



Review of Nora McKeon's *Food Security Governance: Empowering Communities, Regulating Corporations*.



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Nora McKeon. 2015. *Food Security Governance: Empowering Communities, Regulating Corporations*. London and New York: Routledge. 246 pages, ISBN 978-0-415-52910-5 Paper (\$44.95).

This timely book combines food regime and governance approaches to explain the material, ideological and power dynamics of the global agro-food system and its discontents. Nora McKeon's book contributes to a growing literature detailing the shortcomings of the dominant industrial corporate food system in nourishing the world's people and environment. Yet it moves beyond many such volumes in identifying promising alternative agro-food initiatives based on traditional family/peasant farming and local food provisioning, and alternative food governance efforts which empower local citizens and communities and restrict corporate profiteering. McKeon draws on her unique insider view of United Nations policy venues and local food movements in Africa to argue that food security and food sovereignty can and must be linked.

Nora McKeon provides an insightful, historically grounded analysis of the dominant industrial corporate agro-food regime and its material and ideological underpinnings. She explains the roles of multilateral agencies, national governments, and transnational corporations, as well as powerful new actors like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in the contemporary industrial food system, illuminating trends in corporate concentration and financial speculation. The book offers a powerful critique of neoliberalism in the agro-food sector and clarifies how recent world food price spikes and climate crises are tied to failures in food system governance. Challenging the idea that only industrial corporate production can feed the world, McKeon shows how in fact the vast majority of food eaten by people around the world comes from

peasant farming and local food systems. While these local food webs are under siege, most recently through land and water grabs, she argues that they are best able to ensure access to healthy food for all and foster environmental sustainability and resilience.

A key contribution of this book is its interrogation of key concepts upholding the global industrial corporate agro-food system, as well as those challenging the dominant paradigm. Nora McKeon analyzes how neoclassical economic notions of progress, development, and modernization foster the techno-industrial treadmill in agriculture and underpin a definition of food security based on international comparative advantage. The book critiques this market-based conception of food security, contrasting it with a rights-based food sovereignty conception promoted by social movements in the Global South. McKeon explains the key dimensions of this alternative paradigm, including its links to alternative development ideas, practices, and policies. This discussion merges food security and food sovereignty concerns through a focus on the “right to adequate food.”

Nora McKeon demonstrates how conventional food governance failures have fueled recent world food crises and, more importantly, how new local and global initiatives are emerging to forge a rights-based global agro-food system. What makes this volume both unique and highly persuasive is its combined discussion of innovative civil society efforts to foster food sovereignty from the bottom up and new United Nations efforts working to democratize food security governance from the top down. McKeon provides a rich discussion of emerging grassroots efforts to reclaim control over the food system, assessing their achievements and suggesting ways to reinforce these efforts. This analysis draws inspiring examples from across the globe, from Bolivia’s peasant farmer’s markets, Florida’s farmworkers’ Fair Food Program, and from McKeon’s own work with small farmers in West Africa. The discussion of new global governance approaches focuses on the rise of the United Nations Committee on Food Security and its successes and failures in integrating civil society actors and concerns. McKeon provides an insightful insider’s view of this important new governance arena and its policies to protect local land and natural resource rights and to steer agricultural investments in support of local food security and small producers.

This book illuminates challenges and emergent possibilities within the global agro-food system and invites readers to become engaged in fostering food rights at home and around the world. Written in an engaging style, the book is suitable for a wide audience. Many readers will find the numerous textboxes useful in explaining central theoretical concepts, providing illustrative examples, and presenting key movement insights and approaches. This book is recommended for classroom use in advanced undergraduate and graduate level social science courses related to agro-food studies, globalization, and development.

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