

December 2010



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y la
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THIRTIETH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Khartoum, the Republic of the Sudan, 4-8 December 2010

**THE ROLE OF FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCES IN THE
REFORMED COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY (CFS)**

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I. RATIONALE FOR AND PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

1. During 2009, ways to make the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) a more effective body to combat food insecurity and malnutrition were agreed to and widely supported. The new CFS offers opportunities for a wider range of national and regional stakeholders to play a more prominent role in combating hunger and food insecurity. By virtue of their prominence within regions and their anticipated enhanced governance role as provided for in the Immediate Plan of Action (IPA) for FAO renewal, it is considered opportune for FAO Regional Conferences (RCs) to consider how they could contribute more effectively to national, regional and global food security and its governance, and to identify priority areas for action, within the framework of the reformed CFS.

2. The purpose of this document is to assist RC participants to address this important issue which has been included as discussion item in the provisional agendas of all RCs. The document briefly outlines the main features of the reformed CFS and suggests possible roles that FAO RCs could play in order to maximize benefits to countries in the region.

II. REASONS FOR REFORMING THE COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY

3. Faced with rapidly rising hunger and weak synergy and coordination in the governance of world food security, Member Nations of the CFS agreed to embark on a profound reform of the Committee to strengthen it considerably so that it can fully play its vital role especially to coordinate expertise and action in the fight against hunger and food and nutrition insecurity.

4. Wide-ranging reforms of the CFS were agreed to unanimously by its members at its 35th session in October 2009 and subsequently approved in November 2009 by the 36th session of the FAO Conference. In addition, the reforms were endorsed by the Heads of State and Governments in November 2009 at the World Summit on Food Security who committed to “fully implement the reform of the CFS” as one of the four strategic goals of the Summit.

III. KEY FEATURES OF THE REFORM¹

5. As a central component of the evolving Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, the reformed CFS will constitute the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner and in support of country-led processes towards the elimination of hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all human beings. The CFS will strive for a world free from hunger where countries implement the “Voluntary guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security”.

6. Implementation of the CFS’ new roles will be carried out in two phases. Phase I will include coordination at global level, policy convergence, and support and advice to countries and regions. In Phase II, CFS will gradually take on additional roles such as coordination at national and regional levels, promote accountability and share best practices at all levels, and develop a global strategic framework for food security and nutrition.

3.1. Inclusiveness

7. The new CFS will be composed of members, participants and observers and will seek to achieve a balance between inclusiveness and effectiveness. Its composition will ensure that the voices of all relevant stakeholders – particularly those most affected by food insecurity - are heard.

¹ Detailed features of the reform can be found in the CFS document CFS:2009/2 Rev.2 (accessible at <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/017/k6023e4.pdf>).

8. Membership of the Committee is open to all Members of FAO, WFP or IFAD, or non-member States of FAO that are member States of the United Nations. The Committee is open to participants from the following categories of organizations and entities, i) UN agencies and bodies with a specific mandate in food security and nutrition, ii) civil society and non-governmental organizations and their networks with strong relevance to food security and nutrition, iii) international agricultural research systems, iv) international and regional financial institutions, and v) representatives of private sector associations and philanthropic foundations. The Committee or its Bureau may invite other interested organizations relevant to its work to observe entire sessions or for specific agenda items.

9. While governments are the only voting members, participants take part in the work of the Committee with the right to intervene in plenary and breakout discussions to contribute to the preparation of meeting documents and agendas, submit and present documents and formal proposals, and interact with the Bureau during intersessional periods.

3.2. Intersessional activities

10. The overall CFS includes not only an annual global meeting, but also a series of intersessional activities at various levels, including within regions. Coordination among actors and levels between plenary sessions will be facilitated by the CFS Bureau which, composed of a Chairperson and twelve members from the various regions, represents the broader membership of the CFS during such periods.

11. The Bureau, will establish an Advisory Group composed of representatives of FAO, WFP and IFAD and other non-Member CFS participants. The function of the Advisory Group is to provide input to the Bureau regarding the range of tasks which the CFS Plenary has instructed it to perform.

3.3. High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition

12. In line with efforts to revitalize the CFS, members called for the regular inclusion of structured food security and nutrition-related expertise to better inform its sessions and support members and other stakeholders in designing strategies and programmes to address food insecurity. A High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Food Security and Nutrition is being established with this purpose in mind.

13. The HLPE will: i) assess and analyze the current state of food security and nutrition and its underlying causes; ii) provide scientific and knowledge-based analysis and advice on specific policy-relevant issues, utilizing existing high quality research, data and technical studies; and iii) identify emerging issues and help the CFS and its members prioritize future actions and attentions on key focal areas. The HLPE will be composed of a Steering Committee and a subsidiary network of food security and nutrition experts organized on the basis of ad hoc project teams.

3.4. Secretariat

14. There should be a small, permanent CFS Secretariat located in FAO Rome. For the biennium 2010-2011, the Secretariat will be headed by a Secretary from FAO and include staff from the other UN Rome-based agencies (WFP and IFAD). Its task will be to assist the Plenary, the Bureau and Advisory Group, and the High Level Panel of Experts in their work.

15. Further arrangements regarding the Secretary, including possible rotation among the three Rome-based agencies, and the inclusion in the Secretariat of other UN entities directly concerned with food security and nutrition should be decided by the CFS Plenary in 2011.

IV. STATUS OF THE CFS REFORM

16. To date the CFS Bureau has focused on setting up the structures and procedures agreed under the reform plan.

17. Terms of reference and structure of the Advisory Group have been approved by the Bureau. There will be thirteen members from five different categories whose membership for this biennium has been agreed as follows:

- i) UN Organizations and Bodies (5): IFAD, WFP, FAO, HLTF, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food;
- ii) CSOs/NGOs (4): Representatives of participating organizations to be proposed by NGOs/CSOs as an interim solution until a global mechanism is established;
- iii) International Agricultural Research Bodies (1): Bioversity;
- iv) International Financial and Trade Institutions (1): World Bank;
- v) Private sector/philanthropic Foundations (2): International Agri-food Network; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations.

18. Rules and procedures of the HLPE have been approved. Nominations for possible experts in various food security fields have been called for.

19. In accordance with the reform document, CSOs are autonomously preparing a proposal for a global mechanism to facilitate their engagement with the CFS at all levels. This global mechanism for food security and nutrition will function as a facilitating body for CSO consultation and participation in the CFS, including at regional level.

20. Discussion has started regarding possible CFS agenda topics and the format for the 36th Session which will be held from 11-14 October 2010.

21. The CFS has a new, improved web site which features on the FAO home page and links to the CFS page have also been included on IFAD's and WFP's web sites.

V. ROLE OF FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCES

22. As indicated in the CFS reform document (para. 23):

“It is crucial that the work of the CFS is based on the reality on the ground. It will be fundamental for the CFS, through its Bureau and Advisory Group, to nurture and maintain linkages with different actors at regional, sub regional and local levels to ensure ongoing, two way exchange of information among these stakeholders during intersessional periods. This will ensure that at its annual sessions the Plenary is made aware of latest developments on the ground, and that, conversely, results of the deliberations of the Plenary are widely disseminated at regional, sub-regional and country as well as global levels. Existing linkages should be strengthened, such as through the FAO Regional Conferences, and other regional and sub-regional bodies dealing with food security and nutrition related issues.”

23. Paragraphs 24-28 of the CFS reform document suggest ways in which Member Nations may, at their discretion, advance food security and nutrition at national and local levels by constituting or strengthening multi-disciplinary national mechanisms including all key stakeholders (see Annex 1). These suggestions also apply to the regional level. Such measures would not only improve the effectiveness of regional bodies to address food security matters; they would also help the reformed CFS perform its overall role of facilitating a coherent multi-level approach to effectively address food insecurity and malnutrition.

24. While these suggestions apply to all regional bodies, this document focuses on how FAO RCs could contribute more effectively to national, regional and global food security and its governance

within the framework of the reformed CFS and how they can strengthen the work of the Committee at the regional level.

25. Given the importance of national and regional considerations to fighting hunger and malnutrition, regional bodies such as RCs are thus vital to food security governance. They are also fundamentally important for the new CFS which has been reformed to address the need for improved food security governance at all levels through better coordination, greater inclusiveness, and stronger linkages to the field. In this regard, RCs may wish to consider performing all or some of the following functions and address ways to strengthen their ability to do this.

- Take stock of country and regional initiatives directed at improving food security coordination with a view to encouraging convergence and avoiding duplication among such initiatives;
- Improve the sharing of information on food security and nutrition policies and programmes undertaken by national and regional stakeholders by reviewing them periodically in a document to be discussed by RCs;
- Inform the CFS Plenary about successes achieved as well as the challenges and needs to reduce hunger and malnutrition in their respective regions;
- Disseminate CFS conclusions and recommendations at regional and national levels.

26. With a view to performing the above functions more effectively within the context of the reformed CFS, RCs may wish to consider and encourage discussion during their regular agendas on how to build an appropriate regional multi-stakeholder mechanisms to promote food security in the region. Such discussions could be held as a regular standard agenda item. In this case, RCs may wish, as with the CFS Plenary, to invite relevant non-voting members of RCs to participate in debates and contribute to the work of RCs when dealing with CFS matters. Participants and observers could include relevant regional organizations and networks and regional development institutions (e.g. United Nations Country Teams, UN Resident Coordinators, donors with relevant work in the region, Regional Integration bodies, National Alliances against Hunger, CSOs and NGOs, including national and regional food security thematic groups, civil society networks participating in national food security thematic groups, civil society networks participating in national food security councils and farmers' organizations as well as private sector associations). In accordance with the aim to strengthen food security governance, RCs may, furthermore, wish to consider devoting a substantial part of their agenda to address CFS related matters.

27. Should there be insufficient time to prepare for and hold the type of discussion outlined above at the plenary, debates could be held during parallel or side events, the outcomes of which would be reported to the Ministerial Segment of the RCs.

28. RCs meet biannually in non-Conference years while the CFS has an annual cycle. However, the CFS is now an ongoing process involving two-way exchange between national, regional and international levels through the CFS Plenary, its Bureau and the Advisory Group during intersessional periods. In order to facilitate regular interaction between RCs held biannually, and the different bodies of the CFS, RCs may wish to consider establishing an "ad hoc steering group" to help operationalize a multi-stakeholder mechanism as suggested in paragraph 26 of the present document. In this case, the mandate and possible composition of the "ad hoc steering group" should be considered. How and with what bodies such a mechanism would interact at national, regional and international levels, should also be considered.

29. The following proposals are offered in this regard for consideration by the membership:

- a) RCs may wish to establish a representative "ad hoc steering group" to remain in touch with the CFS Bureau and Secretariat with a view to develop the multi-stakeholder mechanism and to propose regional inputs to the CFS agenda including suggestions for work to be undertaken by the HLPE;
- b) Depending on regional circumstances, the "ad hoc steering group" could include a limited number of countries from the region, FAO representatives, other regional UN representatives, representatives of intergovernmental regional organizations, and

representatives of civil society and the private sector. This mechanism could follow the example used for the CFS Advisory Group, which has an equal number of non-country representatives as there are member countries on the Bureau.

- c) In the years when there are no Regional Conferences, provisions should be made for a meeting of the “ad hoc steering group”, with the participation of any other member country from the region or relevant regional actor participating in the CFS part of the Regional Conference, to take stock of progress made, advance any outstanding matters, and make contribution to the draft agenda of the CFS session of that year.
- d) RCs may also wish to discuss the establishment of a technical focal point to provide operational support to the work of the “ad hoc steering group”.

30. RCs may wish to periodically review their functions and working mechanisms and procedures as the CFS gradually takes on additional roles in the future.

ANNEX 1
EXTRACT FROM “REFORM OF THE COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD
SECURITY, FINAL VERSION” (CFS: 2009/2 REV.2)

Section IV

C. LINKAGES BETWEEN CFS AND THE REGIONAL AND COUNTRY LEVELS

23. It is crucial that the work of the CFS is based on the reality on the ground. It will be fundamental for the CFS, through its Bureau and Advisory Group, to nurture and maintain linkages with different actors at regional, subregional and local levels to ensure ongoing, two way exchange of information among these stakeholders during intersessional periods. This will ensure that at its annual sessions the Plenary is made aware of latest developments on the ground, and that, conversely, results of the deliberations of the Plenary are widely disseminated at regional, subregional and country as well as global levels. Existing linkages should be strengthened, such as through the FAO Regional Conferences, and other regional and subregional bodies dealing with food security and nutrition related issues.

24. CFS Members States are encouraged, at their discretion, to constitute or strengthen multi-disciplinary national mechanisms (e.g. food security networks, national alliances, national CFS) including all key stakeholders dedicated to advance food security at national and local levels. Through renewed mobilization and coordination of key stakeholders, such mechanisms will enable more effective identification and implementation of food security and nutrition policies and programmes.

25. Existing structures should be used to ensure programmes are better integrated with each other and aligned with on-going national and local food security and nutrition priorities. This would take advantage of the field presence of stakeholders involved in the CFS. Key partners will include United Nations Country Teams, the United Nation’s High Level Task Force (HLTF), the International Alliance against Hunger and its National Alliances, national and regional food security thematic groups, and a large number of civil society networks and private sector associations operating at the regional and national levels.

26. Such mechanisms could contribute to the elaboration of national plans against hunger and assist with the monitoring and evaluation of agreed actions and outcomes designed to combat hunger and food insecurity. They could also be instrumental in informing regional bodies and the CFS Plenary about successes achieved as well as remaining challenges and needs with a view to soliciting guidance and assistance in this regard.

27. Establishing linkages with the country level is likely to be more challenging in countries with weak capacity or in those without a central organization to address food security and nutrition in a multisectoral manner. Nevertheless, it is precisely in such cases that the CFS Plenary should ensure that consultation with and input from the national level takes place. Ways of enabling such linkages need to be found.

28. FAO Regional Conferences and regional meetings of WFP, IFAD and other concerned organizations are encouraged to devote part of their agendas to disseminate CFS conclusions and recommendations and to provide inputs to the CFS. Such regional bodies should, in coordination with the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group, open themselves to the participation of regional representatives of CFS participants and observers, including active participation by relevant regional intergovernmental and CSO organizations and networks, and to regional development institutions. The possibility of the CFS establishing and maintaining contacts through its Bureau to other regional organizations, such as NEPAD/CAADP, MERCOSUR, Arab Organization for Agriculture Development, Community of Independent States, and others, including regional CSO networks, should also be kept open.