



Account of the CFS Session in Rome, 2017

The 44th session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was held at the United Nations in Rome from 9 to 13 October 2017.¹ On the agenda were nutrition, sustainable management of forests, and the evaluation of this international and intergovernmental platform. During the two days preceding this session, the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) once again played an active and constructive role in the work of the CFS. Some member-organizations of Coordination SUD were involved in it. The CSM side events in particular helped to denounce the risks of mega-mergers in the agri-food sector, defend women's rights, and make the voice of landless people and victims of food insecurity be heard.



© FAO - Alessandra Benedetti

Nutrition back on the CFS agenda

Nearly one third of the global population suffers from one of the forms of malnutrition (acute and chronic malnutrition, deficiencies in micronutrients and vitamins, excess weight or obesity, etc). More concretely, 815 million people suffer from undernourishment (less than 1600 kcal/day), and about 2 billion suffer from one or more forms of malnutrition.²

Experts predict that malnutrition will affect one out of two people in 2050. Malnutrition figures are an interesting indicator, as they give a more holistic view of the quality of current food systems and their impacts on health. In contrast, undernourishment, as measured by FAO, is limited to an estimated average number of kilocalories per person.

1. This 44th session opened several weeks after FAO, IFAD, WHO, WFP and UNICEF published The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, which reported that 815 million people suffer from hunger. This figure, coming just before the conclusion of negotiations, was a reminder to all the stakeholders that the fight against hunger is not a foregone conclusion and that it is the responsibility of the CSA, if it is to remain credible, to tackle the structural causes of hunger and to provide concrete responses to the people affected.

2. Nutrition and Food Systems, a report by the Committee on World Food Security's High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), 2017.



© FAO - Giuseppe Carotenuto

Agriculture, health, water, hygiene and sanitation are all factors behind undernourishment. And nutrition has always had to deal with a major handicap: it is a subject that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The health sector often tends to limit its involvement to treatment of acute undernourishment. As for the agricultural sector, it still tends to consider – and wrongly so – that nutrition is improved by increasing agricultural production.

In 2014, 22 years after the first conference, all the world's States met once again in Rome, this time for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). There they agreed to a negotiated text (the Rome Declaration) and a framework of action including 60 recommendations. Since then, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted, with clear mention of nutrition and two specific indicators dedicated to it. The ICN2 saw greater strength and diversification in the civil society working on this issue. Until then, the civil society working on nutrition was above all made up of large international organizations from the North, and the social movements considered that nutrition was mainly a technical subject. But then things greatly changed. In 2015, following the ICN2, the CFS called for the creation of an internal working group on nutrition and asked the HLPE (High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition) to write a report on food systems and nutrition. This report was produced over the last few months and presented during the 44th session of the CFS. At the same time, a working group on nutrition was created within the CSM; Action Against Hunger was deeply involved in it, alongside Via Campesina and URGENCI in particular.

Since the ICN2 in 2014, several international commitments have been made, within the framework of the SDGs in particular and through the launch of the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition in 2016. An increasing number of commitments by States to better nutrition can be observed, but these latter have not succeeded in agreeing to a precise roadmap or to the roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders. Nutrition was more present than ever on the agenda of this 44th session, as an entire day was dedicated to it. On its agenda were the presentation of the HLPE report, which gave rise to discussion on the follow-up to the process, and the progress report on the follow-up to decisions made during the ICN2 and since the launch of the Decade of Action on Nutrition.

The CSM deplored the fact that the report was published

very late, and above all the absence of translation into other official languages than English, which thereby deprived a great number of CFS participants of the possibility of reading, understanding and expressing an opinion on its content. The CSM, backed up by certain countries including France, expressed its very deep concern about this non-respect of the obligation of multilingualism in the United Nations.

With regard to the HLPE report, the CSM especially deplored the fact that the HLPE experts presented food systems based on agro-ecology as “traditional,” whereas the systems based on industrial agriculture were qualified as “modern.” However, the CSM was very pleased of the mention made concerning conflicts of interest and of the importance of managing them in order to limit them.

In addition to the day dedicated to nutrition, many parallel events were held on the sidelines of the plenary sessions, including one organized on agriculture for good nutrition. It was organized by France and the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), IFOAM and Action Against Hunger. This roundtable was moderated by Delphine Borione, France's new ambassador to the three United Nations agencies in Rome. France took advantage of the occasion to mention the nutrition roadmap adopted in 2016 and stated that nutrition must remain a crucial subject in the CFS discussions. As for the follow-up to the negotiation process regarding nutrition, the governments agreed to take time to understand the content of the report and to draft terms of reference to define the type of product they want to see succeed. The various countries were not all in agreement with regard to how ambitious this product should be, so this is an issue to follow with interest.

Forum on Women's Empowerment

Prior to the 44th session of the CFS, the Forum on Women's Empowerment was held in Rome on September 25. During this forum, which came within the context of food security and nutrition, the CSM members and the stakeholders in attendance touched on the new challenges and the persistent obstacles facing women's empowerment in agriculture and food.

In the morning session, several representatives from CSM member-organizations (such as World March of Women, East Africa Farmers Federation and Via Campesina) reported on

the state of those challenges and persistent obstacles, and they presented initiatives and good practices concerning the implementation of existing legal and political frameworks that seek to reduce the gender gap in agriculture and the agri-food sector. The discussions dealt with the role of women in the transition towards more sustainable systems of production (including systems based on agro-ecology), as well as with the importance of participation by women and social movements to promote gender equality, especially in terms of leadership, decision-making and employment. Emphasis was also put on the need to implement existing normative frameworks, to ensure their follow-up and to take into account the question of gender equality when budgets are developed. More broadly speaking, it is essential to carry out policies that resolutely seek to change mentalities so that the rights of women can be fully realized.

The questions relating to the CFS emphasize the role of the Committee in promoting women's empowerment, especially in terms of concrete measures to improve the implementation of national and international normative frameworks.

On October 11, which was the International Day of the Girl Child, Helen Hakena, Director of Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, presented the conclusions of the Forum to the CFS. The vast majority of the CFS stakeholders stated their support for the declaration that came out of the Forum. In particular, they recalled the need for the United Nations member-countries to respect the commitments made to achieve gender equality as well as to give concrete expression to the rights of women and girls and the empowerment of women. To this end, the CFS recalled that States have a duty to develop policies and national programs, to carry out investments, and to make human and financial resources available. The committee also emphasized the need to carry out work to see that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its recommendation on the rights of rural women be implemented and monitored by the competent bodies.



© FAO - Riccardo De Luca

Finally, the committee insisted that the issues of both gender equality and the rights of women and girls be taken into account in all its activities and publications, as well as in its action plan, which will have to mention concrete measures aimed at women's empowerment.

Sustainable forest management at the service of food security and nutrition

The 44th session of the CFS adopted recommendations concerning forests and their contribution to people's food security and nutrition. They represent the first UN document on the subject that takes into account and recognizes people living in forest environments. The text recognizes the spiritual, cultural, social, political and economic relationships that communities dependent on forests maintain with their environment. Various dimensions of these relationships contribute largely to people's food and nutritional security: diversification of food and nutrients, sources of additional revenue, improvement of populations' resilience faced with extreme climate shocks, and better adaptation to climate change.

On the other hand, the text has a fundamental shortcoming: it does not state that large-scale forest plantations must be excluded from forest environments, and it does not mention their specific features. These monocultures (which are often exotic species such as oil palm, eucalyptus, pine, acacia, rubber trees, etc.) have a severe effect on biodiversity, as they impoverish soil fertility, dry out soil and groundwater, and are a significant cause of deforestation in the world. They thus have disastrous consequences on the food security and nutrition of local populations.

The negotiation process suffered from an extremely limited timeframe and severe lack of resources. These explain the very big delay in the translation of the HLPE report, the absence of translation of proposals and recommendations, and the fact that it was not possible to set down all the issues of this discussion. There was no discussion on monoculture during the negotiations on the text. It was finally decided to create an informal working forum, in order to establish this issue and be able to discuss it during future times between sessions.

Follow-up to the CFS evaluation

The CFS was created in 1975 in response to the food crises of 1974. It was reformed in 2009 following the food crises of 2007 and 2008. Its original mission was to respond effectively to the food crises and to the structural causes for food insecurity and malnutrition. It must thus keep pursuing the gradual realization of the right to food.

A final report on the independent evaluation of the CFS had been sent to all the stakeholders last April. Consultation was then carried out in June and July 2017 in order to determine how to follow up on that evaluation. Consequently, a period of the 44th session was devoted to the CFS evaluation process; its exchanges focused on a report that presented the results of this consultation. In the report, the evaluation team emphasizes that *"the CFS was the only platform within the United Nations system that brings together a broad range of diverse*

stakeholders at the global level to develop policy guidelines and recommendations on food security and nutrition with the participation of civil society and the private sector in all its major processes, drawing on the evidence base provided by the reports of the HLPE.” It recognized that the committee had contributed to improving global coordination on food security and nutrition and put forward 14 recommendations seeking to improve the relevance, effectiveness and performance of the Committee.

Overall, the CFS stakeholders were in agreement that the observations, conclusions and recommendations that were communicated provided a solid and complete basis that could be used to strengthen the Committee. In the plenary session, several States stated that the CFS needs to be more attractive and dynamic, especially by enabling younger people to participate. An action plan will be completed during the period between sessions, in 2018, and presented for approval at the 45th session, because the CFS did not have time in 2017 to discuss all the recommendations and agree to how to follow-up on the issue.

The CSM played an active role in the evaluation process. French organizations participating in the CFS and Confédération Paysanne had responded to the evaluation team's questions. The CSM hopes that this evaluation can help to successfully reform the CFS so that it can fully achieve its initial goals. Its mission is to be a real body for political decisions and not just a discussion forum.

As part of this evaluation, the CSM recalled the richness and crucial importance of its participation in the CFS as a mouthpiece for around 380 million people, many of whom are particularly affected by food insecurity.³ The CSM holds the view that the opportunities the CFS offers to civil society are an encouraging and inspiring perspective for the entire United Nations system.

The CFS takes up agro-ecology!

After nearly 10 years of requests by the CSM, agro-ecology has finally been taken up by the CFS, which has included the issue in its Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPoW) for 2018 and 2019. Indeed, approval was given for the HLPE to write a report on “*Agroecological approaches and other innovations for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition*”. It should be published in 2019 and discussed by the CFS session of that same year.

The fact that a theme as crucial as agro-ecology has been put on the CFS agenda represents real progress. It should moreover help make headway in the issue of people's food security and sovereignty, within a context of climate change and growing pressure on natural resources. It will be important to be especially watchful about the orientations and principles defined by this report, which will have to lay down strong political criteria and recommendations to encourage the agro-ecological transition, which is a real solution for adaptation and mitigation faced with climate change. Indeed, the “innovation” approach in particular could lead to significant lobbying by the seed industry in favor of GMOs.

3. Most of the contributions of the Civil Society Mechanism to the CFS are available on the following website: www.csm4cfs.org

Coordination SUD
Solidarité Urgence Développement

This publication is produced by the Agriculture and food Commission (C2A) of Coordination SUD

As part of its mission to support the collective advocacy of its members, Coordination SUD has set up working committees. The Agriculture and food Commission (C2A) brings together international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security: ActionAid France, Action contre la Faim, AEFJN, aGter, Artisans du Monde, AVSF, CARI, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, CFSI, CRID, Gret, IECI, Inter Aide, Iram, ISF AgriSTA, MADERA, Oxfam France, Plate-Forme pour le Commerce Équitable, Secours Catholique-Caritas France, SOL and UNMFREO.

The C2A is in charge of the representation of Coordination SUD to institutions dealing with agriculture and food, such as the Interministerial Group on Food Security (GISA) and the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Contact Agriculture and food commission:
Sébastien Chailleux, ActionAid France
Email: s.chailleux@peuples-solidaires.org
Website: www.coordinationsud.org

This issue was written by Sébastien Chailleux (ActionAid France), Maureen Jorand (CCFD-Terre Solidaire), Sara Lickel (Secours Catholique-Caritas France), Carline Mainenti (AVSF) and Peggy Pascal (Action contre la Faim).
Translated from French by Eric Alsrue



C2A publications are produced with the support of the AFD. The viewpoints expressed in this document in no way represent the official point of view of the AFD.

