



Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations

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1. What is FAO's mandate?

Achieving food security for all is at the heart of FAO's efforts - to make sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active and healthy lives.

FAO's mandate is to raise levels of nutrition, improve agricultural productivity, better the lives of rural populations and contribute to the growth of the world economy.

FAO's new Strategic Framework identifies a set of five new cross-cutting Strategic Objectives, closely aligned with the most relevant and urgent development problems faced by member countries and the development community:

1. Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.
2. Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner.
3. Reduce rural poverty.
4. Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels.
5. Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

2. What is the Partnerships Unit (OPCP)?

The Partnerships Unit (OPCP) of the Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development (OPC), is responsible for developing and strengthening partnerships with non-state actors, including CSOs, producers' organizations, cooperatives, private sector entities and academic and research institutions.

OPCP's efforts focus on four areas of work:

1. Provision of strategic advice to influence policy change, improve governance mechanisms, and facilitate transparent and participatory processes at all levels (global, regional and national);
2. Identification, promotion and sustainability of strategic partnerships;
3. Development of tools and mechanisms for the establishment of sustainable partnerships;
4. Monitoring & Evaluation of Partnerships.

3. What is the Civil Society Partnerships Team?

The CSO Partnerships Team serves within FAO's Partnerships Branch (OPCP). It is responsible for promoting FAO's partnerships with CSOs. Its main activities include awareness-raising and training for FAO staff for the establishment of partnerships with CSOs, capacity building and training to CSOs, liaison functions with CSOs at all levels, support to civil society organizations, networks and platforms in a number of areas of work of the Organization (see FAQ n.7 below) and their participation in key FAO meetings, governing bodies and technical committees.



4. What does FAO mean by “Civil Society”?

In 1998, the UN defined civil society as: “the sphere in which social movements organize themselves around objectives, constituencies, and thematic interests.” Civil society is a broad category which encompasses a wide variety of organizations, which, although different, often share certain common goals, resources and/or approaches to maximize their decision-making capacity, advocacy and knowledge.

FAO considers civil society organizations (CSOs) as the non-state actors that fit within three main categories:

- Member-based organizations (MBOs);
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- Social movements (SMs) that work in areas related to FAO’s mandate.

Due to their varied nature, categorizing CSOs into distinct groups is a challenge and overlap is likely to exist. Further info on these categories can be found in the corporate [Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations](#).

5. Why does FAO need to partner with Civil Society?

FAO has a long history of collaboration with Civil Society Organizations at the local, regional and global levels.

FAO is committed to involving stakeholders at all levels, to ensure that they have a voice in global governance structures and are actively engaged in policy implementation at the field level. FAO recognizes that civil society plays a crucial role in the fight against hunger. In doing so, FAO appeals to the technical expertise and support of CSOs on a variety of issues related to food security.

The **benefits for FAO** in strengthening collaboration with CSOs include among others:

- Inclusion in relevant processes of isolated and vulnerable groups.
- Better representation in debates and discussions.
- Increased advocacy and mobilization capacity.
- Complementary outreach and capacity for field activities, including improved emergency response.
- Enhanced ownership of endorsed policies/strategies.
- Access to resources (human, physical, knowledge).



6. Which is the framework under which FAO establishes partnerships with CSOs?

The [FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations](#), approved by FAO Member States in April 2013 during the 146th session of the Council, acknowledges the different key contributions that social movements, non-governmental organizations and member based organizations make toward the elimination of poverty and food insecurity, while providing FAO staff with practical guidance on how to develop partnerships with civil society organizations.

The strategy also lays out the general principles, objectives and a set of complementary tools to guide the direction of FAO's collaboration with civil society in their joint efforts to eradicate hunger and food insecurity at global, regional and national levels.

The Strategy is the result of extensive consultation with FAO staff, CSOs and Member States, and builds upon the foundations established by other FAO main corporate work carried out in recent years (IEE, IPA, Organization-wide Strategy on Partnerships, and the Reviewed Strategic Framework).

Along with its complementary tools, it provides guidance to FAO staff on how to work with CSOs towards the eradication of hunger.

7. In which areas does FAO work with Civil Society?

1. Field programme

FAO, in coordination with Member States, will promote dialogue and partnerships with civil society at a field level to design, implement and monitor quality and sustainable local initiatives, programmes, projects and emergency responses to strengthen local capacities and project outreach in a more cost-effective manner.

FAO acknowledges the need to ensure accountability to affected populations. By being more accountable to affected populations – increasing their participation and feedback in programme identification, design, delivery and lesson learning – FAO achieves programmes of higher quality, with greater and more sustainable impact. It increases the space for communities to shape their own recovery and for FAO to better deliver against its commitments to stakeholders, including the people FAO assists and the resource partners who make assistance possible.

Knowledge sharing and capacity development FAO is in a unique position to promote and facilitate the flow of global knowledge on agriculture and nutrition issues and make it accessible to all sectors of society. However, **FAO will also capitalize on the detailed knowledge CSOs have from the grassroots level and regional contexts**, which will greatly complement the stock of knowledge and technical expertise that FAO promotes. **This exchange will allow FAO to better respond to local contexts and needs** (e.g. the Gambia Forestry Department worked with FAO and local civil society institutions, such as the National Consultancy on Forestry Extension Services and Training, to institutionalize a step-by-step participatory enterprise development tool that supports the sustainability of transfer of forest resources to the communities).



2. Policy dialogue

FAO may establish fora for policy dialogue or, when requested, support Member States in creating policy dialogue fora on issues related to food security and nutrition. These fora could be multistakeholder discussions including CSOs in the dialogue together with Member States and decision-makers, thus increasing ownership, accountability and sustainability of policy adoption and implementation (e.g. providing inputs to FAO Regional Conferences, post Rio+20)

3. Joint use of resources in emergency situations

Large international and national NGOs, foundations and academic institutions have considerable stocks of human and financial capital, supplies, assets and capacity development strengths. Some of these entities are specifically mandated and funded to provide support to UN agencies with a range of services. In turn, grassroots CSOs will have numerous contacts, not only at grassroots level, but also with large formal and informal social networks and platforms.

FAO will increase cooperation with some organizations to jointly mobilize and use the wide human, physical and financial resources available, increase the scale and focus of FAO's technical support, improve the coordination capacity of all stakeholders and ensure improved accountability to affected populations (e.g. humanitarian organizations have stand-by partner agreements with FAO through which staff, equipment and supplies can be made available for FAO's deployment missions when responding to crises). The Emergency and Rehabilitation Division (TCE) will collaborate together with OPC in these interventions.

4. Normative activities

FAO supports the involvement of CSOs along with Member States, research institutions and other interested stakeholders in the implementation of codes of conduct, global conventions and regulatory frameworks in areas related to FAO's mandate (e.g. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of food security).

5. Advocacy and communication

FAO and civil society partners will jointly raise public awareness and build strong support and political will in the fight against poverty and food insecurity. They will benefit from each other's extensive experience, networks and outreach. Together, they can reach grassroots audiences, raise issues to key decision-makers and inform public opinion (any joint advocacy initiative will abide by UN principles).

8. What are the benefits for CSOs when partnering with FAO?

The benefits for CSOs in strengthening collaboration with FAO include among others:

- Access to a neutral forum for discussions vis-à-vis private sector, Member States and other stakeholders.



- Access to information, capacity building, technical knowledge and expertise on key food security areas.
- Possibility of suggesting items for discussion in the agendas of FAO meetings.
- FAO can facilitate discussion and the exchange of views between CSOs and Member States at all levels.

9. Can CSOs obtain funding from FAO and how?

FAO does not normally fund proposals. However, FAO Headquarters might consider funding proposals ONLY if formally endorsed by the FAO Country/Regional Office to which the CSO belongs. For project proposals that are national/regional in scope, we suggest contacting the relevant FAO Country/Regional Office which is best placed to evaluate and analyze the initiative and channel the request if and as appropriate.

The contact details of all FAO offices worldwide are available on the [FAO Website](#)

10. Who should be approached to discuss the possibility of a partnership with FAO?

CSOs interested in developing partnerships with FAO can contact FAO offices at the country, sub-regional or regional levels, relevant technical divisions and the FAO's partnership unit in Rome. They should clearly explain which kind of collaboration they have in mind, what it would entail and what are their expectations with respect to the role that FAO could play.

NGOs and other civil society organizations and platforms concerned proposing collaboration with FAO at local or national level are very welcome to approach our Organization through our Country Representations, as FAO is not able to address this kind of requests at Headquarters.

This also reflects FAO's eagerness to foster local and grassroots alliances and collaborations with Civil Society establishing the foundations for a collaborative work in the fight against hunger and food insecurity, acknowledging the diversity of local realities and the need for adaptability of programmes and projects to local contexts.

For the list of our offices around the world visit [this link](#).

11. Which are FAO's governing bodies?

FAO governing bodies are those that which directly or indirectly contribute to:

- Definition of the overall policies and regulatory frameworks of the Organization
- Establishment of the Strategic Framework, the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme of Work and Budget.
- Oversight of the Organization management



FAO's governing bodies include:

- [Conference](#)
- [Council](#)
- [Programme Committee \(PC\)](#)
- [Finance Committee \(FC\)](#)
- [Committee on Constitutional and Legal Matters \(CCLM\)](#)
- [Committee on Commodity Problems \(CCP\)](#)
- [Committee on Fisheries \(COFI\)](#)
- [Committee on Forestry \(COFO\)](#)
- [Committee on Agriculture \(COAG\)](#)
- [Committee on World Food Security \(CFS\)](#)
- [Regional Conferences](#)

12. What is the Committee on World Food Security (CFS)?

The CFS was established in 1974 as an intergovernmental body to serve as a forum in the United Nations System for review and follow-up of policies concerning world food security including production and physical and economic access to food.

In 2008, member states agreed to reform the CFS in order to focus on the key challenges of eradicating hunger. The reform started in 2009: participation to the works of the committee was expanded to ensure that all relevant stakeholders' voices are heard. The rules and procedures of the committee were reviewed for it to become the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform dealing with food security and nutrition. A High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) was created to base decision making on scientific evidence and state-of-the-art knowledge.

The CFS is run through a Secretariat, currently hosted by FAO in Rome which comprises all Rome-based UN agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Further information on the CFS, its structure, governance, rules and procedures, can be found on the [CFS Website](#).

The CFS Structure

The reformed CFS has a structure conceived to allow input from all relevant stakeholders. It is comprised of a Bureau, Advisory Group, Plenary, a High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) and the Secretariat.

13. What is the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) of the CFS?

During the 2010 Civil Society consultation, just prior to the 36th Session of the CFS, a draft proposal for an International Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism for Relations with the CFS (CSM) was presented and discussed. It was subsequently endorsed on the basis that an evaluation would be conducted after one year of operation and amendments made if/as necessary. The consultation also



served as the starting point to move forward processes and plans to appoint focal points to the Coordination Committee – the governing body of the CSM.

Through the end of 2010 and up until mid-2011, consultations, nominations and selections of representatives took place among almost all of the 11 constituencies and 17 sub-regions.

The essential role of the CSM is to facilitate civil society participation in agriculture, food security and nutrition policy development at national, regional and global levels within the framework of the CFS.

The CSM is reaching out to hundreds of CSOs in all continents, sharing information with them on global policy debates and processes, promoting civil society consultations and dialogue, supporting national and regional advocacy and facilitating the participation of a diverse range of CSOs at the global level, in the context of the CFS.

At the global level, the CSM aims to support CSOs to influence policy processes and outcomes by facilitating civil society participation in CFS Plenary Sessions, Open Ended Working Groups, Task Teams, the CFS Advisory Group and other CFS mechanisms.

At regional and national level, the CSM seeks to enable CSOs to influence policy processes by facilitating civil society participation in regional inter-governmental events and processes if related to CFS matters (e.g. FAO regional conferences), and facilitating their participation in national multi-stakeholder food security governance structures and processes.

The CSM facilitates the broad and regular exchange of information, analysis and experience between CSOs from around the world. It also enables the development of common CSO positions where possible and helps communicate divergent positions where there is no consensus. These functions are performed through the facilitation of face to face and virtual meetings, trainings, consultations (held prior to CFS annual meetings and regional conferences), preparation of reports and papers, the CSM website, CSM working groups and an annual CSM Forum.

The work of the CSM members is facilitated by its Coordination Committee (CC) and Secretariat.

Further information on the CSM, its structure, governance and way of working can be found on the [CSM Website](#)

14. Which tools formalize agreements between FAO and CSOs?

It should be stressed that a formal agreement is by no means a prerequisite to establish and maintain fruitful and productive partnerships and collaborations. However, there are circumstances in which agreements in writing are sometimes needed and sometimes very useful for a number of reasons.

These are the main administrative tools and procedures FAO has developed to collaborate with CSOs:



1. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)

MoUs can be developed by FAO in order to establish a framework for collaboration of significant importance with CSOs. They are normally developed to formalize collaborations at the global level.

2. Exchange of Letters

If collaboration is limited to a reduced period of time, or if its scope is more limited and does not entail any financial commitments, a more informal exchange of letters may be an appropriate tool. An exchange of letters can be used, for example, to carry out a joint assessment or to coordinate actions while implementing field activities. The process of approval is similar to that of MoUs.

3. Letters of Agreement (LoAs)

Letters of Agreement (LoAs) may constitute a useful administrative tool for contracting services from CSOs. The scope of LoAs is generally limited to contracting services from non-commercial entities (e.g. organizing a meeting in regional, subregional or national offices; implementing a transboundary animal disease surveillance programme with local NGOs, etc.).

LoAs entail a transfer of resources from FAO to a registered non-profit organization in exchange for pre-defined services and are governed by Section 507 of FAO Administrative Manual under the overall responsibility of the Procurement Service (CSAP) and technical units.

15. What does “formal status” mean?

International Non-governmental organizations that are granted formal status by FAO (as per the FAO Policy concerning relations with INGOs - Basic Texts, Volume II, section M) can attend and participate in FAO Governing Bodies and Technical Committees as observers. Their presence is important to ensure the overall governance of FAO in terms of transparency and for building relations between FAO member countries and Civil Society.

According to FAO's Basic Texts, formal relations can be established in three different ways:

Consultative Status

Applying to organizations concerned with matters covering a substantial part of FAO's field of activity.

Specialized Consultative Status

Applying to organizations concerned with matters covering a particular part of FAO's field of activity.

Liaison Status

Applying to organizations concerned with matters covering a part of FAO's field of activity and in a position to give practical assistance in that field.

The table below summarizes the privileges granted to INGOs holding formal relations with FAO:



Status	Eligibility	Procedure for formal relations	Status	Right of speech in FAO forums	Right to present written views and/or written statements
1. Consultative status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – International in structure and scope of activities – Purposes in conformity with FAO's mandate (Basic Texts/P: FAO Policy Concerning Relations with INGOs 6) 	Approval by Conference (Basic Texts/P. 10)	Observer in Conference and Council (Basic Texts/General Rules of the Organization/B XVII.3 and Basic Texts/P. 19a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – May speak in committees without vote – May participate in discussions upon request of Chairman – May speak before Conference with the consent of the General Committee (Basic Texts/B XVII.3 and Basic Texts/P. 21a) – May be invited in experts meetings, conferences and seminars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – May circulate to the Conference views in writing (Basic Texts/B XVII.3 and Basic Texts/P. 19a) – May submit views in writing to technical meetings (Basic Texts P. 19b) – May submit written statements on programme matters to Council through the Director-General (Basic Texts/P. 19d)
2. Specialized consultative status	Do (Basic Texts/P. 7)	To be granted by the Director-General with reporting to the Council (Basic Texts/P. 12)	Observer in technical meetings and with approval by Conference and Council (Basic Texts/B XVII.4 and Basic Texts/P. 21a and b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – May cooperate fully with FAO both globally and at field level – May be invited in experts meetings, conferences and seminars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Submit memoranda on FAO programme to FAO – May submit views in writing to technical meetings – May submit written statements on programme matters to Council through the Director-General (Basic Texts/P. 21a, b and d)
3. Liaison status	Do (Basic Texts/P. 8)	To be granted by the Director-General with reporting to the Council (Basic Texts/P. 15)	Observer in specialized meetings, and with judgment of Director-General in Conference and Council (Basic Texts B. XVII.4 and Basic Texts/P. 24 and 25)	Level of cooperation to be determined by exchange of letters and special agreements.	



16. Which is the procedure to obtain formal status with FAO?

First of all, it is important to clarify that FAO neither requires formal status nor recognition as observers for Non-Governmental Organizations to collaborate in its activities and technical consultations. Indeed, most NGOs/CSOs working with FAO do not have such status. However, if an organization is interested in pursuing a request for the establishment of formal relations with FAO, the following basic requirements should be noted.

The [Basic Texts](#) of FAO (Volume II, Section M) define general **criteria of eligibility** as follows:

1. be international in structure and scope of activityⁱ, and be sufficiently representative of the field of interest in which the NGO operates;
2. be concerned with matters covering a portion of FAO's field of activity, and be in a position to give practical assistance in that field;
3. have aims and purposes in conformity with the general principles embodied in the Constitution of FAO;
4. have a permanent directing body, authorized representatives and systematic procedures and machinery for communicating with its membership in various countries.

Clearly, the organization must be legally recognized in a country, and be able to provide the attendant legal documentation on its constitution, mandate, by laws, etc.

Before establishing formal relations with an International Non-Governmental Organization, it is requested that cooperation at the technical level be conducted during an extended period (which normally is interpreted as at least 2 years). Such cooperation has to be conducted with relevant technical unit(s) and/or field offices of the Organization.

Only after cooperation has been established and conducted (with or without a Memorandum of Understanding, which is not an obligatory step), does the issue of formal relations arise. Any request for the establishment of formal relations shall be forwarded to OPCP that coordinates required internal procedures. Technical units with which the NGO has been cooperating have to substantiate the request.

If the NGO meets the above-mentioned criteria, we kindly ask them to fill a questionnaire and return it to OPCP with any additional information that may help FAO to appraise their request. The request, along with the questionnaire, should be submitted through the dedicated [page](#) on our web portal.

ⁱ The interpretation of the term “international” (as per point 1) is provided as follows:

- the NGO must be international, with members on its governing body from at least three countries
- its activities must be international, operating in more than three (3) countries
- it must have two years of working relations with FAO already when making the request for formal status