

Input informing the CFS Policy Convergence Process on *Promoting Youth Engagement and Employment in Agriculture and Food Systems* (“Youth Recommendations”).

22 November 2021

Every era’s cohort of youth often bring radical ideas because they have very little to lose and so much to gain. Today’s youth, however, are putting forward bold ideas for food system transformation under very different circumstances with climate change, with diminishing biodiversity, and with the social and food crisis triggered by COVID-19. Combined with the first rise in child labor in 20 years and a global recession whose effects will last for decades – the youth have everything to lose.

The HLPE Youth Report frames the issue as needing to be resolved through more than simply enhancing youth participation within existing structures. The report suggests that any way forward requires nothing less than redistributing of power in a way that transforms existing social, political and economic relationships and conditions within and across countries.

I. WHICH PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY-RELEVANT AREAS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED THROUGH THIS CFS POLICY CONVERGENCE PROCESS AND INCLUDED IN THE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

The HLPE Youth Report is an accurate, thoughtful, and well-balanced report. The report is building on previous HLPE reports, human rights frameworks, binding and voluntary instruments as well as on wide array of documented experiences and most recent literature. It acknowledges four important pillars on which to leverage to improve youth employment and engagement in the food systems, namely: **rights, equity, agency, and recognition**.

The Special Rapporteur recommends the “Zero Draft” of the Youth Recommendations continue building upon these four pillars. The main policy issues should be the following:

1. Ecological Framework: Agroecology

The HLPE Youth report highlights one major problem in food systems to be the increasing power and influence of large corporations that rely on inequitable global value chains and plan around short-term profit, rather than long-term resilience and sustainability. According to the report, these over-arching power structures and economic processes can limit the ability of Individuals, including young people, to exercise agency, both as consumers and as workers.

Alternatively, agroecological approaches offer young people a real opportunity to rebuild a food system based on human rights, equity, and biodiversity. Many Member States are asking themselves how and how fast they want to transition to agroecology or similar approaches. Only a small number of countries remain committed innovative approaches that do not prioritize biodiversity and human rights.

Agroecology provides a strong response to the COVID-19 food crisis and long-standing failures of food systems. It is a way to produce food that ensures communities and ecosystems flourish.¹ Agroecology starts with the question of power dynamics and frames the problem as an issue relating to access to knowledge, resources and control over the food system as underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition.

Agroecology is a scientific discipline that includes experimental knowledge with a focus on the ecology of agricultural environments. It has proven to quickly lead to the tangible realization of the right to food.² Its primary goal is to mimic ecological processes and biological interactions as much as possible.³ It relies heavily on experiential knowledge, more commonly described as traditional knowledge. New research suggests that if we calculate productivity in terms of per hectare and not for a single crop, and in terms of energy input versus output, agroecology is often more productive than industrial intensive techniques.⁴

Agroecological and smallholder-led modes of supplying the world's food do not focus exclusively on crop yields but in more holistic terms of individual, communal, and environmental well-being. Agroecology also focuses on the relationship amongst all living beings in a food system by framing those relationships in terms of equity and fairness.

In the HLPE Youth Report, economies of well-being were identified as “another form of development” now more present in the policy discourse, borrowed from the Indigenous Peoples knowledge derived from managing their territories, landscapes, diets, and health in line with maintaining good relations with the environment.

To transition to agroecological food systems requires ensuring all young people have access to land individually and collectively, credit, infrastructure, and small holder-to-small holder education. The focus should also be on countering practices that disposes youth from core natural resources such as land, seeds, and water.

2. Economic Framework: Territorial Markets

Since it has been established that agroecology provides communities and governments the best way to fulfill everyone's right to food,⁵ people are now asking a more programmatic question: what kind of markets do we need to transition to agroecology?⁶ The Special

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1000en/cb1000en.pdf> ; https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/EN-COVID_FULL_REPORT-2020.pdf;
<http://www.fao.org/3/cb3114en/cb3114en.pdf>

² [A/HRC/16/49](https://www.hrc.org/16/49).

³ Miguel A. Altieri, “Agroecology: the science of natural resource management for poor farmers in marginal environments”, *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, vol. 93, Nos. 1–3 (December 2002).

⁴ HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome; Rachel Bezner Kerr, et al, “Can Agroecology Improve Food Security and Nutrition? A Review” (2021) 29 *Global Food Security* 100540. Relatedly see Ricciardi, Vincent et al, “Higher Yields and More Biodiversity on Smaller Farms” (2021) *Nature Sustainability* <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-021-00699-2> .

⁵ [A/HRC/16/49](https://www.hrc.org/16/49).

⁶ https://afsafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/afsa_2020-virtual-conference-report-final_compressed.pdf ; Allison Loconto et al, *Constructing Markets for Agroecology: An Analysis of Diverse Options for Marketing Products from Agroecology* (2018). See also Bill Vorley (2013), *Meeting small-scale*

Rapporteur on the Right to Food finds, along with a growing number of people and experts, that territorial markets are best suited to help communities and Member States transition to agroecology and fulfill everyone's right to food.

Even before the pandemic there were growing concerns about jobless growth, and UN agencies such as the ILO pointed out to the crisis of youth employment. Moreover, agriculture and food systems are sectors with high rates of human rights violations, especially for young, racialized, or women workers.

Nevertheless, a food system that enhances youth's dignity, would benefit everyone. To encourage and mobilize youth engagement in food systems requires an economy that is consciously designed by international, national, and local governance structures to fulfil youth's human rights. This means that markets should enable solidarity and cooperation and operate equitably

With inadequate governance structures and insufficient resources devoted to developing equitable economies, youth – especially in developing countries or in areas of conflict or protracted crisis – are disproportionately affected by food system's economic effects.

During the pandemic, people are relying even more on their local food systems. One of the most popular demands from local governments, social movements, advocacy groups, experts and some national governments is a call to promote local food production, short supply chains, and a greater degree of self-sufficiency. This also includes promoting sectoral cooperation among local departments, vertical cooperation between municipal and subnational/national governments, and horizontal coordination with other local governments.⁷

Most local markets in the world are supplied by smallholders. As widely recognized, smallholders play an essential role in ensuring food security and nutrition today. Smallholders produce approximately 70 percent of the world's food and yet they face hunger, malnutrition and egregious right to food violations. Part of the problem is that smallholders find it relatively difficult accessing and benefiting from local, national and regional markets because of barriers to finance, infrastructure and appropriate technology.

The 2016 CFS *Policy Recommendations Connecting Smallholders to Markets* were a ground-breaking first step to better understand and develop the role of markets in food systems in a way that focused on people and not economic growth. Civil society and Indigenous peoples through the CSM refined some of the concepts from the Policy Recommendations even more and introduced the notion of "territorial markets" to capture a richer understanding of local, national and regional markets.⁸

Thinking of the world in terms of territorial markets helps better understand how most people actually buy, sell and share their food. The term "territorial" market allows people to

farmers in their markets: understanding and improving the institutions and governance of informal agrifood trade (IIED/HIVOS/Mainumby, London/The Hague/La Paz, 2003).

⁷ <http://www.fao.org/3/cb1020en/CB1020EN.pdf> ; URGENCI, *Enacting Resilience: the Response of Local Solidarity-based Partnerships for Agroecology to the Covid-19 Crisis* (2021).

⁸ Sylvia Kay and others, "Connecting smallholders to markets: an analytical guide" (Civil Society Mechanism, 2016).

overcome the limitations of only thinking in terms of global versus local. Territorial markets can be local, national, or transboundary. They can also be rural, peri-urban, or urban.

The following points outline the characteristics of territorial markets:⁹

- i. **Bounded:** Territorial markets are directly linked to particular local, national and/or regional food systems. Food concerned is produced, processed, sold or distributed and consumed within a given territory. The gap between producers and end users is narrowed; and the length of the distribution chain is significantly shortened or even direct. This can be contrasted to food systems that are at the mercy of global markets, food that is the result of opaque global value chains, or processed foods that are sourced from a variety of places.
- ii. **Diverse:** They are inclusive and diversified with a wide variety of agricultural and local food products to the marketplace, reflecting the diversity of the food system(s) of the territory.
- iii. **Holistic:** They perform multiple economic, social, cultural and ecological functions within their given territories - starting with but not limited to food provision.
- iv. **Remunerative:** They are the most profitable for smallholders since they provide them with more control over conditions of access and prices than mainstream value chains and more autonomy in negotiating them.
- v. **Circular:** They contribute to structuring the territorial economy since they enable a greater share of the wealth created to be retained and redistributed within the territory.
- vi. **Legal:** They may be informal, formal, or somewhere in between. Informal means not taxed or licensed, it does not mean illegal. Being more formal does not necessarily suggest that a market is better functioning. To varying degrees, all have some links with the relevant public bodies and the state through tax collection or through public investments.
- vii. **Embedded:** They include embedded governance systems meaning that they operate according to a set of commonly shared rules that are negotiated between producers, consumers and the different authorities of the territory concerned (what some also call “nested markets”).
- viii. **Solidaristic:** In addition to serving as spaces in which buyers and sellers are matched up, they are places where political, social and cultural relations are made and expressed, and where all people involved interact according to varying degrees of interdependence and solidarity. The power relationship amongst producers, processors, traders and consumers is more horizontal. This means that markets are constituted by long-standing relationships of trust.

⁹ Ibid.

3. Knowledge, skills, and social innovation across the rural-urban continuum

As the HLPE Report highlights: “Formal education itself, as currently practiced, is often an important contributor to the construction of aspirations for non-farming futures, fostering a process of de-skilling of rural youth, neglecting farming skills and local realities in curricula, and downgrading farming as an occupation only for those who do not succeed in school.”

This process of de-skilling rural youth has been happening in different periods of time in many countries, depending on their relationship to industrialization. There is, however, now a renewed interest in the agricultural sector and rural economies. At this critical juncture, it is therefore important to promote the widest and deepest range of knowledge.

A recent study by a research consortium called Ceres2030 recently came out with startling results.¹⁰ After reviewing more than 100,000 articles in agricultural research, using a diverse set of criteria, the Ceres2030 team identified all articles capable of contributing to what is needed to tackle hunger. What troubled the Ceres2030 team and surprised the scientific research community at large was that only around 2 per cent of published agricultural research provides original and high-quality data that can offer solutions for small-scale producers.

From that 2 per cent, we can extrapolate what type of research is needed. Smallholders are more likely to adopt new approaches when supported by extension services; localized education matters. They also found that small producers’ incomes increase when they belong to cooperatives, self-help groups, and other autonomous organizations that share networks and resources. These networks are built on experiential/traditional knowledge that are part of what others describe as solidarity economics. Moreover, they found that informal markets work; producers prosper when they can sell their produce informally to small- and medium-sized firms. Those are markets based on trust, which some have described as territorial markets.

That type of research, geared towards smallholders’ localized education, solidarity economics, territorial markets, and experiential/traditional knowledge, is central to agroecology.

Training programs and resources allocated for youth engagement in agriculture and the food systems should take into consideration youth mobility and migration and the fact that in some societies they may be considered as part of the family (family farms) work labour. Some youth migrate out of farming communities with the intention to return to them. Training and mentoring programs to accompany this phase should be also thought of.

On the other side, increasing urban population has highlighted the need for cities to plan food policies specific their particular context. This includes not relying only on imports but also on developing more stable and equitable relationships with surrounding rural areas in order to overcome rural-urban divisions.

¹⁰ Ceres2030 is a partnership between the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University, the International Institute for Sustainable Development and the International Food Policy Research Institute, built on a common vision: a world without hunger, where small-scale producers enjoy greater agricultural incomes and productivity, in a way that supports sustainable food systems. <https://ceres2030.org/>.

Finally, technological innovation is always important in food system transformation and is often wielded in creative ways by youth. The challenge is to ensure that new technologies do not re-entrench or worsen existing inequalities. Therefore, social innovation and mobilization should be considered of utmost importance and be given particular attention to ensure that technological innovation fulfils everyone's human rights. Young people today are already involved in many innovative initiatives related to food production and distribution that could be supported and expanded. Youth representatives from collective forms of organizations such as cooperatives, confederations, unions, or Indigenous organizations should be central to developing laws and policies that ensure technological innovation is appropriate for people's particular contexts and fulfils their human rights.

4. Human rights should be mainstreamed across the recommendations

Youth engagement in agriculture and food systems cannot be achieved without recentring human rights – including right to food, to protection, social security, to non-discrimination, to participation, to education, and to decent work which should be the basis of an “enabling policy environment for youth”.

Being aware of this, the HLPE report included a rights pillar that incorporates the general “triangle of rights” (protection, non-discrimination, and participation), as applied in various UN conventions and declarations. The report also include reference to the right to food (ICESR, 1966, Art. 11; UNDHR, 1948, Art. 25.1), the rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), the rights of peasants and people working in rural areas (UNDRP, 2017), the rights of women (CEDAW, 1979), and of children (often overlapping with the period of youth) (CRC, 1989) and the right to work (ICESR, 1966, Art. 6; UNDHR, 1948, Art. 23.1).

Human rights instruments operate in complex ways that include different types of obligations. Nevertheless, all human rights instruments draw from and articulate international legal obligations. Policy recommendations should therefore rely on these existing instruments and encourage States and other international institutions to implement them, through laws and legislation, and policy measures. Policy recommendation negotiations are not the appropriate forum to debate the nature of international law's applicability.

II. DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR CFS MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING YOUTH CONSTITUENCIES IN THE POLICY CONVERGENCE PROCESS?

Promoting and enabling youth agency and their right to participate in the decision-making is only possible if young people have opportunities to be organized and recognized as actors, whether as workers, farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, students, or entrepreneurs. Young people should be engaged from the beginning of the design of policymaking processes and through intergenerational dialogue.

Youth have been given political attention in recent years and are now more present than ever in many political contexts. They are increasingly recognized as important actors in political movements for food justice, food sovereignty, and ecological sustainability. However, the classification and oversimplification of this category brings some limitations and risks: beyond and within the broader category of “youth” as an age group there are

economic, gender, class, cultural, and racializing variables that impact working conditions and the full realization of the right to food.

Regarding the engagement of youth constituencies: the CFS according to its 2009 reform process allows for two mechanisms, the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism and the Private Sector Mechanism. The CSM is organized by constituencies and has created a meaningful and diversified youth working group that already participated to the process and vocally expressed its vision during the CFS 49 plenary. The PSM also has youth participants. The policy convergence process can begin by supporting these existing mechanisms and paying due attention to their requests. A call for inputs and participation can also be spread through other youth groups and UN mechanisms dealing with youth, such those mentioned in the HLPE report appendix at pages 138-9.

Moreover, CFS Member States should ensure that their negotiation positions and tactics are informed by meaningful input from youth representatives and groups prioritizing those already working in food systems.