

Position of CONCORD - European Food Security Group on the Reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

1. Introduction

The current crisis of the food system is the product of decades of wrong policies, of neglect of agriculture and rural development, of faith that markets would suffice to guarantee the right to food of the world's population. The food crisis – interlinked with the financial, climatic and energy crises - has worsened the intolerable situation of the over one billion persons in the world who suffer from chronic hunger. At the same time, however, it has opened a window of opportunity by highlighting the urgency of deep changes in both the paradigms and the governance we adopt while seeking to attain food and nutrition security.

The European NGO members of Concord have been heartened by the steps towards more effective cooperation and coordination that have been taken by international institutions over the past months. Now the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) provides a decisive opportunity to set the global governance of food, agriculture and nutrition on a firm basis. As we move toward the final negotiations of the reform in the coming session of the CFS in Rome on 14-17 October the position of the European Union is crucial since its stance thus far has been generally supportive of the effort to transform the CFS into a strong and authoritative global policy forum.

2. Basic principles underlying EFSG/Concord's vision for a global policy forum on food and nutrition security

Establishing an authoritative, democratic and legitimate system of global governance, in our view, requires attention to the following elements:

- ***Support national policy space and action plans and build from the local to the global level***
Effective national policies and programmes formulated with the participation of stakeholders are the foundation of food and nutrition security. Global decision making on food systems has to be rooted in local realities. The responsibility of national governments and regional bodies to take decisions which defend the right to food of their citizens and the health of their environments and economies has to be recognized, respecting the principle of subsidiarity.
- ***Locate the global forum in the UN system***
All countries of the world are represented in the UN system and the rule of "one country-one vote" prevails. This is not the case in the other multilateral institutions or groups which have occupied policy space over the past decades. Within the UN system, the Rome-based food agencies are the legitimate foundation for an authoritative, democratic and legitimate global forum.
- ***Base decision-making on the right to food and take a holistic approach to addressing hunger***

In the absence of an effective dedicated global policy forum and rules, policy decisions affecting food and nutrition security have been taken, by default, by organizations such as the WTO in function of its mission of promoting trade liberalization. The new global forum needs to place the right to food and the food and nutrition security of the world's citizens at the center of its mission and vision and to take a holistic approach in pursuing this goal.

- **Promote the accountability of governments, multilateral institutions and other actors**
The gap between the rhetoric of global declarations and the reality of actions – or failure to act – has characterized the past decades. The new global policy forum has to be empowered to develop a global strategic framework for attaining food and nutrition security, against which the actions of governments and other actors will be measured.
- **Ensure effective participation by social actors**
The voices of civil society actors in policy dialogue regarding food systems have been muted up to now. It is essential that CSOs be empowered to autonomously organize their effective participation in policy dialogue and negotiation at all levels, from the national up to the global. Particular space has to be given to organizations representing those sectors of society most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition, including small food producers and poor urban consumers without whose convinced engagement no policy decisions can be effectively implemented.

3. Specific Comments on the EU's positions on the CFS Reform proposal¹

I. Context

Para. 3:

- The important role of guidance to countries in the implementation of the right to food and food and nutrition security strategies is already being carried out in the context of the present CFS. It would be preferable not to postpone it to a second phase in the renewed CFS as proposed by the EU.
- No need to add another “gradually” to the last sentence as proposed by the EU, since it already starts off with this adverb. Also, the “topic by topic” approach to graduality proposed by the EU is not necessarily the most effective. It could be better to start with a first overall view and then progressively analyse in greater depth the various components.

II. Vision and Role

Para. 4:

- Delete bracketed reference to Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security in the first sentence. It is not appropriate to describe the CFS - a UN system intergovernmental body- as an “element” of a mechanism whose contours, mission, membership and governance are not yet clear. Replace with following sentence at end of para.: *The CFS will seek to work in close communication with the proposed Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security as this mechanism takes shape.*
- Prefer the term “body” to “platform” in first sentence since a “platform” cannot assume the authoritative mandate of fighting against hunger and malnutrition which we feel the CFS should have.

Para.6:

¹ These comments refer to the EU comments on draft 3 posted on the CFS Contact Group web page and to the final draft of the CFS reform (CFS:2009/2)

- The existing title of this para. should be maintained, contrary to the proposal contained in the EU posted comments. CSOs feel strongly that the roles cited in points i, ii, iii of para. 6 are essential ones if the renewed CFS is to be an authoritative and effective global policy body. That the CFS will assume them in phase II should not be open to further discussion. What these roles entail and how to implement them does need to be further discussed.

[The text of the sub paras. of the key para. 6 have been substantially redrafted in draft 4 and the other posted EU comments are no longer valid.]

III. Composition, modalities of participation, and consultation/coordination mechanisms

Para. 15:

- This para. has been redrafted in CFS:2009/2. It no longer cites the specific proportions or numbers which the EU questioned but indicates that the quota assigned to CSOs/NGOs will be such as to ensure their visible and effective participation and that it will be determined in consultation with the autonomous CSO/NGO consultation mechanism. It is important to seek EU support for this new wording.

Para. 16:

- CSOs/NGOs do not agree with the wording proposed in the posted EU comments. Para. 16 as presently worded in CFS:2009/2 is a consensus proposal of the CSOs/NGOs participating in the Contact Group and does not condition how the CSOs/NGOs will organize themselves. The more complete text now figuring in para. 16 makes it clear that CSOs/NGOs are not concerned only with deciding on their representation, as suggested in the EU text, but also in ongoing communication, diffusion of information and caucusing.

IV. Mechanisms and procedures

Para. 32:

- The same principle of a quota ensuring visible and effective participation of civil society which applies to CSO/NGO participation in the CFS Plenary (para. 15) should also apply to the Advisory Group. EU support for this should be sought.

V. Implementation Arrangements

Para. 50:

- Add at the end of the last sentence "and should be estimated in the preliminary budget and modalities of funding with the assistance of the CSO/NGO coordination mechanism".

Para. 51:

- Task 7: Change deadline for establishment of Advisory Group to November 2009. It is important for the Advisory Group to work alongside of the Bureau from the outset.
- Task 12: The objective should be for the Bureau to prepare an overall proposal for the implementation on phase II in October 2010.

7 October 2009

CONCORD is the European confederation of relief and development NGOs. Its national associations and international networks represent over 1 600 NGOs which are supported by millions of citizens across Europe. CONCORD leads reflection and political actions and regularly engages in dialogue with the European institutions and other civil society organisations. CONCORD is part of the 'Global Call to Action against Poverty'.
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