

## **An Open Letter to the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) on Internal Functioning of the CSM.**

The CSM document on Internal Functioning is now being voted in. Unfortunately the document as it is worded includes a provision of exclusion of local and national groups.

The founding document of CSM calls for an open space to all civil society organizations and provides priority to ensuring that the voices of smallholder producers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, indigenous, urban poor, migrants, agricultural workers etc. are heard." However, the present document on "Internal Functioning of the CSM" excludes national and grassroots organizations to be part of the constituencies where they rightfully belong and participate at all levels including at the regional or international level. Segregating CSOs in an open platform based on their level of organization is divisive and unfair to small organizations. Marginalizing national and grassroots organizations based on non-affiliation to global formations is discriminatory. And shutting them out as a minority is oppressive. This violates the Principle of Inclusion within the CSM and will have the potential to destroy CSM. So far what we have heard is logistical arguments to not allow national and local groups to be included in the constituency.

But the same document on Internal Functioning allows global and regional leaders who are nominated in the CC and who are unable to fully participate to identify their representative to attend on their behalf and these representatives can be from any organisation or region.

We, as members of the Coordinating Committee are also concerned about the process. We cannot accept what is being suggested to the Coordinating Committee in the attempt to consolidate the comments made on the draft CSM Guideline on Internal Functioning. We find it disrespectful to the process for anyone to unilaterally declare that the different views on the provision of constituencies cannot be resolved through consensus thereby shutting down any chances to let reason prevail. A transparent and democratic process will first present the opposing opinions objectively, then try to seek a middle ground from the parties involved. Dismissing other opinions based on personal views is unfair and shows one's bias in the process.

Our issue is simple: the provision on 'Constituencies' will prevent national and grassroots organizations from participating in a space intended for their sector just because they do not belong to a global formation. For example, how can we explain to a farmer's organization that is in the forefront of fighting for their rights in the countryside that they cannot join a space called farmers constituencies just because they are not members of a global formation? This defies all logic. It is plain and simple exclusion and can be easily interpreted as turfing. We must remember that:

1. a national or community based organization may exercise their right of association by not joining a Global network for various valid reasons such as:

- Wishing to retain their autonomy, and self determination
- Not desiring to lose their identity in a massive global or regional network
- Retaining their right to think and act independently even in the event of their views being divergent.

ii. A so-called small organization may have more global partnerships and horizontal and vertical linkages, in addition to meaningful input and benefits sharing by its subscribers and like-minded people than the Large Networks. Examples abound of “small organizations” that are ECOSOC accredited, and have demonstrated ability and exhibited capacity to reach out not only to their constituents but beyond their geographical boundaries, to others who have a shared vision.

iii. Large networks are formed by “small” organizations that voluntarily come together. It is not mandatory to belong to them. No one can argue that all farmers, or women, or consumers, or agricultural workers, etc in a given region belong to a large network that purports to represent them in that region. Other than being coerced to join them, where does that leave those who do not “belong” to these networks? Yet the CSM space is for civil society, big or small, as stated in the foundation document and must remain open to all.

iv. Large networks are not without their imperfections. There are reports of large networks that are not democratic in their selection of leadership, inclusion and participation of the membership as well as in their governance.

For us, CSOs’ role emanates from their fundamental concern for social solidarity. This brings CSOs into their role as enablers so that the poor are empowered to claim their rights; and, as advocates for government to address the concerns of the excluded. Excluding national and grassroots organization just because they are not members of global formations is contradictory to the very principles that CSOs are striving for.

We therefore appeal to end this divisive debate. Respect the right of national and grassroots organizations to participate in constituencies where they belong and even be nominated to be focal points if they wish. Respect their integrity and independence. Recognize their valuable contribution to the overall struggle for food sovereignty even if they are not a part of any global formation. Let them interact with regional and international organizations and perhaps they will eventually decide to join them on their own volition.

This is first and foremost a matter of principle. Make the provision on Constituencies truly inclusive. We say no to exclusion of our fellow CSOs who need to be given equal rights and opportunity.

What we should be doing is to encourage each other and not to tear each other down. Thinking Globally and Acting locally is a slogan that we too should adopt.

Finally, we would like to request that this open letter to CSM be posted on the website so that it is a transparent process as well as the document entitled, Internal Functioning of CSM.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

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