

A greater role for nutrition in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

Our concern: the long-standing absence of nutrition issues in the CFS

1. As a group of concerned people, public interest civil society organizations (CSOs), and social movements working in the various fields of nutrition, we have, for a long time, been uneasy about the virtual absence of nutrition issues from the discussions of the most inclusive and participatory current forum for 'food and nutrition' issues: the CFS.

2. In the past, we, as CSOs, have emphasized the importance of the links between food security and nutrition. Last year, nutrition was partially addressed in the right terminology discussion, during which we called for an integrated approach to tackle malnutrition to realize the right to adequate food and nutrition. We also pleaded for the use of the terminology "food and nutrition security"¹ as the best term to emphasize the strong links that exist between food security and nutrition security, stating that food security and nutrition security, in the end, strive to attain the same goal best achieved when addressed in synergy.

3. At the same time, we also believe that more needs to be done within the Civil Society Mechanism for the CFS (CSM) to make nutrition more visible in its own work and for nutrition to be taken seriously into account in the CFS proceedings.

Our call to CSM constituencies: to incorporate the nutrition dimension into the food security and food sovereignty frameworks

4. We think the time has come to fully incorporate the nutrition dimension into the food security and food sovereignty frameworks. Food security makes no sense if it does not guarantee the possibility for all human beings to be well-nourished at all times, as well as able to lead an active life in dignity; this is what the human rights framework actually calls for. Achieving food sovereignty calls for much more than increased food production and access to food and nutrients. It demands the effective eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, as well as all other forms of discrimination. Food sovereignty is every bit as much about people having the right to participate-in and decide how resources are allocated, what food is produced, how, where, by whom it is produced, and to choose, based on unbiased information, what they want to consume. It is about participating in all the other phases of the food chain, all the way to the marketing, consumption and biological utilization of food. It is about the creation of an empowering environment in which mothers can make an informed decision about how to feed their infants and young children. It is about public regulation and effective monitoring of the activities of the private corporate sector and about promoting and securing a sustainable nutrition-sensitive agricultural and food system based on agro-ecological principles, as well as prioritizing small-scale diversified peasant farming and other small scale food producer practices, to guarantee the right to a diversified, nutritious and safe diet for all. Food sovereignty is the most universal effort to reduce

¹ Definition: Food and nutrition security exists when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life. (From CFS 2012/39/4: Coming to Terms with Terminology)

global, national, local and household inequalities. It is about people having access to the productive resources they need, to jobs, to living incomes, to quality public services (health, nutrition, education, sanitation, energy, etc.), as well as to social protection.

5. We contend that agriculture and the food system must have people, nutrition and human dignity at the center and food sovereignty, being based on the human rights framework, ponders agriculture, food and nutrition equally.

6. Efforts in the direction of food sovereignty also require the more explicit incorporation of the nutrition dimension in the deliberations and decisions of all our strategic allies in the CSM. To start with, this means that we all have to make sure that the determinants governing how food is being consumed (its adequacy and whether it is safe and healthy) enter more prominently into our deliberations. Not less important is whether the environment where food is consumed has minimum sanitary standards. This also means making sure that people have a range of food choices available to them at prices they can afford so that they themselves can decide what to consume.

The time to act is now: we need to confront the real risk of the capture of nutrition issues by powerful actors

7. After CFS 39, despite CSOs' insistence, discussions about nutrition in the CFS came to a stop. We see the disappearance of this focus from our discussions as a serious problem.

8. In contrast, currently, nutrition is receiving significant attention elsewhere in international agendas. Nutrition is being discussed by the G8 and G20, as well as by many nutrition actors gathered around the SUN initiative. It is being discussed in fora where hardly any connection is made to the need for an inclusive and participatory bottom-centered approach to discuss food and nutrition issues from a human rights perspective.

9. The current discussions in these fora pose real risks for the future of how nutrition issues are framed. There is a distinct risk that nutrition will be captured by powerful (private sector/TNC) actors. Furthermore, nutrition is too often being treated as a stand-alone issue with no linkages being made with, for example, agricultural production.

The CFS: the forum for an inclusive and participatory bottom-centered approach to discuss food and nutrition issues from a human rights perspective

10. We consider it to be key to include, in these discussions about nutrition the people's movements which, not only bear the burden of malnutrition, but can also offer the better solutions. Malnutrition has many causal layers: immediate, underlying and basic. The latter include key social, economic and political aspects. The rights-based framework looks at the underlying and basic causes of malnutrition and places nutrition in touch with other areas and sectors --the most relevant being food and agriculture, health, and social security. Moreover, women's human rights and gender are essential and cross-cutting in all the areas of nutrition. It must always be emphasized that it is the social determination of malnutrition that is ultimately responsible for the unequal way malnutrition affects specific groups in society.

11. We see the CFS, where a good many of organizations with grassroots connections are present through the CSM, as being crucially relevant in confronting the risks outlined above and in addressing important missing nutrition issues. The CFS gathers members not only from different sectors relevant to food and nutrition governance, but most importantly brings together representatives of women and men food producers involved in agricultural activities, fisheries, forestry, pastoralism, indigenous peoples, landless, youth and the urban poor --the groups most vulnerable to malnutrition. The CFS is a body we should use more effectively to improve the governance of nutrition throughout the life-cycle in a comprehensive, participatory way.

12. Furthermore, the absence of this discussion in the CFS is leaving Southern governments [without the opportunity to collectively ponder the potential risks of the food and nutrition security strategies that are being proposed to them by the powerful G8 governments and TNCs especially in Africa. More and more, states are being induced to negotiate bilateral cooperation agreements with rich countries that, in fact, impose severe deleterious conditions.

Our proposal: comprehensive solutions with people at the center

13. We, as CSOs, should continue to strive for comprehensive solutions that tackle malnutrition in all its forms and that make the right to adequate food and nutrition a reality. We cannot be satisfied with any type of quick solutions that are being proposed in some fora at this moment. Some of us have publicly expressed valid concerns with some of what is going on in SUN. Since nutrition is such a complex and all-encompassing issue, it can only be improved by looking at the entire picture, taking all related issues into account. Single, silver bullets, do not exist; they do not work. Sometimes, specific technical or economic solutions are helpful to solve parts of a nutrition problem, but approaches that ignore the social determination of malnutrition can never be the full long-term solution. Comprehensive solutions must be developed, forged and implemented by and with all constituencies of the CSM, producers and consumers together, particularly guaranteeing that people are placed at the center of the policy and decision-making. This is why we are bringing the issue of ensuring full incorporation of nutrition into CFS deliberations. We are in this together.

14. The current Nutrition Working Group needs reinforcement to effectively discuss nutrition and to also bring it to the discussions in other working groups. We encourage more representatives from all constituencies of the CSM to join the Nutrition Working Group. Currently, we have (many) INGOs, some consumers, some women and some social movements in the group. To the existing health and child nutrition constituencies already represented, it will be extremely helpful to add constituencies representing producers (agricultural workers and farmers, the landless, fisherfolks, as well as youth). We need broader buy-ins.

15. At the same time, we strongly recommend nutritionists and nutrition advocates to join the other CSM working groups to guarantee that, in practice, nutritional issues and contents are effectively reflected in their discussions by proposing (or by including) policies that integrate food and nutrition thus achieving better CSM inter-WG coordination to ensure coherence.

16. We realize that certain determinants of malnutrition, such as health, water, sanitation and care are not covered (extensively) by the CFS; for these elements, effective linkages must be sought with members of the specialized UN agencies and others. But still, we feel that an overall framework and related strategies must be discussed in the CFS. The basic elements for these discussions are already mentioned in the GSF, specifically in the paragraphs quoting the Voluntary Guidelines on the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition.

The next concrete challenge: the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN) 2

17. Beyond the issues discussed above, we must propose a CSM strategy that guarantees an effective CFS participation in the already launched preparatory process of the ICN 2 (November 2014) organized by FAO and WHO. The process simply has to have relevant inputs on food security/food sovereignty and nutrition. This is a must if we want to guarantee international and national policy coherence with the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition framework. These are already central goals of the CFS; they have to be projected to the ICN2 negotiations and follow-up.

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