

Addressing Governance for increased effectiveness of FAO interventions at country level (with an example from Niger)

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In its new strategic framework the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) acknowledges the importance of addressing governance appropriately in order to interact more effectively with the political environments in which it operates and achieve its five Strategic Objectives. “Governance” is one of the four cross-cutting themes (besides nutrition, gender and climate change) to be addressed throughout all FAO work. In order to do this effectively, FAO has established a small team of professionals that support other FAO colleagues and partners in this task.

FAO addresses governance relevant for its work at two levels:

At global level FAO engages with a leading or a contributing role and in multiple international initiatives, fora or other so-called ‘international governance mechanisms’. It plays a unique role in governance of global public goods, such as natural resources (e.g. Commission on Genetic Resources), food safety (e.g. *Codex Alimentarius*), food security (e.g. CFS and the Zero Hunger Challenge), and the implementation of the Agenda 2030. At this level, FAO is directly involved in the relevant decision making processes.

At regional and national level FAO supports governments in the design and implementation of policies and programmes related to food security, nutrition and sustainable rural development. At this level, FAO plays mainly an advisory role. Policy support to member countries is a core element of FAO’s work for ending hunger and malnutrition, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development.

In this article, we refer to FAO’s involvement at regional and country level.

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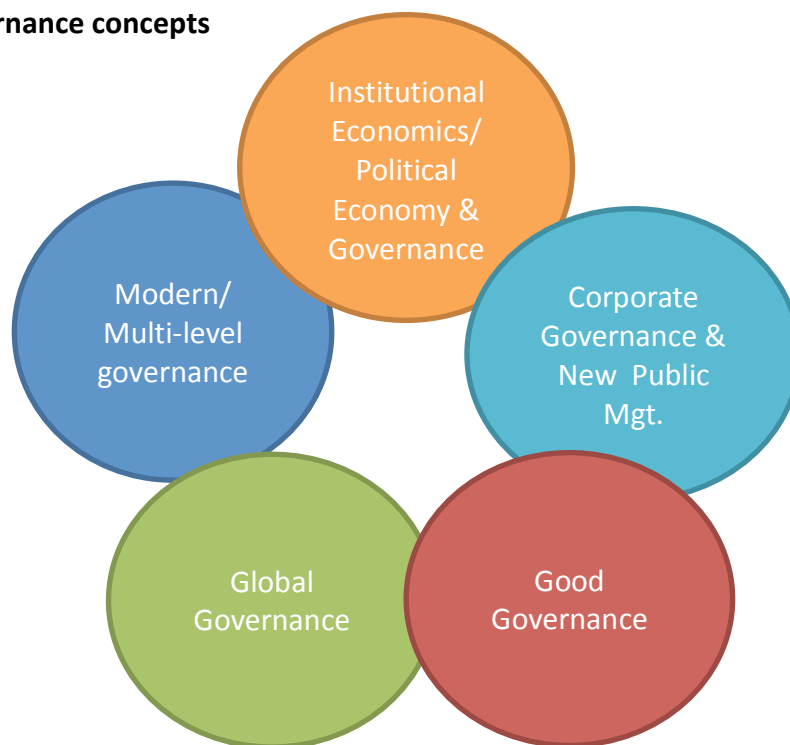
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'Governance' – a 'slippery' concept?

There is a lot of confusion around the term governance. This is not surprising as it has been developed and used by many different disciplines in a variety of contexts during the last 20 years. There is no universally accepted definition of the term and even scholars that have been working on governance for many years consider it a 'slippery' concept³.

The concept of modern or multilevel governance used in the *field of political sciences* was developed in the 90s to explain the integration of new stakeholders like the private sector and civil society organisations into the political decision making processes at national level. The concept of governance used in the *institutional economics and political economy debate* focused more precisely on the interactions between people and organisations trying to understand and explain the reasons for individual and organisational behaviour. The work of late Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom on the management of common pool resources (CPR) belong to this category as well as the broad debate on the 'principal-agent' relationship that centers on incentives for 'expected' behaviour and service provision and includes important factors such as power and influence.

Figure 1: Governance concepts



Other concepts, such as the concepts of 'Global Governance' and 'Corporate Governance', on the other hand, are much more focused on the underlying 'institutional structures' – 'Global Governance' referring to the institutional architecture for international problem solving whereas 'Corporate Governance' does the same at the level of individual organizations. The aforementioned concepts are mainly analytical, meaning that they try to

³ Jon Pierre and Guy Peters (2000): *Debating Governance, Politics and the State*, Oxford, p.7

help understand reality better in order to contribute to improved problem solving. But there are also concepts with normative ‘intentions’ such as the concept of ‘good governance’ that promotes the adoption of a series of established good governance principles (such as transparency, accountability and participation) at the level of state and within organizations hoping that this will subsequently lead to ‘improved’ functioning of the state or improved organisational behaviour.

Already this brief illustration of five different concepts (there are many more) shows that it is difficult to expect a unified understanding of what we mean by governance. This, however, should not worry us too much. Instead of trying to identify the ‘right’ concept of governance, FAO acknowledges and respects the diversity of the broad debate. However, we should always make it clear to which of the debates we relate when we talk about governance.

What does FAO mean by governance?

In our work at country level, we can benefit very much from the first two of the debates mentioned above, the debates on modern/multilevel governance and institutional economics and political economy. If we want to approach a *definition*, in this context we would define governance as *“the process of political decision making, that beyond the rules, regulations, and other institutional processes considers the underlying dynamics of the relationships between the involved stakeholders determined by e.g. power and influence and other incentives for behaviour”*.

Governance is not only what governments do. Governance takes place at many levels in a variety of contexts. Governance ‘is’, as some authors say.

How do we propose to approach governance at country level?

In order to identify our approach to governance at country level, we had to take a strategic choice. In our ‘technical’ work over the last decades it has become clear that food security, agriculture or sustainable management and use of natural resources interventions cannot be developed and implemented without recognition of the roles of politics and institutions in shaping what actually happens on the ground. When analysing potential solutions to identified problems, it is as important to understand the actors and politics surrounding the issue as it is to develop a sound technical approach. Very often, we have adequate technical solutions, but problems related to governance hinder successful implementation.

In FAO work at country level, we thus invest in understanding the ‘politics’ around a given technical issue or problem in order to be able to support member countries in designing solutions that will be considered legitimate in the eyes of the concerned persons, have the chance to be effectively implemented and become sustainable. This does *not mean that we will be getting involved in politics* at country level, but that our support to countries will aim at finding solutions that are both technically sound and politically feasible.

FAO governance concept is problem driven and committed to an analytical approach and iterative problem solving (see Box for an example of addressing governance in the work of FAO at country level).

***FAO Support to organizing small-scale producers and their involvement
in law-making in Niger***

In Niger, where 80% of the population is rural, small-scale and family farming is a rule. Most smallholders face difficulties in accessing resources, inputs, finance and information necessary to sustain their livelihoods. Producer organizations (POs) play a key role in helping producers improve their food security and are the main vehicle for defending their interests at the policy level.

The CoOPequity⁴ Project in Niger began in 2012 as part of the EU/FAO Programme on Improved Global Governance for Hunger Reduction. It focused on: i) facilitating policy dialogue between POs and government; and ii) strengthening of POs' organizational capacities and gender equality - to improve the quality of services to their members.

FAO was asked to support POs to bring their claims to the negotiation table in the process of the formulation of the Draft Law on Agricultural Orientation (Draft Law), led by the Ministry of Agriculture which led asked. Considering the relevance of small farms for reducing food insecurity at the local and national level, the integration of smallholders' voice in the Draft Law formulation process seemed critical.

Governance issue: In planning FAO support to POs, the key question was: why isn't the voice of small-scale producers' heard in the Draft Law formulation process?

The analysis of the Draft Law negotiation process showed that the Chamber of Agriculture was involved as the formal representative of producers before the government. The apex POs and their networks claimed, however, that they were not given information and the opportunity to express their views on various issues of importance, and to formulate proposals to be included in the future Draft Law. In fact, by having a representative of the POs sitting at the negotiation table was not a guarantee that their real needs and views would be raised in the process. The assessment undertaken by the Project (through a stakeholder analysis, problem analysis and several bilateral and multilateral meetings with the relevant actors) showed the highly fragmented landscape of POs lacking the capacity to make alliances, mobilise their members, coordinate and speak with one voice as the valued partner in the conception of the Draft Law.

The assessment revealed that there was a need to bring together the different organizations, combine their resources and functional strengths, and agree on common position regarding the Draft Law. The Network for dialogue and collaboration between POs of Niger (NDCPON), the recent initiative launched by the four main apex POs and their five networks, was perceived as a pertinent institutional platform for this. From 2013 to mid-2015, FAO supported the organizational consolidation of the NDCPON and its work on the Draft Law.

⁴ CoOPequity stands for collaboration between producer's organizations for more equitable agricultural services to men and women producers.

With FAO support, the NDCPON was able to coordinate several months of intense dialogue among representatives of rice producers, vegetables producers, pastoralists and livestock keepers, national and regional federations, the farmers' platform and the Chamber of Agriculture. As a consequence, more than 1,000 proposed amendments by different POs were collected and analysed. In May 2015, the common producers' position and the amended text of the Draft Law were endorsed by all key national and regional apex POs and their networks, including the Chamber of Agriculture, and officially submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture by the NDCPON. If the final version of the Draft Law includes the PO amendments, it will be the important step towards fostering smallholder agriculture in Niger and its contribution to poverty reduction and food security.

The implications of FAO support are beginning to extend beyond the Draft Law. The NDCPON continues to function as an informal space for PO consultations, and is consolidating as a recognized player at the Niger policy scene. NDCPON is currently organizing a major awareness raising campaign on FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forestry and Fisheries; and it has facilitated the establishment of the equivalent consultation structures at the regional level.