

Summary of CFS participation in the FAO Regional Symposia on Nutrition and Food Systems

1. Background

In June 2017 Anna Lartey, Director of the FAO Nutrition Division, invited CFS to participate in the FAO Regional Symposia on “Nutrition and Food Systems”. The objectives for CFS were to prepare for the upcoming CFS policy work on nutrition in 2017-2019 by gaining a better understanding of regional priorities and disparities. Another objective was to engage with regional and national policy makers and other stakeholders on CFS and its work, to trigger discussions on policy challenges of a global nature which could require policy coherence and convergence. Representatives of CFS who attended the Symposia included the CFS Chair, the CFS Open-Ended Working Group Chair and members of the CFS Secretariat.

2. Summaries of the Regional Symposia

The Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Eating, San Salvador (5-6 September 2017), jointly organized by FAO, Pan American Health Organization and WHO. This Symposium brought together governments (agriculture, health, social development, education, environment, research institutes, planning, economics and finance, consumer protection bodies), parliamentarians, academics, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, civil society associations or organizations (cooperatives, consumer organizations), international agencies and organizations. The programme is available [here](#).

Important cross-cutting themes identified were the centrality of women in the promotion of sustainable food systems and healthy eating, the contribution of indigenous peoples, people of African descent and traditional diets for healthy eating, the need to combat the effects of climate change and other environmental factors affecting food security and nutrition, human rights, life cycle and equal attention to groups in vulnerable situations.

The Asia and the Pacific Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition – Accelerating nutrition, Bangkok (8-12 November 2017), jointly organized by FAO, WHO, WFP, UNICEF and SAFANSI. This Symposium brought together around 250 participants, mainly from government and research/academia, with a few representatives of the private sector and civil society, as well as representatives of the UN system. The programme is available [here](#).

While areas were identified where policy work is already well-advanced, such as food based dietary guidelines, countries also highlighted a number of challenges facing government efforts to improve national nutrition. These include the difficulty to reach the poorest, climate change, resource depletion and biodiversity loss, particularly of indigenous crops, the disruptive effect of conflicts on food systems, the impact of international trade rules on smallholder agriculture, and the need to further promote the involvement, dialogue and accountability of the private sector in the implementation of national

nutrition policies which protect consumers. Shaping social behavior change (in particular through consideration of the role of women and education and consumer awareness) and the imperative of integrating nutrition in all sustainable development efforts and coordinating initiatives were also noted as challenges.

The African Regional Symposium on *Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition*, Abidjan (16-17 November 2017) jointly organized by FAO, WHO, and the Republic of Côte D'Ivoire, and chaired by the Vice-President of the Pan-African Parliament. This Symposium brought together around 200 participants from government and parliaments, research/academia, the private sector, civil society, and UN organizations in 47 African countries. The programme is available [here](#).

Discussions highlighted the role of climate shocks, conflict and weak growth, as well as environmental degradation in the persisting high rates of hunger and malnutrition. Challenges highlighted by governments included insufficient knowledge and lack of metrics to assess most strategic entry points for interventions in food systems, the position of the private sector, which should be better integrated and empowered to favourably impact nutrition, food safety challenges related to the lack of control over food systems, more risk assessments, research and governance to address conflicts of interest, and the lack of funding to set up quality control mechanisms.

The Europe and Central Asia Regional Symposium: *Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets in Europe and Central Asia*, Bucharest (4-5 December 2017) was co-organized by FAO, WHO, UNICEF and WFP. The detailed programme is available [here](#). During the thematic country-centred, expert-focused and sectoral sessions, and the complementary side events, a major conclusion emerged that the current food systems must be further transformed into systems that respect long-term environmental limits and create a level playing field that enables effective nutrition governance. There is need to connect sustainable production and sustainable consumption through nutrition-sensitivity and leveraging the potential of all elements of the food systems to deliver healthy diets for all.

The Near East and North Africa Symposium: *The Regional Symposium on Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa*, Muscat (11-12 December 2017) co-organized by FAO, WHO, WFP, UNICEF and IFPRI, involved 75 participants from 17 countries. The agenda is available [here](#). Cross-cutting themes of importance to the region were highlighted such as conflict and protracted crises, local procurement for food aid, food subsidies, non-communicable diseases, maternal and infant nutrition and gender. Initiatives undertaken by countries to address these challenges were presented as good examples for others to learn from and for countries to build upon in their own context. The need for a holistic approach to diets was emphasized.

3. CFS participation in the Regional Symposia and the CFS take-aways

The presentations made by representatives of CFS informed participants on the roles of CFS, its work, and highlighted some examples of policy work relevant to regional priorities. They highlighted symposium discussions of relevance to the mandate and roles of CFS such as the need for more

collaboration between actors, multisectorial interventions, inclusive discussions on transboundary challenges resulting in frameworks that support policy coherence and convergence.

Finally, the presentations sought to collect feedback from participants around three guiding questions:

- Which regional nutrition objectives are the most difficult to achieve?
- On which issues do national policy makers think that global guidance and policy convergence is needed?
- How can links between national policy makers be strengthened to ensure that the work of CFS supports their work? Also how can the experience of national practitioners be channeled through their representatives to Rome to provide feedback on their effectiveness?

The interactive discussions offered a number of interesting preliminary insights. The participation of CFS also offered an opportunity for outreach. Few participants were familiar with the work and opportunities provided by CFS as a global platform. They were made aware of the comparative advantages of CFS particularly in providing policy guidance on complex, multisectorial, transboundary issues which are often the root causes of hunger and malnutrition.

Discussions took place on some of the current challenges and gaps facing countries to improve nutrition, which could be of relevance to CFS discussions. These included better coordination and multisectorial interventions, the importance of environmental factors for improved nutrition, the inclusion of the private sector in policy discussions, strengthening accountability, the benefits of strengthening regional-global links and including parliamentary organizations in policy discussions in view of future country-level implementation.

The CFS Secretariat asked that participants can be contactable through the FSN Forum in the future.