

The Committee on World Food Security: A Multi-Stakeholder, Evidence-Based Approach to Policy Making

Promoting an enabling environment for policy formulation and implementation

Food security has multiple dimensions – availability, access, utilization and stability. Eradicating hunger requires policy action that addresses all four dimensions. Depending on the specific context, actions may be required to increase productivity, promote rural development and incomes, strengthen social protection mechanisms, improve infrastructure and invest in education and health. These multiple actions involve a variety of stakeholders who often have diverging views and goals. The challenge is to improve stakeholders' coordination to enhance the effectiveness of actions to promote food security and nutrition. Such coordination requires an enabling environment that creates incentives for all stakeholders and empowers them to participate in policy formulation and implementation. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) promotes such an enabling environment at global level.



CFS was set up in 1974 as the United Nations intergovernmental body to serve as a forum for review and follow up of food security policies. CFS is still the only body within the UN wide system specifically tasked with dealing with food security and nutrition policy. In 2009 CFS agreed on a substantial reform package aimed at increasing its legitimacy as a decision-making body for global governance of food security. Five years after the reform, CFS has often been referred to as a model for inclusive decision-making at the global level.

In this room, we find a coordinated process that is inclusive, international, and intergovernmental. [...] I encourage you to share more of your knowledge and experiences [...]. Yours is one of the best "untold stories" of modern development.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's address to CFS, May 2014

The CFS framework

Governance, in any form, requires legitimacy. Achieving and maintaining legitimacy implies a perception by all relevant stakeholders that there is a value-added component. Three elements can be identified as distinctive and unique to the CFS framework and contribute to its legitimacy:

1. The multi-stakeholder institutional structure

The effectiveness and authority of an institution depends on the architecture of the system, the level of inclusiveness and the sense of ownership towards its results.

There is increasing recognition by the international community that participation can enhance the quality of decision-making, increase ownership of the decisions, improve accountability and transparency of processes and enrich outcomes through a variety of views and experiences. However, participation needs to be organized around clear institutional structures and rules of engagement in order to find the right balance between inclusiveness and effectiveness.

The CFS vision is to be *"the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner"* (CFS Reform Document). To achieve this vision, CFS has gone beyond the traditional UN grouping of "Members vs. Observers"

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and created a new space for active engagement to “ensure that the voices of all relevant stakeholders – particularly those most affected by food insecurity - are heard” (CFS Reform Document).

The new “Participants” category includes representatives from UN agencies with a specific mandate in the area of food security and nutrition, civil society and non-governmental organizations, private sector associations and philanthropic foundations, international agricultural research systems as well as international and regional financial institutions.

Recognizing that different stakeholders have different roles and responsibilities when it comes to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition, the reformed CFS establishes clear rules of engagement for the different actors involved in the work of the Committee.

CFS Members:

- ✓ *have the right to intervene in Plenary and breakout discussions*
- ✓ *approve meeting documents and agendas*
- ✓ *submit and present documents and formal proposals*
- ✓ *have exclusive voting and decision taking rights, including drafting the final report of CFS Plenary sessions.*

CFS Participants:

- ✓ *have the right to intervene in Plenary and breakout discussions*
- ✓ *contribute to preparation of meeting documents and agendas*
- ✓ *submit and present documents and formal proposals*
- ✓ *contribute regularly to intersessional activities of the Committee through the Advisory Group and Open-Ended Working Groups established by the Bureau*

This means that while transitioning from “a business as usual” to “an inclusive multi-stakeholder” model, CFS has retained its intergovernmental character whereby Member countries remain the ultimate decision makers as well as principal actors in the attainment of food security.

Another distinctive element of the CFS multi-stakeholder approach is the full recognition of the principle of self-organization and autonomy of stakeholder categories. Within the UN system CFS is the only intergovernmental forum where the participation of civil society organizations and private sector associations is facilitated by their own autonomously established coordination mechanisms. Such mechanisms – the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM)¹ and Private Sector Mechanism (PSM)² - ensure that participation is based on a process of consultation prior to CFS meetings and feedback of results following the meetings, so that the few persons present at the sessions represent the views of many and that there is continuity in the work of the Committee.



2. The regular inclusion of structured food security and nutrition-related expertise

In addition to acknowledging that effective policy-making on food security and nutrition issues requires the active participation of multiple actors, CFS has also recognized that due to the complex, multidisciplinary nature of food security, decision making needs to be based on solid inter-sectoral expertise.

The production of CFS policy work is technically supported by a multi-agency Secretariat (FAO, IFAD, WFP), and by the High Level Panel of Experts for Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE). The HLPE was established as an outcome of the CFS reform in response to the need to complement existing research

¹ http://www.csm4cfs.org/about_us-2/what_is_the_csm-1

² http://www.agrifood.net/wp-content/uploads/Private_Sector_Modality.pdf

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and knowledge already conducted by various institutions with global multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary analysis.

The HLPE contributes to facilitating CFS policy convergence work by separating the political objectives from the technical issues and by building a common understanding of the different causes of food insecurity among the different stakeholders.

The ability of the CFS Secretariat to capitalize on the three agencies' expertise and comparative advantages, complemented with the science and knowledge-base provided by the HLPE, allow CFS to conduct its consultation and negotiation processes with a solid science and knowledge base.

3. The linkage of multi-stakeholder consultation and state of the art knowledge to decision-making

Many expert-based and dialogue-focused processes have their weak point when it comes to identifying their linkage into official decision-making. In CFS, all multi-stakeholder consultations feed into the CFS Plenary decision making processes whose outcome is then reported yearly to the UN General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This means that within the CFS framework, inclusiveness and sound expertise are not considered an end but rather a means for the Committee to better deliver on its roles as a global governance body for food security and nutrition:

- Co-ordination at the global level
- Policy convergence
- Support and advice to countries and regions

Promoting policy convergence is the primary role of the reformed CFS. Throughout its relatively short history, CFS has transformed itself from a “policy review and follow-up body” to a “policy making and knowledge provider”.

Since 2009 CFS has produced several policy outputs aiming at mainstreaming food security and nutrition through sector-specific guidance. These include recommendations developed on the basis of HLPE reports, as well as stand-alone guidance tools (see graphic below).

The inclusive and evidence-based process through which CFS policy products are developed, combined with their formal endorsement by a legitimate UN body, provide the basic framework for effective implementation by a variety of actors at global, regional and national level .



CFS IN NUMBERS

- ✓ 130 Member Countries
- ✓ Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) - Several hundred civil society organizations from 11 global constituencies and 17 sub-regions worldwide
- ✓ Private Sector Mechanism (PSM) - 11 international private sector associations + ~ 500 further companies independently engaged
- ✓ ~ 1,000 delegates at CFS Plenary sessions

To find out more visit the CFS website www.fao.org/cfs or contact the Secretariat on cfs@fao.org

