

Guidelines for ensuring balanced representation of Civil Society in FAO meetings and processes

This note is meant to serve as a guide on how to ensure balance representation of Civil Society organizations in FAO activities or processes.

Balanced representativeness of Civil society has four main components that need to be ensured and look at, these are: constituencies, geography, gender and groups. By ensuring that these four components are taken into account during relevant discussions, FAO will ensure that whether from meetings or processes, the results are truly representative of the relevant groups making up a society.

Each component addresses a specific aspect of representativeness: constituencies, ensure that the different voices are listened to with equal weight; geography, allows for those inhabitants in remote areas to be included in relevant discussions affecting their lives; gender, to avoid women being left out or miss represented; and groups, since it is not the same to involve social movements, NGOs or member based organizations.

FAO has a double role to play with respect to representativeness. The first one is to ensure that at FAO conveyed meetings or driven processes, these four components are taken into account. The second one is to facilitate in front of the Governments and other organizations that these components are followed at relevant discussions and processes.

Constituencies: Participants from Civil society must be chosen so as to have balanced representation from across 12 different constituencies that have been identified as per the main groups of FAO beneficiaries. These 12 constituencies ensure that the diverging interests, voices and concerns of society are included. These are: Small farmers, landless, agricultural workers, fishers and fish workers, pastoralists and herders, forest dwellers, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, urban poor, consumers, NGOs, women and youth.

To ensure that this component has been taken into account successfully, at least 75% of the abovementioned 12 should be represented by at least one organization during activities/processes at all levels (national, regional and global).

Geography: Equal participation of organizations must be ensured from each of the regions, sub-regions, and/or national provinces/districts, as appropriate. Balanced geographical representation of organizations must be ensured if the meeting or process is to be labelled as “National” or “Regional”. As in the case of the constituencies, the minimum number of provinces or districts to be present at a national discussion needs to be of 75% of the total. In the case of regional, 75% of the countries in the region.

In general, 75% of geographical areas, as determined by the type of event/process, should be represented by at least one civil society organization.

Groups: There should also be a balance in the types of organizations represented, taking into account that NGOs are themselves considered a constituency and therefore should be equally balanced with other types of CSOs, such as social movements and other member-based organizations. While it is difficult to establish a minimum threshold in this case, it is important to consider that at least NGOs, social movements and Member based organization are invited to take part in the discussions.

Gender and Age, To ensure gender and age balance, ideally 50% of the representatives from civil Society should be women, and at least 1/3 youth.

FAO funding, FAO is not a funding institution. Whenever possible, FAO encourages civil society organizations to obtain their own funding from donors and resource partners. However, in cases where FAO is funding civil society participation, there are a number of minimum considerations that should be taken into account. Funding from FAO should be limited to one participant per organization. If multiple representatives from the same organization want to participate, they must find alternative sources of funding. Multiple participants from one organization may attend a meeting or process, provided that there is enough space for other relevant organizations and ensuring that only one of their representatives is allowed to speak per discussion point. Otherwise, discussions get captured by stronger groups and more vulnerable organizations get marginalized within the discussions

Priority in funding must be given to producer organizations, peoples' organizations, social movements and civil society networks and member based organizations, especially those representing small-scale farmers, fishers, artisans, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, landless, rural workers, consumers, women and youth. Normally, INGOs and strong national NGOs have enough resources to be able to support their own travel, therefore priority should be given to those without proper resources.

INGOs with formal status with FAO who desire to participate in discussions and processes are not eligible for financial support from FAO, and must fund their expenses independently.

INGOs (in the case of regional or international activities) or strong national NGOs with larger financial resources should consider assisting FAO in providing financial support to those smaller CSOs and social movements who do not have the financial capacity.