

CSM Inputs for the CFS policy convergence process on “Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition”

This document conveys the comments of the Agroecology Working Group of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM) for relations with the CFS on the policy convergence process on «Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition».

We would like to convey our deep appreciation for a CFS policy convergence process to reflect on and engage with the critical issue of how our food is produced and how food systems are operated. We also warmly welcome the HLPE report on “Agroecology and other innovative approaches” as a good first step of this discussion. The HLPE report presents us with evidence of the different production models’ impacts and gives us a basis to assess what steps are needed towards the real transformation of food systems so desperately needed. Therefore, we believe that the report has presented Agroecology quite strongly and accurately, reaffirming that it has the power and potential for this transformation of our food systems. As CSM, we have been the strongest advocates for the CFS to take on an agroecology workstream. We reaffirm our commitment to engage comprehensively, and with the full scope of our diverse constituencies, with this policy convergence process that will follow.

- 1. Do you think that the recommendations in the HLPE report accurately reflect the findings of the report?*

The introduction of Chapter 4 of the HLPE report recognizes the urgent need of “a radical transformation in our food systems” while also highlighting its challenges “because a considerable inertia, manifest in policies, corporate structures, education systems, consumer habits and investment in research, favours the currently dominant model of agriculture and food systems improvement in which environmental and social externalities are not fully considered and, therefore, not appropriately factored into decisions influencing the development of food systems meeting expectations for sustainability (Tilman and Clark, 2014).” It further states that “overcoming this inertia and challenging the status quo implies the need to create a level playing field on which alternative approaches can be equitably assessed and compared”.

However, the recommendations of the HLPE report are very weak in addressing these challenges as well as reflecting the findings of the report. The report’s extensive analysis and its primary contributions clearly demonstrate that Agroecology is a truly transformational pathway to address all the structural changes needed in our food system in a systemic and integrated way. Agroecology has catalysed the agency of those most affected by insecurity and marginalization to become the architects and drivers of socio-economic justice in their food systems. Since such an approach clearly pursues many critical public objectives, the recommendations should be much clearer on public policies and investments that can strengthen and promote the radical shift to agroecology, building on its agency to drive the transformations that are necessary to find new sustainable pathways for our societies and economies. Unfortunately, the recommendations are silent about such needed actions, with agroecology almost entirely disappearing from the final recommendations. The recommendations should reinforce the primary focus of the report, namely agroecology, and its transformational potential compared with the narrow incremental changes brought by other innovative approaches.

On another hand, the report’s main body gives a strong conceptual framework to assess the innovative approaches announced throughout the document on whether they would truly transform our pathways towards sustainable food systems. In particular, Chapter 2 presents a holistic approach, combining production, livelihoods, gender, socio-cultural, ecological and political perspectives, for the assessment of innovations. In this sense, the recommendations should embed and acknowledge this systemic framework, and therefore give concrete advice on the assessment’s final outcomes of the “other innovative approaches” presented in the report. The reduction of the ecological footprint and achievement of agency are key aspects in the latter. In particular regarding Digital agriculture:

- No serious impact assessments on digital agriculture have been conducted until now. These have to cautiously consider:
 - The lack of clarity on the impacts of digitalization on food and agriculture, and in particular, on the collecting and concentration of data which risks the extreme concentration of power in the food sector.
 - The impact of the entry of new actors - ICT companies - on the food sector.
 The assessment should address their impacts on the economy, ecology, and society;
- Digital agriculture is in the hands of few and is currently intensifying the polarization in rural areas between poor and rich farmers, leading the latter to be extremely dependent on technology. Governments, actually, have no control over this process;
- Digital innovations are introduced by the private sector, without comprehensive impact assessments or regulatory frameworks by governments. This undermines government control over processes in the food and agriculture sector which impacts directly the Right to Food for all.

Policy and regulatory frameworks for digitalization should be the main priority and the CFS should define an overarching one. However, concentration of data in the hands of few companies is already happening. Therefore, until no comprehensive regulatory frameworks are in place, an immediate moratorium on all kinds of agricultural data concentration in the hands of private companies should be put in place on the basis of precautionary principle. There is a clear underestimation of the impact of digitalization of food systems at global level on the Right to Food.

Governments should support:

- 1) Digital agriculture programmes as farmer/community led processes for the well-being of family farming. Agroecology (Nyeleny 2015) presents examples of this.
- 2) Impact assessment of the on-going digitalization innovations
- 3) Technological sovereignty initiatives
- 4) Regulatory frameworks that prevent any privatisation of data.
- 5) Precautionary principle applied in all policy recommendations on the implementation of digital agriculture.
- 6) Policies and practices of the CSO's lead initiatives on digital agriculture

Finally, the recommendations should support the evaluation and monitoring over time of the multiple impacts of technologies, in particular the above-mentioned digitalization of food and agriculture, on food security and nutrition, and the full realization of all human rights in their interdependence, including those granted in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

2. Do you think that major problems are missing from the HLPE recommendations?

Following on this first response's analysis, recommendation 2 tackles some crucial aspects related to the transition towards agroecology such as the need to redirect subsidies, promote territorial management (access to land, water and genetic resources, farmers' seeds rights), regulate the use of chemicals, promote healthy diets, support horizontal education systems, and assess production modes by their ecological footprint, but does not even mention agroecology explicitly. This particular recommendation should clearly reveal the pathways and link them to how to make the transition towards agroecology.

On policy coherence: the report emphasises that public investments and public policies will be needed to support agroecology for the transition to sustainable food systems. However, in order to fully achieve the transformation needed, key issues that are not or only partially dealt with in the report, such as trade, power imbalances and corporate power should be addressed. Consumers alone or market forces, left to themselves, will not result in transitions to sustainable food systems. Recommendations should be stronger on the adverse impact of these policies, including the intensive use of chemicals and pesticides, IPRs and seeds laws.

Recommendations must encourage and support countries in using agroecology as a tool to adapt to climate change by including it in the national adaptation plans as well as the revised Nationally Determined Contributions for post-2020 action to be tabled with UN Climate before end 2020. Governments should also be encouraged to provide adequate funding to implement agroecology through international funding mechanism such as the Green Climate Fund. The lack of a recommendation on the capacity of agroecology to face climate change or its proper discussion within the current discussion within the UNFCCC process (the Koronivia work programme on agriculture) reflect the lack of proper analysis in the HLPE report on this aspect.

We acknowledge that the agency aspect is included in the recommendations. It is essential to keep this element by ensuring that the central agency in transforming our food systems must come from small-scale food producers and indigenous peoples and their organizations. We emphasise the importance of setting such actions within the framework of the UN Decade of Family Farming

Participation and inclusiveness of small-scale food producers and of the most vulnerable and most affected by our current modes of production should be included in the recommendation 5 on evaluation and monitoring.

The human rights' framework used in the primary contributions of the report should not be erased in the recommendations. Furthermore, the gender perspective should be strengthened: we must understand that it is not only about women's empowerment, but on the centrality of women's rights and gender equality. More in particular, the recognition of women's roles, responsibilities and practical and strategic needs in practising agroecology and their knowledge accumulation should be highlighted. Agroecology must be recognized for its potential to transform social relations and traditional sexual division of labour, by promoting practices that are accessible to women and increase their access to resources and their decision-making power at all levels.

Recommendation 3 is particularly relevant as it concerns research funding as well as knowledge sharing of innovations to farmers. Special attention should be brought to:

- 3.a: research funding on agroecology practices and social technologies of production (the report highlights the lack of such funding);
- 3.b: develop and support transdisciplinary research conducted through innovation platforms that foster co-learning between practitioners and researchers, and horizontal dissemination of experience among practitioners (e.g. farmer-to-farmer networks, communities of practice and agroecological lighthouses);
- 3.f: management of conflict of interest and power imbalance regarding knowledge within agricultural and food value chain. Power concentration and concentration of funding in private led research are mentioned but they don't bring to strong conclusions/recommendations.

3. *Can you give examples of policies related to agro-ecological systems and other innovation systems for sustainable food systems that ensure food security and nutrition? How were these policies formulated and what was their impact?*

Although the HLPE report states some examples of best practices in achieving an agroecological transformation, this policy convergence process should not rely and build only on "best practices" as they usually refer to specific contexts and look at successes without addressing the root causes of problems. Recommendations should rather look at the challenges and fill in current policy gap to achieve truly transformative pathways towards agroecology. To unleash the full potential of agroecology as the true sustainable and healthy mode of production:

- Normative policies, including agroecology laws, and the inclusion of agroecology in national, sub-national, regional, sectoral and local plans and strategies should be promoted;

- The role of producers' organizations along the whole policy-making process (formulation, adoption, implementation, evaluation, and termination) should be strengthened and built on inclusive, interdisciplinary and rights-based policy spaces with robust safeguards against conflicts of interest. The centrality of peoples' action should be recognized, and food democracy should be promoted by:
 - Protecting social and community organization;
 - Encouraging participatory and decentralized planning processes and local food councils as they authentically democratize food systems and local governance, as well as being an important space for leadership training;
 - Promoting associativism.
- An agrarian reform should be ensured, including the right to territories (land, water, forests, fishing, foraging, hunting) and the secure access to and control over productive resources. The right to freely save, plant, exchange, sell and breed seeds, phylogenetic resources (plant and animal species) and livestock should be restored. Regulations (ie. sanitary laws) impeding the normal functioning of local markets and diversity should be removed. Resource management and food production should be inclusive and responsible, and since any distribution of productive resources implies a gender power relationship, the agrarian reform must have women as the fundamental protagonist.
- Social and solidarity-based economy rules should be instituted, determined by small-scale food producers-led policies. Sanitary regulations and laws should be categorized according to the size and mode of production of enterprises (i.e. Small agroindustries/cooperatives making benefits out of agroecological productions are affected by having to comply to the same sanitary laws as big enterprises).
- Policy measures should be put in place to prevent and end state, parastatal and private interests' ongoing violence against Indigenous and rural communities, peasant farmers, women and associated social formations (including not only physical violence but also economic, environmental and cultural violence in the form of land, water and seed grabs).
- The rights of women in all their intersecting gender identities such as the elderly, people living with disabilities, youth, social statues, etc should be protected, respected, re-affirmed and fulfilled while pursuing gender equality and justice, by the medium of policies or participation quota and of resources targeted specifically for women
 - This explicitly relates to female autonomy and the construction of spaces of equal participation between men and women by incorporating respect, care, solidarity, shared responsibility, by ensuring equal income and shared power, and by putting an end to gender violence and sexism;
 - It also relates to equal access to territories (land, water, forests, fishing, foraging, hunting) and public services.
- Decent work conditions should be established by respecting the rights of all workers, including from migrant workers to union representation, the collective bargaining and the living wages. They should also ensure fair, safe and healthy working environments that are free from any form of discrimination, violence, and/or harassment. They should also include access to public services.
- More in particular, public policies and investments should be focused on:
 - Strengthening territorial markets, short circuit markets and markets of incentive towards the commercialization of agroecological food;
 - Public procurement schemes that are inclusive and responsible to support communities, cooperatives and producer associations, while creating positive opportunities to distribute healthy food to the places where it is most needed: nursing homes, maternity and recovery centres, hospitals and schools;
 - Public services, rural infrastructure and education by:
 - focusing on building the infrastructure needed for the local processing of farm produce (local mills, abattoirs, micro-diaries, community food processing facilities, waste recycling, renewable energy systems...) to create jobs and wealth within territories whilst reducing overall carbon and ecological footprints;
 - Investing in public services is the most concrete way of contributing to the quality of life and reducing poverty. Public health with a preventive approach, universal and

- free education, libraries, extension services, etc., create jobs and develop a healthy and capable population to face the vulnerabilities produced by climate variability and economic instability;
 - Ensuring an inclusive and responsible approach in urban and rural infrastructure, as well in urban planning. Appropriate road and communications infrastructure are key to providing producer communities access to territorial markets and extension services, also allowing or the marketing of a greater diversity of fresh products;
 - Education, training and formation are fundamental dimensions of agroecological massification. Public research and training for development should be reoriented to build on the agency of peasants and respond to their needs (training in transition practices and agroecological production between peasants and rural extension technicians). Public policies should promote participatory research schemes given the key role that small-scale food producers play in research and development.
- Supporting the different phases of transition by:
 - implementing technical advisory systems, especially with a horizontal approach, such as the farmer-to-farmer method;
 - facilitating subsidies and access to public and flexible agricultural credit and insurance, that are not tied to monoculture;
 - removing perverse incentives (e.g. government subsidies for chemical inputs) that favour continued dependence on hazardous inputs;
 - facilitating access to alternative products at reasonable prices, so that public investment in research, development and dissemination of biological means of fertilization and pest control becomes an important support;
 - protecting and guaranteeing communities and indigenous peoples' rights to land and to territories, as well as the rights to their traditional knowledge and cultural identities. These include access by producers' communities to resources or common goods, the training in their territories to lead the transition, technical training and co-production of knowledge in terms of productive practices, artisanal processing and territorial food circuits; technical and political support;
 - incentivizing for healthy production and the end of subsidies to industrial agriculture. In this sense, healthy and sustainable diets should be reclaimed as public goods, to foster and facilitate access to healthy, fresh and locally produced foods, such as fruits, vegetables and legumes, reinforcing the nexus between the rights of consumers and those of small-scale local food producers;
 - generating of decent jobs in new sectors associated with sustainable lifestyles;

4. *Are there any other thoughts that you think should be taken into account by the CFS as part of this policy convergence process?*

First, the CFS could seize a historical opportunity and strengthen the obvious synergy between the two policy convergence processes to be concluded by 2020. Indeed, the CFS Food Systems and Nutrition Guidelines are the first intergovernmental negotiation to establish a food system approach to the realization of the Right to Food, one that recognizes the multiplicity of public objectives that food systems serve. Once the proper synergy with the Agroecology policy convergence process is established, the Guidelines may provide critical opportunities to re-affirm the multidimensional contribution of smallholder agriculture, promote agroecology, implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas and concretize the combined aspirations of the UN Decade on Family Farming and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, with a particular emphasis on women's rights and youth perspectives.

Second, we would like to highlight the fact that the CFS process is not expected to redefine agroecology. This process should rather expose the way movements have shaped agroecology as a result of their struggles to obtain the adequate policy and funding support for it. It would be also recommended a proper synergy with the FAO work on agroecology, which can provide a substantial contribution to the CFS process.

Third, the HLPE report, through its findings, asserts that agroecology is the truly transformative approach towards sustainable food systems and has made clear that this transformation will only be achieved through the agency of small-scale food producers and their knowledge, practices and organizations. In this sense, we truly hope that this policy convergence process will be responsive to their claims and make sure it is participatory and inclusive of the voices of the small food producers who are also those most affected by food insecurity.