

## Introduction

### Purpose

1. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) commissioned an independent evaluation of the reform adopted by the Council of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) in 2009. The purpose of this document is to share with the Bureau and Advisory Group, the themes emerging from the data collected to date. These will be discussed at the meeting with the Bureau and Advisory Group on 29 November 2016. *The Evaluation Team wishes to emphasise the very preliminary nature of these findings, as data collection and analysis are still in progress.* Some of these may change once the data collection and analysis have been completed, and the interview data is triangulated.

2. In addition to the extensive interviews in the inception mission in May, the Evaluation Team conducted interviews during the CFS Plenary 43, and observed the Plenary discussions and side events. The Evaluation Team conducted country missions to Panama, the Philippines, Senegal, Uganda, and USA, and interviews in Brussels. Data collection missions to be completed are France (23-25 November), Jordan 4-7 December, and a pending focus group discussion with civil society in Brussels. The Evaluation Team carried out a desk review of documents including CFS reports and working documents, High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) reports, documents from the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), the Private Sector Mechanism (PSM), the Rome-Based Agencies, and other organisations.

## Preliminary findings

### Achievements of CFS

3. **The reform has changed the structures and processes for discussing and responding to issues related to food security and nutrition (FSN) at the global level.** Most interviewees believe that the reform has been for the better, and that the current CFS is a major improvement over the pre-2009 CFS. The inclusion of self-organising mechanisms for civil society and the private sector as participants, and not observers represents a major departure from how CFS operated pre-2009. The creation of a mechanism for those directly affected by FSN issues, for example, small-scale food producers and fisher folk, to participate directly in shaping global policy is an important achievement. The High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) has brought a closer inter-face between science and FSN policy processes. While the annual CFS Plenary remains the highlight of CFS work, critical discussions aimed at generating global policy and voluntary guidelines take place inter-sessionally through the Open Ended Working Groups (OEWG). The governance structures outlined in the 2009 Reform Document are in place and are supported by a CFS Secretariat operating within the administrative rules of FAO.

4. **From the evidence to date, CFS is still some way from achieving the vision of a reformed CFS as “...the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform...” and its impact at regional and country levels is yet to be felt.** While most interviewees want CFS to ‘move forward’, there is diversity and divergence of views among interviewees on what has to be done to achieve the vision of a reformed CFS. Some call for a ‘step change’ in how CFS is organised and functions, but most seek to consolidate the achievements and build on them. Interviewees do not have a shared vision of how CFS should be positioned. On the one hand there is a *push* for CFS to assert itself as the foremost intergovernmental body on FSN at the global level and not avoid certain issues just because they are complex or sensitive. This ambition is tempered by the counter argument that CFS should be modest about its role and realistic about what it can achieve as a global body. There is nevertheless a cautious optimism about CFS, and this is an asset that CFS can draw on as it seeks to improve its effectiveness.

### **Relevance of issues addressed**

5. **From the available evidence, CFS is addressing relevant FSN issues to the extent that they fall within the mandate of CFS, though there are gaps.** The process of selecting issues seeks to be inclusive and there is broad agreement amongst interviewees that CFS is working on relevant FSN issues. The issue of trade was noted as gap by several interviewees, including by those at country level. Youth is another issue that appears not to be receiving sufficient attention in the CFS agenda. With the so-called demographic dividend in developing countries, youth are an important constituency in FSN, but they are yet to be fully integrated in CFS work streams.

6. There are other issues that interviewees felt should receive attention, for example, climate change, agro-ecology, and food sovereignty. Even though the process for the selection of topics is inclusive, participants in the process are not equally powerful, nor do they have access to the same level of resources for their participation. Some interviewees proposed that the consensus decision-making model ensures that CFS focuses on less controversial issues. The Evaluation Team will explore this issue further in its analysis.

7. **CFS has taken important steps to include nutrition in its agenda, but there are conflicting views on how nutrition should be reflected in the activities of CFS, and how CFS can add value at the global level to an already crowded ‘space’ globally and regionally.** From several accounts, getting nutrition onto the CFS agenda was a long struggle and gained impetus from ICN2 in 2014, and the resolution of the UN General Assembly on the Decade Action on Nutrition. The establishment of the OEWG on Nutrition is a major step forward. Some interviewees expressed reservations about the separate work stream of the OEWG on Nutrition, and suggested that it may be eventually mainstreamed across the other OEWGs. It was also noted that the nutrition space is crowded and it would be wise for CFS to focus its attention where there are gaps and needs. There are nutrition platforms at country level that have no link with CFS, and in one case, there were strong views expressed about the need to retain nutrition as distinct but related to food security.

## **Effectiveness of CFS**

8. The Evaluation Team assessed the six roles of CFS aimed at achieving the following three outcomes: Outcome A: Enhanced global coordination on FSN questions; Outcome B: Improved policy convergence on key FSN issues; and Outcome C: Strengthened national and regional FSN actions. As noted in the Inception Report, the absence of a results framework poses challenges for assessing the extent to which these outcomes have been achieved. The Evaluation Team is able to comment on how CFS carried out these six roles, and further analysis is required to assess the extent to which the three Outcomes have been achieved.

### **Coordination at the global level**

9. The CFS Plenary is a platform that brings together a diverse range of actors including governments, international organisations, UN agencies, civil society, the private sector, and philanthropic organisations. The stated purpose of the CFS coordination role is to strengthen collaborative action among these various actors. From the information collected at this stage, there appears to be several gaps in CFS executing its coordination role. With the exception of the RBAs, WHO and UNICEF, other UN agencies appear less involved or not involved at all. CFS has linkages with the UN system in New York through its annual reporting to ECOSOC and participates in the work of the High Level Political Forum, and these linkages are potentially a vehicle for CFS to raise its profile in New York. CFS linkages with CGIAR appear weak. The Evaluation Team will conduct further analysis on the issue of coordination.

### **Policy convergence**

10. Policy convergence can be viewed as a process of negotiating to arrive at policy guidelines that have application across different countries, and it can also be viewed as the output or end result of the negotiation process. Policy convergence can also be viewed as an outcome where several countries adopt a common policy on a global issue. Most interviewees saw policy convergence as a negotiation process. CFS engaged in policy convergence processes and produced the guidelines (policy convergence outputs/products) for VGGTs, Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI); the Framework for Action (FFA); and the Global Strategic Framework. These policy convergence products are normative tools and their success lies in the extent to which countries adopt them. There is clear evidence that the VGGTs are being applied in several countries. The VGGTs have a higher profile than the other CFS products, and case studies and monitoring report presented at CFS 43 indicate that there are success stories as well as challenges associated with the application of the VGGTs.

### **Support and advice to countries and regions based on request**

11. CFS is a coordinating structure and not an implementing body, and the current design of CFS does not lend itself to provide direct 'on the ground' support and advice to countries. The country missions revealed that many in government did not know about the existence of CFS or its functions, except for those who had participated in the CFS Plenary. There is also a low level of awareness of CFS among country office staff of the UN system, except for those staff involved in supporting the implementation of the VGGT.

12. CFS has not worked out, in practical terms, how to link with and leverage the large number of regional institutions and regional processes relevant to FSN. Where there is some connection with regional institutions, it is mainly for information sharing. Regional organisations have Observer status in CFS, and this might not be sufficient incentive for them to become involved in CFS. It has perhaps not been made clear to regional organisations what is expected of them. Yet regional organisations, especially intergovernmental bodies are potential vehicles through which the application of CFS voluntary guidelines can be promoted. The Evaluation Team needs to collect further information about regional organisations to fully analyse the issues.

### **Promoting accountability and sharing best practice**

13. CFS generates global policies, and though the guidelines are voluntary, they have the potential to change the life circumstances of millions of people. Monitoring the implementation of CFS decisions and the application of guidelines is an imperative and the Reform Document called for the development of an innovative mechanism, including the definition of common indicators, to monitor progress towards agreed objectives. There is disagreement in CFS about exactly what should be monitored, how it should be monitored and who should monitor. The monitoring role also assumes that there is a structured process in place for the decisions and products of CFS to be transmitted to the country level, and this is not the case. The adoption of the Terms of Reference to share experience and good practices in applying CFS decisions and recommendations should go some way towards addressing the monitoring challenge and sensitivity about 'accountability'. The approach is also in keeping with the 'follow-up and review' approach to Agenda 2030 that calls for country-led follow-up and an approach that holds all development actors mutually accountable.

### **Functioning of CFS structures and mechanisms**

14. *CFS Plenary*: The Plenary represents the culmination of a year's work and the start of the next. Many interviewees commented positively on improvements made to CFS 43 where negotiations were concluded in advance of the Plenary, thus reducing the time spent in the Plenary on negotiating text. Many expressed the benefits of attending the CFS Plenary, notably, as an opportunity to learn what others are doing, and to share good practices and experience. While the CFS Plenary is the decision-making event for CFS, it plays an important networking function. There are some who are critical of the large number of side events, and its use by the RBAs to promote their own work rather than the work of CFS.

15. *Advisory Group*: There are several issues or contestations with regard to the Advisory Group perhaps because it has become the forum to renegotiate things or issues from the OEWDs. The function of the Advisory Group is to provide inputs (advice) to the Bureau for the latter to make decisions. But meetings until recently have been joint meetings with the Bureau, so it is not clear how the Advisory Group executes its advisory role. Advisory Group is open to Participants as defined in the Reform Document. There are opposing views about the distribution of seats between CSM and PSM, and absence of a participant seat for the World Farmers' Organisation. Various options have been put to the Evaluation Team, and the Evaluation Team requires further analysis of these options.

16. *Open Ended Working Groups*: OEWDs provide space for Participants and Observers of CFS to make inputs to the work of CFS, and are important inter-sessional structures. Several have expressed

concern about the number of OEWGs, as it is difficult for delegations especially small delegations, to participate in all of the OEWG.

17. *High Level Panel of Experts:* The HLPE is an important element in the reform, intended to provide the evidence base for the policy proposals and decisions of CFS. Opinions of interviewees on the effectiveness of HLPE reports are mixed. There is an appreciation for the technical quality of HLPE reports, but concern that the final recommendations represent a political compromise rather than hard science. Furthermore, the long process from decision on the HLPE topic to the adoption of the final report recommendations runs the risk of obsolescence. There is perhaps a need to complement HLPE reports with shorter briefs on topics that require immediate attention. HLPE members also expressed frustration that their products are not promoted sufficiently outside CFS and remain on the shelves.

18. *Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) and Private Sector Mechanism (PSM):* These two self-organising mechanisms were introduced to bring voices of their constituencies into CFS policy processes, but their roles in these processes is not universally accepted by CFS Members. There are some CFS Members who believe that according these two mechanisms a seat at the table puts them on par with governments and potentially undermines the mandate that governments have from their citizens.

19. CSM has made use of its 4 seats at the table by participating in all the OEWGs of CFS and in the Advisory Group. They are active at the country level, for example, advocating for the use of CFS guidelines, and translating VGGTs into local languages to make them accessible to their constituencies. There is an expectation from some CFS Members that civil society should speak with one voice. CSM comprises a very diverse constituency and although it seeks consensus on issues it does not always achieve consensus. There are internal tensions in CSM and this is to be expected given the diversity of its constituencies. It is unclear however, what internal mechanisms there are to resolve disputes within this self-organising mechanism.

20. *Joint CFS Secretariat:* The Reform Document envisaged a small permanent secretariat to assist the Plenary, Bureau and Advisory Group and HLPE in their work, with staff from the three RBAs. There are weaknesses in the current working arrangements of the CFS Secretariat. The Secretariat is located within FAO administratively and is largely seen as a FAO secretariat not as a joint RBA secretariat. Each RBA has seconded one senior professional and this is complemented by access to technical expertise of the RBAs. CFS appears to rely extensively on the technical expertise of FAO and less so on the technical expertise of the other two RBAs. The CFS Secretariat has a flat structure, and this potentially makes for greater flexibility in the deployment of human resources. However, the wide span of control that accompanies a flat structure makes people management challenging.

21. *Role of RBAs:* The RBAs provide financial and technical support to CFS. The Reform Document envisaged that FAO Regional Conferences and regional meetings of WFP and IFAD devote part of their agenda to disseminate CFS conclusions and recommendations, and also provide input to CFS. The Evaluation Team has not yet found evidence that this has been done to a level that would constitute substantial support to raising awareness about CFS and its decisions.

## **Communication and Outreach**

22. CFS is not well known outside Rome and is not an instantly recognisable institution. Many at country level requested that CFS improve its communication. CFS has a communication and outreach strategy adopted by the CFS Plenary in 2013. The strategy sets out roles that the various structures and mechanisms of CFS should play in communication, the Evaluation Team did not detect a strong, collective effort to promote CFS and to raise awareness of CFS decisions at country level.

## **Planning and budgeting**

23. There is a strong message from many interviewees that CFS is doing too many things and this impacts negatively on its performance. There is a demand for CFS to prioritise its work and narrow its focus on the one hand, and a contradictory push for CFS to take on more topics that are considered a high priority by those proposing those topics. The majority of interviewees raised the issue of the chronic under-funding of the MYPoW, and many see the solution as trimming back the scale of CFS activities. Few offered alternative sustainable funding models.

## **Inclusiveness of CFS and multi-stakeholder model**

24. While CFS is generally viewed as an inclusive model for coordinating FSN issues at the global level, there are processes that undermine inclusiveness. The issue mentioned most frequently in interviews was the lack of translation during negotiations in CFS. This is particularly relevant for Indigenous People who do not have access to translation into their indigenous language.

25. Several expressed the view that inclusiveness comes at the cost of efficiency, and one person commented that there was so much inclusiveness that nothing gets done. A key lesson collected from multi-stakeholder platforms at country level is that there are no shortcuts to inclusive approaches. They take long, and require patience, and do not always achieve the desired result. But the alternative of not being inclusive guarantees that the results will not be sustainable.

26. The Evaluation Team found a degree of ambivalence amongst interviewees about CFS as a multi-stakeholder model that could be replicated. Some expressed concern that challenges such as inefficiencies in processes should first be addressed before it can be considered suitable for replication. Others are concerned that multi-stakeholder platforms as a new form of global governance run the serious risk of eroding the standing that rights holders have with their governments as the duty bearers, and treating them as ordinary stakeholders. They are also concerned that multi-stakeholder platforms disguise the asymmetrical power between, for example, the small-scale producers and the large agribusiness corporations.

## **Next steps**

The meeting with the Bureau and Advisory Group on 29 November 2016 will assist the Evaluation Team to identify areas where additional data collection and analysis are required. The Evaluation Team will conclude the remaining country missions and interviews by 9 December 2016, and complete the data analysis process. The draft report will be submitted to the Bureau and Advisory Group by 31 January 2017 for their comment. The final report will be submitted by 31 March 2017.

**CFS Evaluation Team**  
**23 November 2016**