

Special Event
Food security and genetic diversity

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Food security and nutrition in a multi-stakeholder framework
Gerda Verburg, Chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

(Speaking points)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thanks for organizing this special event on such a crucial topic and for inviting me, as Chair of the Committee on World Food Security.

1- CFS

- In CFS, we work on a lot of topics, which have an incidence on Food Security and Nutrition: price volatility, land tenure, climate change, social protection, biofuels, food losses and waste, innovation, responsible investments, fisheries, forestry, sustainable development of agriculture, etc.

- One of our core goals in CFS is precisely to identify the key issues which matter for food security and nutrition. Understand and overcome their root causes, what prevents the implementation of solutions, what prevents stakeholders from working individually and together in the good direction.

- Acting for food security and nutrition requires the involvement of many actors. Not only governments and specialized international organizations, but also the private sector and civil society. They all have a role to play. But they also all have their specific points of view, their own vision, interests, logic.

- Identifying challenges involves many knowledge-holders. This brings two issues: the first is that there is a need to assemble and organize, comprehensively, knowledge from various different sources, disciplines, methods of works, etc. The second issue is that we cannot be blind to the fact that many knowledge holders are also stakeholders: they are interested and have a stake in the follow-up actions.

Therefore a fundamental turn, which CFS took in 2009, was to put two principles, - I would say the two pillars-, of inclusiveness and evidence-base as bottom line of all CFS works and decisions. And to give flesh to inclusiveness and evidence base in innovative ways.

This is why we have created the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, a dedicated and scientifically inclusive knowledge-policy interface working for us.

Grounding our multi-stakeholder work on inclusiveness is key to confront the points of views, and also the challenges encountered by many actors, many populations, especially the most vulnerable, affected by food insecurity, including smallholders, indigenous people and women, who often have difficulties to make their voices heard.

2) Genetic resources in the work CFS

CFS has not (yet?) tackled genetic resources and FSN as a specific topic in its program of work. However, throughout the many areas of work of CFS to address the multiple causes of hunger and malnutrition, there are many considerations of how genetic resources are important for FSN, and what to do about it. Let me give a few examples.

First example: Vulnerability, risks and resilience is a major area of work in CFS. Risks and vulnerabilities, whatever the nature, are a major cause of food insecurity and malnutrition. Resilient food systems are a condition for food security and nutrition. Key to the resilience of food systems, is how climate change will be addressed.

In 2012, CFS discussed Food security and climate change, and CFS adopted a series of recommendations, some of which invited all stakeholders, and especially member states “to create conditions to facilitate access to genetic resources for food and agriculture and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from their use for example by:

- recognizing the importance of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and of the Nagoya Protocol adopted by the 10th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD);
- inviting the FAO Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture to continue and strengthen its work on climate change and genetic resources including conservation and use of genetic resources for adaptation to climate change.

CFS recognized the relevance of the work of the Commission on GR for F&A, notably to give farmers the means to adapt to climate change. In regions which will be particularly impacted, in Africa or Asia for example, farmers will need the very best seed, also new varieties, with a high germination rate, resistant to drought, heat, fungi, pests or whatever adverse conditions they will face locally. Breeders will also need animals able to resist new threats such as extreme climate variability or diseases.

A second example is the work of CFS on investing in Smallholders agriculture, in 2013.

Discussing how important and critical SH farming was for the world's FSN, CFS noted the contribution farmers' and breeders' make to conserving and developing plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. In line with this, CFS pointed to the importance of promoting SH access to assets, including genetic resources. It recommended all stakeholders to promote smallholders'- particularly women farmers'- ability to access, breed, produce, conserve, purchase, exchange, sell and use the seeds they need, including local, indigenous and modern varieties. Strengthen information and knowledge sharing related to practical on-farm implementation and foster local innovation. CFS recommended stakeholders to support in situ and ex situ conservation and development of agricultural biodiversity by smallholders together with research and extension systems, in line with sustainable agricultural development and good practices, including through agro-ecological approaches and sustainable intensification.

CFS further recommended that access to public goods, research and extension technology be promoted, notably by prioritizing public investment and encouraging private investment,

specifically in support of smallholders' own investments, in, among others (...) sustainable management of genetic resources for food and agriculture.

Third and last example, last year, in 2014, CFS adopted the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI Principles), and two principles, 6 (Especially 6.2), and 7 (Especially 7.2 and 7.3) make explicit reference to genetic resources.

Principle 6 : Responsible investment in agriculture and food systems conserves and sustainably manages natural resources, increase resilience, and reduce disaster risks by: Supporting and conserving biodiversity and genetic resources, including local genetic resources (...)

Principle 7: Responsible investment in agriculture and food systems respects cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, and supports diversity, including genetic diversity, and innovation by

- Recognizing the contributions of farmers, especially smallholders in all regions of the world, particularly those in centres of origin and diversity, in conserving, improving, and making available genetic resources, including seeds (...)

- Promoting fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization, including commercial, of genetic resources for food and agriculture, on mutually agreed terms, in accordance with international treaties, where applicable for parties to such treaties. This should be done within applicable systems of access to genetic resources for food and agriculture (...)

3) So what is the way forward?

As you see, there is a convergence of concerns, and a great interest of CFS in the work of the Commission.

This is also why as CFS Chair I am especially eager to follow your work, at your 15th regular session this year, on Genetic resources and climate change, and on biodiversity and nutrition. I am eager to hear more on the contribution of genetic resources for nutrition.

I also hope that, conversely, members of the Commission will contribute to future works of CFS. This year, we will discuss water and food security: appropriate genetic resources and varieties are key to resist salt, drought, floods, and also to sustain more efficient and productive and resilient rain fed systems. The Report will be launched in May, and next October, CFS will discuss and adopt policy recommendations for all stakeholders on what can and should be done.

In June, CFS is also organizing a High Level Forum on Smallholders' access to markets, where access to varied genetic resources, seed and semen, will be one very important point on the discussion agenda.

The debate over plant and animal genetic resources is polarized; too polarized. It is driven by political agendas, strong ideological convictions, researchers, huge economic interests of some specific private sector companies, legal traps and of course questions about sustainability.

It is also framed by a number of international treaties: on breeders' rights, UPOV (International Union for the Protection of new varieties of plants), and treating dealing with intellectual property.

In the interest of people, the planet, and prosperity, it is important to include all stakeholders in the dialogue. Bring all stakeholders around the table, identify the problems, invest in trust and start to think, discuss -and if necessary negotiate- about possible solutions.

As Chair of CFS, I am well positioned to know how time consuming this is. At the same time we all know that a prosperous future for the next generations can only be built upon inclusiveness, trust and responsibility. I wish you a fruitful and future oriented outcome of this meeting, that not only opens doors for the next generations of farmers for a more prosperous future, but also for the 805 million people who still suffer for hunger and malnutrition.