

THE CFS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SDGs – CSM Position Paper (February Submission to OEWG)

The present document aims to offer some basic information, an initial assessment and some preliminary forward-looking propositions with respect to the engagement of the CFS with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on an earlier version prepared for the CSM Forum 2015 and CFS 42, the document was elaborated by the CSM Working Group on the SDGs in preparation for the SDG Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) process.

1. Introduction and description of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (attached)¹ was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015² (New York, 25-27 September 2015), following a three-year process of discussion, consultation and negotiation. The agenda includes the Declaration (which replaces the Millennium Declaration as the overall chapeau), the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets (17 goals and 169 targets)³, the Means of Implementation and Global Partnership⁴, and the Follow-up and Review mechanism. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development replaces the Millennium Development Goals (which reached their established deadline) and integrates their re-formulation with the outcomes of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

The formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marks the beginning of a new phase with all countries beginning to translate the SDGs into their respective national contexts. Each UN member country is expected to develop a national action plan, showing how it will pursue the SDGs and how it will measure their progress. The implementation of the SDGs will be monitored through a set of global indicators⁵ to be adopted by the UN General Assembly in the first half of 2016. The monitoring process will be articulated at national, regional and global levels, as well as around thematic reviews. The global monitoring will be centred on the newly established High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which meets annually under the auspices of the ECOSOC and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly, and will be informed by a Global Sustainable Development Report. The thematic reviews, while supported by the ECOSOC functional commissions and other inter-governmental bodies and fora, will also take place in conjunction with the HLPF, with modalities currently being determined.

2. The Post-2015 Agenda Process

The past three years witnessed an unprecedented carousel of events, discussions and processes aimed at informing and influencing the new Sustainable Development Agenda. This included an informal consultation of the CFS in Rome, followed by a high-level thematic consultation on Hunger, Food Security and Nutrition in Madrid. As opposed to the technocratic genesis of the MDGs, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emerged with the asserted legitimacy of such a global inclusive process and the long intergovernmental negotiation at General Assembly level. However impressive this may sound, it is also important to note the significant frustration by many constituencies for the strong and at times abusive power play of developed countries, the uneven space provided to like-minded voices rather than dissenting ones, the limited consultations with those primarily affected by development challenges, and the pervasive influence of the corporate sector and corporate philanthropies at all levels of the process.

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

² <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/summit/>

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>

⁴ This also refer to the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, outcome of the Third Financing for Development Conference, which forms an integral part of the agenda.

⁵ These indicators are being developed by the Inter Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators for final agreement by the UN Statistical Commission by March 2016 and thereafter adoption by the UNGA.

3. Initial Assessment of the 2030 SD Agenda & SDGs from a CSM perspective

The CSM WG on SDGs conducted an initial assessment, which outlined a number of positive dimensions of the SDGs as well as a number of gaps and concerns.

In terms of the positive aspects:

- a) The 2030 Agenda for SD & SDGs provide a universal framework for sustainable development for the next 15 years. They therefore surpass the notion of an agenda almost exclusively focused on developing countries (such as the MDGs) and highlight the need for action by all countries;
- b) The agenda includes some ambitious goals, such as **Goal 2**, which refers to the elimination of hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030; **Goal 3**, which includes a number of fairly ambitious health targets (i.e. target 3.2, the end of preventable deaths children under 5 years of age, in relation to malnutrition, being it the determinants of close to half of child deaths); **Goal 5**, which refers to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (including targets on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private sphere; and undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources); and, **Goal 6**, which refers to ensuring access to drinking water and sanitation to all by 2030 (especially the targets on universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water; access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, and end open defecation);
- c) Goal 2, the most directly related to the CFS work, includes a focus on people in vulnerable situations (women, children, indigenous people, and smallholders/peasants), explicitly targets the doubling of smallholder incomes on a sustainable basis to hedge against the widespread poverty of small-scale farmers and landless agricultural labourers and proposes to ensure their equal access to land. It also aims to ensure that food systems are sustainable and resilient and maintain the genetic diversity of seeds and livestock. Furthermore, the SDGs take into consideration all the pillars of food security (availability and access in Goal 2; utilization in Goal 12) and address both quantity and quality of food;
- d) Many other Goals address important dimensions of the CFS mandate (e.g., Goal 1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty and addresses the need of access to and control over land and natural resources; Goal 6 with its targets on sustainable water resource management; Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns, including its explicit target on halving the per capita global food waste and food losses along production and supply chains; Goal 14 on the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources; Goal 15 on the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, including its targets on desertification and restoring of degraded land and soil; Goal 17 and its target on policy coherence for sustainable development; just to name the most immediate ones);
- e) The agenda explicitly reaffirms “the important role and inclusive nature of the CFS” (para 24 of the Declaration) and states that “[Member States] will devote resources to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, supporting smallholder farmers, especially women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, particularly least developed countries”;
- f) The SDGs are broad, elaborate and inclusive of many development concerns and constituencies.

Despite these positive dimensions, the assessment identified major gaps and significant areas of concern:

- a) While stating to be grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties (para 10), the SDGs are not centred on a human rights based approach, and the right to food and nutrition is not mentioned under the specific Goal 2, neither is food sovereignty. On the contrary, the SDGs promote significant shifts in the governance model: a shift away from the

centrality of human right-holders in favour of stakeholders; a shift away from sovereign spaces in favour of multistakeholder platforms (with no safeguards that would promote the ways of working and rules of institutions like the CFS or CONSEA rather than other problematic approaches); and, a shift away from the role of the State as unique duty-bearer to a concept of the State as “just one among many actors” and an enabler of private sector action;

- b) The implementation of the SDGs risks to promote a conventional model of development without addressing the root and structural causes of hunger and malnutrition, resulting in a “doing more of the same” rather than promoting real political change and deep transformation of the currently unsustainable and hegemonic form of economic globalization. Indeed, the new agenda is profoundly biased in favour of the unchecked action of the corporate sector, without advancing any concrete attempt to redirect the currently unsustainable business model and address issues of conflict of interest within public policy spaces. Many of the implementation mechanisms will be probably based on multistakeholder partnerships, with the risk that these could be heavily driven by the vested interests and political economies;
- c) The SDGs lack serious political commitment in terms of their means of implementation. This is confirmed by the profoundly regressive nature of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, which was heavily criticized throughout its process and eventually declared a failure by civil society. The lack of political commitment for any substantial redressing of the current drivers of economic liberism and hegemonic globalization and any real democratization of global economic governance as well as the lack of serious commitment of public funding combined with a strong focus on mobilizing private investments, open the doors to an even more pervasive influence of the private sector in instrumentalizing the nicely worded goals for private gain. Nutrition is a perfect example of this rapidly evolving danger;
- d) The emphasis given to the so-called “Data Revolution” and the push for a new set of development indicators to support the follow-up of the 169 targets is another element of concern. While the importance of data cannot be neglected, an overemphasis on data could in fact lead to another technocratic shift and a new generation of seductive statistics that shift away from the direct engagement of those primarily affected in the actual monitoring of development progress. The process is indeed driven by a strong belief that data offers the main path to knowledge, disregarding the information and knowledge possessed by those primarily affected by development challenges;
- e) The need to limit targets to a manageable number has left many important dimensions out of the blue-print. For example in the case of nutrition, Goal 2 includes only two of the set of six WHA nutrition targets⁶ on ending all forms of malnutrition (i.e. stunting and wasting), although a third one - child overweight - is explicitly set out at indicator level against target 2.2. Furthermore, neither Goal 1 nor Goal 2 clearly underline the critical importance of the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition, and the centrality of the implementation of the GSF, the VGRtF and the VGGT, for the successful pursuit of the zero hunger target. These gaps could lead to simplifications of and narrow-focused approaches to the more comprehensive agendas defined by other legitimate thematic platforms and policy spaces. Furthermore, the SDGs do not explicitly recognize the interconnected nature of many of the goals (advancing on some might be necessary to advance on others and/or advancing on some with no interconnected strategy may actually hinder implementation of others).

⁶ **Six WHA Targets**

1. Reduce the number of children under 5 who are stunted by 40 percent;
2. Achieve a 50 percent reduction in the rate of anemia in women of reproductive age;
3. Achieve a 30 percent reduction in the rate of infants born with low birth weight;
4. Ensure that there is no increase in the rate of children who are overweight;
5. Increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months to at least 50 percent
6. Reduce and maintain childhood wasting to less than 5 percent.

4. Role of the CFS in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

The initial CSM WG discussion highlighted different potential levels of engagement of the CFS in the follow-up to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Given the fact that the SDG framework is the “official” global development agenda for the next 15 years, all recognized that the CFS, as the foremost global governance platform on food security and nutrition, has a key role to play, especially with regard to Goal 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture). Indeed, the CFS is explicitly mentioned within both the Declaration and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, as well as implicitly referred to as one of the “thematic” intergovernmental policy spaces for the follow-up and review. However, the way this role should play out, and the actual scope of the engagement, needs to be driven by clear principles that respect the nature and mandate of the CFS.

4.1 Driving principles for the CFS engagement in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Based on the CFS Reform and subsequent CFS decisions and plans, the following key interlinked principles should drive the engagement of CFS in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda:

- **Respect and enhancement of CFS mandate**: The CFS role should be carefully anchored to its mandate and its Global Strategic Framework, and deployed after a critical and strategic assessment of which elements of the SDGs can be meaningfully re-conducted to the CFS mandate and plans;
- **Centrality of human rights**: The CFS should reaffirm the centrality of the human rights framework and the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition as the cornerstone of the zero hunger goal, as per Vision of the CFS (as defined in the CFS Reform Document) and explicitly recalled in the MYPOW 2016-2017: “CFS strives for a world free from hunger where countries implement the voluntary guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security”;
- **Primacy of the depth of CFS past and future policy products**: As a global comprehensive development blueprint, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda naturally embodies significant simplifications, when seen from the perspective of any in-depth thematic review. Indeed, one of the main critiques of the MDGs was the evidence that they led of oversimplification and de-contextualized implementation. The CFS engagement should therefore be driven by the depth of its past and future policy products and resist any attempts of simplification of its substantive policy process;
- **Subsidiarity in the relations between CFS and HLPF/UNGA**: There should be no normative hierarchy between the HLPF/UNGA and the CFS. On the contrary, the relations between these bodies should be driven by the principle of subsidiarity. The process should indeed respect and elevate the depth of the thematic platforms to provide more comprehensive and substantive interpretations of the SDGs, rather than promote simplifications and races to the bottom (i.e. the fact that only two of the WHA agreed nutrition targets are mentioned among the SDG targets does not mean the others are dropped);
- **Direct engagement of both the primary contributors to food security and those primarily affected by food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms**: Small-scale food producers (including, small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fisher-folks, agricultural workers, landless farmers, rural women and youth and others) are the main producers of food around the world and the primary contributors to food security. At the same time, many of these constituencies also include those most affected by the development challenges the agenda aims to tackle. The CFS is the only intergovernmental policy platform that includes their direct participation and the CFS engagement with the SDG process should enhance and strengthen this critical dimension of the CFS process.

4.2 Domains of CFS engagement in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

Based on the above-mentioned principles, the CFS should engage strategically with the SDGs agenda and leverage the current momentum of high-level political commitment in order to further strengthen the CFS process and promote a renewed and stronger push for the implementation of the GSF, the VGRtF and the VGGLT. However, the CFS does not have any implementation functions and its possible areas of engagement are therefore related to following three domains: normative, coordination and monitoring.

4.2.1 Normative Domain

- **Strengthening of CFS policy/normative instruments (past and futures)**: The most important dimension of the CFS engagement with the SDGs is the continued advancement of its “normative instruments” (policy recommendations, voluntary guidelines, etc.) for the progressive realization of the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition and the implementation of the Global Strategic Framework. The key role of the CFS would therefore be related to the development of those international norms and policies that would create the conditions and policy convergence/coherence for many of the agreeable SDG targets to be met. This would require a more ambitious policy agenda and greater emphasis on issues such as trade, climate change, agro-ecology, genetic resources, etc. It remains understood that the first step in this process is to strengthen the implementation of the GSF, the VGRtF and the VGGLT, which would also promote the reinforcement of the CFS coordination and policy convergence roles. The CFS workstream on Monitoring is therefore extremely important and synergic with this process;
- **New policy engagement in nutrition**: The inclusion of the “commitment to end malnutrition in all its forms” under Goal 2 is consistent with the CFS plans to step-up its role in nutrition and could be a further catalyst in this respect. As articulated by the CSM Nutrition WG in preparation for the CFS OEWG on Nutrition, the CFS could play an important role in reducing the significant fragmentation of nutrition policies, building policy coherence and coordination, through its multi-sectoral and multi-actor engagement, and bridging the health and food system dimensions of nutrition. In the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the CFS could also further advocate for the launch of the Decade of Action on Nutrition from 2016 to 2025, as endorsed in the Rome Declaration on Nutrition.

4.2.2 Coordination Domain

- **Promoting coherence with RtAFN & GSF among global/regional initiatives and programmes**: Another important domain of the CFS engagement with the SDGs should be related to the strengthening of CFS’s coordination role to ensure it can provide recommendations to different initiatives and programmes on how to make them consistent with the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition and the GSF. Appropriate space should be built within CFS Plenaries to promote this role and adequate preparations should be promoted;
- **Supporting/advising countries in advancing inclusive national processes**: Beyond the global level, another key dimensions is related to the advancement of CFS’s role in supporting and advising countries on how to progress in fulfilling the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition for all, including by actively promoting mechanisms at country level that fully involve those most affected by development challenges and small-scale food producers;
- **Promoting the use of HLPE products in SDG implementation process**: The High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) could also play an important role in providing science/evidence-based inputs related to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture during the SDGs implementation phase, including in the framework of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM).

4.2.3 Monitoring Domain

- **Providing space and methodology for inclusive dialogue on progress assessments:** The CFS should develop its own innovative monitoring mechanism— one that would go beyond the data on indicators provided by Rome Based Agencies and incorporate a more in depth participatory and qualitative assessment at country and global levels. The CFS should therefore resist the “technocratic data revolution” and set its own methodology to measure progress toward Goal 2. It should be the space where pathways toward achieving Goal 2 are debated, including those more controversial such as trade, seeds and agro-ecology. The CFS should have a leading role in providing an inclusive platform for sharing, learning and identifying achievements and challenges ahead with the direct engagement of those primarily affected, rather than simply relying on seductive statistics;
- **Promoting/supporting inclusive assessment at country level:** The CFS should also promote, facilitate and provide guidance to country-initiated inclusive and participatory assessments to support decision-making in determining and implementing effective policies and strategies, including national review mechanisms. The CFS can provide guidance or basic templates for governments and assistance to deliver these country assessments and, based on their outcomes, could make recommendations for policies and actions that are needed to successfully implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda;
- **Supporting thematic reviews in conjunction with the HLPF process:** The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calls for the “functional commissions of ECOSOC and other intergovernmental and similar bodies and forums to support HLPF Thematic Reviews of progress in achieving the SDGs”⁷. The CSM is continuing its internal consultations on this particular aspect of the CFS engagement and will submit its proposals at the next session of the OEWG. However, it remains understood that such an engagement should be driven by the above-mentioned principle of subsidiarity in the relations between CFS and HLPF/UNGA (see item 4.1 above). This means that the proposed schedule of thematic reviews (which proposes the thematic review for Goal 2 to take place during the HLPF in July 2017) appears to be particularly problematic, as it does not take into account the actual modalities of the CFS process. Should it be confirmed, it would not allow proper time for the regular CFS cycle to unfold (CFS 43 will decide on the CFS role in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the proposed thematic review would take place before CFS 44, rendering any CFS preparatory process impossible), which would affect the direct participation of those constituencies that should be primarily involved, such as the small scale food producers. This implies that further discussion is needed on the role and modalities of the CFS in the thematic reviews.

⁷ Seventieth session of the Un General Assembly, Report of the UN Secretary-General on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, 19 January 2016