

CFS at the Crossroads, 7 Years after the Reform

CSM Draft Reflection Paper on the State of Health of the CFS in 2016

1. Context

Discussions about the political situation of the CFS and the assessment of its development after the reform have been part of the CSM Work since the beginning. Important occasions of collective debate within the CSM during the recent years have been:

- The CSM Forum 2014, with substantial assessment of the CFS 5 years after the reform ¹
- The CSM Forum 2015 which included a discussion on global trends and challenges – What role for the CFS?²
- The CSM Forum 2016 public debate on the “CFS at the crossroads -7 Years after its reform”, which was included in the agenda of the Forum after an in-depth discussion of the CC in May 2016 on the topic.

This discussion is also important and timely as the CFS Evaluation has started in September 2016. It will involve all actors and bodies of the CFS, including members, participants and observers, on the Rome level and also through several country visits. Two draft versions of the evaluation report shall be discussed in February and March, the discussion on the response to the report recommendations will be a major issue of debate between April and October 2017.

Many social and civil society organizations participating in the CSM, and also the Coordination Committee of the CSM believe that the CFS is at a critical point. In order to inform proposals for the future, it is important to highlight some of the most important assets and achievements of the reformed CFS, and to assess the limitations and challenges the CFS faced during the past years and months.

2. Main assets and achievements of the CFS

Civil society organizations have considered the following points as essential assets and achievements of the CFS:

- Since its reform in 2009, the Committee for World Food Security has become the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform to promote policy convergence, coherence, coordination and cooperation for food security and nutrition.
- In response to the food price crisis of 2007/8, the CFS reform established a new vision for global governance on food security and nutrition, with a strong mandate to foster the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food, opening the space to all relevant actors, but explicitly underlining that particular space and voice should be given to those constituencies who are most affected and at risk, and who are at the same time the most important contributors for food security and nutrition worldwide.
- In that sense, the CFS has become a unique space in the United Nations System where the voices of small-scale food producers, family farmers, fisher folks, indigenous peoples, food and agricultural workers, pastoralists, landless, women, youth, consumers, the urban food

¹ See the summary of this debate in the CSM Annual Report 2014/2015, http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/En-CSM_Annual-BR.pdf

² The analyzed trends and challenges at that occasion included global trade policies destroying small-scale food production; mega-mergers and concentration processes in the global agri-food and nutrition corporate sector; Sustainable Development Goals; the unprecedented displacement of people through conflicts and protracted crises; and the monitoring and accountability challenge of the CFS.

insecure and NGOs have been able to actively participate through an autonomous and open space, the CSM.

- Most topics dealt with by the CFS so far have been extremely relevant to urgent demands of CSM constituencies: governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests, gender equality, investment in smallholder agriculture, connecting smallholders to markets, fisheries, climate change, responsible agricultural investment, food security and nutrition in protracted crises, water, food loss and waste, and others which all together compose the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition.
- The CSM constituencies and working groups have formulated positions and contributed proposals to all CFS processes since the reform, with an enormous commitment of its participating organizations to the different workstreams. Through this engagement, social movements and civil society organizations have contributed an enormous amount of substance and legitimacy to the CFS, and are among the most active actors and promoters of the use, application and monitoring of CFS outcomes.
- The CSM, with its exclusive mandate to facilitate civil society participation to the CFS, is at the same time the most inclusive and largest space of civil society organizations working on food security and nutrition worldwide. Its participating organizations, particularly those who organize small-scale food producers and consumers, represent far more than 380 million individual members from all continents. This fact is an incredible asset for the CFS. No other UN Committee or Commission can claim to have a similarly huge participation of these constituencies.
- The HLPE has been called by many the second pillar of innovation to the CFS, as it introduced a knowledge-policy interface with the CFS, which in addition to the comprehensive analysis of academic research also uses the extraordinary diversity of actors in the CFS in their role as knowledge holders. The inclusive methodology as well as the quality of its reports have been widely acknowledged by actors from governments, intergovernmental agencies, academia, civil society and private sector.

3. Limitations and challenges:

Since the discussion before the Reform of the CFS, there have been controversial discussions about the general orientation of the process, including the vision and roles of the reformed CFS. All these discussions were concluded with the unanimous approval of the CFS Reform Document in 2009. When assessing the effectiveness of the CFS Reform 7 years later, we can observe that some of the previous controversies still remain and present challenges today. Other limitations have become more evident over the years, others only recently. The following list is not complete, but points out some key concerns from a civil society view:

- Regarding the Vision of the CFS: The Reform Document clearly defines as essential part of the CFS Vision Statement that: *“The CFS will strive 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.”*³ The mandate of the CFS to work for the progressive realization of the right to food, in line with the principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights, has been challenged by some actors in many occasions. The centrality of human rights for the CFS work on food security and nutrition is fundamental to contribute to the progressive realization of the rights

³ (Paragraph 4, Reform Document): The CFS “will become the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings. The CFS will strive 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”

to adequate food. The fact that the concept of women's rights has not been explicitly and consistently included into CFS outcome documents, is not acceptable and extremely problematic. We expect the CFS Members and all other participants to fully recognize and support the centrality of human rights and women's rights for food security and nutrition in future CFS decisions.

- Priority attention to the voices of the most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition: The Reform Document states: *"The CFS is and remains an intergovernmental Committee. It will be composed of members, participants and observers and will seek to achieve a balance between inclusiveness and effectiveness. Its composition will ensure that the voices of all relevant stakeholders – particularly those most affected by food insecurity - are heard."*⁴ These sentences express clearly that a) decisions of the CFS will be taken by Member countries, that b) everybody will be heard, and c) special voice and space will be given to the constituencies of the most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition. This is the spirit of the CFS Reform, of a new vision of inclusive governance on food security and nutrition.

The constituencies of the most affected by food insecurity are specified in paragraph 11,ii) in the Reform Document, and they are identical with the constituencies of the CSM. The CSM was created as the space for them in the CFS. If some actors today claim that the private and corporate sector should have the same space as civil society in the CFS, they try to ignore this fundamental decision of the Reform. Moreover, an observer organization with strong links to the interests of large-scale and industrial agriculture suggested in two recent negotiations (Smallholder to Markets, and Livestock) that the smallholder focus of the respective CFS negotiation document should be deleted. This is a deep misunderstanding of the CFS Reform and an attempt to destroy the focus on small-scale food producers that has been consensus in the CFS outcomes so far. We expect CFS members and participants to consistently reject all attempts to abolish these main achievements of the reform.

- The implementation challenge: It is evident that one of the weaknesses of the CFS is the lack of use, implementation and monitoring of its decisions and outcomes. There is an enormous potential of impact when a CFS instrument such as the VGGT is being applied in policies and programmes. The ongoing monitoring exercise provides detailed evidence for that. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many other CFS outcomes. Civil society organizations have taken important steps to facilitate the use other complex CFS outcomes, such as the GSF, to make CFS decisions useable for actors on the national level, to "bring the results of Rome back home". However, the general assessment is that governments, civil society and the RBA need to do much more to foster and promote the use and application of CFS outcomes on all levels.
- The monitoring challenge: When looking into the roles of the CFS, as defined in 2009, it is clear that the role on *"Promoting accountability and sharing best practices"*, including through an innovative monitoring mechanism)⁵ has been the CFS function with the lowest degree of compliance. However, the recent decisions of CFS 42 which led to the Global Monitoring Event at CFS 43 and to the Terms of Reference for Monitoring Events, to be adopted by CFS 43, are initial steps of progress in this area. It is important in this regard to remind that without a proper monitoring mechanism, it would be impossible to know if and how the CFS outcomes have made a difference for policies on food security and nutrition on country, regional and global level. Hence, strengthening the monitoring and accountability function of the CFS remain one of the outstanding challenges of the future.

⁴ See paragraph 7 of the Reform Document

⁵ See full text in paragraph 6 ii) of the Reform Document

- Policy convergence: The negotiated strategic outcomes of the CFS are the result of policy convergence processes that took several years, and their extraordinary value is widely appreciated within and outside the CFS. These negotiation processes addressed burning and controversial issues of high relevance for food security and nutrition. However, the current biennium is the first after the reform in which no major negotiation process is taking place. And still, many members and participants complain about the amount of work required for the different processes. A general feeling is that the CFS has entered too many processes, some of them only superficially, while an increased amount of papers makes it difficult for many delegations to fully follow and participate all processes. Policy convergence should not shy away from the difficult topics, and some of them have been blocked by few actors, just because they don't want to see these topics being discussed. Policy convergence is particularly necessary on those issues of high relevance on which a divergence of views prevails. What is needed is the courage to prioritize and address those key issues that are contentious but central to food security and nutrition, taking into account particularly the relevance for constituencies most affected by hunger and malnutrition.
- Budget and MYPOW: A key problem of the CFS in the current biennium is the lack of funding to carry out the integrity of the agreed MYPOW. A donor-driven agenda setting of the CFS is not acceptable, nor a donor-driven partial implementation of the agreed MYPOW. Unfortunately, some workstreams are funded, and others are not. The negotiations on "Connecting Smallholders to Markets" where the first negotiations within the reformed CFS without official interpretation. The cost of the interpretation for this important policy convergence negotiation would have been 35.000 USD which was finally not within the financial possibilities of the CFS. No resources were available at the beginning of September 2016 for the CFS workstreams in 2017 on Women's empowerment, GSF, monitoring, while other workstreams can even afford organizing additional events. The lack of interpretation puts the inclusiveness of the CFS at risk, particularly when it comes to negotiations. The current deficit in the budget of the HLPE puts at risk the possibility to having its reports translated in other languages than English in 2017. A structural and effective solution to the CFS budget problem must be found, and for that the collaboration of all member states, regions and the RBA is essential.
- Inclusiveness and roles of actors in a multi-stakeholder setting: what does inclusive governance mean in the CFS context? It does mean that all actors, as member states or in advisory function, or as observers can contribute according to their roles, and that clarity about roles and responsibilities is ensured. An unspecified use of multi-stakeholder language, that does not differentiate between members, distinct kind of participants, and observers sometimes creates confusion about the roles and responsibilities. For instance, there is an important distinction between stakeholders and rights-holders, particular when addressing rights and duties in a human rights based institutional framework. There is another important distinction between public interest and private interest, particularly when it comes to the formulation of policy formulation for food security and nutrition in an UN context. While the role of states and intergovernmental agencies, as well as of civil society organizations is very clear in this framework, there is a need to better clarify the role of the private sector: the private and corporate sector that has been defending interest of profit-oriented agribusiness cannot claim the same legitimacy and space in the CFS as the constituencies of small-scale producers, consumers and public interest groups that defend the rights of hundreds of millions of people affected or at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition, the CFS needs to elaborate robust standards against potential conflict of interest, to address properly the tensions between public and private interest in the field of food security and nutrition.

- **Ambition:** The added value of the CFS lies in the full compliance with its vision to be the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform within the United Nations on food security and nutrition, to promote coordination, convergence, coherence cooperation and accountability of policies on food security and nutrition towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food. This is the ambition of the CFS reform. It is not the added value of the CFS to be reduced to a niche for issues that are dealt with in other forums, to conduct “light” negotiations or focus on being a forum to share best practices and lessons learned. There is indeed a strong need for much more effective policy convergence, policy coordination and policy coherence on food security and nutrition on the global level. If the CFS does not address this challenge, it misses its mission. Other forums or diffuse multi-stakeholder initiatives cannot claim the legitimacy the CFS has.

4. The way ahead: the CFS at the crossroads

Taking into consideration what is outlined above, there are two possible pathways to the future of the CFS.

1. **One option is the way of the erosion of the CFS reform**, by revising fundamental decisions taken with the reform, and slowly evolving into an insignificant multi-stakeholder forum which claims to comply with its vision and roles, but in reality does not have the needed political commitment, clarity, support and budget to comply with its functions as defined in the Reform. Such CFS would:
 - put in doubt its fundamental commitment with the right to adequate food and its human rights mandate;
 - ignore the decision of the CFS reform to give special space to the voices of small-scale food producers, family farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, food and agricultural workers, pastoralists, the landless, women, youth, consumers, the urban food insecure and NGOs;
 - treat the constituencies of the most affected by hunger and malnutrition as equal to the agribusiness community composed by the private sector, companies, large farmers, and private philanthropic foundations;
 - avoid to make strong and new efforts to foster the use, application and monitoring of its outcomes on the national, regional and global level;
 - avoid to tackle difficult issues for the policy convergence process, concentrating in those issues that are not contentious and are not dealt with by others;
 - shy away from the fundamental need to foster policy coordination and coherence on food security and nutrition on all levels;
 - be weak due to the lack of political and financial support of its members and the RBAs.
2. The other option is **to strengthen the CFS in line with the vision and roles defined in the CFS Reform**. This would require self-critical, in-depth learning process on progress and shortcomings regarding the effective compliance with its roles, and the political commitment of CFS members and participants to reaffirm and reinforce their practical commitment with key decisions of the CFS Reform. Such CFS would give priority attention to:
 - the human rights mandate of the CFS, particularly the right to adequate food and women’s rights in the context of food security and nutrition;
 - the focus on the constituencies most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, giving more space to the voices of the constituencies of small-scale food producers, family farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, food and agricultural workers, pastoralists, the landless, women, youth, consumers, the urban food insecure and NGOs;

- promote together with member states and RBA, civil society and other actors, the use and application of CFS instruments on all levels;
- put in practice and further develop the monitoring mechanism of the CFS, encouraging the realization of national and regional monitoring events and establishing an annual Global Thematic monitoring event during the CFS Plenary.
- focus the selection of topics for the policy convergence process on those issues that are most relevant for food security and nutrition, particularly for the most affected and at risk, and on which policy convergence, policy coherence and coordination are strongly needed.
- Establish a solid and sustainable funding structure of the CFS which would reflect the support of all members and the RBA to the CFS, and ensure the full implementation of the agreed MYPOW.
- Clarify the terms of participation of the private and corporate sector within the CFS and develop robust safeguards to protect the space from conflict of interest, to address the tensions between public and private interest in the field of food security and nutrition in an adequate and effective way.
- Keep the ambition of the CFS Reform and make every effort necessary to fulfil its vision to be the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform within the United Nations on food security and nutrition, to promote coordination, convergence, coherence, cooperation and accountability of policies on food security and nutrition towards the progressive realization of the right to adequate food.