

Multilateral Policy Convergence for Food Systems Transformation; CFS and its Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition.

Monday, 26 July 2021 from 6:30-7:20 PM (Rome time)

HLPE Chair remarks

Brief remarks on the HLPE of the CFS and its unique role and achievements in providing a science-policy interface for food security and nutrition

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Good evening, my name is Martin Cole, I am the Chairperson of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, known as the HLPE, of the UN Committee on World Food Security.
- I am happy to be here today, I am joining this meeting from Australia, it is 2.30 AM for me, because it is critical to bring the experience of the HLPE at the pre-Summit of the UNFSS.
- My intervention will focus on the role of achievements of the HLPE of the CFS for **'Multilateral Policy Convergence for Food Systems Transformation'**.
- I want to start by saying a few words about the HLPE as part of the CFS governance structure.
- HLPE operates as the science-policy interface for the CFS. The origins of HLPE date back to 2009, when CFS underwent reform that made it the foremost legitimate and inclusive body for coordinating food security and nutrition policies. This reform addressed the lack of an effective global institutional architecture to deal with a world food crisis and to achieve goals on eliminating hunger and malnutrition. HLPE was established to contribute to this effort by providing independent evidence-based policy advice to the CFS.
 - The work of HLPE is important – It provides independent **scientific assessments** that represent state of science and knowledge on important themes for consideration by CFS membership, to ensure that policy convergence processes are **based on evidence**.
 - As a way of working, the HLPE **approaches controversies - by laying out different perspectives and evidence**. It also **acknowledges and tries to incorporate different kinds of knowledge, including informal and indigenous knowledge and different scientific disciplines**. The **recognition of different viewpoints and approaches** is crucial for the policy convergence process and helps policymakers make informed choices.

- HLPE operates in a highly **transparent way with wide engagement of stakeholders**, which gives it strong legitimacy and richness.
- The **HLPE has therefore the key attributes of a science policy interface**: It provides **high-quality, independent, and impartial scientific expertise** that serves policy-makers' needs. It holds a **high degree of legitimacy**.
- The **HLPE has played and continues to play a key role in FSN policy convergence processes**.
- **Last year our main assessment report** (Food Security and Nutrition: Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030) sought to bring together the lessons from HLPE's work in its first ten years since its formation in 2009. The report highlighted the need to take a **food systems approach**, mapped out **four key policy shifts** needed to -achieve SDG2 – and stressed the need to widen our understanding of food security to **include 6 dimensions** – adding the importance of agency and sustainability to the standard four pillars we most often see in policy documents: availability, access, utilization and stability. **Considering the importance of this report, I am disappointed that the UNFSS largely ignored this body of work.**
- The most **recent HLPE report on youth** launched earlier this month marks the start of the CFS policy convergence process **on one of the most pressing issues for food systems transformation: youth engagement and employment**.
- The **2017 HLPE report informed the policy process culminating in the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food systems and Nutrition** endorsed this February.
- The **2019 HLPE report is at the basis of the new [Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative approaches](#)**. This process is an excellent example of why the HLPE is unique. Agroecology is very complex, as it is a movement, a practice, and a set of principles. Only a representative process able to balance all the different views and controversies could effectively lead to policy convergence.
- Other CFS policy products that are based on HLPE reports I could also mention are:
 - The Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests (The CFS VGGTs);
 - The Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (The CFS RAI);
 - A number of CFS Policy recommendations, such as those on Food losses and waste, Sustainable forestry, Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, Connecting smallholders to markets, Social protection, to mention but a few.
- The HLPE has also shown to be able to respond quickly to provide policy recommendations on COVID-19 and food security, with the release of an issues paper which is now undergoing its third update as the pandemic and its economic and social effects continue to evolve.
- Recent data, including the just released SOFI report show that we are at a **critical moment** with respect to food systems challenges – hunger is on the rise, a pandemic is raging, and climate change is threatening food systems.
- We see the **UN Food Systems Summit as an opportunity to strengthen food systems governance** structures. **On the contrary**, however, some **proposals** discussed as possible outcomes of the summit of **creating a new science-policy platform** for food security and nutrition, seem a **step to undermine existing food systems governance**.

- **In the middle of the current crisis, it would be inconsiderate to start anew with a new structure.** You don't go off to invent a **new fire extinguisher** in the middle of a fire, but use the fire extinguisher you have in the best possible way to stop the fire.
- **The HLPE challenges these proposals of creating a new science-policy interface** for a number of reasons, and I want to explain them.
 - These proposals **overlook the important work that the HLPE is already doing for the CFS and for the UN**, as the **UN-mandated** foremost inclusive intergovernmental governance platform for food policy coordination. **The HLPE and CFS are firmly grounded in a UN process, directly reporting to the UN General Assembly through ECOSOC.**
 - Pushing for a new SPI in these circumstances risks **fragmenting and duplicating international food policy governance in ways that will undermine efforts to address the current crises**
 - We are not saying that HLPE is perfect and that it does not need to be improved. However, rather than trying to establish a new body that tries to replace the UN CFS-HLPE processes, some **simple reforms can further strengthen the HLPE** – measures that are already underway.
- For example:
 - **The HLPE could be given the capacity to initiate its own reports in response to rapidly changing global conditions** – the need for which was made evident by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on food systems.
 - **In our upcoming data report, the HLPE is working to improve monitoring, data collection and assessment** – to enable HLPE and its partners to more precisely track changes in food systems including data from on the ground, including uptake of policy recommendations and their impacts.
- At this critical juncture, **more can be gained** by putting resources behind strengthening the science policy interface that **has already has salience, credibility, and legitimacy – the HLPE within the UN CFS policy convergence process** – (which, I stress again, is the **most legitimate intergovernmental space** for food systems policy and governance at the international level)
- On the basis of these reflections, the HLPE is calling the CFS member states to ensure that CFS 49 can take the necessary decisions to ensure the HLPE and of CFS itself to ensure that they are fit for purpose for UNFSS follow up and global food security and nutrition governance.
- Thank you!