

CSM Key Comments on Zero Draft HLPE Report on Agroecological Approaches (...)

Initial Draft - 12 November 2018

This document conveys the initial comments of the Agroecology Working Group of the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) for relations with the CFS. Despite the language restriction (the English-only text significantly limits the capacity of non-English speaking constituencies to participate in this important step), this document conveys the collective comments of the broad array of civil society constituencies that actively participate in the CSM WG process. While this document highlights the initial overarching comments, a more comprehensive and detailed contribution will be submitted by the November 19 deadline.

The CSM attaches great importance to this HLPE Report and the related workstream. However, the CSM is deeply concerned with the Zero Draft. Its actual focus on Agroecology is weak, inconsistent and inadequate to the CFS mandate, where agroecology was clearly singled out among the other innovations. On the contrary, the Zero Draft's prime emphasis is on "innovations" for sustainable food systems, with a far too weak reference to the CFS vision related to the progressive realization of the Right to Adequate Food to ensure Food Security and Nutrition (FSN). The draft introduces many other approaches without really exploring the reasons for their inclusion and actually neglecting to explore how some of these "other approaches" are the primary drivers of the dynamics of dispossession, marginalization, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss as well as malnutrition and disease. In this context, the draft somehow blends all these approaches together into a mish-mash notion of "sustainable food system", leading to very broad and weak recommendations for policy makers. In this context, the CSM would like to put forward the following five overarching comments and suggestions for the review of the Zero Draft:

1. **The centrality of peasants' and indigenous peoples' agency in the genesis of agroecology need to be properly recognized.** The Zero Draft's description of agroecology emerges from the surveying of scientific literature and does not recognise the co-evolution of science, practice, and movement, which has been developing over millennia, with older forms of indigenous and peasant agroecology pre-existing formal sciences. It is therefore essential to clarify the historical genesis of agroecology as a peasant and indigenous peoples' movement that has blended together different forms of knowledge within its practice in the territories where it has evolved. The direct agency of peasants and indigenous peoples and the systemic implications within their territories should therefore be explicitly highlighted;
2. **The concept of innovation needs to be de-coupled from technology and primarily related to advancing Food Security and Nutrition.** Despite the initial definitions, innovations are primarily framed in terms of technological advancement and the motives and drivers of these innovations are not explicitly recognised. Innovations should be considered as creative responses to challenging conditions and/or the mix of processes and practices that promote transitions to a new desired state. In the CFS context, the only innovations that should be considered are those whose explicit motive is the realization of the right to adequate food and the pursuit of food security and nutrition. It is also essential to differentiate between systemic innovations that aim to address the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms, and more specific innovations of limited scope that only mitigate symptomatic effects. In this context, the relations between agroecology and such a broader and more holistic understanding of innovation need to be clearly articulated, while also explicitly differentiating between innovations that promote shared knowledge and socialize their benefits and those innovations that generate asymmetry of knowledge and facilitate the concentration of power;
3. **The human rights framework, and particularly the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition, should be the foundational pillar of the Report's analysis and assessment.** Agroecology and other approaches should be primarily assessed with respect to their capacity to advance the progressive realization of the RtFAN and the agenda towards food security and nutrition. In this respect, the CSM would like to

challenge the excessive focus of the Zero Draft on improving the sustainability of food systems, as the latter is not the ultimate objective. Any approaches that fail to meet these fundamental criteria should either be excluded from the Report or exposed in all their shortcomings. The centrality of human rights also leads to upholding the centrality of people and their agency and therefore to the need to apply adequate power analysis to expose if innovations lead to power and wealth concentrations that undermine people's sovereignty;

4. **The assessment framework should clearly enable policy makers to take informed decisions on which approaches need to be supported with public policies and investments.** The HLPE Report should serve a policy making objective rather than a scientifically-descriptive objective. The current assessment matrix is too confused and complex to be able to clearly support policy making. The CSM would like to propose three fundamental changes:

- a) Firstly, the Zero Draft details many different approaches and this is both inadequate and misleading. In the CSM analysis, many of these approaches are neither systemic nor meet the above-indicated criteria. Furthermore, climate-smart agriculture, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, sustainable intensification and value-chain approaches are all technical strategies employed by industrial systems, rather than being separate entities. These should all be compacted together under "industrial system innovations", as this can expose the different direction of innovation between smallholder systems and industrial systems. Reducing the number of "approaches" is the first fundamental step in making the assessment framework understandable and useful for policy making;
- b) Secondly, the assessment criteria that are proposed are far too many, uneven in importance and confusing at best. The CSM would like to propose that the criteria would be limited to the following:
 - a. Scope of the approach (systemic/specific);
 - b. Primary agency and power implications;
 - c. Human rights assessment, particularly with respect to the RtAFN;
 - d. Contribution to FSN (with reference to the four pillars and healthy/sustainable diets);
 - e. HLPE evaluation principles (resource efficiency, resilience, social equity/responsibility, environmental footprint).

Reducing the criteria to a set of well-established principles, combined with the compacting of the approaches, would provide much more understandable and useful outcomes for policy making. We are deeply convinced that agroecology would clearly feature its complete responsiveness to all these criteria and expect the Report to expose this fact in unambiguous terms;

- c) Thirdly, the assessment framework should clearly expose the tensions and challenges related to the co-habitation/coexistence between the approaches being compared;

5. **The Report should provide clear and substantive proposals on how to strengthen Agroecology as well as those approaches that may prove equally conducive to the realization of the RtAFN and FSN.** The Zero Draft is excessively focused on the descriptive and analytical side, while its normative contribution remains limited with fairly weak and unsubstantiated policy recommendations. It is essential that the HLPE assessment of the various approaches be followed by a much deeper articulation of key options, in terms of public policies and investments, that policy makers can employ to strengthen agroecology and other valuable approaches. At the same time, it is equally essential that the Report exposes current policies and investments that undermine agroecology and other valuable approaches. Ultimately, the Report needs to inspire and support a policy convergence process. While the analysis is an important contribution, as mentioned above, the usefulness of the Report is also that of highlighting concrete policy options that policy makers can consider, in terms of both new approaches that appear to be promising and discontinuation of those that are proving inadequate.