

## CFS POLICY CONVERGENCE PROCESSES

### OPTIONS PAPER

#### CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lock-down of FAO premises has not stopped CFS from conducting business (via virtual means), but it has interrupted scheduled negotiations on two ongoing policy convergence processes which, under normal circumstances, would be conducted in person on FAO premises. While the Italian Government is taking steps to return to some degree of normalcy in terms of easing restrictions on movements and business operations, FAO is instituting a conservative, phased return of its staff to headquarters, with no public decisions yet on safety protocols for “in-person” meetings to be held in its various meeting rooms. At this point, the latest indications are that such meetings at FAO could be months away, pending various developments with respect to public health and safety. In the meantime, governing body meetings are being conducted using virtual means, using off-the-shelf teleconferencing platforms and technologies. To finalize the two ongoing work-streams contained in the CFS’s 2020 Program of Work before the CFS47 plenary session scheduled for October, either negotiations by virtual means must commence shortly with agreed modalities, or CFS47 must be postponed to allow in-person negotiations to proceed finalization of those workstreams. A variety of options are presented below, with modifications possible to address various unforeseen contingencies. A working assumption in this paper is that both workstreams will be pursued together, vice having one process take precedence over the other. Another operating assumption is that, while in-person negotiations is preferred, this option will be dependent upon FAO decision-making on its operational protocols and is therefore beyond the control of the CFS. Virtual negotiations, on the other hand, could technically commence at any time the Chair and membership are prepared to begin. Last, while the originally-agreed schedule of negotiations to finalize the two workstreams can be adjusted, there is a generally-agreed desire to finalize both well in advance of the planned UN Food Systems Summit.

#### **OPTION A – AWAIT RETURN TO “NORMAL” PROCESS OF IN-PERSON NEGOTIATIONS**

This “wait-and-see” option would mean waiting until FAO’s operational policy would allow “business” as usual in terms of negotiations taking place, in person, as has been done in previous policy convergence processes. This approach is highly risky, as there is little confidence that such “normalcy” is possible under current or future conditions, especially in the light of possible re-occurrences (or, waves) of the COVID-19 pandemic. This would most likely lead to lengthy

delays in finalizing both workstreams, and risk failing to implement the 2020-2023 MYPOW as agreed by Plenary at CFS 46.

## **OPTION B – PHYSICAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH LIMITED NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS**

In the likely possibility that large gatherings will not be permitted in FAO Headquarters for many months, the following “hybrid” option would allow for a small group to be present with the OEWG Chair/Rapporteur in one of FAO’s larger meeting rooms (under clearly detailed health/safety rules and protocols), with others following “virtually” by digital means. Each respective group or constituency would identify its “negotiators” to be present at FAO, while colleagues follow the process virtually. The documents and text being negotiated would be shared digitally for all to follow. The following represents a proposed format and procedure for this option (for which the FAO Director General’s final approval (or that of a delegated senior official) will be required.):

- a) “Physical negotiations” would take place in FAO Headquarters (Rome), as soon as physical meetings of non-staff guests is permitted, with a reduced number of participants representing the range of CFS stakeholders and constituencies;
- b) Regional Groups and CFS Participant constituencies would be asked to designate spokespersons who will participate in negotiations on behalf of those groups and constituencies, presenting previously-agreed and defined positions and proposals, and with the mandate to negotiate on behalf of their groups and/or constituencies;
- c) A number of seats will be assigned to each Regional Group, reflecting the quota system used for FAO Council (compared to that system, the number of seats has been reduced by half):
  - i) Africa: 6 seats;
  - ii) Asia: 5 seats;
  - iii) Europe: 5 seats;
  - iv) Latin America and the Caribbean: 5 seats;
  - v) Near East: 3 seats;
  - vi) North-America: 1 seat;
  - vii) South-West Pacific: 1 seat;
- d) In order to ensure an adequate and balanced participation of CFS Participants, seats are assigned to the five categories established in the CFS Reform Document (paragraph 11) as follows:
  - i) UN bodies: 3 seats;
  - ii) Civil society organizations: 3 seats assigned to the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM);
  - iii) Private sector: 2 seats assigned to the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM);
  - iv) International Agricultural Research System: 1 seat assigned to CGIAR;
  - v) International Financial Institutions: 1 seat assigned to the World Bank;
  - vi) Philanthropic foundations: 1 seat assigned to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- e) The CFS Secretariat should be provided with the name of ONE (and not more than one) designated spokesperson per Regional Group and per CFS Participant Constituency in

advance of the negotiations. In line with the proposed quota system, a total number of 37 participants are expected to take part in the negotiations;

- f) While no silent observers will be allowed in the meeting room, sessions will be webcast in order for interested stakeholders to follow remotely;
- g) In this regard, Regional Groups and CFS Participant Constituencies would establish internal coordination systems to ensure active communications during the negotiations between spokespersons and stakeholders following remotely;
- h) Virtual calls will be organized by the OEWG Chair/Rapporteur and the CFS Secretariat in advance of the negotiations to brief delegations on established rules and procedures, help them familiarize with the process, and respond to any questions.

### **OPTION C – PROCEED NOW WITH FULL “VIRTUAL” NEGOTIATIONS**

The condition for the implementation of Option B is that “physical negotiations with reduced participation” can take place in FAO premises between September 2020 and January 2021.

In the scenario whereby in-person meetings at FAO headquarters are either prohibited or significantly controlled (with limited numbers of guests), and while taking into account previous Bureau discussions and decisions on the subject, it may be worth reconsidering the option of commencing negotiations by virtual means.

In the case of full virtual negotiations, the same modalities and procedures foreseen for Option B would be followed, with a limited number of spokespersons nominated by Regional Groups and other key constituencies.

### **MODALITIES FOR NEGOTIATIONS**

The process will build on the experience of previous CFS policy convergence processes and follow standard CFS Rules of Procedure. It will be facilitated by the OEWG Chair/Rapporteur with the support of the CFS Secretariat.

The proposed modalities for debate are as follows:

- a) In the interests of time and efficiency, the OEWG Chair/Rapporteur may place limits on the time available for interventions, and or indicate the number of interventions that will be heard before sharing a Chair’s/Rapporteur’s response or proposal;
- b) CFS stakeholders are asked to refrain from making lengthy opening or general statements. Inputs should be focused on substantive topics or issues where amendments are requested. Interventions should contain concrete text proposals, and concise clarifications of their rationale/meaning;
- c) Regional Groups and Participant constituencies are strongly invited to form collective positions that would be presented by their designated spokespersons;
- d) Proposals from Participants that do not find Member state support, will not be further considered;

- e) Based on the round of interventions, a Chair's/Rapporteur's proposal will be then formulated and projected on the screen, for which the Chair/Rapporteur will seek agreement;
- f) Absent agreement, the Chair/Rapporteur will call for one additional round of focused interventions, after which a new Chair's/Rapporteur's proposal will be formulated and presented;
- g) If no agreement is reached after this second round, the Chair/Rapporteur will request bilateral or smaller group discussions, and if/when appropriate will call for a Friends of the Chair/Rapporteur discussion to resolve outstanding issues. These side discussions will be held either over lunch time or in the evening after the end of session;
- h) There will be two sessions each day (9.30-12.30 and 14.30-17.30) and, if needed, the OEWG Chair/Rapporteur may decide to continue the session into the evening. The sessions will be interpreted in the six official FAO languages (English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian).
- i) All delegations are encouraged to be ready to reach consensus on the policy documents to be presented in plenary for final endorsement.