Coordinated policy response is needed to address the new layer of global food crisis raised by war in Ukraine

- Through a letter delivered to the Chair of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM) calls for an Extraordinary Plenary Session to address the new layer of global food crisis.

- The solutions proposed so far are insufficient and fall short of a real transformation to prevent future crises.

Rome, Italy. April 07 2022. The war in Ukraine is creating a new layer of global food crisis placed on top of existing crises stemming from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple conflicts and protracted crises, deep inequalities and climate change. For this reason, the Coordination Committee of the CSIPM requested an Extraordinary Plenary Session of the UN Committee on World Food Security, through an Open Letter addressed to its Chairperson Gabriel Ferrero, Ambassador at Large for Global Food Security of Spain.

This CFS Extraordinary Plenary Session should aim to address the accumulated crisis by bringing together the views and demands of all affected countries, communities and actors to build a coordinated global policy response.

In the letter, the CSIPM notes that the new layer particularly affects low and middle-income countries that are dependent on food imports. This is the case, for example, for Middle Eastern and North African countries, whose local production systems have been weakened over the last decades and are now heavily dependent on food imports, particularly wheat from Ukraine and Russia, making war and rising prices a major destabilizing factor.

Globally, food prices have been rising already for some time and this increase is not just the result of a shortage of food production, as some UN institutions, agro-exporting countries and agri-business corporations have claimed. On the contrary, it is mainly associated with a number of factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, power concentration in supply chains, rising energy prices, increasing social injustices and poverty, as well as climate disasters, exacerbated by the financialization of food and agriculture and speculation.

This increase has had devastating impacts on food price inflation and the right to food of marginalized communities, especially in low-income countries that rely heavily on food imports and agriculture, and in countries in protracted conflict that depend on humanitarian food aid.

Moreover, the current global agro-industrial food system is heavily dependent on fossil fuels. Food prices are directly linked to fossil fuel-based energy prices, for example, through increased costs of fertilizers and other inputs, transportation and increased agrofuel production.

Another facet to this unfolding crisis is the increasing feed-food competition. Russia and Ukraine are big exporters of maize but only approximately 12% of maize is consumed for food, while approximately 60% is destined for livestock feed. Immediate efforts towards responding to the feed crisis, such as allocating further land to increase the feed production, without questioning the deeply rooted and multiple problematics of the intensive livestock sector, will put even more pressure on the diversity of agricultural and food production and consumption that is most relevant to societies in different regions of the world.

Furthermore, there is an increased narrative that emphasizes the need for a more productivist approach to agriculture, rather than support for small scale family farmers. There are also increased State subsidies in many cases for fertilizers, rather than support for environmentally friendly approaches or agroecology. These aspects, together with the very high carbon footprint of the war are an increased threat to our planet and aggravating factors of the climate crisis.

https://www.investmentmonitor.ai/special-focus/ukraine-crisis/countries-exposed-ukrainian-food-exports
In this moment, we see many ingredients for a growing global food price crisis: the energy crisis, international and domestic speculation, rising production costs, and the concentration of power by only a handful of actors in cereal trade, fertilizer production and shipping transport that control international trade. Moreover, the existing regulations governing global markets are asymmetrical: they are more stringent for importers than they are for exporters since exporting countries can easily decide to tax or limit exports during a crisis.

The constituencies of the CSIPM highlight that this is not a production crisis to be addressed by agrobusiness-as-usual recipes. It is another layer of a systemic crisis that had already generated hunger and malnutrition before. The agro-industrial narrative, with its narrow focus on increased production at any cost, global value chains and short-term solutions, fails to address the structural and complex causes of intertwined crises, conflicts, inequalities and climate collapse.

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism makes an urgent call to redirect efforts towards a profound transformation of food systems with peasant agroecology, food sovereignty and human rights at its core. Many countries need to reorient their economic strategies away from dependency of global value chains to pursue real economic diversification strategies, with local food systems at the center.

This can only be conceived through strong and inclusive global food governance, with the CFS at the center, as the most inclusive intergovernmental platform for food security and nutrition.

Global discussions on policy responses to this new emergency need to fully include CSIPM’s voices as the most important actors for food security and nutrition: peasants and smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, pastoralists, food and agricultural workers, landless, fisherfolks, consumers, and urban food insecure.

“The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism stands ready to support the CFS in taking significant and decisive steps towards an immediate, sound, inclusive, effective, and globally coordinated policy response to the new layer of global food crisis, in line with its mandate to promote food security and nutrition, and the progressive realization of the human right to adequate food for all” says the Coordination Committee of the CSIPM.

Read the Open Letter to the Chair of the CFS

Resources
- CSIPM Advisory Group preliminary statement on the war in Ukraine
- CFS Chair Statement
- Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food statement

For further information please contact
Betsy Díaz  betsy.diaz.millan@csm4cfs.org
Giulia Simula  giulia.simula@csm4cfs.org