

CSM comments on the outcome of the MYPOW Informal Discussion

on the theme of the HLPE Report 2019

24 May 2017

- 1) The Civil Society Mechanism for relations with the CFS is composed by organizations that together represent far more than 380 million people, among them more than 330 million farmers, fishers, pastoralists, agricultural workers and other food producers, and includes also large international networks of consumers, women and indigenous peoples. The CSM appreciated the fact that the proposal for an HLPE report 2019 on agroecology for food security and nutrition has received the highest support in the CFS ranking exercise and also during the two OEWG meetings this year.
- 2) Agroecology is a practiced reality of many millions of food producers and consumers. Governments around the world have developed public policies in support of agroecology, as part of their efforts to foster sustainable food systems and food security. The Rome-based Agencies, particularly FAO and IFAD have been supporting these country efforts with specific programs and processes. The new HLPE Note on Emerging and Critical Issues suggests agroecology among the priority issues for food security and nutrition that should be dealt with by the CFS.
- 3) At the last two OEWG meetings on 6 February and 2 May, the broad majority of participants said that the theme of the HLPE should be focused, and that this focus should be on agroecology and its contributions to food security and nutrition. During the informal meeting on 18 May, several additional remarks and alternative suggestions were made to accommodate different concerns expressed by some delegations.
- 4) CSM has acted in the spirit of the CFS by contributing with alternative and compromise proposals to the consensus building process. These efforts include:
 - CSM did not insist in working only with the proposals that won the ranking and was the most supported in the two OEWG meetings. CSM expressed its willingness to continue to work on the title and scope of the report based on the respective part of the HLPE Note on Critical and Emerging Issues.
 - In addition, the CSM suggested to accommodate the concern of some members of the OEWG said that agroecology is not the only innovative approach towards sustainable food systems. Therefore, we suggested to formulated the theme precisely in this way: “Agroecology as **an** innovative approach to sustainable food systems for FSN”.
 - Moreover, CSM offered a proposal to even formulate the title as an open question: “Agroecology – an innovative approach to sustainable food systems and FSN?” The aim was to accommodate particularly the concerns of the few more skeptical OEWG members.
 - On the other topics that were introduced into discussion as to be combined with the agroecology theme, CSM suggested that they should be brought up as proposals to the next MYPOW process and its discussions on prioritization. The experience of the last years shows that the scope of a request of the CFS to the HLPE should have a clear focus and a single theme. The fact that this best practice applied over several years was not used in the case of the HLPE report on “sustainable agricultural development, including the role of livestock”, was broadly recognized as a major problem both for the HLPE report and the subsequent policy convergence process within the CFS.

- 5) The CSM is deeply concerned about the way how so-called “red lines” have been used with the intention to prevent the CFS to include a highly relevant topic into the MYPOW. This is not in line with the spirit of the CFS as the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform on food security and nutrition.
- “Red-line” language can have a specific space and use in a consensus-building space as the CFS, but it also includes the risk to paralyze the space when used as a tool with veto-like character.
 - In some situations, when specific formulations are being discussed within a CFS negotiation process on specific policy recommendations on specific topics, it might be useful that participants express which are the limits that their delegations won’t be able to cross. In each case, very strong reasons need to be given for these limits, so that the CFS can jointly search for an alternative wording on the specific topic in order to find language that is acceptable to all.
 - However, using a red-line language to block a highly relevant theme for discussion at the CFS, or to explicitly condition the discussion of one theme to another one, brings severe problems to the CFS, with the potential to limit the space for policy dialogue to the lowest denominator. If applied by several delegations, such approach would effectively paralyze the CFS.
 - We would like to remind everybody that in 2016, CSM and others expressed serious concerns on the topic selected for the HLPE 2018, and proposed some adjustments that would make this report more relevant for the millions of rural people living in poverty. However, these suggestions were not taken into account and the subject was approved without substantial changes. CSM did not block it, and has continued to engage with the process. We do not understand why a different methodology is applied now.
- 6) In the case of the current discussions on the HLPE theme for 2019, this problematic use of red-lines was unfortunately applied and has led to the unacceptable preliminary outcome of the informal meeting last week.
- In the OEWG meeting on 6 February 2017, one delegation said that agroecology is a red line for them. No justification was offered for such position. In the OEWG meeting on 2 May, the same delegation said that any title that would only focus on agroecology and would not include biotechnology would be a red line for them. Again, no reasonable justification was offered for that position. This kind of approach was the main reason for not reaching consensus in the OEWG.
 - At the end of another debate without solution during the recent informal discussion on 18 May, the same delegation presented an alternative proposal that is fully consistent with the red lines expressed before. The proposal includes the concept “the use of innovative technologies” as a placeholder for their precondition, to not discuss agroecology without biotechnology. Still, there is no logical reason for linking these two very different topics. There is no reason why this link should be compulsory, why it should be called a “red line”.
- 7) For the above-mentioned reasons, the CSM, after consulting again with the participating organizations involved in the MYPoW process, believes that the topic proposed by the US (“*agroecological approaches and the use of innovative technologies for sustainable food systems and FSN*”) cannot be accepted. It needs further revision, in line with what was said and supported by most members of the OEWG during the past months, and accompanied by a discussion about the appropriate and legitimate use of red-lines in the CFS, particular when identifying topics that the CFS should be able to discuss.

- 8) We have made several suggestions for alternative titles that can still be discussed. We are also open to discuss further other titles that keep the centrality of agroecology, maintain one clear focus for the report, and allow the HLPE to apply a coherent methodological approach to the subject.

- 9) With regards to the scope of the report, CSM already expressed before that we are open to merge the elements of the original CSM proposal with the scoping questions on agroecology, outlined in the HLPE Note on Critical and Emerging issues, as it was suggested by a number of delegations in the previous meetings.