

Draft CSM speaking notes on HLPE report 'Multi-stakeholder partnerships to finance and improve food security and nutrition in the framework of the 2030 Agenda – 27 June 2018

General

- We reaffirm our full confidence in the HLPE to provide a valid basis for policy convergence exercises when CFS uses it properly.
- However in this case the CFS's assignment was flawed in several ways, making it difficult for the report to produce clear indications on the suitability of MSPs as a tool for FSN:
 - ✓ The topic itself was inappropriate due to scarcity of existing research, as noted by HLPE team, whereas the HLPE performs well when it can collate, compare and analyse evidence already produced by a wide range of researchers and other actors.
 - ✓ The CFS assignment assumed that MSPs, as suggested in SDG17, are indeed the prime way forward to generate funding to improve FSN, making it more difficult for the team to address their limits and inherent potential contradictions and to assess their suitability as compared with other instruments and mechanisms, although they have made a good effort to do so.
 - ✓ The assignment was framed in such a way to mix 'funding' with 'improving' FSN, leading to governance contradictions since today it is far too often investment (and investors' priorities) that condition public policy rather than the other way around.
 - ✓ The potential policy convergence objective was unclear, making it difficult for the report to develop a strategic flow leading to useful recommendations.

Would like to hear from the HLPE their own reflections on the assignment and any difficulties they have had in carrying it out.

Basic principles and key points

More specifically....

The report correctly draws attention to the fact that 'the performance and even the relevance of MSPs as a suitable institutional mechanism to finance and improve FSN' is questioned by many and that MSPs should not be considered a 'silver bullet' solution (pg. 2, para. 4 of Summary and para. 30). It also highlights the major challenges and limitations that MSPs face (paras. 23-24). However, it fails to fulfill its basic task: that of clearly defining the conditions under which a MSP may be considered a legitimate tool for addressing a public good like FSN. *Would like to hear the team's reflections on why.*

In particular:

- **Primacy and legitimacy of public policies.** The report reiterates the ultimate responsibility of states for adopting effective strategies to eradicate hunger and 'ensure that the efforts of all stakeholders concur to public interest' (para. 2). It suggests that 'an institutional framework is needed for MSPs to effectively strive for enhanced FSN and the progressive realization of the right to adequate food' (para. 37), yet it fails to identify the essential elements of this framework and to clearly state that MSPs can perform as a legitimate tool for FSN only when this primary role of states is being performed and 'appropriate governance mechanisms' have been put in place.
- **Whose interests are being served?** In its definition of MSPs the report continues to conflate 'collective' interests (the interests of the members of a particular MSP, which may or may not include the government and the most vulnerable actors) with 'public' interests, although it footnotes the dangers of doing so. 'Public interest' itself is defined in a questionable manner. Initiatives such as PPPs, privatization of public services and common goods, mega infrastructure projects are presented as projects in the public interest against all evidence. The discussion of the 'internal conditions' for improving MSPs' contribution to FSN is flawed by the fact that it does not

consider who the partners of any particular MSP may be, how and by whom they have been selected, and what 'collective' interests they are pursuing.

- **Power imbalances and Conflicts of Interest.** Even in the relatively rare cases in which actors representing the most vulnerable and marginalized are among the members of a MSP, issues of power imbalances and Conflicts of Interest pertain. The report's treatment of these is totally inadequate. Rec. 3 assigns responsibility for addressing them to 'partners in MSPs' without considering who these 'partners' are or the essential role of states in setting the rules and overseeing their application. The suggestion that power asymmetries in a MSP can be overcome simply by improving participation conditions of the weaker partners (para. 24) ignores the economic, organizational and political dimensions of the issue.
- **Legitimacy and accountability.** The definition of accountability adopted in the report is puzzling in the extreme ('the responsibility that a representative or a group acquires with the action of speaking or deciding on behalf of someone else', para. 28). Although strengthening MSPs' contribution to the Right to Food is cited as the objective of the report (pg. 2, last para. of Summary), it fails to adopt a HR approach to accountability (cf. GSF, pg. 29) whereby states as duty bearers are accountable to citizens as rights holders or to consider how other parties (corporations, academia, international institutions) can be held accountable.

These comments are only preliminary pending a reading of the full report and consultation among CSM constituencies, as soon as the translations are available.