



Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism
for relations with the UN Committee on World Food Security

Mecanismo de la Sociedad Civil y de los Pueblos Indígenas
para las relaciones con el Comité de Seguridad Alimentaria Mundial

Mécanisme de la Société Civile et des Peuples Autochtones
pour les relations avec le Comité des Nations Unies sur la sécurité alimentaire mondiale



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Civil society groups and Indigenous Peoples demand more ambitious CFS Policies on Agroecology

Rome, Italy. 6 December 2021 – Hundreds of organizations grouped under the umbrella of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) are criticising the lack of ambition of the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches which were recently approved by the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). After an internal and inclusive consultation process, CSM constituencies have concluded that the recommendations fail to guide the profound transformation that industrial food systems ought to urgently undergo if humanity is to avoid the worst consequences of the growing intertwined hunger, climate and health crises.

Despite efforts by the Rapporteur of the process to promote fairness and inclusion, the online modality of the negotiations and the time pressure to reach consensus led to inequitable outcomes, with discussions being cut off prematurely and inequalities in terms of participation not addressed adequately. Southern delegations, unlike those from the Global North, struggled to participate due to connectivity issues, lack of translation or scarce capacities. “We ended up having sessions without interpretation. This was a severe structural barrier that made it difficult for many CSM delegates and member states to participate,” wrote the CSM’s Agroecology Working Group in its collective assessment of the policy recommendations.

While containing references to instruments that call for protection of vulnerable communities and biodiversity – for example, the FAO’s 10 Elements of Agroecology and the 13 principles of agroecology of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) – the policy recommendations fall short in providing a normative framework that could and should effectively guide the urgently needed overhaul of industrial food systems. On the contrary, the policy recommendations seem to normalize *status quo* arrangements of power and resources in which the interests of a handful of powerful agri-food commodity players and dominant agricultural exporting countries are well protected, with small-scale food producers and low-income food-deficit countries left behind.

Among their most glaring shortcomings, the policy recommendations’ fail to recognize, prioritize and mainstream human rights. Key international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) do not shape the direction of the document, despite being essential to the lives and livelihoods of many social groups and communities struggling to survive and achieve economies of well-being. The resistance of some actors to include adequate reference to the realization of women’s rights – including CEDAW’s General Recommendation 34 on rural women’s rights – was deeply concerning. CSM finds it unacceptable that, in 2021, we still have to demand that recognition and affirmation of these rights be included in a UN document. The fact that they have only been included in the Preamble and not in the recommendations themselves weakens the normative force of the document.

Moreover, the policy recommendations undermine agroecology’s transformative potential. They put agroecology on an equal level with other so-called ‘innovative’ approaches that are at best unproven and at worst unsustainable, and which either preserve or deepen the inequality, exploitation, and power imbalances behind the current agri-food system. The document fails to recognise the social, economic and environmental impacts of the industrial agri-food system and goes as far as including recommendations that are antagonistic to agroecology and that ignore the ancestral knowledge of indigenous and peasant communities.

Agroecology is a way out of dependence on external inputs. The fact that the optimisation of pesticide use is part of the recommendations undermines not only CSM participants’ struggles to defend the health, livelihoods and survival of peasants, family farmers, Indigenous Peoples,



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agricultural workers and other small-scale food producers who have practised agroecology for centuries, but also contradicts existing United Nations agreements, policy frameworks and agreed guidelines on pesticide and chemical management. These guidelines on pesticides clearly prioritize first and foremost reduction in reliance on pesticides.

The CSM fears that the contradictions embodied by the policy recommendations are reflective of a deeper and more insidious trend in which United Nations spaces have been opened far too much to the corporate, industrial agriculture agenda which promotes a system of globalised, corporate-dominated trade, investment and finance that benefits the world's ten percent, but wreaks havoc on our planet and the majority of the world's people. Flagrant examples of this trend are the UN Food Systems Summit, whose agenda and follow-up are influenced by multistakeholder institutions grouping some of the world's most powerful transnational corporations and philanthropy groups; as well as FAO's strategic partnership agreement in 2020 with CropLife international, an organisation that represents the interests of the world's largest agrochemical groups such as Syngenta, Bayer-Monsanto and BASF.

In this context, the CFS is at a crossroads, as also witnessed during the negotiations of the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition. The CSM is now sounding the alarm bell and calling on Member States and other CFS participants to ensure that future policy processes better protect people and their rights, particularly those most affected by global inequalities, hunger and environmental crises, and give clear, unambiguous guidance towards healthy, equitable food systems.

In 2022, when the CFS will convene again to negotiate the Policy Recommendations on Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems and the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment, the CSM strongly demands that Member States embrace agroecology, human rights and the participation from civil society and Indigenous Peoples in a different, holistic and more careful and ambitious way.

Media contact:

Marion Girard | Communications officer | marion.girard.cisneros@csm4cfs.org

Resources:

- [CSM's Agroecology Working Group positioning vis-à-vis the Policy Recommendations](#) (2021)
- [CFS Policy Recommendations on agroecology and other innovative approaches](#) (2021)
- [Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition](#) (2019) A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security.
- ["Exposing the corporate capture of the UN Food Systems Summit through multistakeholderism"](#) (2021) FoodSystems4People - People's Autonomous Response to the UNFSS.