

CSM key messages to the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group Meeting (17 April 2020)

Agenda item 1: Briefing on Uptake of VGGT and RAI

We welcome the inclusion of such an item in the agenda of CFS Bureau and Advisory group meetings, as the use and application of CFS policy outcomes – we call it “bringing Rome home” - is fundamental to make CFS more effective on the country level.

Civil society, small-scale food producer organizations and Indigenous Peoples have broadly used the VGGT in their work, often in close collaboration with FAO and governments, in capacity building, advocacy and other efforts, and have prepared a popular manual for the application of VGGT which is widely used.

It could be a good dynamic for Bureau and Advisory Group Members to voluntarily present their experiences in using and applying CFS policy outcomes. It would be good to hear from the other RBAs as well as FAO. As CSM, we would be happy to contribute to this exercise as well.

Agenda item 2: COVID 19 Crisis and Implications for the CFS Plan of Work 2020 – CFS Business Continuity

In the many internal consultation calls within CSM over the past weeks, we have heard how people and organizations from all parts of the world are now engaged in urgent responses to the health crisis, as well as to the emerging economic, financial and food crises. This situation is triggering serious violations to political and human rights, affecting the rights to health and food of increasingly millions of workers, women, refugees, displaced, migrants, urban food insecure, smallholders, Indigenous Peoples and especially the elderly in each of these groups.

In this unprecedented and multidimensional global catastrophe, we cannot do *business as usual* in the CFS. We were shocked to see that the proposed agenda of this meeting is almost identical to the one that was originally prepared for the beginning of March.

Our colleagues in all regions work closely with the people most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, who will once again be the most affected by these multiple crises. They get the impression that those who propose to continue business as planned, simply switching it onto a virtual track, have not understood the seriousness of the situation and its implications for the core mandate of the CFS. This way of viewing seems very far from the real world of most people.

This crisis is already affecting negatively the livelihoods and food security of millions of people due to closures of small-scale food producers' and informal food markets, loss of income, shortage of labor on the fields, suspension of school feeding programs, closures of food shelters and increases of domestic violence. It will also have long term impacts since it will amplify already existing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities in our food systems, within and between countries. Food and agriculture workers will be particularly affected, as well as small-scale food producers, family farmers, small and medium enterprises. The webinar hosted by the CSM yesterday with high attendance of CFS members and participants underlined that sectoral policies and fragmented actions alone will not be sufficient to cope with this crisis and prevent its worsening. We need an urgent and coordinated global policy response.

The CFS was reformed as a response to a food crisis and it must prove useful when a new food crisis erupts, which might become much larger and more dangerous than the one in 2008. Due to its experience of multi-actor dialogue and negotiated outcomes over the past decade, its nature as an international and intergovernmental forum, its vision and its inclusiveness that allows engagement with all the constituencies affected by hunger and food insecurity, the CFS has a unique added value, legitimacy and mandate to discuss and agree on policy solutions to face the 2020 food crisis.

Responding to the two questions posed in the CFS Business Continuity background document regarding the CFS roles as a platform and policy, as civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and social movements, we call on you today:

- Let us use the CFS as a platform to learn about the impacts of the crisis on food security and nutrition. Let us share experiences and analysis about effective response of governments, international institutions and societies to this crisis.
- Let us use the policy function of the CFS as the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform to draft and agree on a Global Policy Response to the new food crisis. This response should be built upon the many actions already under way by all of us, governments, international institutions and societal actors, and should aim to ensure convergence, coherence and coordination among them.

For us, this must be the priority of the next months, if the CFS wants to be relevant to the world and adhere to its core mandate and functions. We will submit in writing a rationale and process outline for such a coordinated policy response under the umbrella of the CFS, for your consideration.

On the other side, we suggest continuing the current workstreams of the CFS, but on a slower rhythm. In order to ensure inclusiveness, participation and high quality of the processes on food systems and nutrition, as well as on agroecological and other innovative approaches, negotiations should be scheduled for a time when face-to-face meetings are possible again.

We see two options for a possible timeline (see more detailed in Annex 2 below):

- 1) If the CFS 47 can be held in October, negotiations could be held in August or September, but surely not in May and June.
- 2) If CFS 47 can only be held in January 2021, these negotiations can be held in November or December 2020.

In the meanwhile, some flexibility should be possible to advance consultations through virtual means. But we insist here: considering the depth of controversies in both workstreams and the need to come to meaningful results by consensus, we cannot achieve substantive and meaningful consensus without face-to-face negotiations.

We will learn in these coming months a lot about food systems, their strengths, risks and vulnerabilities, and particularly about which food systems are more resilient under stress. We need to take these lessons into account in the production of these new CFS policy outcomes, as highlighted also by some members countries during the last OEWG meetings of 14th April.

Our proposal for a reprioritized CFS agenda is realistic in the best sense of the word: We cannot do everything at the same time but we can indeed reconcile the need to address the new priority generated by the crisis and the workplan as agreed in MYPOW.

Agenda item 3: CFS Final Report Preparation

The proposal for the elaboration of the Final report remains almost unchanged. We cannot see if proposals from members and participants made during the January meeting were taken up, and why or why not.

In our view, the proposal still fails to address effectively the main problem: how to capture the wealth and substance of the plenary debates in the final report, in order to avoid a third consecutive empty report of a CFS Plenary.

The Type B proposed in this paper is the one that should address this problem, but it does it by foreseeing that the draft conclusion of a Plenary would be mainly prepared beforehand, and then a few bullet points would be added to reflect a 2-hour Plenary debate. This does not seem satisfactory, and it is also not said how the additional bullet points would be agreed on without a time-consuming Plenary discussion.

We believe the CFS report should be a fair and accurate reflection of the plenary discussion. It does not need to reduce everything to the character of conclusion, rather should aim to be a dynamic summary of the discussion.

For drafting such fair, short and accurate summary of the debates, a group that reflects the diversity of CFS participants could be tasked to elaborate with the support of the CFS Secretariat, a first draft summary on each Plenary debate, which then would be sent to the Drafting Committee for consideration.

Agenda item 4: Theme of the CFS47 Plenary:

Transformation of food systems is both a fact and a need. Deep transformations are under way since decades, all over the world. The question is not whether transformation exists, but in what directional it is heading.

Transformation is an urgent humanitarian need. For those millions suffering from malnutrition and hunger, transformation of food systems to achieve better outcomes is urgent.

This is even more evident in these times in which we see ever more clearly the risks and vulnerabilities of globalized and industrialized food systems, and the ways in which the current systems exacerbate existing deep inequalities: without transformation, those most affected by hunger and malnutrition will be even more affected by this crisis. They will be definitively left behind. This is not acceptable.

Therefore, the theme “Transforming food systems to end all form of malnutrition” for the CFS Plenary is clear but might be also better framed in this time of crisis, as Transforming Food Systems in Times of Crises, in the Eye of the Storm.

Agenda item 5: Budget Update

One question: Do we understand correctly that the CFS underspent 166.000USD in 2019 and had to return these resources to the FAO General Fund at the end of 2019. How could this happen?

Given that we were told that certain CFS meetings, such as the Forestry event, did not have any resources to cover participation or interpretation, this is an important question.

Agenda item 6: Workstream updates

Agenda item 7 (any other business):

Composition of the CFS Advisory Group with a special attention to Youth participation

We would like to express our surprise and concern about the fact that this issue and a comprehensive proposal is brought for Bureau decision today, and that the Bureau did not see any need to further inform or consult with the CFS Advisory Group. For example, concerning the Youth Council request, it is surprising to see that CSM constituencies were not consulted by the Bureau Working Group on this topic. In this sense as CSM youth working group we would like to deliver some of our key messages contained in the letter that we drafted for AG and Bureau members (*see Annex 1 below*)

Annex 1: CSM Youth Letter to the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group

Dear CFS Bureau and Advisory Group members,

We are writing as the Youth Working Group of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) to express our surprise and concern at the request of a newly formed Youth Council to the Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs) to join the CFS Advisory Group.

The Youth Working Group of the CSM gathers smallholders and family farmers, Indigenous Peoples, fisherfolk, agricultural and food workers, women, landless, consumers, pastoralists, urban food insecure and NGOs from around the globe, through our national and global organisations. The CSM Youth Constituency and Working Group are a strong advocate for youth engagement in the CFS. We are thrilled that the CFS is now working towards a policy convergence process on Promoting Youth Employment and Engagement in Agriculture and Food Systems. We were delighted that youth were given a key role in CFS 46. In the lead up to the Plenary week, PSM and CSM youth successfully designed the Youth Side Event that took place during the last day of the CFS. During that occasion, we demonstrated our capacity to work constructively together to contribute to CFS policy dialogues.

At the Youth Side Event, a representative from the PSM mentioned an initiative to form a Youth Council to the RBAs. Since then we have communicated with the Council to better understand its objectives, scope and key principles. Our constituency has examined the Council's founding document, and we are worried about its limited framing regarding youth identity, its failure to centre human rights principles, and its narrow focus on entrepreneurialism and innovation. We are disheartened and alarmed by the Council's process of construction, which was led by youth organizations of the PSM, despite its statement of inclusivity. In a recent letter to the Youth Council, we expressed our concern that the process to create this Council was neither participatory, inclusive, nor transparent. Although we worked closely with youth from the PSM throughout 2019 to co-create the CFS Youth side event, youth from civil society organizations and social movements participating in the CSM were not directly informed about the initiative, nor invited to attend the multiple consultations used to form the Council.

Although we have now been invited to participate in the proposed Council, there remains a lack of clarity about what in fact we would be participating in at this late stage in the Council's development. We do not know its vision for food systems, its governance principles, or if it has processes to ensure coherence with the core aims of the CFS. In addition, we question why youth of the PSM have decided to form such a council and apply for a seat on the CFS Advisory Group, when youth already have established mechanisms for participation in CFS work – the CSM and PSM. Rather than establish an additional body without an inclusive process or coherent aims, we believe the focus should be on strengthening youth participation in our respective mechanisms and in the CFS. We, as civil society youth have shown that we can speak for ourselves, thereby ensuring that a diversity of youth perspectives are voiced and heard. The CFS must safeguard that this stays possible in the future.

To this end, we propose a Special Session of the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group on Youth Engagement in the CFS. This would create a space to hear the perspectives of a diversity of youth and their organisations on the upcoming CFS workstream on youth, but also how we want to be involved in current CFS processes and the CFS structure, including the Plenary and the Advisory Group. Potential discussion points for this Special Session could be oriented to the current policy process on Agroecological Approaches and Other Innovations; to the upcoming policy workstream on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; or the framework of discussion related to the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit. This Special Session could include youth constituencies of the CSM and PSM, but also youth researchers from CGIAR and youth staff experts from the RBAs.

The CSM Youth remain committed to continuing our active engagement in CFS events and activities. We are also open to further reply to any questions or doubts from Bureau members, and we welcome any further discussion on youth topics.

Best Regards/Sincerely,

CSM Youth Working Group

Annex 2: Proposal timeline for Re-prioritized CFS agenda 2020

Objectives:

1. Give priority to the urgently needed global policy response to the food crisis that comes along with the COVID19 health, economic and financial crisis
2. Reschedule the policy processes on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in a way that the respective policy negotiations can be conducted through face-to-face meetings.

Two different options could be considered for a re-scheduled CFS agenda which reflects this reprioritization. Option 2 is our preference and also more realistic.

Option 1: In case the CFS Plenary can be held in October 2020 (not likely, but maybe still possible)

- During the coming months, CFS serves uses its potential to be the most inclusive platform of exchange of experiences and analyses to advance the knowledge and dialogue about how the COVID19 crisis affects food security and nutrition. This exchange of knowledge and dialogues can be done on a virtual basis, by including all members and participants involved.
- Out of this learnings, exchanges and consultations, a draft global policy response is elaborated, presented and finalized at CFS 47 in October 2020.
- In this case, is suggested to conduct the policy negotiations on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in August and September 2020, for adoption of these policy outcomes at CFS 47 in October.

Option 2: In case the CFS 47 can only take place in January 2021 (more likely than Option 1):

- As in Option 1, the CFS would use its potential to be the most inclusive platform of exchange of experiences and analyses to advance the knowledge and dialogue about how the COVID19 crisis affects food security and nutrition. This exchange of knowledge and dialogues can be done on a virtual basis, by including all members and participants involved.
- Out of this learnings, exchanges and consultations, a draft global policy response is elaborated, *as a living document*, by October 2020 or even earlier, and then further updated, finalized and formally approved by CFS 47 in January 2021.
- Conduct the policy negotiations on food systems & nutrition and agroecology & other innovations in November and December 2020, for adoption of these policy outcomes at CFS 47 in January 2021.