

Fourth Informal discussion – Right to Food, Gender, Agency
CSM Written Inputs

1. *How do different innovative approaches for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition contribute to the right to food?*

Today's session is extremely important to underpin the core elements of a transformation towards sustainable food systems in all the dimensions.

Before going into each question, we'd like to outline how the three elements, right to food, gender equality and women's rights, and agency, cannot be addressed in isolation, rather they are profoundly interconnected. We cannot talk about the realization of the Right to Food for all without envisaging gender transformative policies. The right to food and the rights of women are interrelated and indivisible, as are all human rights. Equally we cannot talk about women's rights without the Right to Health, the Rights of Workers, and Rights of Indigenous peoples and Peasants Rights. The Human Rights framework ensures a holistic approach towards food systems that are not only sustainable but also equitable, and respectful of rights of the people. This is why we have to acknowledge the concept of agency presented by the HLPE as there is no food without people.

First and foremost, today's multiple crisis show how discrimination is arising in our world if we don't put at the center human rights. As CSM, we are gathering information from our people on the field and we hear about women informal workers in meat plants who are disproportionately impacted on their daily income, which exposes them and their families to food insecurity and health risks, especially if they belong to already marginalized groups of society like migrants or black people. This example clearly exposes the interconnection between the right to food, rights of women and rights of workers.

We highlight once again the need to transform our food systems taking into consideration all this intersectionality and reaffirm the capacity of agroecology to pave the way for this transformation. Agroecology contributes to the right to food because it puts small scale food producers at the front, recognizing their rights to access and control the resources they need to produce, while ensuring that food is not only available, but also adequate and healthy. Agroecology contributes to gender equality and women's rights because addresses the root causes of inequality in society and contributes to women's economic and social empowerment, building social relations on values such solidarity, respect, self-determination, and the recognition of women's productive and reproductive roles for a fair distribution of unpaid care work.

The right to food, gender equality and women's rights, and agency, are three interrelated elements embedded in the human rights framework on which any sustainable food systems and societies should build upon.

2. *Do each of the various innovative approaches for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition contribute to gender equity and equality?*

The HLPE has made important contributions by recognizing the need of gender transformative policies and putting gender equity as key driver. We agree with the need to underpin underlying causes of gender inequality within food systems with respect to norms, relationships and institutional structures, in particular by ensuring that laws and policies improve gender equality and address gender-based violence.

CEDAW therefore is a key instrument to provide real equality as it recognizes discrimination against women by acknowledging that violence against women is in place due to its tolerance and social acceptance. Recognition of today's structures of discrimination and violence against women should be the starting point to transform our food systems into ones that ensure women's rights, self-determination, autonomy and equality.

Agroecology in this sense has to be recognized for its potential to transform social relations and traditional sexual division of labor, by promoting practices that are accessible to women and increase their access to resources and their decision-making power at all levels, while also valuing the role of women in knowledge accumulation.

For example, the network of women producers in Pajeú in the semi-arid Pernambuco region, northeast Brazil has managed to deal with chronic water scarcity by adopting agroecological practices. The women engage in collective knowledge construction, farmer-to-farmer exchanges and participatory trainings. Through their experiences of working collaboratively through the network, the women, many of whom were socially isolated and were living under the threat of domestic violence, have been empowered and secured greater autonomy. The network activities resulted in cutting the dependence on external inputs and increased climate resilience while the acquired knowledge of agroecological methods and access to agroecological markets and fairs improved the position of the women in their household affecting family and community relationships.

This same example of Agroecology illustrates clearly the concept of agency, once again a core element to achieve gender transformative policies but also ensure the right to food for all. The concept of agency brings in not only the individual autonomy but also the collective dimension and ensures not only the control of resources (crucial to food producers and workers) but also the control of decisions. In particular for women, agency grants the power to decide over when, what and how we feed ourselves and our families and communities.

The CFS has already recognized the concept of agency while acknowledging the need to put at the centre the voices of the most marginalized in current food systems. This process should therefore keep this concept central.

- 3. Do you think that the 4 pillars of food security (availability, access, utilization, and stability) are adequate to cover all important aspects of how food security is achieved? Could the concept of agency fill in any gaps that may exist?*

Throughout this process, including the preparation of the HLPE report, the CSM has repeatedly expressed the need to include Agency as one of the pillars of food security.

As a global platform gathering hundreds of millions of small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples, workers and consumers, we strongly believe in the right of individuals, communities and peoples to define the direction, productive and consumption approaches, means, functioning and outcomes of their agri-food systems, and to this end, to actively engage in any process of strategic definition and public policymaking. We also believe that States must guarantee proper democratic institutionalality to that end.

For this reason, we believe that it is extremely important to respect, promote and strengthen peoples' and State's capacities to make this right effective. Therefore, we agree on the centrality of Agency for the realization of the right to adequate food.

The Background Note for Today's Informal Discussion reminds us of two relevant questions: who controls, decides and benefits from agrifood systems? and, how to ensure that people have access to critical public goods that are essential for agricultural production? Answering these questions will lead us to address key issues for the realization of the right to adequate food: the differentiation between right holders, duty bearers and stakeholders; the power asymmetries and structural inequalities between different actors in agri-food systems; and the need to create and strengthen democratic institutional mechanisms that deal with the transformation of agri-food systems while counteracting and dismantling these power asymmetries and structural inequalities.

We uphold that the central agency in transforming our food systems come from small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples, workers and their organizations, as well as the strong Agency capacity of Agroecology. The HLPE report asserts that agroecology is the truly transformative approach towards sustainable food systems and has made clear that this transformation will only be achieved through the agency of small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples and workers and their knowledge, practices and organizations.

In this sense and based on a human rights approach, we must differentiate between rights-holders versus stakeholders and promote the agency of the main contributors to the food system.

Therefore, the initiatives for the transformation of agri-food systems should be built on the agency of small-scale food producers, indigenous peoples and workers, especially women and youth, by:

- enhancing their participation and inclusive engagement in democratic decision-making processes, including the strengthening of their organizations;
- providing public services and rural infrastructure;
- reorienting education public research, education and training to build on the agency of these key actors and respond to their needs:
- promoting participatory research schemes:
- ensuring women's autonomy, self-determination, equal participation and access to territories (land, water, forests, fishing, foraging, hunting), public services, income and shared power, and putting an end to gender violence and sexism.