

CSM draft messages to the Extraordinary Meeting of the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group 31 March 2020

"No volveremos a la normalidad porque la normalidad era el problema"

Standing up to the crisis

The CFS was reformed in 2009 to strengthen the coordinated global policy response capacity on food security and nutrition which was found wanting during the food price crisis in 2007/2008. It was a high-level and collective commitment of member states and actors attending this virtual meeting today. In this moment, almost 11 years later, we find ourselves in the midst of one of the most dramatic global crises of our times. It is subverting our livelihoods and horizons, urging us to make of this moment a turning point to ensure that from now on no-one is left behind.

All initial reports and analysis from communities, countries, research and UN centers, including from the HLPE, indicate that the current global health crisis has begun to generate or exacerbate critical situations in food systems at local, national and global levels.

This situation is likely to lead to a new, unprecedented global food crisis which will require a coordinated and effective global response, just as the global health crisis would desperately call for one.

CSM commends the CFS Chair for taking immediate and decisive steps to raise awareness about the impacts of Covid-19 on food security and nutrition, by convening the Virtual Meeting of the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group, commissioning the HLPE note and releasing his Statement.

The role of the CFS

Following these first reactions, it is now time for the CFS to **concentrate on what is most urgently needed** and has been at the core of its mandate since its reform: **to promote policy coordination, convergence and coherence in response to the huge challenges posed by this new global food crisis** to the right to adequate food of millions of people.

There is no other more inclusive intergovernmental and international platform in this world that can take on this task. The CFS has produced substantial policy guidance on many aspects of food security and nutrition over the past 10 years, approved by consensus by Member States following due consultation with all other participants. Now is the time to put them to use as effective responses to prevent, or at least mitigate and alleviate, the terrible effects of the upcoming food crisis on people at risk and the upsurge of hunger and malnutrition around the world.

No business as usual!

CFS cannot do business as usual. The Committee needs to shift its priorities to what is urgently needed today. The priority should now be that of **scaling-up the multilateral response to the crisis while slowing down the policy negotiations processes** originally planned for the next few months.

In this sense, the CFS should immediately **review its proceedings and schedule for 2020/21 and establish the urgent intergovernmental process required** to effectively address the challenge before all of us. Time is of the essence.

If anybody still believes we can replace the face-to-face CFS negotiations planned for May and July with virtual meetings and proceed as if nothing had happened, we need to be very clear: Our member organizations, communities, constituencies and, we believe, Member States and UN agencies as well will concentrate over the coming months on responding to the global health crisis and the related global food, financial and economic crises.

Our time and resources, as CFS members and participants, should be focused on the elaboration of a Global Policy Response to the new Food Crisis. This coordinated global policy response should be finalized and approved either by the upcoming CFS 47 Plenary session or at an extraordinary CFS Plenary Session. We suggest that the next CFS Bureau-Advisory Group meeting on 17 April should discuss the process and outline for this Global Policy Response. **CFS members and participants are already engaged in, monitoring, assessing and analyzing the latest developments, drivers and expressions of the food crisis and should be encouraged to step up these efforts and share the results.** The CFS Plenary 2020, to be held either in October 2020 or as an Extraordinary Plenary later in the year, **should adopt, as the main point in the agenda, the Global Policy Response** in presence of highest governmental representation from Member States. We have no time to lose.

Faced with the crisis the UNFSS necessarily moves to the back seat

The CSM understands that what is being referred to as a UN Food Systems Summit is an independent initiative of the UN Secretary General to raise political attention to the critical impact that the transformation of food systems may have on multiple dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including but not exclusively the challenges of hunger and malnutrition in all its forms. It will be **a political initiative of emblematic value, but with no direct normative implications** in terms of policies, programmes and institutions. The role of the CFS needs to be coherent with this understanding.

The SG's effort to place food systems as a cornerstone of the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development is certainly appreciated, although its modalities raise several concerns as explained in the collective letter of 550 Civil Society organizations submitted to the SG himself. But first and foremost, the world is confronted with a human crisis of horrific proportions, which once again will impose its heaviest tolls on the marginalized and most vulnerable.

The immediate evidence about how the crisis is unfolding exposes the multiple challenges generated by dependence on global value chains and the **centrality of local food systems in ensuring food security and solid resilience to external shocks.** Local food systems are **primarily based on the agency of small and medium-scale food producers** around the globe, and primarily small-scale in the developing world. This should be the fundamental premise and the hopeful prospect that **should guide the normative process among UN Member States to establish clear pathways towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable food systems.** To this end **the debate needs to be grounded in the human rights and policy frameworks** established by the past World Food Summits and the policy guidance **approved by Member Governments in the FAO and the CFS.** **The inclusive and democratic nature of its normative process constitutes the reason why this debate needs to take place within the CFS. This is now the priority.** The SG's initiative necessarily steps back to a second level of importance.

If and when the process towards the UN Food Systems Summit may be resumed, it will have to start from these normative foundations. The CFS policy deliberations could certainly contribute to informing the Summit and its preparations. But it will have to be clear that the Summit would be expected to reflect, share and amplify the democratic decisions taken by UN Members States in the institutions that are legitimately designated for such decision-making. **No normative outcomes, programmes and other initiatives should be generated in a forum such as the UNFSS.** Rather the emphasis should be on **generating the necessary high-level political attention for legitimately adopted decisions to be transformed into actions.**