholder Organisations in Global Food Systems Governance

The Case of the World Food Forum

Saskia Dorssers

Registration number: 1061593

Program: MSc Resilient Farming and Food Systems

Chair group: Rural Sociology

Supervisor: Jessica Duncan

Course code: RSO80436



Abstract

The recent rise in multistakeholder organisations in global food systems governance has been met with criticism from both social movements and academics using the concept of multistakeholderism. In this shifting landscape of global food systems governance youth are a key stakeholder group who have not been researched in this body of literature. With these changes in global food systems governance and the battle of legitimacy, this research looks at the role of youth participation in influencing the legitimacy of multistakeholder governance organisations. This is done by employing a case study methodology analysing youth participation in the World Food Forum and employing both a sociological and normative theory of legitimacy to deepen the critique of multistakeholderism. This research concludes that the WFF is an example of multistakeholderism through its discrepancy between narratives and structures of participation, lack of transparency and accountability, and dominant corporate narrative of food systems. Youth participation is commonly used as a justification for these organisations but this participation lacks democratic legitimacy and therefore puts youth at risk of being tokenised.

Acknowledgements

First of all, thank you to my amazing supervisor, Jessica, for your faith in me and all your time and advice. I am grateful that you always keep pushing me to do the best that I can and allowing me to work on this thesis and create something beyond my expectations.

Next, I need to extend my gratitude to all my participants who shared with me their wisdom and opinions. Thank you for your time, candour, and your trust. I hope to have done your stories justice.

Vervolgens, dankjewel Bram. Je bent mijn houvast als dingen niet lekker gaan en degene waarmee ik het liefst wil vieren als het goed gaat. Bedankt voor je eeuwige geduld en vertrouwen in me, zonder jou was ik nooit zover gekomen.

And finally, I have to thank my friends, both Dutch and Taiwanese, for your laughter, delicious food, and constant support that keeps me going. Shout out naar mijn *vrouwkes*, je weet wie je bent.

Positionality Statement

As a young person myself this research ended up being very personal to me as I am deeply concerned about the future of the planet and with it our food system. The topic of food is something that I have loved all my life but the challenges of our current world have caused me to focus on the sustainability and justice issues of food systems. My upbringing in a rural area surrounded by farms has also impacted my interest in agriculture and food systems. Through this thesis and the people I have met, I have also gotten more involved in youth organisations concerned with food systems and have had a lot of time to reflect on the role of youth in food system transitions. If one were to ask me now, I could deliver a full monologue on why youth matter in global food systems governance. Lastly, due to my age being very similar to that of a majority of my interview participants, I found it easier to relate and empathise with them. I have learned a lot from their diverse experiences and hope to have done their views justice in this thesis.

I must also acknowledge my privileges as a young, white woman with a Dutch passport from a middle-class family which allowed me to travel to Rome for my participant observations with relative ease. Many youths, and other people, do not have these opportunities and whilst I feel grateful, I also feel indebted to those who do not have the privileges to access these global food systems governance spaces and make their voices heard loud and clear as they should be.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Literature review	8
Participation in global food systems governance	8
Legitimacy in global food systems governance.....	9
Youth as a stakeholder group.....	11
Theoretical framework.....	13
Multistakeholder(ism)	13
Legitimacy.....	15
Multistakeholder governance and legitimacy.....	20
Methods	21
Methodological approach	21
Data collection.....	22
Data analysis.....	24
Results	25
Justifications of the World Food Forum.....	25
Dynamics of the (de)legitimation process around the World Food Forum	32
The democratic legitimacy of youth participation in the World Food Forum	41
Discussion.....	51
Multistakeholder governance and critiques of multistakeholderism.....	51
Multistakeholderism and legitimacy.....	52
The World Food Forum as a case study of multistakeholderism	55
Conclusion	59
Bibliography.....	61
Appendix on AI	67

Introduction

To achieve a transition towards a just and sustainable food system, addressing questions on how this should be governed is a key aspect (SAPEA, 2020). Food systems are defined as being all the parts and processes that are related to in production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food, as well as the output of these processes relating to socio-economic and environmental outcomes (High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2021). Governance of these systems is the interactions among public and/or private entities that aim at ultimately realising certain collective goals (Candel, 2014). This governance takes place at all scales, but this thesis aims to look specifically at the global scale.

The most recent literature on global food governance has strongly focused on the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 which received a lot of criticism from both researchers and social movements. The main points of critique were that corporations had too much power, power imbalances among stakeholders were not addressed, and insufficient attention was paid to the right to food (Nisbett et al., 2021). This critique of the UNFSS refers largely to its multistakeholder governance structure which aims to include all-affected stakeholders (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). Among social movements this critique is often presented under the term 'multistakeholderism' (Chandrasekaran et al., 2021) and is a continuing concern as both movements and scholars observe the decline of multilateral spaces and an increase of corporate capture of multistakeholder initiatives (Anderson et al., 2023; Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023). The Summit also has had serious consequences on the legitimacy and authority of, and trust placed in, the UN food organisations (Anderl & Hißen, 2023; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). Furthermore, since the Summit, the current global food governance architecture has also seen the rise of new food governance organisations such as the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub and the World Food Forum. Simultaneously, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which existed before the 2021 Summit and was meant to be the foremost platform for intergovernmental discussions around food security, appears to be losing influence and relevance, and is, according to some researchers and activists, being circumvented in favour of the new organisations (Guttal, 2021). From this, one can conclude that the space of global food governance is highly contested and power is shifting whilst the importance to 'get it right' has never been so important (McKeon, 2021).

As we see this phenomenon of multistakeholder governance gain in popularity it is key to study and analyse it in more depth as it raises serious concerns about how our food systems are governed in the future. It is vital to keep asking who gets to participate, in what structures, and for what purpose, and what claims are made by institutions about the participation in them. A key concept that relates to

these questions is the concept of legitimacy. Legitimacy is a complex concept that is theorized in many ways but it is largely explained as either: normative, by addressing whether an organisation should have the right to rule (Dingwerth, 2007); or, sociological, by addressing whether other people/organisations believe that it has the right to rule (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). Currently, as described by Canfield, Duncan, et al. (2021), a battle is waging in global food systems governance over authority and legitimacy. The UNFSS in 2021 has caused major shifts in what is seen as a legitimate organisation in global food systems governance. Through attempting to legitimise the multistakeholder organisation (the UNFSS), they have simultaneously attempted to delegitimise the multilateral CFS, even though the UNFSS has been critiqued based on its lack of democratic legitimacy. In this battle around legitimacy and authority 'participation is emerging as a key dimension through which legitimacy is assessed in global governance' according to Canfield, Duncan, et al., (2021) but participation is often contested and problematic both in theory as in practice (Parfitt, 2004). This battle is continuing as the shift to multistakeholder governance is still a major concern for both social movements and scholars alike. More theorizing has to be done on this connection between legitimacy and multistakeholder governance to observe how the battle is raging on.

In this new era of global food governance, it is important to observe how stakeholder groups are responding to and engaging with these power shifts. An important stakeholder group in food and agriculture governance is youth. This group has recently seen a few new developments such as the creation of the CFS youth policy recommendations in 2022 and the new World Food Forum which states that it is a youth-led network. These initiatives aim to increase youth participation and engagement in food systems (governance) but in this era of contested legitimacy and authority, it is imperative to view these developments with a critical lens. Youth participation in global food governance has also so far not been studied extensively despite other global governance areas having drawn concerning conclusions about youth participation in sustainability and environmental governance areas (Kolleck & Schuster, 2022; Kwon, 2019; Orsini, 2022; Thew, 2018; Thew et al., 2021). To conclude, with the rise in multistakeholder governance there is an ongoing battle for legitimacy and authority of which participation is a key dimension, and since this growth of multistakeholder governance organisations, youth participation has seen certain new developments that might be problematic. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following question:

How does youth participation influence the legitimacy of multistakeholder governance organisations?

To answer this question this research uses a case study approach, with a focus on the World Food Forum. The World Food Forum (WFF) was created in 2021 by the Youth Committee, which consists of

young people from the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), with the purpose of empowering youth for a better food future. However, the WFF is already being critiqued by social movements for the same reasons as the UNFSS; multistakeholderism, corporate capture, threatening the multilateral bodies, etc. (Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023). This provides an interesting case study to explore the dynamics of youth participation and the ways it influences legitimacy as well as build on the theory of multistakeholderism through the lens of legitimacy. To answer the research question the following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. In what ways does youth participation play a role in the justification of the World Food Forum?

This question aims to answer in what ways the WFF justifies itself, specifically through youth participation. For this the legitimacy framework, specifically the section on justifications, by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) as well as the theory on self-legitimation by Stappert & Gregoratti (2022) is used. This question identifies justifications related to the purpose, procedures and performance of the WFF.

2. What are the dynamics around the (de)legitimation process of the World Food Forum?

This question addresses the broader dynamics of (de)legitimation and therefore uses the whole framework of legitimacy by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022). In this, the practices of legitimation employed by the WFF and its supporting organisations are addressed as well as the larger institutional structure of the WFF and the policy field, global food governance, that it is part of. To explore these dynamics it looks at the perspectives of both the youth participants and global food governance experts.

3. To what extent is the current youth participation in the World Food Forum legitimate?

The final sub-question is answered by drawing from Dingwerth's (2007) theorising of democratic legitimacy and the six dimensions he proposes of which democratic legitimacy is made up, to analyse the legitimacy of the youth participation in the WFF. In this, I hope to have put central the experiences and stories of the young people that attended or are/were part of the WFF organisation.

When studying a stakeholder group it is imperative to respect and deeply value the knowledge and experiences of that stakeholder group. However, according to Orsini (2022), many studies treat youth as a passive group to be studied and observed, which in turn influences international institutions in

seeing youth as subjects that need to be trained and educated. This perspective does not view youth as political actors who have agency and an important voice. In this research, I aim to put central youth as actors as suggested by Orsini (2022) and to tell their stories and views with as much nuance as possible.

This thesis first starts with a literature review covering literature about participation in global food systems governance, focusing on the shift from multilateralism to multistakeholderism, it also provides an overview of how legitimacy has been studied in global food systems governance. Next, the literature review dives briefly into why youth is an important actor in food systems and covers what issues youth face both in food systems and in participating in global governance organisations. The next section presents the theoretical framework which looks at the phenomenon of multistakeholder governance through the lens of both normative and sociological legitimacy. The following section presents the methodology in which the case study, the WFF, is outlined and the methods for data collection and analysis are explained. The results address the three sub-questions posed by this research and each has a concise conclusion in which the answers to these sub-questions are provided. Furthermore, the discussion builds on the theoretical argument linking legitimacy to the critique of multistakeholderism and presents the WFF as a case study of multistakeholderism. It also addresses the role of youth in this battle for legitimacy and the risks associated with a multistakeholder approach. Lastly, the conclusion reflects on the research, its contributions, and its limitations.

Literature review

Participation in global food systems governance

Within global food governance, participation and democratic processes of governance are seen as necessary in international institutions (Fraundorfer, 2015). However, this participation can occur at different levels and what has been commonly observed is that participation of civil society actors takes place to a limited extent in most institutions. Simply including a diversity of participants is viewed as insufficient; it will not necessarily lead to public good as commonly believed, as political differences among stakeholders cannot be neutralised (Duncan & Claeys, 2018; McKeon, 2017a).

From multilateralism and most-affected principle in the CFS

An example of an organisation often discussed in global food governance literature that tackles these problems differently is the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). The CFS is a multilateral, governance structure that involves member states have the final say which ensures accountability (Duncan & Claeys, 2018). The Committee consists of states that are members of the UN, participants that can be representatives of UN agencies and bodies, civil society and NGOs, research institutions, financial institutions, the private sector, philanthropic foundations, and observers (Committee on World Food Security, 2022a). This inclusion of multiple participants is organised via the most-affected principle to actually account for power differences and to provide more seats in their committee and supporting mechanisms to those most-affected by the policy (Duncan, 2015). The participation of civil society actors and indigenous peoples is organised via the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) in which those most-affected can autonomously organise themselves and facilitate their participation in the CFS. This mechanism functions using a quota system to categorise and prioritise those most-affected so that the decisions are made and influenced most by those most affected by them; the most-affected principle (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). This all allows for the participatory policy process to be politicised and creates space for disagreement and diverse views. This diversity increases the deliberative quality of the CFS (Alves Zanella et al., 2018). However, there are also criticisms of the CFS such as its limited accountability, low adoption rates of their policies in national and local contexts (Alves Zanella et al., 2018) and the fact that one state can technically block all of civil society during negotiations (Fraundorfer, 2015).

To multistakeholder governance and corporate capture

In recent years a shift has been observed in transferring the governance of food systems and its conflicted policy areas to multistakeholder governance structures (Valente, 2018). Multistakeholder governance refers to the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in the decision-making process to tackle issues that cannot be solved individually (Herens et al., 2022). Power in food systems governance has been shifting in all directions; to a more global scale involving more non-state actors, but also inwards

to smaller spaces of powerful decision-making that are less accessible (Baker et al., 2021). Claims are being made by certain organisations such as the World Economic Forum that multilateralism has ended and that its legitimacy is in crisis (McMichael, 2021). The solution presented is the creation of new governance structures that for a large part include corporations as a temporary solution to deal with our current crises. However, this multistakeholder governance that aims to de-politicise food governance has been criticised heavily and the term multistakeholderism has been introduced to voice this critique: inviting all stakeholders on the same footing whilst ignoring differences in power, responsibilities, roles, interests, etc. and not addressing power imbalances (Duncan & Claeys, 2018; McKeon, 2017a). This often leads to corporations ‘capturing’ these governance spaces due to the power they hold outside of governance; this is to the detriment of the existing multilateral spaces such as the CFS (Valente, 2018).

This concern of multistakeholderism and corporate capture is not only a theoretical one but also an empirical one that can be observed best in global food governance in the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. The Summit was presented as a people’s Summit in which everyone could participate and which praised itself for the high number of participants (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; Nisbett et al., 2021). However, many scholars and social movements critiqued these claims heavily; arguing that the Summit was an example of multistakeholderism due to its neglect of power differences and the large involvement of large multinational agri-food businesses and philanthropic organisations (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; Clapp et al., 2021; Montenegro de Wit et al., 2021). The argument can be made that the UNFSS used narratives of participation and depoliticised the space so that there were no questions about who was present there and how this participation was actually ‘meaningfully’ structured. This critique can be summed up in the all-affected principle; including all participants that are affected by the decision-making process and not structuring this participation in a way that deals with power imbalances (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021).

Legitimacy in global food systems governance

Global food governance literature has focused on both normative and sociological aspects of legitimacy. This review starts with the sociological understanding of legitimacy in the literature and within this a clear theme is the focus on legitimacy and language; Clapp & Fuchs (2009, p. 10) state that “legitimacy is intimately wrapped up in discourse itself”. They also note that agri-food corporations especially gain part of their legitimacy through their public discourse. This relation has also been studied by Fuchs & Kalfagianni (2009) as they used critical discourse analysis to show that food retail corporations use discursive power, the power to influence policy through discourse, to claim legitimacy. A more recent paper looks at how legitimacy is conceptualised and claimed within three discourses in food governance; strong food democracy, liberal food democracy and co-regulation

(Behringer & Feindt, 2019). The authors conclude that within each discourse the criteria used to assess the legitimacy of food system governance differ. The co-regulatory food discourse focuses more on private norms, efficiency of the organisation, expertise, transparency and compliance with regulations. On the other hand, strong food democracy discourse considers legitimacy based on their level of participation, deliberation, inclusivity, and bottom-up processes. Liberal food democracy sits in the middle of this with an emphasis on participation based on consumer choice, a broad range of consumer options, responsiveness to societal demands, and accountability through the public and state. From this, one can conclude that there is a clear connection between discursive practices and legitimacy in global food governance, especially employed by corporations.

This emphasis on the role of corporate influence is also visible in more normative understandings of legitimacy (Alcaraz et al., 2021; Freidberg, 2020; Fuchs et al., 2011; Henson, 2011; Kaan & Liese, 2011). In this body of literature, the authors perform a normative assessment of private governance using criteria such as participation, transparency, and accountability (Alcaraz et al., 2021; Fuchs et al., 2011; Kaan & Liese, 2011). For this they look at various structures such as multinational corporations, private-public partnerships, and private governance, however, all authors include that these organisations lack legitimacy in global food governance (Alcaraz et al., 2021; Fuchs et al., 2011; Henson, 2011; Kaan & Liese, 2011; Ryland, 2018). One author concludes that big agri-food companies experience that their legitimacy is taken away whilst they are doing their best (Freidberg, 2020).

Moving towards literature that connects multistakeholder governance and legitimacy in global food governance one can see that lately there have been major shifts in who is claiming to be a legitimate actor in global food governance (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). Canfield, Duncan, et al. (2021) argue that there is a battle going on over the authority and legitimacy within food systems governance and that multistakeholder organisations are trying to claim more legitimacy and authority and delegitimise and sideline the existing, multilateral organisations such as the CFS. Montenegro de Wit & Iles (2021) in their critique of the UN Food Systems Summit state that science is key to creating the legitimacy that multistakeholder organisations claim to have. This usage of science to claim legitimacy was also visible in the UNFSS, they argue, through the inclusion of the Scientific Group of the UNFSS. Furthermore, claims for legitimacy by multistakeholder organisations are often based on their participatory structure and the number of participants present, of which the UN Food Systems Summit was an example (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). In these claims, multistakeholder processes are framed as a way to improve deliberative legitimacy if the participation of stakeholders in them is structured more fairly (Alves Zanella et al., 2018). Global food governance organisations are trying to improve their legitimacy perceptions as well by including more diverse participants in their

deliberation process (Ryland, 2018). This all demonstrates the link already created in global food governance literature between participation and legitimacy in multistakeholder organisations. However, the question is now what role youth play in all of that.

Youth as a stakeholder group

Youth are a key actor in food systems as identified by the High Level Panel of Experts of the CFS in a report in 2021 about youth engagement and employment in food systems, which reviews the literature on youth in food systems. The report states that youth hold great potential for the transformation of food systems but are currently limited in their involvement in agriculture and food systems (High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2021). In this report youth are defined as being between 15 and 24 years of age but being defined as youth is also seen as having a relational aspect; a person is perceived and treated as a young person, and this can change based on the context. It also mentions that youth engagement and employment in food systems is heavily under-studied. Youth have several areas of special needs in food systems such as different nutrition needs than adults, they are also significantly affected by (forced) migration, they have limited access to land and natural resources as well as to knowledge, and they are often excluded from decision-making, experience high rates of unemployment, have deep concerns about climate change, and their ability to use technology is high (High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, 2021). This makes it so that youth have a strong stake in the future of our food systems and should therefore be an important stakeholder in governance so that their unique needs can be addressed. Youth are often active in social movements but lack a seat at the table in formal decision-making processes (Kwon, 2019; Orsini, 2022; Thew, 2018; Thew et al., 2021, 2022). Based on this report by the High-level panel of Experts, the CFS created guidelines on the engagement and employment of youth in food systems and these guidelines were adopted in 2022 in the plenary meeting (Committee on World Food Security, 2022b). These guidelines emphasize the need for more youth participation in decision-making at all levels and in all types of organisations and also highlight the need for an intersectional approach as not all youth have equal access to governance and power in decision-making processes. However, the CSIPM youth working group has published their reservations and criticism about these guidelines as to them it lacked focus on human rights, diversity of youth, peasants, etc. (Youth Working Group of the CSIPM, 2022).

Since little academic literature has been written about youth participation specifically in global food systems governance, it is useful to look at youth participation in global governance in general and some examples from case studies in environmental governance. Youth participation is defined by Checkoway (2011) as the process of involving young people in the decisions and institutions that affect their lives in an active and real way, and by viewing them as competent citizens. This participation can be structured in different ways but the current mechanisms in international governance and politics limit

youth engagement (Kwon, 2019). Kwon (2019) analyses UN youth conferences and critiques the processes of participation available to youth as they reinforce existing power relations. The conferences create a culture in which participation is expected with no space to challenge the status quo. The conferences create an environment to practice global citizenship. Multiple case studies have been published on the participation of YOUNGO, a coalition of youth NGOs and a Non-State-Actor that is part of the UN Food Climate Change Convention, in international climate change negotiations (Thew, 2018; Thew et al., 2020, 2021, 2022). These conclude that the quality of participation of youth is low and that youth are constrained due to financial limitations and existing power relations, and because of this, the legitimization of this participation is limited (Thew et al., 2021). Another important fact to consider is that the scope of participation of youth is limited as mostly privileged and highly educated young people get to engage in these processes (Kolleck & Schuster, 2022).

This all demonstrates that despite youth being identified as an important stakeholder they are not well represented, engaged, and involved in policy processes. It is therefore vital to analyse how youth are involved in this changing landscape of global food governance with its rise of multistakeholder organisations and its contested legitimacy.

Theoretical framework

Multistakeholder(ism)

Firstly, it is important to note the difference between multistakeholder governance and multistakeholderism. Various policy fields have seen growth in multistakeholder governance organisations, however, it is addressed by many names such as multistakeholder initiatives, organisations, platforms, processes, approaches, etc. (Almeida et al., 2015). In this form of governance, the role of stakeholders is emphasised; those that have an interest in the decision-making process as they might be influenced or affected by it. This is a shift from the multilateral governance structures in which the role of states is central. Multistakeholder organisations first started emerging in the 1990s around sustainable development issues to address complex problems that could not be solved by governments alone (Almeida et al., 2015). This form of governance has also been very prevalent in governing the Internet. A key characteristic of many multistakeholder organisations is that all stakeholders are treated as equals in the search for a consensus. However, multistakeholder governance does not take on the same form in every organisation and can be very different based on the institution or policy field. This variation is influenced by the types of actors involved, and the authoritative relations between these actors according to Raymond & DeNardis (2015). Most often the stakeholder classes involved in these organisations are split up into four classes: states/governments, firms/private sector, civil society actors, and formal intergovernmental organisations or academia (Almeida et al., 2015; Raymond & DeNardis, 2015). Therefore, this research defines multistakeholder governance as the inclusion of multiple stakeholders in a common governance structure in which they address issues that the involved stakeholders have an interest in. This form of governance can be done effectively and meaningfully with structures put into place to facilitate an open conversation (Manahan & Kumar, 2021). Manahan & Kumar (2021, p.5-6) set the following criteria for effective multistakeholder processes:

- Complex problem or problems in question cannot be solved by any single actor involved (or a need for coordinated action across political boundaries)
- Problem or problems are clearly defined and bounded
- Explicitly defined set of stakeholders with common but often conflicting vested interests
- Each stakeholder has sufficient power to at least partially subvert the effectiveness of an outcome contrary to its interests
- A negotiated, agreed-upon and mutually understood process and time frame
- Stakeholders engage in a learning process (and are not merely negotiating based on fixed positions)

- Stakeholders are equally committed to sharing relevant information related to addressing shared challenges
- Stakeholders engage in good-faith negotiations, committing to honesty and fairness in the deliberative process and remain accountable.

However, most multistakeholder initiatives do not meet these criteria which opens up a critique of these processes; multistakeholderism. This critique is that these organisations claim to have open dialogues with all stakeholders but ignore the power differences between them and therefore reproduce existing inequalities (Manahan & Kumar, 2021). This critique has been voiced by multiple authors and movements in multiple policy fields (Jongen & Scholte, 2022; Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023; McKeon, 2017b; Muttaqin et al., 2023; Schuster & Mossig, 2022; Taggart, 2022). Stakeholder groups that hold less powerful positions outside of these governance organisations, but that are affected most by the outcomes, often have less power within these multistakeholder governance organisations which results in an inability to influence outcomes to benefit them (Jongen & Scholte, 2022; McKeon, 2017b; Muttaqin et al., 2023; Schuster & Mossig, 2022). Because the private sector and firms are commonly part of these multistakeholder organisations, there is also a strong chance of corporate capture of these spaces and the narrative (McKeon, 2017b). This critique of multistakeholderism is especially prominent in the creation and implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Manahan & Kumar, 2021). Within these multistakeholder organisations that address the SDGs a reoccurring trend has been observed; the creation of epistemic communities that hold a common view on concepts related to sustainability and with these communities narrow the discussions that are possible in these organisations. This capturing of the narrative is most often done by corporations through their discursive power, and this capture also allows corporations to legitimise themselves by controlling the narrative about their involvement. Often the organisations themselves also decide on who they want to involve and how they facilitate the process, commonly those are people that fit within the epistemic community of the organisation. Therefore, it is important to examine multistakeholder organisations more thoroughly, through the lens of legitimacy, to address this critique of multistakeholderism and to strengthen its theoretical groundings.

Legitimacy

Seeing as global food systems governance organisations lack hard power it is key that they are seen as legitimate institutions. Legitimacy can be defined in many ways such as normative/democratic legitimacy, which allows for the assessment of an organisation/state's legitimacy by using certain criteria, but a different conceptualisation of legitimacy is sociological/popular legitimacy (Dingwerth, 2007). This theoretical framework employs a broad understanding of legitimacy drawing both from the normative understandings provided by Dingwerth (2007) and the sociological theory of legitimacy presented in the book written by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) which also provides an analytical framework to analyse justifications presented by organisations.

Normative legitimacy

Normative legitimacy is a concept which allows scholars to assess and discuss the acceptability of authority and it consists of three aspects according to Dingwerth (2007); input, throughput, and output legitimacy. Input legitimacy refers to who is involved in the decision-making process and whether representation is done well, throughput legitimacy focuses on fair procedures to create decisions, and output legitimacy is concerned with the quality of the results. Dingwerth (2007) largely focuses on input and throughput legitimacy which combined he calls democratic legitimacy. He also creates three criteria for this conceptualisation which are participation and inclusiveness, democratic control, and discursive practice. Each of these criteria is divided into two dimensions respectively: (1) scope of participation and (2) quality of participation, (3) transparency and (4) democratic accountability, (5) deliberativeness and (6) discursive balance.

The criterion of participation and inclusiveness addresses to what extent those affected by the decision are included in the decision-making process. The scope of participation (1) according to Dingwerth (2007) raises questions about how constituencies and participants are selected, and whether those affected by the outcome are also involved in the process. It also delves into whether those invited have the capacity to join the process. Moving on to the quality of participation (2) the discussion moves from *who* should participate to *how* these actors can contribute to deliberation and decision-making processes. This dimension discusses that participation can happen at several levels from more passive to very active and that this level of participation can be influenced by the resources available to the actors. Furthermore, it raises questions about representation; who is representing whom in which ways?

The democratic control of an organisation addresses that those affected by the decision-making process should be able to influence the process and their opinions should be taken into account (Dingwerth, 2007). The dimension of transparency (3) addresses to what extent participants and the

public can gain information about the processes and structures of the organisation. It also dives into what barriers exist to gain relevant information and how easily this can be obtained. Next, the dimension of accountability (4) questions what mechanisms are put into place to ensure that accountability exists, and what opportunities groups have to access these control mechanisms. It refers to the translation of input into effective policy-making.

The last criterion, discursive practice, refers to the presence of diverse perspectives, the lack of barriers for people/organisations to join that have differing perspectives, how a consensus is reached, and respectful discussions that are open to all (Dingwerth, 2007). The dimension of deliberativeness (5) examines to what extent a sincere exchange of arguments is present across participants. It raises questions about how the structure allows for sincere deliberation and whether the space is open for all participants. This is assessed by Dingwerth (2007) using the following criteria: continuous membership, small size, collective identity, and consensus procedures. Lastly, the dimension of discursive balance (6) looks first at the dominant discourse that exists, what are the qualities of this discourse, and how this discourse influences the decision-making process. It also addresses to what extent alternative discourses can be present.

Sociological legitimacy and (de)legitimation processes

A sociological understanding of legitimacy has led to defining legitimacy as “beliefs within a given constituency or other relevant audience that a political institution’s exercise of authority is appropriate” (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019). It looks at how a certain audience, as well as the institution itself, views and believes in the authority of the said institution. In conceptualising legitimacy as not a normative assessment but a relational concept, it is also ever-changing and not a static property that an organisation has in a certain quantity. Legitimation and delegitimation are processes that shape and change this legitimacy (Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al., 2022). Legitimation is the process in which institutions try to increase the beliefs about the appropriateness of its position and authority whilst delegitimation is the process of trying to challenge these beliefs. An important distinction is that (de)legitimation does not necessarily change legitimacy beliefs but provides concepts to answer questions about legitimacy and the processes surrounding it.

The theoretical framework on (de)legitimation by Bexell et al. (2022) can be viewed in Figure 1 which the authors created. The processes of (de)legitimation have two actor groups; the agents of (de)legitimation which try to affect perceptions of legitimacy of the object of (de)legitimation, and the audiences which hold these perceptions. The object of (de)legitimation in this case does not necessarily need to be an institution, it can also be a policy, but the object does exist within a larger institutional structure which has certain characteristics: the degree of authority, state-centeredness, and its geographical scope. The whole process of (de)legitimation also takes place in a larger context such as the policy field(s) of which the institution is a part, which consists of various actors, interests, and norms which influence the (de)legitimation processes. Among these various organisations, institutions, and actors there can be tensions around and competition for legitimacy. The larger surrounding social structure refers to the larger power relations in society and across policy fields that influence the norms, ideas, and discourses available to the organisations.

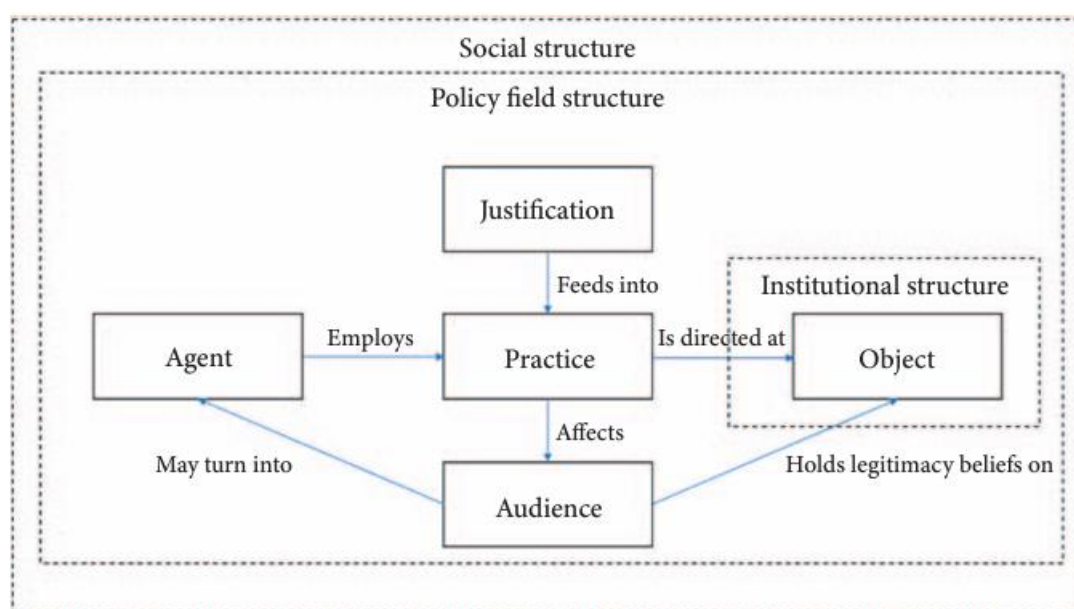


Figure 1: Conceptual map of theoretical framework of (de)legitimation of global governance institutions (Bexell et al., 2022)

In this framework (de)legitimation processes consist of three core elements: legitimation practices, justifications, and audiences (Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al., 2022). (De)legitimation practices can be performed in various ways: discursive, behavioural, or institutional, and it can be done by different actor groups. The discursive (de)legitimation practices occur through claims and other messages through public communications in which they either try to legitimise themselves or delegitimise others. These discursive practices can be informed by various justifications and can be spoken in both formal and informal settings and written in various types of documents and through other communications. Behavioural (de)legitimation practices delve into non-linguistic practices and thus look at acts of supporting, withdrawing support from, or even attempting to obstruct an organisation. This can be observed in the funding structures of an organisation, whether other actors/organisations

assist the organisation in making and implementing policies, whether other organisations aid in organising and participating in events, and through ratings, certifications, etc. If an actor participates in these practices it is legitimising the organisation and if they are mirroring these practices, such as withdrawing attendance or funding, they are delegitimising the organisation. Lastly, institutional (de)legitimation practices refer to practices that modify the organisational structure in a way that may affect its legitimacy. This can be through cooperation with external actors, reforms of the decision-making process, new institutional mechanisms, and/or the establishment of new entities in the organisation. The type of practices used differs based on many factors such as the policy field and the structure of the institution.

(De)legitimation processes can be directed at various audiences, these audiences are the people that hold or do not hold legitimacy beliefs over a certain institution or organisation (Bexell, Jönsson, et al., 2022). The book makes two distinctions in legitimisation audiences, the first is constituencies versus non-constituencies which demonstrates whether a group has or does not have an institutionalised bond with the organisation which imposes a certain connection and responsibility. The second distinction is targeted versus self-appointed audiences; whether the actor is directly addressing their practices towards a certain audience or not. Both these distinctions are more like a spectrum on which a certain audience group can sit, this position can also change over time. The type of audience is also influenced by the institutional structure and how participation is structured. The most often targeted legitimacy audience is civil society actors (Bexell, Jönsson, et al., 2022).

Both behavioural and discursive practices of (de)legitimation are informed by justifications (Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al., 2022). Justifications can be defined as “public statements through which global governance institutions give reasons for their right to rule” (Stappert & Gregoratti, 2022, p. 119). Justifications can refer to the social purpose, procedures and performance of an institution and are based on various norms according to the framework: democratic norms, technocratic norms, and norms related to fairness (Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al., 2022). In the application of this framework by Stappert & Gregoratti (2022), the researchers only use the democratic vs. technocratic division of norms and define democratic norms as emphasising participation, deliberation, accountability, and transparency, and technocratic norms as emphasising expertise and expediency, as well as effectiveness and efficiency. In recent years international organisations have shifted the way they legitimise themselves from narratives about their functionality, expertise, and efficient problem-solving, to narratives about democracy, participation, and representation (Dingwerth et al., 2020). This demonstrates that there is a shift in global governance fora from technocratic to democratic norms to legitimise themselves. It is, however, important to note that justifications and the norms they are

based on are not necessarily accurate representations of the truth and are always just claims made by the organisations themselves to gain legitimacy.

Seeing as this research focuses partially on legitimacy claims, it is important to delve deeper into how agents use justifications to feed into legitimization practices targeted to increase the legitimization beliefs of their targeted audience, this process is also referred to as self-legitimation. The purpose of self-legitimation is to shape and reinforce the identity of the organisation and to establish its authority among the organisation itself and other organisations surrounding it (Von Billerbeck, 2020a). Justifications can be given by various actors, especially leaders of international organisations play an important role in this (Von Billerbeck, 2022). Legitimacy claims can also contradict each other as well as backfire if the audience does not perceive the claims to be legitimate (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018). Von Billerbeck (2020a) introduces an important new idea relating to justification which is that legitimacy claims can also be directed towards members of the organisation itself to strengthen its internal legitimacy; making the staff and members of the organisation the audience. This form of legitimization is an ongoing process to present a steady image and to reaffirm the authority of the organisation both outwards and inwards. According to Von Billerbeck (2020a), self-legitimation is practised through narratives, internal communication, and ceremonies, symbols and spaces. Which is similar to the discursive and behavioural (de)legitimation practices presented by Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al. (2022). Recent times have seen a rise of organisations self-legitimising themselves in their public communication as a response to the increasing public awareness of and activism directed towards international organisations (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018). The intensity of this discursive self-legitimation also varies based on the age of the organisation and in what phase it is in (Schmidtke & Lenz, 2023). The 'grammar' of self-legitimation justifications follows the following construction according to (Stappert & Gregoratti, 2022, p. 126):

- Agent of self-legitimation: the GGI
- The object(s) of legitimization: the procedures, performance, or institutional reforms related to either performance or procedure
- Tone: which, in the case of self-legitimation, is positive or self-reflective
- A pattern of legitimization: the normative reasons that are given by an organisation to be recognized as legitimate

Multistakeholder governance and legitimacy

Most studies investigating self-legitimation largely focus on multilateral institutions in which governments hold much of the authority and in which sometimes multilateralism is used as a justification (Von Billerbeck, 2020b, 2020a, 2022). Little research has been done on how nongovernmental (multistakeholder) institutions differ from intergovernmental (multilateral) ones concerning their (de)legitimation processes (Bexell, Bäckstrand, et al., 2022). Stappert & Gregoratti, (2022) do note that multistakeholder organisations appear to mostly use democratic justifications over technocratic ones to signal their legitimacy when constructing these narratives. These democratic justifications are based on the good procedures that the organisation is communicating that they employ, which very often includes participation (Jönsson & Gregoratti, 2022). Another important aspect to note in particular is the relationship between participation in multistakeholder organisations and legitimacy as outlined by Manahan & Kumar (2021). The flexibility in who is a stakeholder creates issues on who the participants appear to represent. An outsider (a member of the audience) can look at the stakeholders involved and see themselves as not represented and therefore question the legitimacy of the processes. Returning to Dingwerth (2007), we see that in his dimensions of normative legitimacy, participation is a key concept. It makes sense that it is, therefore, also used by multistakeholder organisations to justify themselves since they cannot relate to justifications based on the authority held by the governments as in a multilateral organisation. It is, however, key to explore further what legitimacy claims are made by multistakeholder organisations specifically and to continue to build on these theories of legitimacy. Furthermore, the participation of various stakeholders in a changing governance structure affects the legitimacy of these organisations. It is therefore imperative to explore and build upon the theory of legitimacy to examine the relations between legitimacy and participation in multistakeholder governance.

Methods

Methodological approach

Because this research aimed to answer a “how” question and studied a contemporary phenomenon it was apt to use a case study approach (Yin, 2018). Using this approach allowed for an in-depth explanation and analysis of the changing governance landscape and how legitimacy is being claimed and taken. This is a similar approach to that taken by other authors studying justifications made by organisations and the legitimacy processes surrounding these organisations (Stappert & Gregoratti, 2022). A case study is defined as a research strategy that provides a detailed study of the subject of the analysis within its context (Priya, 2021). This approach also allows for this research to build onto the theories of multistakeholderism and legitimacy by making analytical generalisations. For this research, the subject of the analysis is multistakeholder organisations in which youth participate. Due to a limited amount of time, this research focused on one case study to provide the most meaningful analysis of it. Furthermore, the case study chosen, the WFF, is a very unique organisation since it focuses specifically on youth participation and it has emerged after the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and is thus part of this shifting governance architecture. Previous research has also critiqued the WFF as being a multistakeholderism example with strong corporate ties (Carriedo et al., 2023). This makes it so that the WFF was chosen as an apt case study for analysing these dynamics around legitimacy and youth in multistakeholder governance structures.

Case study: World Food Forum

The World Food Forum was launched in 2021 by the FAO Youth Committee established by the Director-General. The Forum describes itself as being “an independent, youth-led global network of partners facilitated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)” (World Food Forum, 2024e). This network of partners consists of 70+ partners of various types of organisations at the time of this study. The organisation aims to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aligns with FAO’s Four Betters: Better Production, Better Life, Better Environment, and Better Nutrition. The WFF structure entails four different tracks (although there used to be more) that are Youth Action, Innovation Lab, Education, and Culture. However, in its latest brochure outlining the 2024 goals the WFF structure is outlined via thematic programmes: policy, innovation, education, culture, advocacy, local action, and the flagship event.

Returning to the tracks, the Youth Action track is involved in creating policy recommendations through hosting events and dialogues, especially the Youth Action Assembly which takes place during the flagship event (World Food Forum, 2024f). They also organise consultations with various stakeholder groups such as young farmers, indigenous youth, etc. to create a Youth Action Compendium. This track consists of a Youth Policy Board made up of sixteen individuals from various backgrounds and regions

who govern the Youth Assembly and draft policy recommendations, and the Young Scientist Group who write a biannual report on policy issues that youth are concerned with. The Innovation Lab hosts several challenges and awards to support entrepreneurial youth (World Food Forum, 2024c). The Education track hosts masterclasses, the school assembly and various other projects to improve food education (World Food Forum, 2024b). Lastly, the Culture track hosts several events and competitions related to art, film, gastronomy, and music to aid intercultural communication (World Food Forum, 2024a). The WFF has lately also seen an increased focus on localised action through both regional assemblies and the establishment of national chapters in several countries (World Food Forum, 2024d).

The WFF has held an annual flagship event since 2021 of which the first two renditions have been largely online. Since 2022 the event has been held simultaneously with the Hand In Hand Investment Forum, and the Science and Innovation Forum (Food and Agricultural Organisation & World Food Forum, 2023). The event in 2023 also included the celebration of World Food Day and, what seems to be independently organised from the WFF, the biennial UN Global Indigenous Youth Forum which had its first in-person event. All these fora occurred at the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) headquarters in a single week in October 2023 and were largely organised by the FAO itself; these fora were also supplemented by a broad range of side events.

Data collection

Doing a case study approach about an organisation means that one can get data from different sources. This research obtained data from individuals and organisations to get a more complete picture (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, this allowed this research to look at justifications made by the organisation and at the experiences concerning the WFF of youth. Data from individuals was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews, data from organisations was collected based on documentation from the WFF, and lastly, data was collected in the form of participant observations at the World Food Forum flagship event and some follow-up meetings held by various organisations.

The first stage of the data collection was attending the 2023 WFF flagship in October and observing the participants and procedures. During this event, I, the researcher, attended the main events of the WFF and focussed on the events relating to youth and policy creation processes. I paid special attention to how participation was discussed by youth and other actors as well as observed the structures of participation and how youth navigated these. Furthermore, I had informal conversations with several young participants about how they experienced the flagship event. Since I am a young person myself I was able to blend into the audience and collect data without interrupting the process. This event was also treated as the starting point for finding relevant interviewees.

Moving on to the interviews, the interview participants consisted of youth participating in the WFF (8), a member of the leadership of the WFF, as well as some expert interviewees (5) to verify the data and to provide a more contextual understanding. To find participants this study employed both purposive sampling, to interview individuals who are members of the WFF, and snowball sampling, to identify interesting individuals that purposive sampling might have missed (Priya, 2021). The youth participants were selected based on a high level of involvement in the WFF, preferably including members of the WFF and board members. The table below outlines the participants that I have spoken to with some relevant characteristics whilst preserving their anonymity.

Table 1: Interview participants

Participant number	Global South or North	Youth or not	Relation to WFF
71	Global South	Youth	Member of WFF
72	Global North	Youth	Participant in WFF
73	Global North	Youth	Participant in WFF
74	Global South	Youth	Member of WFF
75	Global South	Youth	Member of WFF
76	Global North	Youth	Member of WFF
77	Global South	Youth	Member of WFF
78	Global North	-	Leadership of WFF
79	Global North	Youth	Participant in WFF
81	Global North	-	Expert
82	Global South	-	Expert
83	Global North	-	Expert
84	Global North	-	Expert
85	Global North	-	Expert

The interview questions for the youth who participated in or are/were a member of the WFF were centred around their views on the purpose, procedures, and performance of the WFF, as well as more personal questions about their experience in the WFF, both the organisation and the flagship event, and the struggles they might face as a youth in these spaces. Members of the WFF were also asked more in-depth questions about the structures of the WFF and its relations to other organisations. The expert interviews on the other hand were more in-depth about the legitimacy claims made by the WFF, and the (de)legitimation processes ongoing in the policy field of global food systems governance. The interviews lasted around an hour with some going on a bit longer if needed. Most interviews took place online and some in-person. Before participation, all research subjects were informed via email and verbally before the interview about the research and their participation in it, as well as obtaining their written and verbal consent. The data obtained from the interviews was transcribed intelligent verbatim, removing any stuttering or repetition, using Trint software. Next, the transcripts were pseudonymised to protect the privacy of the interviewees using a random numbering system.

The third form of data used in this research was documents published by the WFF itself. As mentioned by both Stappert & Gregoratti (2022) and Tallberg & Zürn (2019), annual reports are one of the most prominent places where justifications occur. The documents produced by the WFF that were coded were three annual reports (2021, 2022, 2023), the participant guide for the 2023 flagship event, the annual brochures (2023, 2024), the youth action compendium, the youth governance mechanism, the national chapters blueprint, the toolkit for new partners, the regional compendium, and the first Youth Scientists Group report.

Data analysis

The method of analysis chosen for this research was largely deductive, adhering to the concepts provided by the two theories of legitimacy outlined in the theoretical framework. The coding for this research was done using Atlas.ti, a coding software. The first round of deductive coding focused on (1) identifying justifications and categorising them as being about either the purpose, procedures, and performance, (2) coding the experiences of youth and critique of the experts about the WFF based on the dimensions of democratic legitimacy, (3) coding for both the larger policy field that the WFF is part of and the institutional structure of the WFF itself, (4) coding for multistakeholder processes that the WFF employs, and (5) coding for general claims made about youth as a stakeholder group and its unique challenges and attributes. The next step was to start sub-coding these larger codes and to start looking for patterns, this was a more inductive process looking more deeply at the content of the codes. To answer the first sub-question the justification codes about procedures and performance were sub-coded first into either democratic norms or technocratic norms as a justification (Stappert & Gregoratti, 2022). However, this proved to be a distinction that was not present in the data and therefore, this coding was not used for the actual analysis. Furthermore, the policy field relations were sub-coded based on the organisations the quotes referred to. The institutional structure of the WFF was sub-coded into funding, internal structures, and the partner network. During this process of analysis, the research question and the sub-questions were reworked due to the contents of the data being. This research started with a more narrow research question which evolved to be more broad over time. Because of this some of the codes no longer aligned with the sub-questions as different patterns were discovered when performing a deeper and more focused analysis such as analysing the different legitimisation practices relating to the WFF. This made the analysis a more inductive process but still guided by the theory to a large extent.

Results

The results of this research are presented based on a broad understanding of legitimacy which looks at both the sociological and normative aspects. This section starts with a presentation of the justifications employed by the WFF to gain legitimacy. The second part uses the broader framework of sociological legitimacy provided by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) to structure the results around the dynamics of (de)legitimation that the WFF is involved in. The last part delves into the normative legitimacy of the WFF by using the six dimensions proposed by Dingwerth (2007) to assess the legitimacy of youth participation in the WFF.

Justifications of the World Food Forum

This first section addresses the question ‘In what ways does youth participation play a role in the justification of the World Food Forum?’. This section zooms in on the justification part of the legitimacy framework by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) in which justifications are defined as statements given by organisations that justify the organisation’s right to rule. They are positive or self-reflective in tone and explicitly state a reason for justification related to the purpose, procedures, or performance of the organisation (Stappert & Gregoratti, 2022). In this original framework, the distinction between democratic and technocratic norms is made when addressing justifications based on procedures or performance, however, during the analysis of the WFF’s justifications, this proved to be not a useful distinction and is therefore, not included in these results. Furthermore, seeing as this is a sociological understanding of legitimacy and justifications are highly subjective this research addresses what narrative is used to justify instead of what norms. The justifications in the data occurred most often in the annual reports and other documents produced by the WFF itself.

Purpose

One main finding is that the purpose of the World Food Forum is ambiguous, this is the case even among both the members of the WFF, the attendants and even the speakers at the WFF flagship event. Therefore, the justifications for the WFF’s purpose vary widely and speak to its various aspects and tracks as well. To structure the diverse justifications they are ordered based on a general chronological order of when they were published or mentioned at the flagship event by interviewees, this order is also outlined in table 2.

In its inception in the WFF’s first annual report in 2021, the purpose of the WFF is presented as ‘an independent platform for real and lasting change’ in which it is imagined that the WFF will create a completely new mechanism for youth participation. The WFF also harnesses the energy of youth to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and overcome global hunger. In this report, the

first WFF flagship event is also explicitly framed as a 'follow-up to galvanize action after the UN Food Systems Summit'. Furthermore, the event is immediately framed as a global network of partners.

The following year, 2022, sees the introduction of the Hand-in-Hand Investment and the Science & Innovation Forum at the WFF flagship event. The Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum is justified as being 'a platform for national authorities, global and national public and private entities, along with multilateral development banks and donors to discuss opportunities to finance the FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative' (WFF report 2022), and the Science & Innovation Forum is justified as having 'highlighted the crucial role of science, technology and innovation in transforming our agri-food systems, and explored scientific advances and the opportunities and risks associated with them' (WFF report 2022). As for the WFF itself, the justifications are more focused on the goal of empowering youth and giving youth the tools necessary to create a 'better food future for all' and to achieve the SDGs, but also the goal of sparking a global movement to empower youth. This is also when we see the narrative of framing the WFF in multiple documents as 'the premier global Forum to harness the passion and power of youth to identify solutions and incite positive action for agrifood systems'.

In 2023 the narrative seems to solidify itself in the WFF documents, and the purpose of the WFF is presented to be empowering youth for a better food future to meet the SDGs: by creating a global movement; as a premier global Forum; as a global think tank for youth-led solutions; as a major youth platform; and through supporting youth initiatives. Regarding the Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum and the Science & Innovation Forum, the justifications are relatively similar to that of 2022 but the Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum adds as a goal that it wants to eliminate rural poverty and hunger via mobilising investments and the Science & Innovation Forum justifications focus more specifically on 'discussions on technology's role in addressing the climate crisis within agrifood systems'. In its most recent publication which outlines the 2024 goal of 'Investing in youth is investing in durable solutions' the WFF reframes itself again slightly and emphasises more clearly the inclusion of youth voices in decision-making and policy creation as one of its goals and it refers to itself as 'a catalytic movement and driver of youth engagement in food governance, and serves as a knowledge centre and innovation lab, fostering and inspiring youth-led solutions' (WFF brochure 2024).

Table 2: Timetable purpose justifications of the WFF

	2021	2022	2023	2024
Structure of WFF	Platform	Premier global platform, global movement	Premier global Forum, global movement, global think tank, major youth platform	Catalytic movement, driver for youth engagement in food governance, knowledge centre, innovation lab
Goal of WFF	Achieve SDGs and no global hunger	Empowering youth, better food future for all, achieving SDGs	Empowering youth, better food future for all, achieve SDGs	Investing in youth, achieving SDGs, empowering youth
Flagship event	Follow-up for UNFSS, a network of partners	Introduction of Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, and Science & Innovation Forum	Investment Forum: eliminate rural poverty and hunger Science & Innovation Forum: technology	Introduction of Indigenous Youth Forum

All in all, the World Food Forum keeps changing its purpose every year which is understandable as it is a relatively young organisation. The reoccurring, overarching goals are the achievement of the SDGs, a better food future for all, and empowering youth. It also positions itself as the first organisation/platform/Forum to empower and engage youth in this way. The sub-goals of the organisation, however, are very broad and diverse which is reflected in the different tracks, they aim to foster youth innovation, advocate for youth in policy, spark a movement, etc. These justifications generally use a lot of evocative language and bold claims that are presented as extremely positive suggesting that the WFF tries to justify itself through a very positive purpose as a way to engage more people as illustrated by these quotes:

The WFF's vision for the future underscores its commitment to empowering young people to drive positive transformation in agrifood systems and climate action on the local and global scales. With its multifaceted and ever-evolving approach, the WFF strives to make a lasting impact on the journey towards a more equitable and sustainable food future. (WFF report 2023)

Together we aim to identify bold, actionable solutions and approaches to minimize and mitigate climate change impacts in our lifetime, while also increasing global access to safe, nutritious food and healthy diets for all. (WFF toolkit for partners)

Never before has there been such a singular opportunity for leveraging the passion and energy of youth for a better food future. The World Food Forum is harnessing that energy. (WFF report 2021)

At the most recent WFF flagship event, the purpose justifications were diverse to the extent that it appeared as if the speakers themselves were not aware of the purpose of the event that they were part of. The flagship event was referred to as a global networking event, a springboard, an instrument to connect young and established people, a network to exchange ideas, and even just an event to connect governments and funders. These justifications were given by various high-level speakers at the WFF events, especially during the opening ceremony. The FAO Deputy Director-General, Beth Bechdol, framed the aim of the WFF as talking and learning, and that the WFF's end goal should try to include everyone in 15 years, even those most marginalised and oppressed.

In the interviews conducted, this diversity in justifications also occurred but simultaneously focused on the main WFF narrative of empowering youth for a better food future. Participant 71 justified the WFF by stating that no other platform brings all stakeholders together to discuss agri-food systems and covers such a diverse range of topics. They also argued that youth were not represented meaningfully in global food governance spaces before the WFF and that there was no space for youth to come together and discuss their policy priorities. The WFF both advocates for youth and aids implementation according to them. This aspect of bringing all stakeholders together was also echoed by other participants who are/were members of the WFF. Participant 75 also stated that creating this youth-led platform is something that has not been done before in the FAO and that the WFF manages to bring all youth-led organisations together and provides a safe and candid space for people to deliberate agri-food systems transformations. It should be noted that the members of the WFF justify the WFF more by its purpose to influence policy and to make youth voices heard whilst that is emphasised less in the documents by the WFF itself.

Procedures

One major justification given that refers to the procedures of the WFF is the narrative about the diversity of the participants present as illustrated by this quote from the 2023 WFF participant guide: 'It will include youth from all spheres of society and all corners of the world, including marginalized youth such as Indigenous Youth and young farmers from least developed countries.' This diversity can apply to the types of youth present such as their nationality, social class, and form of involvement in the food system, such as presented in the previous quote, but the procedures are also justified by their diversity in the types of stakeholders present. Justifications of this type apply to both the organisation

and the flagship event, whilst at the flagship event the stakeholder diversity is emphasised, in justifications of the procedures of the organisation the emphasis lies on diverse youth.

Furthermore, the WFF presents a narrative about inclusivity to justify itself, these justifications largely coincide with those referring to its diverse scope of participation: 'The Youth Assembly provides a dedicated, self-organised and institutional space for youth in agrifood systems advocacy and action founded on inclusivity, diversity and respect of all persons' (WFF 2023 participant guide). The WFF is justified as being a space where everyone can come together: 'We also hope that they can be inclusive and diverse, that, just like the World Food Forum is an open space for young people to come together' (participant 75). The Forum also emphasizes its deliberative attempts to include marginalised groups, the interview participants also specifically mentioned the inclusion of indigenous people in the WFF flagship event. One of the members of the youth policy board also mentioned as a justification for the accountability mechanisms of the WFF and that the WFF is working on establishing mechanisms to create tangible results. There is also some reference to the transparency of the WFF: 'The WFF operates on the grounds of inclusivity and transparency' (WFF toolkit for partners).

Other procedural justifications appear to refer to the problem-solving narrative presented by the WFF and address what mechanisms are employed by the WFF to solve the issues of our food systems. The documents presented by the WFF emphasise the fact that the WFF incubates, showcases, and promotes innovations that are meant to solve problems in our current food system. They do this, for example, through the yearly WFF Innovation Lab which hosts several challenges and awards to promote youth-led initiatives. The WFF flagship event is also a space where youth can go to find possible funders for their projects and start-ups, as well as network. Furthermore, the Education Track is presented as sharing knowledge, ideas, and actions to empower and educate youth on food systems. Another procedural justification is the establishment of national chapters that are meant to promote local youth action and present a more bottom-up approach to solving food system problems.

Performance

The justifications related to the performance of the WFF are at times a bit strange as often participation in the WFF and the participation of the WFF in other events is presented as the performance and end goal of the WFF itself. Some of the interview participants also framed this as a positive outcome produced by the WFF, for example: 'I think it was a success in that it brought lots of groups of people together like there was a lot of people there and a lot of people from different backgrounds' (participant 79). Furthermore, the WFF presents its success as bringing youth perspectives and voices to the world stage and making heard marginalised voices. This participation narrative focus is truly apparent when looking at the end-of-year reports by the WFF as well as their social media; they always

present numerical summaries of the number of participants as a justification for the WFF. This performance justification through inclusion and diversity becomes apparent when looking at the numerical summaries given about the flagship event by the WFF in their end-of-year reports, and especially on their social media platforms. These numbers are presented as the direct outcome of the flagship events and refer to the number of participants, the number of events, the number of social media followers or posts, the number of newspaper mentions, etc. An example of this is figure 3. When justifying the WFF in this way both interviewees and people observed at the WFF also hugely emphasise the growth of the WFF in its number of attendees as a justification for its success as it demonstrates the reach and the interest in the Forum. One participant explained: 'And if I see the numbers rather from the last year, the numbers have been growing much. I think it's doubled or more. So in that way, it is a success' (participant 74). The Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum also frames its performance largely by using numbers: how many countries were present, how many projects, estimated beneficiaries, the worth of investment opportunities presented, etc. which can be observed in figure 2.

WFF Results Overview 2023

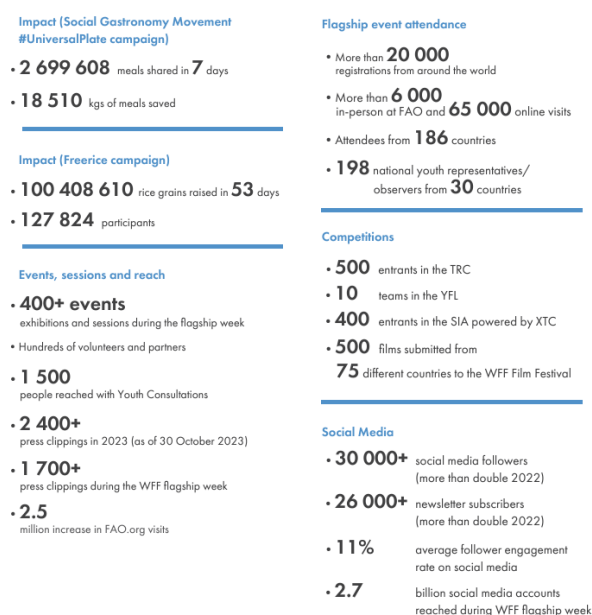


Figure 3: WFF Results Overview 2023 (WFF, 2023, webpage)

Other justifications that used this participation narrative are also present in the WFF in both its documents and mentioned by a few of the interview participants, these refer to the participation of WFF youth in other events in the policy field or sustainability/climate change events in general such as COP27 and COP28, HLPE, etc. Furthermore, they also justify themselves via the fact that the WFF has made an impact on improving youth participation in FAO's governing bodies and committees.

Hand-in-Hand IF in numbers

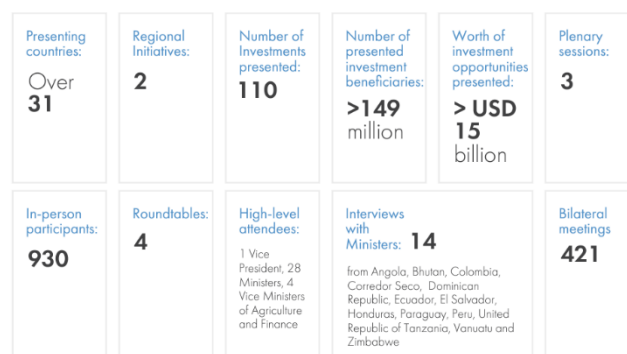


Figure 2: Hand-in-Hand Investment Results Overview 2023 (WFF, 2023, webpage)

The results reports that the WFF publishes yearly contain a few justifications based on the projects they do and their success such as their projects related to food waste in which they mention how much food has been saved. These projects also include the national chapters of which the establishment of them is presented as a success of the WFF. The organisation also makes very broad claims about its performance such as their contribution to solutions, their support of youth initiatives, raising awareness, etc. These justifications are usually very broad statements with lots of buzzwords such as 'transformation', 'innovation', and 'action'. The members of the WFF that have been interviewed also justified the WFF by emphasising the network and learning abilities it provides youth and the role of the national chapters in localising action. I chose not to code the performances of the national chapters as a justification of the WFF as it says nothing about the WFF itself as a global organisation and this work is done by people that are usually not direct members of the WFF. However, one could argue that the WFF and its members present the successes of the national chapters as their successes and thus as a justification of the WFF itself.

Conclusion

Returning to the sub-question that started this section: 'In what ways does youth participation play a role in the justification of the World Food Forum?' one can conclude that the WFF justifies itself often based on youth participation. Regarding its purpose, it presents itself as a premier platform and movement for youth engagement in agri-food systems and it also sets itself the goal of empowering youth for a better food future. However, the purpose justifications also delve into the partner network of the WFF and that they also engage a large variety of stakeholders, especially in the flagship event. Continuing to the justifications related to the procedures of the WFF, these also refer to the participation of youth as a justification, specifically the diversity of youth and that the WFF is a very inclusive platform. Furthermore, they also refer to how youth participation and involvement in particular through the WFF can help solve the problems in agri-food systems. Again, justifications relating to procedures also address the larger diversity and inclusivity of other stakeholders other than youth. Lastly, justifications addressing the performance of the WFF almost always use a participation narrative, whether this is in the WFF itself or youth related to the WFF participating in other events. They present these justifications often through numerical summaries of the number of attendees. Therefore, one can answer the sub-question by stating that participation by youth is presented as the main justification for the purpose of the WFF, the procedures through which they aim to achieve their purpose, and even their performance itself. This participation is presented to be diverse and inclusive and will help achieve the SDGs and a better food future.

Dynamics of the (de)legitimation process around the World Food Forum

This section of the results answers the sub-question: ‘What are the dynamics around the (de)legitimation process of the World Food Forum?’ and for this the framework of sociological legitimacy by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) is used. In this framework, one of the key elements is legitimation practices, which can be discursive, institutional, and behavioural. These distinctions are also used for this results section. Furthermore, this section outlines the institutional structure of the WFF briefly based on the criteria of state-centredness, scope, and degree of authority. Finally, it addresses the policy field that the WFF is part of the relations the Forum has with other organisations such as the Rome-Based Agencies and the competition between the WFF and the Committee on World Food Security. The data used for this part of the analysis was largely interviews with both youth participants and experts as well as participant observations.

Institutional structure

When looking at the three main criteria of institutional structure it is apparent that the WFF is not state-centred but focused on stakeholders and that its scope is global. However, the degree of authority of the WFF is as of yet uncertain. When looking at some of the claims made about the purpose of the WFF it becomes apparent that within the WFF itself and FAO at large there is no consensus about the level of authority the organisation should have. The experts interviewed, however, all questioned whether the WFF had any authority, to begin with.

Legitimation practices employed by the WFF

Discursive legitimation practices

In terms of the discursive legitimation practices, these overlap with the justifications discussed in the previous sub-question. Seeing as the analysis of the justifications drew from interviews, observations, and documents, these are almost all discursive forms of data and thus the justifications were drawn directly from the discursive practices employed by the participants of the WFF and the documents created by the WFF itself. Here, again, is a huge emphasis on the positivity the WFF brings and how it is such an inclusive and diverse space for both young people and other stakeholders, especially when referring to the flagship event as demonstrated by this quote:

We showed the world the importance of the active engagement of the youth in all global processes, for a truly inclusive decision-making process... The importance of partnership, collaboration and solidarity... And we heard from everyone, across all events, from all partners, on the importance of leveraging the power of science and innovation, and investments. This is the only way we can accelerate bold and actionable solutions to catalyse the transformation of global agrifood systems. (WFF 2023 results report)

Institutional legitimization practices

When looking at institutional legitimization practices, these rely almost solely on the level of cooperation with external actors and some reference to the establishment of new institutional mechanisms and entities. However, no legitimization practice of the WFF that was in the data is based on reforms in decision-making, the reason for this might be because the organisation is so new. Cooperation is heavily emphasised as a reason why the WFF is a meaningful organisation, and it is even embedded in the WFF itself through its partner network. In the interviews conducted the members of the WFF itself legitimised the WFF by stating varying levels of cooperation; from bringing all stakeholders together involved in agri-food systems (youth groups, influencers, companies, academic institutions, nonprofits, governments, media, the public, farmers, indigenous peoples, policymakers, agri-investors, scientists, small-scale producers, UN entities, etc.), to just bringing youth groups together.

These partnerships can vary largely on the level of formality and commitment as illustrated by this quote: ‘We do partnerships that is like we don't have like a formal partnership except like e-mail exchange we don't do like big MoU's and those things except for like bigger stuff’ (participant 71). Reoccurring partner organisations in the interviews are the UNFS Coordination Hub, IAAS, YOUNGO, MGCY, UNCCD Youth Caucus, Act4Food Act4Change, YPARD, PROVEG, NGIN¹, Wageningen University, other UN agencies, etc. These cooperations are often mentioned to be intergenerational and cross-sectional, and sometimes specifically defined as youth-led. At the WFF flagship event in 2023, there was a significant emphasis on this collaborative aspect of the WFF, specifically relating to the role of the private sector. It was argued that both youth, the WFF, FAO, and even the UN in general, are required to work together with the private sector because without it, according to some speakers at the WFF such as the Deputy Director-General of FAO, Beth Bechdol, we cannot achieve more just and sustainable agri-food systems.

In terms of other institutional legitimization practices the WFF interviewees referred to the establishment of a new institutional entity at FAO under which the WFF is now hosted: the new Office of Youth and Women. This reform, according to these participants, will institutionalise youth participation further in the FAO:

There needs to be institutionalised youth engagement in all the facets and all the events and processes within the UN. And so I think, this is where this is going and the World Food Forum

¹ UNFS Coordination Hub: UN Food Systems Coordination Hub; IAAS: International Association of Agriculture students and related Sciences; YOUNGO: youth and children constituency of the UN Climate Change processes; UNCCD Youth Caucus: UN Convention to Combat Desertification Youth Caucus; Act4Food Act4Change: youth movement for food systems transformation; YPARD: Young Professionals for Agricultural Development; PROVEG: international organisation for protein transition; NGIN: NextGen Agricultural Impact Network

contributing towards the Office of Youth and Women towards institutionalised youth engagement for young people within the agricultural space is something that is really good.’ (Participant 75).

However, one expert participant mentioned that the creation of this office has caused tensions within FAO, the WFF’s host organisation because FAO already has bodies and offices that are focused on youth and/or women:

Yes, so there is an entire gender division and they work on institutions, policies and women empowerment seriously. These committees are fluffy, with no function, no real mandate to influence anything but the propaganda. Okay? When the director general presented that [the new Office of Youth and Women] to the governing bodies, the membership said, no thank you. Why are you adding another name? Why do we need to separate those issues? The same division that has gender, has child labour, decent work and rural development. With four staff, experts in youth education, participation, and empowerment. Why a separate office reporting to the DG? Because that is your playground, and you can play with that puppet as you wish and pretend you are doing the best in the system about those issues without changing any of the substantive and structural inequalities that are impacting women and youth through that office. It is pure nonsense, an empty box. But that is really biased. But to me, it's interesting that the membership said no and he did it anyway. And that office has ever contacted anyone that has been formed. Did you receive any communication? There is no appointment on anyone. You know, the focal point for youth in your organisation is 58 years old, I am sorry? There is something wrong. When you reinvent the wheel there is always something suspicious, you know... (participant 85)

Behavioural legitimisation practices

In looking at the behavioural legitimisation practices it is vital to also look at the relationship between FAO and the WFF. In the interviews, the members of the WFF stated that FAO is responsible for most of the funding of the WFF: ‘the majority of the funding is still coming from the regular budget of FAO, that's where the secretariat is funded from’ (participant 78). Additional funding according to multiple interviewees comes from voluntary donations by, for example, governments of which last year Ireland and the Netherlands were the biggest funders, but also an airline company and Wageningen University and Research. There was also interest from large agri-food companies to fund the flagship event but that ended up not succeeding but why is somewhat unclear: ‘I know that companies like Bayer wanted to invest, and Nestlé and others, but they did not go through the due diligence of the World Food Forum. So they are not supporting it financially’ (participant 73). The Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum

and the Science & Innovation Forum are funded by the regular budget of their respective offices, Chief Economist and Chief Scientist, according to participant 78. These voluntary funders are thus legitimising the WFF by providing it with the resources it needs but also an implicit level of trust that the WFF is a worthy source of funding. Many participants, however, still mentioned that the WFF lacks funding and that the youth themselves struggle to attend the flagship event due to the substantial costs of travelling and staying in Rome. There are also struggles for youth participating in the WFF organisation itself because it is all volunteer work which is, of course, unpaid. So despite the discursive practices employed at the flagship event of needing to involve youth, following through with concrete mechanisms, such as funding, is lacking.

Another way in which the WFF is legitimised is a large number of organisations and individuals that help organise and participate in the flagship events: including both main and side events. The presence of high-level speakers in the opening and closing ceremonies legitimises the WFF by showing that even presidents, princes, kings, ministers, etc. are joining this event and that therefore, this event matters greatly. The other events were also well-attended by members of organisations, universities, companies, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, many (youth) organisations also organised side events at the WFF, which further goes to show that the flagship event is an important event to attend and participate in.

The support given to the WFF differs per organisation, but FAO appears to be the main supporter due to its position as the host organisation. However, this support is experienced differently by the interviewees who are members of the WFF. FAO does provide basic necessities and facilitation, however, in terms of support in policy creation and implementation this is experienced to be lacking substantially by some participants which is illustrated best by the following quotes:

And you see that you see that back, for example, the first World Food Forum, there was the director general, and there were like young people giving their inputs so they said like “I have so many problems in my country to start agricultural projects and youth are so seen as such a marginalised group, we are treated as such a marginalised group”. And the response of the DG was like “I learned one thing from my mother, and you shouldn't complain that much”.
(participant 73)

I really noticed that, whilst people are really looking at us thinking what are you going to do ... So, the bar was set pretty high ... the tips they had, and one of them, for example, was that financing is necessary to bring youth to these kind of places. And then Qu Dong, the Director

General, said immediately that we should not ask for money immediately and that we first had to show results. (participant 76)

... there is not a direct link between the World Food Forum and FAO policymaking that I can see. (participant 79)

However, some other participants (74 and 75) do feel substantially supported by the FAO and its regional offices. These participants are/were more involved in the Local Action Track and collaborated with FAO regional and national offices in the establishment of the new national chapters. Furthermore, participant 78 also is working with a regional office of FAO to improve youth participation in their region which they also experienced as very positive and well-supported. From this, there appears to be a discrepancy between the global FAO support and regional/national support of the WFF endeavours.

In terms of support in policy creation and implementation by other organisations, this was most visible during the observations at the flagship event. Multiple organisations (both youth and non-youth-focused) collaborated in the youth assembly sessions to work on policy documents, and future and past negotiations, including the implementation aspects. Negotiations and policies discussed were, for example, the UNFSS Stocktaking Moment, the High-Level Political Forum, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the UN Convention of Biological Diversity, and COP28, and for these sessions, some relevant policymakers were presented. Whilst this might appear to be a good support system in theory for policy creation and implementation, in reality, this was not the case. The majority of the time the policymakers and established individuals would either leave the session after giving a presentation or they would not pay attention to the youth discussions. The policy document discussed during the COP28 assembly had already been finished by YOUNGO and thus any contributions made at that session would never be incorporated. This demonstrates that these organisations and individuals were legitimising the WFF discursively by having their names associated with the WFF on the website, on social media, in documents, etc. as participants, but in practice, their behaviour in sessions delegitimised the WFF towards the youth audience.

Another example of attempted behavioural delegitimation of youth participation can be observed in the interaction with large agri-food companies in this quote:

So that lobby is there and I think that with more large companies, but I see that then, you do not see that that easily. You do not get to hear this easily. I know this about Bayer. Even more so, I know about one of the intellectual property legal advisors that they in, for example, sessions as the investor sessions and start-up session in the Youth Food Lab, they were heavily

trying to get the intellectual property. 'Because we financed it, we have offered support here, so we get the intellectual property.' And I think it is really good that the World Food Forum from the beginning offered support in that area by having good intellectual property rights advisors to those teams. because if they had not been there, those youth would have lost their intellectual property, or, say, their role. That is a shame actually. (participant 76)

Policy field

Rome-based agencies

Working outwards from the WFF towards the Rome-based agencies, the organisation that it is most closely connected to is FAO as the WFF is hosted in the FAO and, according to many interviewees, is very closely connected to it. This connection is also visible in the previous sections as the FAO legitimises the WFF in various ways through funding, providing support, helping organise and participate in WFF events, etc. According to some participants who were critical of the WFF the Forum is just part of FAO and has little to no independence despite the WFF claiming to be an independent organisation. However, some participants do experience the WFF to be independent.

Moving further outwards the other organisations that the WFF interacts with in its field are the Rome-based agencies of which FAO is one of the three; the others are the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The WFF itself in its reports state that they collaborate with these other agencies as well and that the WFF's success and growth have relied on this collaboration. IFAD and WFP both send delegations to the WFF and saw the participation of the Executive Director of the WFP and the President of IFAD at some of the high-level events. According to participant 73, however, the relations among the Rome-based agencies are a bit awkward but participants at the WFF were housed and assisted by employees of IFAD. Participant 81 also described the relations between the Rome-based agencies as being strenuous and that they compete with one another:

But FAO understood *prima* but did not understand the *inter pares*. And this *prima inter pares* [meaning: first among equals] has been worked out probably at the end of the 80s, 1980s. Because there were already problems at that time with the World Food Program and what was going to be Biodiversity International. So nobody negated that FAO for historical reason was important, but the fact is that there were two other organisations in Rome and that Rome was the agriculture and food capital of the world, because of those three organisations. FAO has had extremely difficult relationship mainly with WFP, because WFP is part of the UN system, which is not the case of IFAD, which is part of the Bretton Woods arrangement as a monetary fund, a reserve. It depends basically on the personality of the head, but also the interests of

the member states that do not hesitate to make a statement saying that they should work together, but on the other hand, to play one against the other to defend their own interests. And so the member states are not without responsibility in this situation. (participant 81)

According to this participant, the WFF was invented to return attention to FAO instead of the other agencies, and this might even be partially caused by the fact that the WFP won a Nobel Prize:

One of the things that has really played a role, which is really bad for FAO and that hated it, was the fact that in 2020, I think, WFP got the Nobel Prize Peace Prize, and that was really bad, including regarding the young people, and I would not exclude, so with a question mark, that is to be put again in the list of the elements that may have been at the origin of the World Food Forum, and the attractive aspects it represent for the young people to compensate for this Nobel Prize. (participant 81)

Competition with the CFS

Another relationship of the WFF in this policy field is one with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) which is a very difficult one. This is also the case because FAO appears to be having a more strained relationship with the CFS. However, the relationship between WFF and CFS is also difficult seeing as the independent Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) to the CFS also has a youth working group which plays an important role in issues surrounding youth in global food systems governance. This creates some possible tensions on who is the legitimate organisation for youth in global food systems governance. This year's WFF flagship event's opening ceremony was held simultaneously with World Food Day whilst previously the opening of the CFS was held in combination with World Food Day. As one interviewee explains:

It was mainly because of the competition trying to get the 16th of October. It's very recent and last year was the first year where they managed to get the 16th of October and displaced the CFS, but I think the year before, it was after, but it was already clear because they discussed it that year that they wanted for it for 2023 to have it around. (participant 82).

Participant 82 also goes on in the interview to explain why this is significant:

Because I think from the communications point of view and from the point of view of public attention, this is the date. So in that sense, that's why it is so important, because now they manage to have, from a communications point of view, the main attention. (participant 82)

Additionally, participant 72 mentioned that the Director General of FAO was abundantly present at the WFF but not at the CFS despite both organisations being housed in the FAO. This participant also stated

that some governmental leaders were present at the WFF but not at the CFS which occurred a week later. Furthermore, at the flagship event itself, the constituencies of the CSIPM itself did not want to engage with the WFF despite being asked to do so, one of the reasons given for this was the belief that the WFF 'was a space that was weakening the kind of participatory space of the CFS, and maybe trying to overtake it or at least undercut it. And there was no interest in participating in an undercutting of the CFS' (participant 84). Some other interviewees (both experts and youths) also held the opinion that one of the reasons that the WFF was created was indeed to undercut, side-line, and even as a weapon to get out the CFS.

However, from the perspective of the WFF interviewees, these tensions are also felt and observed but they explain them very differently. They state that the WFF is a neutral and open space for everyone and that they do not understand the problems that CFS, CSIPM, and those aligned with them have with it. A member of the leadership of the WFF went even further than that by actively, discursively delegitimising the CSIPM during the interview by stating that through the UNFSS and WFF, both open spaces for discussion, that:

You are taking a lot of business away from those groups as well. Because they live off of actually discourse, and sometimes not finding solutions. That is what the businesses is of many of these lobby groups, that is their salaries, their raison d'être in the end of the day. So as long as there is discourse, they have a reason to exist (participant 78).

This shows a very interesting framing presented by the leadership of WFF: global food governance as a market rather than a democratic space. At the end of the interview, the participant even went on to say that the WFF is definitely taking away their raison d'être and that this is the reason why the CSIPM felt threatened. It appears clearly that some of these institutional and behavioural practices employed by various actors are legitimising the WFF further whilst simultaneously delegitimising the CFS.

It is also vital to note that a majority of the youth, including youth representatives, that were interviewed were barely aware of the existence of the CSIPM, especially the youth working group, which also might indicate a failure to engage youth on behalf of CSIPM or a lack of public communication.

Conclusion

With all this information we can now return to answering the sub-question 'What are the dynamics around the (de)legitimation process of the World Food Forum?'. These dynamics appear to differ largely per organisation and legitimisation practice. In terms of discursive legitimisation practices, the WFF is very active on social media and in writing reports to legitimise itself, which it does via the

justifications presented in the previous section. Moving towards institutional practices we see the huge amount of cooperation that the WFF has with many different organisations, including youth and non-youth organisations. From this, we can conclude that the partner network WFF legitimises the Forum greatly. Furthermore, a new institutional entity has been created; the Office for Youth & Women in FAO, to further institutionalise youth participation in FAO. However, this entity has already been met with criticism as the FAO already has existing offices for youth and women. Lastly, the behavioural legitimisation practices are the hardest to observe but this research shows that the WFF is legitimised by the FAO through its funding and its participation in WFF activities. The FAO's support in policy creation and implementation is experienced differently by the youth interviewed. Furthermore, the WFF is legitimised via funding from voluntary contributions by, for example, the Dutch and Irish governments. During the flagship event, the WFF is also legitimised by the large number of participants in its sessions and the number of organisations that host side events at the flagship event. The lack of structural support in policy creation and implementation of the WFF by other organisations and established individuals on the other hand delegitimises the WFF.

Branching out to the policy field of global food governance this section has shown that the WFF is closely connected to the FAO but the Forum has little interaction with the other Rome-based agencies. The FAO itself experiences strained relationships with IFAD and the WFP and some participants theorise that this is why the WFF was created. Lastly, the relationship between the WFF and the CFS and its autonomous CSIPM is extremely complicated. According to some participants, especially those who align themselves with the CFS, the WFF is observed as an undercutting of the CFS. This can be observed in the fact that the WFF flagship event is now held simultaneously with World Food Day whilst previously the CFS plenary was held around that day, and in other behavioural delegitimation practices aimed at the CFS. This tension is also experienced by members of the WFF but explained differently; the CFS feels threatened by the existence of the WFF whilst the WFF is just an open space for stakeholders, especially youth, to come together. The leadership of the WFF, on the other hand, admits to undercutting the CFS.

The democratic legitimacy of youth participation in the World Food Forum

Since the justifications of the WFF heavily emphasise the coming together of all stakeholders in agri-food systems, the diversity and inclusivity of youth, and the following empowerment of youth it is important to see whether these justifications are accurate. Therefore, this section answers the sub-question: 'To what extent is the current youth participation in the World Food Forum legitimate?'. This section discusses the democratic legitimacy of the WFF according to Dingwerth's (2007) theory of democratic legitimacy based on the criteria of (1) scope of participation, (2) quality of participation, (3) transparency, (4) democratic accountability, (5) deliberativeness, and (6) discursive balance. To analyse the legitimacy of youth participation, this analysis drew from the experiences of youth, including participant observations, at the WFF to assess the different legitimacy dimensions and supplemented these findings with the information provided by the experts interviewed.

Scope of participation

The scope of participation and levels of inclusivity can be observed at the different parts of the WFF: both the organisation and the flagship event. The WFF organisation itself defines diversity based on identifying different regions: Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Near East and North Africa, and North America, and it includes youth from all these regions in its boards. Participant 71 reflected on this by stating that: 'still we are trying to build the representation of Near Eastern, North Africa. And in the Pacific region we have like, I think we lack Pacific representation. But other regions, I feel like we represent it fairly'.

Within its youth policy board and young scientists group there also appears to be a good ratio in terms of gender. This diversity was a conscious effort of the WFF, also during its inception to ensure a better diversity than just white, privileged, highly educated youth. The scope of participation in the other policy processes such as the regional consultations and the surveys used to inform the WFF's policy priorities is unknown.

However, one of the interviewees (participant 77) from the Global South stated that representation in the policy board is still lacking in terms of different perspectives, types of knowledge, and ethnic representation. This participant noted that within regions there is still an enormous diversity and this, they felt, was not represented on the board. They also noted the importance of language barriers and that the WFF is still largely in English which excludes participants who do not speak English, and that not everyone has a (good enough) internet connection to join online meetings and events. Furthermore, multiple participants reflected on the fact that indigenous peoples and (smallholder) farmers are not represented well enough on the policy board. Finally, one major aspect that stood out in all interviews was that when the members of the WFF were asked about who they represented,

almost all of them struggled to answer this question. From this research, it became apparent that the members of the policy board appear not to be elected because they represent a certain constituency, movement or organisation. This was also emphasised by the experts who heavily critiqued the WFF for merely including individuals, not representatives. This sentiment was also echoed to a certain extent in reflections on the flagship event, however, during this event youth representatives were also present from countries, partner organisations, academia, etc. This can also be seen in the 39 statements made by these representatives at the most recent flagship event which have been published by the WFF. However, the other attendees, likely the majority, were there with no mandate, no support system, and representing only themselves. This aspect was heavily criticised by the experts:

To carefully avoid any kind of legitimate or autonomous self-organised representation or presentation of civil society and social movement interests and to instead handpick, cherry pick young people, indigenous people, whatever, who can very often, you know, be manipulated into this because they're not used to having voice heard. They get called on the stage, if they are not, you know, critically prepared and if they are not part of a movement, I think it is very easy... (participant 83)

The Youth Forum is a standalone chapter that is, for the first time that sort of thing opens up and explicitly names, not only individuals, that has been the case for 20 years, 15 years, picked and choose individuals, not people's organisation. Individuals, A youth sitting in a panel, A youth that may or may not represent their own constituency. (participant 85)

Addressing whether there was a balanced diversity in the flagship event is more challenging because there are no precise numbers on which types of youth were there, from where etc. except for the total number of attendees. Therefore, this section can only address the perception of the scope of participation. In terms of diversity of stakeholders, the flagship event was experienced to be very diverse with a large scope of organisations, universities, companies, indigenous peoples, etc. However, multiple participants noted that there was a lack of (smallholder) farmers who are at the forefront of climate change struggles and food systems, which was the theme of this event. This was also reflected in the fact that La Via Campesina Youth had declined the invitation of the WFF. There was also a lack of activists despite them being explicitly mentioned in some of the sessions. Across the different fora, there was also a clear division of participants with government delegates and funders attending the Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum, academics attending the Science & Innovation Forum and mostly youth attending the Youth Action sessions, however, in the side events depending on the topic there was a greater diversity in age.

Returning to the topic of regional diversity and inclusivity, this is where some other major issues in participation emerge. Some of these issues were not the fault of the WFF, such as the struggles many people from the Global South faced getting a visa to enter Italy. However, this and other issues led to a lack of representation from people from the Global South, especially those most marginalised and often most affected by the issues the WFF aimed to discuss at the event. There certainly were efforts made by the WFF to ensure people from the Global South could attend but one major issue that kept coming up was funding; young people lack the funding to attend the WFF.

Youth usually don't have the funding for coming to Rome they, and in particular if we want to have people from communities that are not the most privileged, and from the Netherlands we probably don't necessarily need to fund anybody, but even there in some cases, I mean, students don't necessarily have so much money to come over. But then more you are going, of course, to developing countries, least developed countries and so on, there it is out of the question. I mean, unless you want to attract the most, the richest people in this country. And then comes the visa as well, because, unless you do fund the person in full Italy would not even give a visa to a person. So, it's the funding, the full funding of a young person to come to the World Food Forum is almost a prerequisite in order to actually get a person a Schengen visa. (participant 78)

In the end, the scope of participation at the flagship event was both narrow and broad at the same time: many youths were present from all over the world and from a rather large range of backgrounds, but systematic issues that sometimes were not addressed meant that the breadth of participation narrowed and therefore the space remained inaccessible to those most affected.

Quality of participation

The structures of participation at the WFF as an organisation are rather unclear and thus not much can be said about the quality of them. The creation of the policy recommendations started with a global youth action compendium which analysed the statements from global youth groups. Next, a synthesis was produced based on existing regional and national youth policy statements. Afterwards, a survey was conducted and finally six online and six in-person regional consultations to identify solutions and actions. The outcomes of all these activities are presented but little to no additional information on the process of how they received these outcomes (this is especially true for the survey).

At the flagship event, there were many forms in which one could participate but the overall feeling that participants had was overwhelmed and rushed. The number of events and the chaotic layout of the building, combined with the need to move from session to session, meant that the quality of

participation was severely lowered. Furthermore, many of the rooms were too small for the number of youths who wanted to attend the session. Another reoccurring complaint was that too many sessions suffered from a lack of interpretation in languages other than English. However, most of the young people really seemed to appreciate the relatively low barrier of entry for joining the youth sessions.

It is one of the conferences where you can just walk in a room, sit somewhere and just start talking, and you have the feeling you are being heard in a way, that you contributed. And are a lot of UN conferences where you cannot do that, where it is just countries, parties talking, because parties decide and there are some observers and that is it. And this is like completely the other way around, it's like almost no parties and just completely only observers talking in circles, but at least having the idea they can contribute. (participant 73)

For this research, it is relevant to dive deeper into the assembly sessions as those were designed to discuss policy. In these sessions it was common to first have one or more speeches on the topic that was going to be discussed, these were largely given by established people, and afterwards, there was space to either ask questions or give input or the sessions would break up into smaller groups for coming up with recommendations which would then be discussed in the larger group again. In these sessions, however, the balance was often rather poor between speeches and actual discussions as the speeches would take up half of the time in the session or more, and since the sessions were rather short (often 2 hours) this would mean that the quality of the actual participation in discussions was extremely poor. To add onto that, these break-out sessions were all held in the same room, meaning that multiple small groups were all trying to discuss in the same room in awkward settings in a way too loud space. This meant that the quality of participation in these assemblies was incredibly poor.

Transparency

As already alluded to in previous sections, information about the organisational structure and the policy processes of the WFF organisation is very hard to find. Multiple youth participants who both attended the WFF and engaged with it regularly described the WFF as being opaque and that they could not find the information that they should have access to. This was especially true when referring to the regional assemblies that shaped the policy recommendations, but also referring to how the policy process will lead to implementation or uptake by both international organisations and governments. This obscurity is also experienced with regard to how the WFF is funded and how that money is being spent, also concerning the FAO.

So, I think that that is a place in, I personally feel like are really invalidated as a youth representative, even having the position. Because maybe we are still able to ask harder how this is doing but, from being already part of the World Food Forum that is a part that looks really obscure for us, like we are part of the house, but that is a room that is blocked for us. (participant 76)

This lack of transparency is also experienced at the flagship event, and especially regarding the policy processes:

At no point it gets clearly communicated what is going on that week, how this will be brought up to policymakers and at an institutional level at FAO. (participant 72)

I think what's difficult is like understanding the continuum of some of these things, like a lot of the sessions in Rome or like at the flagship event, are preceded by like regional consultations. So, I would say the session for regional youth assembly in Africa has like a session beforehand where young people that are attending the World Food Forum in Rome can feed into that process beforehand, and then it's like a continuous process that ultimately leads to outcomes that can be used for advocacy. But like that is not always entirely clear, that line of like making sure the people that are going to Rome are at that session beforehand, and that the people can like, see the outcomes. So, and even after the conference, like sometimes there isn't like that level of outcome follow up like, yes, people present at the closing and say, oh, we found x, y and Z, but in terms of like a document that you can have, either it isn't publicly available or it's not very easy to find. So, I think that part definitely requires work. (participant 79)

The experts also note that despite this opacity you do see some very powerful people involved in this Forum from FAO such as the Director General, the Chief Economist, the Deputy Director General, etc. This lack of transparency is described as making the participation of youth ineffective as 'You don't know the rules of the game, you don't know how the decision-making process is, you know what is going to happen, you don't know how many resources are there, you don't know anything' (participant 82). But it is also described as concerning especially with the connection to the Hand-in-Hand Investment Forum in which a lot of money is involved but also, again, lacks transparency.

Accountability

This lack of transparency feeds directly into the issues with accountability. Whether there are any accountability mechanisms regarding the WFF is not communicated at all, so again here we have to draw from the experiences of the youth engaging in the WFF and the experts' views, and the accountability can also be observed by those who were in the room and how they were treated. During

the participant observations at the WFF flagship event, it became apparent quickly that very few established people took part in the assemblies and those that did attend often left after giving their speech and thus did not pay attention to the participating youths' views and recommendations. During the assembly in which the preliminary results were discussed, during which no established person was present, this disappointment and frustration about the lack of people in power attending the youth sessions was clearly expressed. In the session after this about the COP28 negotiations, this exact phenomenon occurred again; a staff member of FAO presented basic information about climate change and its relation to food systems and left, and after another 2 speeches containing only introductory level information and one hour later, only one established person remained in the room and answered two questions, left, and then the youth discussion started with no established person present. This example perfectly illustrates the general trend of the assembly sessions. However, what is extremely interesting is that at the WFF flagship event, it was continuously repeated that youth should hold those in power accountable. Every time this was said there was no follow-up on how youth should do this or how they would be supported in this process of accountability.

The lack of accountability mechanisms was also echoed in most of the interviews with participants in the WFF. One session in particular was experienced as poorly organised, which was wherein the youth delegates presented their statements. Those present described this session as 'so you were just chunked in the room with World Food Forum organisers and all other youth, and you were just performing your speech for each other. Which is actually just totally useless and pointless.' (participant 72). One participant did mention that their national government had seen their statement and had discussed it, but they also emphasised that certain recommendations were intended for an international audience and thus were not heard. Finally, regarding the closing ceremony in which the findings of the week were presented, this also did not inspire trust in the follow-up process:

They do have people reporting from what the findings were of this and what the findings were of that, but like some of these like closing events are just like speech after speech, and people are not really paying that much attention anyway.' (participant 79).

This lack of accountability is perfectly articulated by participant 72: 'But I mostly had the sense that I was there to be part of it, from the World Food Forum that I was just there to be part of an image and that it was about bringing people together and that that was enough'. Those who were even more critical of the accountability processes (or lack thereof) were the experts:

There is no political, you know, substitution of political decision making and accountable, you know, decisions and negotiations by governments throwing all of that out of the window and letting in spectacle and financial decision making. (participant 83)

But what I am saying is what came out of the youth Forum that is also in the form of final report and sort of declaration, if you wish. To whom is going? Because the ones deciding are the governments, our constituencies, the governments. Did they hear? Is there any structured mechanism for those messages to filter into debates when they have to discuss guidance to the world on how to improve the resilience and sustainability of food systems? They speak of you, but they do not speak with you. (participant 85)

Deliberativeness

Again, not much can be said about the deliberative quality of the policy recommendations that have previously been drafted by the WFF, so this section addresses the deliberative quality of the flagship event using Dingwerth's (2007) criteria to assess this quality: continuous membership, small size, collective identity, and consensus procedures. In terms of continuous membership, this varies based on which level one is looking at the WFF; its youth policy board and young scientists group do have a membership basis of around two years, and the partner organisations also have a membership status and thus (can) engage regularly with the WFF, but the other participants of the WFF who engage in the sessions have no such membership and thus can also just be a one time attendee. This means that the amount of depth possible in sessions is limited as new participants have to be introduced to the topic and procedures each time. Following that, the size of the youth policy board is also relatively small (16 at the time) which indicates that there is likely space for good deliberation. On the other hand, the WFF flagship event is massive, and the deliberations are also quite large considering the amount of time available:

A lot of the sessions are quite short, there is a lot happening in a few days, and say at the session on SDG2, yes, there was like a meeting beforehand, but then on the day, if people are just attending that session. It is like two hours and the first like 20 minutes is probably people saying speeches or explaining what is going to happen, and then you have little breakout rooms and then you have people sharing on behalf of the group. And it is difficult because you do not get to have the full breadth of people's opinions through that sense. You just kind of get like a picking of what each group had to say. So, I don't know if I have like an opinion on whether there's a wide difference of opinion on the food system. But I think that is probably because, maybe the space does not allow as much as it should for people to really delve into their

thoughts on difficult questions, because it was like dipping in and out of loads of different sessions. (participant 79)

The WFF does have some sense of collective identity to the extent that everyone in the youth part is a young person who is interested in these topics. However, most young people appear not there for the collective interests but appear to be there to network and learn which means that there is little sense of collective action and moving policy forward. This emphasis on learning, networking, getting funding, etc. but not deliberation also means that there are no consensus procedures. However, I now want to move beyond Dingwerth's criteria and address more deeply the experiences and criticisms of the discursive process and this is beautifully articulated by the following quote:

And those principles are not respected [referring to principles of youth participation: self-determination, self-organisation, self-representation, and an actual influence on the decision-making process]. Why? Because adults and governments decide youth are not involved in decision making, are *consulted*. And this principle of a difference, a strong difference between being a potential resource to be educated, and be a voice that has a point of view, legitimate point of view to be taken into account, is a present resource, and that present resource is never part of those Forum. (participant 85)

Almost every youth participant interviewed subconsciously reiterated this emphasis on educating youth, and also connecting youth to established people for either jobs, internships, research, etc. Furthermore, the experienced deliberativeness, meaning how youth experienced the discussions, was incredibly low: too little time, too many people, no balance between youth and established people, no space for critical questions, no space for a calm conversation, etc.

Discursive balance

To address the discursive balance, first one has to identify the dominant narrative which in the WFF is both obscure and ever-present. The WFF presents itself as an open space where all types of views and perspectives are welcome, participant 73 even mentioned that no topics are cancelled. Despite this, when looking at what the speakers at the WFF flagship event repetitively say and the experiences of the youth participants a certain narrative does emerge. This narrative frames agri-food systems transitions as finding solutions and solving problems. However, as participant 72 stated, the problems are never mentioned or defined whilst the WFF does select the solutions it sees as most promising. There is space for many types of solutions such as discussions about agroecology, for example, but these alternative solutions are rarely brought up at high-level events such as the opening and closing ceremony. The solutions that are presented most often and most positively are those relating to

innovation, investment, science, technology, and digitalisation. This, of course, makes total sense looking at the other parts of the fora: investment, and innovation & science. Some of the experts referred to the narrative as that of the corporate food system that is highly industrialised. Furthermore, many of the solutions presented are highly individualistic relating to personal behavioural change instead of systematic solutions. There was also a very prominent narrative about the collaboration with the private sector that is reflected well in the title of one of the mainstage events ‘Unleashing private sector power; new pathways to sustainable innovation’ in which representatives of Nestle, PepsiCo, and Tetra Pak were present. Private sector involvement was described as being necessary and food system transformation without this collaboration is impossible.

Another aspect of the dominant narrative is about how youth were addressed and framed. This occurred in many different ways. The established people present who gave speeches either addressed the future potential that youth hold, their role in the current system, or the fact that youth will inherit the problems of this world and the consequences. Youth in the current system were framed in various ways such as agents of change, fresh eyes and a new perspective, or even as hope. Furthermore, a certain responsibility was placed on them stating that youth should hold governments and organisations accountable for their actions or should help them perform and behave better. Youth as a future resource framed them as future leaders, and drivers of economic growth, and that youth should be taught and educated for them to contribute to the future. However, the youth themselves framed their position quite differently and more as a current stakeholder that should be involved in all parts of the decision-making process and as having a unique and meaningful perspective on food systems transitions. They also responded to the assumptions made by established people by saying that they lack resources, financing, and access to policy spaces to do what is expected of them.

Now looking at the balance, the different discourses present at the WFF, of which quite a few were present in the side events, the young farmers roundtable and the indigenous youth Forum. This is also reflected in some of the participants’ reflections during the interviews in which they expressed that they did feel that they were exposed to different perspectives and that there was space for that. However, other youth experienced the absolute opposite: ‘But to exist the World Food Forum actually has to systematically and adamantly ignore many realities and perspectives. And in this there is some type of narrative violence, and I find that really problematic.’ (participant 72). This participant also stated that they felt that there was no space to ask critical questions because those were just ignored. One interaction observed at the event during the youth assembly on the UNFSS Stocktaking Moment did indeed show that critical questions were not welcome but during this instance, the only established person at the table got angry at a critical question which created an incredibly uncomfortable situation

for all youth present. From this it is apparent that the discursive balance is a contested area; depending on the individual session it varied greatly but certain perspectives were certainly lacking such as a rights-based approach to food systems and more radical as well as systematic views of food systems transitions.

Conclusion

To answer to what extent the current youth participation is legitimate in the World Food Forum the analysis of the six dimensions is outlined here. Firstly, the scope of participation is perceived as quite broad by many participants and there are youth representatives present from several countries and organisations. However, existing inequalities such as Global South vs. Global North are reproduced in the WFF itself and were insufficiently addressed meaning that those most-affected were not included sufficiently. Secondly, the overall quality of participation experienced by youth was relatively poor; they felt rushed and that there was little space for meaningful conversation. The policy sessions were also chaotically structured with little space for meaningful deliberation. About the processes of the WFF outside of the flagship event not much can be said as little data is known about that. The transparency of the WFF is also an issue; little can be found about the actual processes of policy- and decision-making, and even youth representatives could not get this information. This leads to accountability because due to the lack of transparency, this research could not identify any accountability mechanisms present in the WFF to ensure the uptake of all the input into actual policies. Additionally, the policy sessions saw established people being uninterested in the discussions or leaving, and this was a criticism echoed throughout the flagship event and in almost all of the interviews the accountability of the WFF was questioned. The deliberativeness of the WFF can possibly be quite good in the organisation itself, however, at the flagship event, it was insufficient due to the short sessions in crowded rooms with little to no preparation of the participants. In addition to that, many of the participants present were not there to deliberate policy but to network, educate themselves, and seek funding. Lastly, the discursive balance demonstrates that there is a dominant narrative focused on problem-solving, innovation, and technology, and frames youth as future resources. There was space in other events for different discourses and some participants did feel that there was a diversity of opinions, but other participants were seriously concerned about the oppression of certain discourses. From this one can conclude that youth participation in the WFF is seriously lacking democratic legitimacy.

Discussion

This research aimed to answer the question of ‘how does youth participation influence the legitimacy of multistakeholder governance organisations?’. In turn, this discussion links theorising on legitimacy with the results of this research to build upon the theory of multistakeholderism in global food systems governance. Furthermore, it also reflects on the role of youth participation, both as a narrative and as a stakeholder group, in global food systems governance. The first section returns to the phenomenon of multistakeholder governance and the rise in critique of multistakeholderism in which I argue that at the core of this critique are questions about legitimacy. In the second section, I highlight how the theory of multistakeholderism can be made more robust by incorporating literature on democratic legitimacy. Finally, in the last section, I connect the World Food Forum to this criticism of multistakeholderism and apply the legitimacy framework to this case to advance multistakeholderism theory. In this section, I also reflect on the implications of claiming youth participation as a legitimisation strategy and present the World Food Forum as a case of the risks of a multistakeholder governance approach.

Multistakeholder governance and critiques of multistakeholderism

For this discussion, we first return to the phenomenon of multistakeholder governance in global food systems governance. The inclusion of all parties who hold a stake in the decision-making process may sound like a good idea as it aims to include all those affected. However, it appears that in practice for global food systems governance, this often leads to the reproduction of existing inequalities. Most multistakeholder governance organisations in this field do not abide by the criteria set by Manahan & Kumar (2021) for effective multistakeholder processes which open them up to the critique of multistakeholderism. Most theorising on multistakeholderism in global food systems governance has been done by social movements that centre the risk of corporate capture of these spaces (Carriedo et al., 2023; Chandrasekaran et al., 2021; Liaison Group of the Autonomous People’s Response to the UNFSS, 2023; Manahan & Kumar, 2021). They emphasise that by presenting these spaces as open and accessible to all with no clear rules, responsibilities, and roles, those who are most powerful in food systems in general also hold more power in these governance spaces; corporations, especially large agri-food businesses. Further, theorising has also been done by academics who bring in the all-affected principle, a lack of accountability and transparency, and started linking it to questions of legitimacy (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; McKeon, 2017a). Because of the narrative of an open, participatory space, the voices of those most-affected but least powerful are not prioritised and therefore, are at risk in these spaces.

The UN Food Systems Summit has been identified as an example of multistakeholderism by both academics and social movements, but little in-depth academic theorising has been done on the concept of multistakeholderism (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; Chandrasekaran et al., 2021). Multistakeholderism, as a critical theory, raises questions about who gets to participate and how, what narratives are present, whether there is space for differing ones, how accountability is ensured or not, etc. which are all questions directly connected to the democratic legitimacy of governance organisations. These multistakeholder governance organisations which are critiqued for multistakeholderism are trying to legitimise themselves and they are shifting what it means to be a legitimate global food systems governance organisation (Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021). Therefore, to strengthen the critique of multistakeholderism and to deepen its theorisation this research argues that questions of legitimacy are at the core of this critique.

Multistakeholderism and legitimacy

To build on the theory of multistakeholderism this research made use of two major theories of legitimacy; the sociological theory of (de)legitimation by Bexell, Jönsson, et al. (2022) and the normative theory of democratic legitimacy by Dingwerth (2007). Both authors include reflections in their books about that the legitimacy (practices) of a multistakeholder governance organisation differs from that of a multilateral one but do not go into detail about how these differ. Furthermore, multistakeholderism theories lack robust theorising about how these organisations operate and what precisely makes them viable for criticism of multistakeholderism other than clear corporate connections and capture. This next section presents a deeper theory of multistakeholderism and goes into why certain practices and structures of multistakeholder governance organisations are (potentially) harmful.

The discrepancy between narratives and structures of participation

First of all, multistakeholder organisations justify themselves using narratives of democracy more often than narratives of technocracy; this means that these organisations rely more on narratives of participation, inclusivity, diversity etc. to claim their authority (Bexell, Jönsson, et al., 2022; Dingwerth, 2007; Dingwerth et al., 2020). As this research shows, these narratives are employed both by the organisations themselves and by those supporting them. Furthermore, positive and evocative language regarding this participation is used often to attract more participants. In addition to that, they emphasise solving problems and that this can only be done through everyone participating and collaborating. This participatory narrative can most commonly be observed in the messaging of these organisations about their high numbers of participants. However, a multistakeholder governance organisation is vulnerable to the critique of multistakeholderism if these narratives of participation are not combined with robust and legitimate participation structures. This appears to be often the case

currently in global food systems governance (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Canfield, Duncan, et al., 2021; Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023) which demonstrates a clear discrepancy between the narratives and structures of participation.

For an organisation to be democratically legitimate according to Dingwerth (2007) two of the six dimensions are about participation; the scope and the quality of participation. A lack of attention to the quality of participation leaves multistakeholder organisations vulnerable to critiques of multistakeholderism. The scope of participation can often be quite broad for these organisations since participants from anywhere and from any part of the food system can attend. This is, however, directly linked to the all-affected principle, a key part of the critique of multistakeholderism, as simply inviting everyone to join does not necessarily lead to more legitimate and better outcomes, in fact, it does the opposite. First of all, through not addressing systematic inequalities, many people and organisations, those often most-affected and most marginalised, are unable to join these so-called open spaces: due to a lack of funding, resources, visa issues, etc. Next, issues of representation emerge as a common part of a multistakeholderism approach is picking and choosing individuals to be part of these events and organisations despite them not representing a larger group of people (Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023). Therefore, one can invite a large number of people and still not have a lot of people represented. This directly lowers the quality of participation. Furthermore, due to the usage of the all-affected principle, these organisations do not address and mitigate the power relations present outside of the organisation, which leads to the reproduction of them inside the organisation which again lowers the quality of participation and contributes to powerful corporations capturing these participatory spaces (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Carriedo et al., 2023; Chandrasekaran et al., 2021; Clapp et al., 2021; Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023).

Lack of transparency and accountability

Two other dimensions of democratic legitimacy (Dingwerth, 2007) that play an important role in the critique of multistakeholderism are transparency and accountability. These have already been theorised in connection to multistakeholderism by Canfield, Duncan, et al. (2021) and their conclusions are the same as this research; a lack of transparency and no clear accountability mechanisms are core aspects of the critique of multistakeholderism. I argue, however, that this lack of transparency goes even further than that of a lack of transparency about the decision-making process and accountability mechanisms as outlined. This lack of transparency relates to everything in the institutional structure of the organisation from the funding to all the partner organisations involved; this seems to be so purposefully opaque that participants remain uninformed and thus do not know precisely if and what to critique. This means that the participation of corporations is seen as even more problematic by

social movements because the organisations are not transparent about how they collaborate with these corporations, how funding operates, and the level of influence these corporations hold (Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS, 2023). Again, as argued by Canfield, Duncan, et al. (2021) this lack of transparency is directly related to a lack of accountability mechanisms because if a multistakeholder organisation is not transparent about how input will be incorporated or how decisions are made and no actual outcomes are visible, one has to inevitably conclude that no such mechanisms exist. Furthermore, because so many stakeholders are present and those are presented as being the decision-makers, who will then ensure that these decisions are upheld and how? Returning to the theory of democratic legitimacy one can conclude that a lack of democratic control is a key aspect of the critique of multistakeholderism.

Dominating narrative and lack of deliberativeness

Again, we return to the narrative of these organisations, not about participation but about food systems themselves in this section. I have already mentioned that part of the theory of multistakeholderism is a very solution-oriented narrative that is positive in tone. However, one might ask what are the problems that these solutions should address and what solutions are we precisely talking about? This links to Dingwerth's (2007) theorising on the two dimensions of discursive balance and deliberativeness which thus far has not been linked to multistakeholderism extensively. The dominant narrative being presented in these organisations focuses on innovation, technology, and digitalisation as solutions to the problems of food systems but these problems are rarely discussed and analysed (Canfield, Anderson, et al., 2021; Montenegro de Wit et al., 2021). There is an emphasis on improving food security via a productionist lens of increasing production and making agriculture more efficient as well as focusing on behavioural change to reduce food waste. However, a rights-based approach to food systems is completely lacking in this dominant narrative. Most of these organisations do invite some people or organisations who hold different views but these are often a minority or, in the case of both the UN Food Systems Summit and the WFF, refused to attend. Therefore, the discursive balance is an element that is lacking in these organisations in the critique of multistakeholderism. The same can be said about the deliberativeness of these spaces; there is very little time and space for deliberation in these organisations/events and even if there is, the lack of attention to power inequalities severely limits the possibility of alternative perspectives to the dominant one.

Relevance for democratic legitimacy

Multistakeholder governance in its structure does not rely on states primarily for their legitimacy and accountability as opposed to multilateralism and these multistakeholder organisations must, therefore, rely on their own democratic legitimacy. However, from this analysis, I conclude that

multistakeholder organisations that are prone to the critique of multistakeholderism lack democratic legitimacy in almost all dimensions. Because of this one can see these organisations continuously justifying their authority to rule, and thus their legitimacy, using narratives of participation and problem-solving. However, since these organisations lack democratic legitimacy in all dimensions they are not capable of providing actual outcomes in terms of decision-making and policy creation; the quality of participation is too poor, there is no transparency or accountability, and not enough space exists for actual deliberation and differing perspectives. The consequence of this is that these organisations cannot justify themselves using any actual performance and effective procedures and must therefore rely on these positive narratives of participation. But, as stated before, this research has concluded that this participation is poor and lacks legitimacy which means that these organisations are very vulnerable to corporate capture and with it, the critique of multistakeholderism. Therefore, they appear to be doomed to fail in governing the transition to sustainable and just food systems. Then the question remains; why do these organisations exist if they are doomed to fail? It is suggested that this is to ensure the power of corporations in these governance spaces but more research should be done to see if this strong claim is true.

The World Food Forum as a case study of multistakeholderism

In this theorising, I have already started integrating the World Food Forum as part of this battle of legitimacy and in the following section I apply this theory of multistakeholderism with its legitimacy framework to the case study of the World Food Forum. This demonstrates how the WFF is an example of multistakeholderism and how theories of legitimacy can help strengthen the critique of multistakeholderism. Furthermore, this section outlines what the implications are specifically for claiming youth participation as a legitimisation strategy and connects this to the risks of a multistakeholder governance approach.

Legitimacy and the World Food Forum

Participation and inclusiveness

As this research has shown, justifications based on narratives about participation, specifically the inclusivity, diversity, and scale of it, are frequently employed by the WFF. These discursive legitimisation practices can be observed in the written documents presented by the WFF as well as at the flagship event itself. The claim made by the WFF is, therefore, that it is an apolitical organisation which includes a large number of youth from everywhere with all kinds of backgrounds, and that in doing so the organisation empowers youth to achieve the SDGs and realise a better food future for all. The narrative that the WFF presents of themselves whilst doing this, is that they are an open space for all stakeholders, specifically youth groups, to come together and discuss to achieve these goals. Through this, the WFF employed a participatory narrative using the all-affected principle despite issues with its

structures of participation; a clear discrepancy which is common in multistakeholderism. Despite the relative breadth of participation at the WFF, the quality of participation was lacking immensely at the flagship event due to the chaotic nature of the discussions and the event, the lack of time or space for meaningful conversations, the lack of support provided to youth, the disinterested attitude of high-level officials, the lack of proper translation at multiple sessions, etc. In addition to that, the claims of providing an open space for youth to discuss food systems were also not observed at the event itself since a majority of the time was spent listening to speeches or lectures by established people, leaving not enough time for youth to speak. Again, the lack of attention to power differences and interests led to the space being captured by those who were already powerful instead of providing a meaningful platform for youth to participate in these discussions which goes to show why the WFF is an example of multistakeholderism.

Democratic control

Through the data collection, there were few references identified as to the accountability or transparency of the WFF. Accountability and transparency are the two dimensions that make up the criteria of democratic control. However, since the WFF frames part of its purpose as driving youth engagement in food governance and that they want to make youth voices, especially marginalised ones, heard it is vital that to achieve these, accountability mechanisms are present. This research has demonstrated that first of all, the transparency of the WFF is very low which means that even if there are accountability mechanisms in the WFF these are not made visible to researchers as well as to many of the interviewees. This lack of transparency is a key component of the critique of multistakeholderism. Furthermore, the WFF outright lacks accountability mechanisms. For example, the balance between high-level officials speaking and youth discussions, which is a similar finding to one presented by Kwon (2019) who critiqued youth participation in UN initiatives in general; too much time is spent by high-level people talking and too little time for actual youth deliberation. This discrepancy in speaking time undermines the purpose of the WFF which is to provide youth with a global platform to be heard and their opinions incorporated into policy-making. Furthermore, in both this case and the cases Kwon covered, high-level officials rarely attend such youth assembly sessions. This lack of balance between these two groups means that there is limited direct interaction between these groups and due to the lack of overall transparency no other mechanisms are visible to translate input into policy and convey this to these officials, even youth representatives expressed not seeing these mechanisms. Due to the lack of transparency and accountability, the WFF conforms to the critique of multistakeholderism.

Discursive practice

In many of the purpose justifications by the WFF, a large emphasis is also placed on the apolitical nature of the WFF as a space where all opinions are welcome and where differences are set aside to work together to achieve the solutions necessary. However, this depoliticising approach of multistakeholder governance organisations leads to lower discursive quality because no space is created for disagreement and thus only the narratives that are most powerful outside of the organisation are reproduced inside of it (Alves Zanella et al., 2018; Duncan & Claeys, 2018). This can be seen reflected in the analysis of Dingwerth's (2007) criterium of discursive practice which includes the dimensions of discursive balance and deliberativeness. In the analysis, a relatively dominant narrative of food systems emerged with a focus on solutions such as innovation, technology, and digitalisation with a strong emphasis on collaboration with the private sector. Of course, some other narratives about food systems were also present at the WFF, however, the most prominent one that was repeated throughout the event was a more corporate one. Previous literature on global food systems governance has already emphasised how important discourses and narratives are for claiming legitimacy and shaping legitimacy beliefs, especially for corporate actors (Clapp & Fuchs, 2009; Fuchs et al., 2011; Fuchs & Kalfagianni, 2009). To see this corporate narrative in the WFF prominently does raise questions about the corporate capture of this space intended for youth, similar criticism has also been published by Carriedo et al. (2023). As mentioned by the participants, private sector involvement is not inherently bad but to see only very powerful agri-food companies is seriously concerning. Furthermore, the deliberativeness of the WFF's flagship event is very low which suggests that even despite there being different narratives present to some extent, there is not enough time/space/structures to ensure that these narratives are shared and discussed. This suggests that critiques of multistakeholderism can be applied in terms of the corporate capture of the narrative to a certain extent and the lack of deliberative quality at the WFF.

Implications of claiming youth participation as a legitimisation strategy

Claiming youth participation as the goal of an organisation and therefore, as a justification, creates certain responsibilities and expectations in fulfilling this goal (Kwon, 2019; Thew et al., 2021). To achieve this goal it requires these organisations to have good governance structures to ensure democratically legitimate participation and provide youth with enough capacity-building and support to contribute meaningfully. However, the opposite is most often true due to various reasons (Kwon, 2019; Thew et al., 2021, 2022). First of all, there is often a lack of transparency in these spaces and youth do not have enough information to facilitate their participation (Kwon, 2019; Thew et al., 2021). Furthermore, youth have to navigate existing power relations that are reproduced in these spaces which also leads to the fact that they cannot ensure accountability of others in these governance

spaces whilst this is expected of them. Another key issue is the lack of space and time provided to youth to discuss and deliberate in depth which means that their contributions cannot be as useful as possible (Kolleck & Schuster, 2022; Kwon, 2019; Thew et al., 2021). Youth participants are often not adequately supported which means that the quality of their participation and therefore, its legitimacy stays low. Furthermore, youth who already have the 'know-how' of how these conferences operate, mostly youth from the Global North who are supported by their governments, are at an advantage in their participation in these types of fora (Kwon, 2019). This all demonstrates the struggles youth face in participating in these spaces whilst simultaneously a lot of pressure is put onto them to come up with meaningful contributions, to hold governments and organisations accountable, to be future leaders, etc. If these organisations are truly interested in providing legitimate ways for youth to participate they need to support and facilitate this participation better because otherwise, they will keep co-opting youth participation as just an empty justification.

Risks of a multistakeholder governance approach

This is especially dangerous when employing a multistakeholder approach to youth participation; youth generally hold less powerful positions and therefore cannot be expected to participate successfully in a multistakeholder place with no formal and clear rules. Youth will simply be confronted with the same power relations that they have to mitigate outside governance spaces with more established, more powerful, older, etc. people, organisations, and corporations dominating these spaces because the structures of participants do not name and address these power inequalities. This is especially true for youth whose identity intersects with other marginalised positions as they will be even more at risk of having their voices ignored or co-opted. This is further aggravated by the lack of transparency and accountability that is already commonly faced by youth participants in UN institutions which is also a key characteristic of the critique of multistakeholderism. Youth also need to be supported by clear information and mechanisms to ensure that their contributions can and will be taken up into policy and decision-making processes. Lastly, youth are not a monolithic group and hold many different views about food systems, however, this diversity of narratives often gets lost in a multistakeholder approach due to the dominance of a corporate narrative. This demonstrates the many risks associated with a multistakeholder approach; reproduction of power imbalances, lack of accountability and transparency which leads to no concrete results, and the spread of a corporative food systems narrative.

Conclusion

This research set out to analyse the role of youth participation in multistakeholder organisations in this battle for legitimacy in global food systems governance whilst putting the perspectives and experiences of youth centre stage. By putting youth central for the first time in global food systems governance literature, this thesis has made a unique contribution to the literature. Through using a case study approach, I examined the World Food Forum as a unique case of a multistakeholder governance organisation that claims to focus on youth participation. I now conclude that there is a clear discrepancy between the justifications employed by the WFF about youth empowerment and engagement and the actual democratic legitimacy of this participation. The youth participation in the WFF in general lacks democratic legitimacy; it does have quite a broad scope of participation and tries to balance some different discourses and narratives, but it fails in providing accountability, transparency, deliberativeness, and has an overall poor quality of participation. This lack of democratically legitimate participation combined with the justification claims, makes the WFF an example of multistakeholderism. Despite these severe issues, the WFF is promoted and legitimised as a global platform for youth participation by several organisations which is highly problematic as youth are being co-opted in a governance space that fails to deliver what it promises. Furthermore, the WFF is being used as a way to delegitimise the Committee on World Food Security, a multilateral body that is the most inclusive organisation in global food systems governance with its autonomous Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism and within it the youth working group.

In addition to this empirical research, this thesis also set out to build on the theoretical argument of linking multistakeholder governance and legitimacy and by doing so strengthen the critique of multistakeholderism. Despite the World Food Forum being just one case which limits the generalisability of the results, this research has only further confirmed the theorising by other authors in this field. Herein, we see that these governance organisations legitimise themselves using narratives of participation but fail to provide democratically legitimate participation, especially for those most affected by these decisions. These organisations lack mechanisms of accountability and transparency, and by deploying an all-affected approach depoliticize the space which leaves the door open for those who are most powerful to dominate the space, corporations, which in turn leads to the corporate capture of both the narrative and the space. Since these organisations are fundamentally built on participation this lack of democratic legitimacy of said participation leads to the failure of the organisations themselves as meaningful outcomes and improvements of food systems transition are impossible due to this failing governance structure.

We return to our battle of legitimacy and from this we can see that it cannot and should not be won by multistakeholder governance organisations that suffer from the critique of multistakeholderism. However, the question remains: what governance structures can provide a democratically legitimate transition to sustainable and just food systems? This will require much further research. In terms of the role of youth in this battle, it has become apparent that whilst their participation is often promoted discursively, democratically legitimate structures of participation are lacking. With organisations and high-level officials putting a large amount of pressure and expectations on youth, it is key to improve the governance structures that youth engage in and to provide them with the support, capacity, and knowledge to make themselves heard and listened to.

This thesis has demonstrated the importance of talking and engaging with youth to do research; they provided incredibly rich and nuanced answers to any questions and they are experts in their own experience. Further research should be done on how youth participate in other governance organisations in global food systems governance, to further delve into the issues youth face in participating in these structures and how they overcome them. In further research it is also important to get an even broader scope of interviewees seeing as for this thesis I did not interview members of every track at the WFF or the other fora of the flagship event, and most of the experts I interviewed were very critical of the WFF. In any of this future research, it is key that youth should be treated as a current voice and not a future resource. The creation of the Office of Youth and Women also appears questionable in providing more institutionalised youth participation and requires further research. It is also vital to keep studying the changes in global food systems governance as these structures are very opaque but also very powerful, we need to understand the internal processes of these organisations and make them visible to improve transparency and accountability. The battle of legitimacy is not over yet and we need to stay vigilant and informed.

Bibliography

- Alcaraz, J. M., Tirado, F., & Gálvez, A. (2021). Dark times for cosmopolitanism? An ethical framework to address private agri-food governance and planetary stewardship. *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility*, 30(4), 697–715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12362>
- Almeida, V., Getschko, D., & Afonso, C. (2015). The Origin and Evolution of Multistakeholder Models. *IEEE Internet Computing*, 19(1), 74–79. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MIC.2015.15>
- Alves Zanella, M., Goetz, A., Rist, S., Schmidt, O., & Weigelt, J. (2018). Deliberation in Multi-Stakeholder Participation: A Heuristic Framework Applied to the Committee on World Food Security. *Sustainability*, 10(2), 428. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10020428>
- Anderl, F., & Hißen, M. (2023). How trust is lost: the Food Systems Summit 2021 and the delegitimation of UN food governance. *European Journal of International Relations*, 135406612311735. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661231173553>
- Anderson, M., Clapp, J., Guttal, S., Paskal, A., & Monsale Suárez, S. (2023). *Who's Tipping the Scales? The growing influence of corporations on the governance of food systems, and how to counter it*. https://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/tippingthescales.pdf
- Baker, P., Lacy-Nichols, J., Williams, O., & Labonté, R. (2021). The Political Economy of Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems: An Introduction to a Special Issue. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*, 10(12), 734–744. <https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2021.156>
- Behringer, J., & Feindt, P. H. (2019). How Shall We Judge Agri-Food Governance? Legitimacy Constructions in Food Democracy and Co-Regulation Discourses. *Politics and Governance*, 7(4), 119–130. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i4.2087>
- Bexell, M., Bäckstrand, K., Ghassim, F., Gregoratti, C., Jönsson, K., Söderbaum, F., Stappert, N., & Uhlin, A. (2022). The Politics of Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Governance. In *Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Governance* (pp. 25–46). Oxford University PressOxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192856111.003.0002>
- Bexell, M., Jönsson, K., & Uhlin, A. (2022). *Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Governance* (M. Bexell, K. Jönsson, & A. Uhlin, Eds.). Oxford University PressOxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192856111.001.0001>
- Candel, J. J. L. (2014). Food security governance: a systematic literature review. *Food Security*, 6(4), 585–601. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-014-0364-2>
- Canfield, M., Anderson, M. D., & McMichael, P. (2021). UN Food Systems Summit 2021: Dismantling Democracy and Resetting Corporate Control of Food Systems. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2021.661552>

- Canfield, M., Duncan, J., & Claeys, P. (2021). Reconfiguring Food Systems Governance: The UNFSS and the Battle Over Authority and Legitimacy. *Development*, 64(3–4), 181–191.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00312-1>
- Carriedo, A., Naik, A., Monsalve, S., & Wolpold-Bosein, M. (2023). *A World Food Forum captured by corporate interests? Mapping corporate actors behind WFF partnerships and narratives*.
- Chandrasekaran, K., Guttal, S., Kumar, M., Langner, L., & Manahan, M. A. (2021). *Exposing corporate capture of the UNFSS through multistakeholderism*. <https://www.foodsystems4people.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/UNFSSreport2021.pdf>
- Checkoway, B. (2011). What is youth participation? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(2), 340–345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.017>
- Clapp, J., & Fuchs, D. (2009). Agrifood Corporations, Global Governance, and Sustainability: A Framework for Analysis. In J. Clapp & D. Fuchs (Eds.), *Corporate Power in Global Agrifood Governance*. MIT Press.
- Clapp, J., Noyes, I., & Grant, Z. (2021). The Food Systems Summit’s Failure to Address Corporate Power. *Development*, 64(3–4), 192–198. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00303-2>
- Committee on World Food Security. (2022a). *CFS Structure*. <https://www.fao.org/cfs/about-cfs/cfs-structure/en/>
- Committee on World Food Security. (2022b). *Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems*. <https://www.fao.org/cfs/workingspace/workstreams/youth-workstream/en/>
- Dingwerth, K. (2007). *The New Transnationalism*. Palgrave Macmillan UK.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230590144>
- Dingwerth, K., Schmidtke, H., & Weise, T. (2020). The rise of democratic legitimization: why international organizations speak the language of democracy. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(3), 714–741. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119882488>
- Duncan, J. (2015). *Global Food Security Governance*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315754130>
- Duncan, J., & Claeys, P. (2018). Politicizing food security governance through participation: opportunities and opposition. *Food Security*, 10(6), 1411–1424.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12571-018-0852-x>
- Ecker-Ehrhardt, M. (2018). Self-legitimation in the face of politicization: Why international organizations centralized public communication. *The Review of International Organizations*, 13(4), 519–546. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-017-9287-y>
- Food and Agricultural Organisation, & World Food Forum. (2023). *WFF Flagship Event*.
<https://flagship.world-food-forum.org/en>

- Fraundorfer, M. (2015). Experiments in global democracy: The cases of UNITAID and the FAO Committee on World Food Security. *Global Constitutionalism*, 4(3), 328–364.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381715000088>
- Freidberg, S. (2020). Assembled but unrehearsed: corporate food power and the ‘dance’ of supply chain sustainability. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47(2), 383–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2018.1534835>
- Fuchs, D., & Kalfagianni, A. (2009). Discursive power as a source of legitimation in food retail governance. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 19(5), 553–570. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09593960903445434>
- Fuchs, D., Kalfagianni, A., & Havinga, T. (2011). Actors in private food governance: the legitimacy of retail standards and multistakeholder initiatives with civil society participation. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28(3), 353–367. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-009-9236-3>
- Guttal, S. (2021). Re-imagining the UN Committee on World Food Security. *Development*, 64(3–4), 227–235. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00322-z>
- Henson, S. (2011). Private agrifood governance: conclusions, observations and provocations. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28(3), 443–451. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-011-9309-y>
- Herens, M. C., Pittore, K. H., & Oosterveer, P. J. M. (2022). Transforming food systems: Multi-stakeholder platforms driven by consumer concerns and public demands. *Global Food Security*, 32, 100592. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2021.100592>
- High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition. (2021). *Promoting youth engagement and employment in agriculture and food systems*. <https://www.donorplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/cb5464en.pdf>
- Jongen, H., & Scholte, J. A. (2022). Inequality and legitimacy in global governance: an empirical study. *European Journal of International Relations*, 28(3), 667–695.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221098218>
- Jönsson, K., & Gregoratti, C. (2022). Justifications in the (De)legitimation of Global Health Governance and Global Trade Governance. In *Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Governance* (pp. 140–161). Oxford University Press Oxford.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192856111.003.0007>
- Kaan, C., & Liese, A. (2011). Public private partnerships in global food governance: business engagement and legitimacy in the global fight against hunger and malnutrition. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 28(3), 385–399. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-009-9255-0>
- Kolleck, N., & Schuster, J. (2022). Youth participation in global policy networks on climate change. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 114, 102002.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2022.102002>

- Kwon, S. A. (2019). The politics of global youth participation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 22(7), 926–940. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2018.1559282>
- Liaison Group of the Autonomous People's Response to the UNFSS. (2023). *Multistakeholderism and the corporate capture of global food governance. What is at risk in 2023?* https://www.fian.org/files/is/htdocs/wp11102127_GNIAANVR7U/www/files/EN_Analysis%20Report%202023_FS4P.pdf
- Manahan, M. A., & Kumar, M. (2021). *The great takeover: mapping of multistakeholderism in global governance* (B. Brennan, G. Berrón, M. Drago, & L. Paranhos, Eds.). People's Working Group on Multistakeholderism.
- McKeon, N. (2017a). Are Equity and Sustainability a Likely Outcome When Foxes and Chickens Share the Same Coop? Critiquing the Concept of Multistakeholder Governance of Food Security. *Globalizations*, 14(3), 379–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1286168>
- McKeon, N. (2017b). Transforming Global Governance in the Post-2015 Era: Towards an Equitable and Sustainable World. *Globalizations*, 14(4), 487–503. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1244757>
- McKeon, N. (2021). Global Food Governance. *Development*, 64(1–2), 48–55. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00299-9>
- McMichael, P. (2021). Shock and Awe in the UNFSS. *Development*, 64(3–4), 162–171. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00304-1>
- Montenegro de Wit, M., Canfield, M., Iles, A., Anderson, M., McKeon, N., Guttal, S., Gemmill-Herren, B., Duncan, J., van der Ploeg, J. D., & Prato, S. (2021). Editorial: Resetting Power in Global Food Governance: The UN Food Systems Summit. *Development*, 64(3–4), 153–161. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00316-x>
- Montenegro de Wit, M., & Iles, A. (2021). Woke Science and the 4th Industrial Revolution: Inside the Making of UNFSS Knowledge. *Development*, 64(3–4), 199–211. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00314-z>
- Muttaqin, T., Soraya, E., Dharmawan, B., Laraswati, D., & Maryudi, A. (2023). Asymmetric power relations in multistakeholder initiatives: Insights from the government-instituted Indonesian National Forestry Council. *Trees, Forests and People*, 12, 100406. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2023.100406>
- Nisbett, N., Friel, S., Aryeetey, R., Gomes, F. da S., Harris, J., Backholer, K., Baker, P., Blue Bird Jernigan, V., & Phulkerd, S. (2021). Equity and expertise in the UN Food Systems Summit. *BMJ Global Health*, 6(7), e006569. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-006569>
- Orsini, A. (2022). Youth Goals? Youth Agency and the Sustainable Development Goals. *Youth and Globalization*, 4(1), 108–139. <https://doi.org/10.1163/25895745-04010001>

- Parfitt, T. (2004). The ambiguity of participation: a qualified defence of participatory development. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(3), 537–555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000191429>
- Priya, A. (2021). Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>
- Raymond, M., & DeNardis, L. (2015). Multistakeholderism: anatomy of an inchoate global institution. *International Theory*, 7(3), 572–616. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971915000081>
- Ryland, D. (2018). Animal Welfare Governance: GLOBALG.A.P. and the Search for External Legitimacy. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 30(3), 453–482. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqy015>
- SAPEA. (2020). *A Sustainable Food System for the European Union*. <https://doi.org/10.26356/sustainablefood>
- Schmidtke, H., & Lenz, T. (2023). Expanding or defending legitimacy? Why international organizations intensify self-legitimation. *The Review of International Organizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-023-09498-0>
- Schuster, D., & Mossig, I. (2022). Power Relations in Multistakeholder Initiatives—A Case Study of the German Initiative on Sustainable Cocoa (GISCO). *Sustainability*, 14(18), 11279. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su141811279>
- Stappert, N., & Gregoratti, C. (2022). The Self-legitimation of Global Governance Institutions. In *Legitimation and Delegitimation in Global Governance* (pp. 119–139). Oxford University PressOxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192856111.003.0006>
- Taggart, J. (2022). A Decade Since Busan: Towards Legitimacy or a ‘New Tyranny’ of Global Development Partnership? *The Journal of Development Studies*, 58(8), 1459–1477. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2032672>
- Tallberg, J., & Zürn, M. (2019). The legitimacy and legitimation of international organizations: introduction and framework. *The Review of International Organizations*, 14(4), 581–606. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11558-018-9330-7>
- Thew, H. (2018). Youth participation and agency in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 18(3), 369–389. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-018-9392-2>
- Thew, H., Middlemiss, L., & Paavola, J. (2020). “Youth is not a political position”: Exploring justice claims-making in the UN Climate Change Negotiations. *Global Environmental Change*, 61, 102036. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2020.102036>
- Thew, H., Middlemiss, L., & Paavola, J. (2021). Does youth participation increase the democratic legitimacy of UNFCCC-orchestrated global climate change governance? *Environmental Politics*, 30(6), 873–894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2020.1868838>

- Thew, H., Middlemiss, L., & Paavola, J. (2022). "You Need a Month's Holiday Just to Get over It!" Exploring Young People's Lived Experiences of the UN Climate Change Negotiations. *Sustainability*, 14(7), 4259. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14074259>
- Valente, F. L. S. (2018). Evolution on Food and Nutrition Governance and the Emergence of Multistakeholderism. *Development*, 61(1–4), 68–83. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-018-0198-x>
- Von Billerbeck, S. (2020a). "Mirror, Mirror On the Wall:" Self-Legitimation by International Organizations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 64(1), 207–219. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz089>
- Von Billerbeck, S. (2020b). No action without talk? UN peacekeeping, discourse, and institutional self-legitimation. *Review of International Studies*, 46(4), 477–494. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021052000011X>
- Von Billerbeck, S. (2022). Talk from the Top: Leadership and Self-Legitimation in International Organizations. *International Studies Review*, 24(3). <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viac022>
- World Food Forum. (2024a). *Culture*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/culture/en>
- World Food Forum. (2024b). *Education*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/education/en>
- World Food Forum. (2024c). *Innovation Lab*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/innovation-lab/en>
- World Food Forum. (2024d). *Local Action*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/local-action/en>
- World Food Forum. (2024e). *The World Food Forum: About Us*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/who-we-are/about-us/en>
- World Food Forum. (2024f). *Youth Action*. <https://www.world-food-forum.org/youth-action/en>
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Youth Working Group of the CSIPM. (2022, December 15). *Youth reservations on the CFS Policy Recommendations*. <https://www.csm4cfs.org/youth-reservations-on-the-cfs-policy-recommendations/>

Appendix on A.I.

For this thesis, I did not use any generative AI. However, the software used for transcription, Trint, is powered by A.I., which saved a lot of time in the transcription process and ensured accuracy. However, it did not influence any of the results or text written in this thesis.