



Cabbage grown in a nutrition cooperative in Mauritania

Global food governance

the Committee for World Food Security

May 2010

Half a year ago, in October 2009, the world's governments agreed to reform the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in order to make it "the central United Nations political platform dealing with food security and nutrition" in order to "strive for a world free from hunger."¹ This year is a vital window of opportunity to shape the CFS into an effective global forum with the power to lead global governance toward true food security.

Coordinating a global food system

The ways in which we feed ourselves have been globalised now for many decades but we have no means of managing and coordinating this global food system. It is a system that needs coordination because it is clearly broken.

The world currently produces enough food to feed almost double the current population, yet over a billion people are living in constant

hunger. This is not because of war or natural disaster but just because of systemic failures in how we produce, share, buy and sell food.

Africa stands out as the only region in which the average per capita food production has been consistently falling for the last 40 years. Today, more than 265 million people, predominantly women and children, are undernourished and chronically food insecure.

The global nature of the food system and its dangers were cruelly demonstrated in 2007 and 2008. A confluence of several short-term factors around the world contributed to a global food price shock, including:

- policies on biofuels in Europe and the US
- increased speculation in agricultural commodities due to reduced speculation in high tech stocks and the beginnings of concerns about the US housing market
- drought in Australia and China

These are not matters that an African government had any control over, yet they

¹ FAO, Reform of the Committee on World Food Security: final version. Rome: FAO, 2009. CFS:2009/2 Rev.2, ¶2 & 4. Available at: www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs0910/ReformDoc/CFS_2009_2_Rev_2_E_K7197.pdf

had dire effects for African countries. Massive increases in the price of staple foods led to increased hunger, and also caused food riots and social instability in several countries. Recent declines in prices on the world market have not been felt in local African markets, where the prices on average are still higher than in previous years.

A global food system can only be governed globally and multilaterally. There is a vital need for a global forum that is able to coordinate the world's food system and address global factors such as those of the 2008 food price shock. The CFS has the potential to be that forum, as a forum in which all countries have equal say. African governments and civil society must actively participate in the CFS and make use of it, in order that this potential can become a reality.

How does this relate to the Global Partnership and existing UN bodies?

At the time of the global food price shock in 2008, international leaders called for a 'Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition', which was agreed upon at the beginning of 2009. The Global Partnership is intended to be based in existing structures to improve their coordination and effectiveness, avoiding setting up something new that just duplicates current work. Around £22bn has been pledged by G8 countries for the Global Partnership.

The CFS is

“..a central component of the evolving Global Partnership for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition [and] will constitute the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform...”²

The funding for the Global Partnership is being held in a multi-donor trust fund at the World Bank. Decisions about the fund will be managed by donor countries, five recipient countries and the Gates Foundation with the World Bank as trustee. In contrast in the CFS, as part of the UN, each member country has an equal vote in decision making.

It is crucial that the central policy role of the CFS within the Global Partnership is

respected by the World Bank trust fund. The fund should be used according to the policy priorities of the CFS, rather than by any alternative agenda of the trust's management. African countries have a key role here in ensuring that the CFS both asserts its role and lives up to its responsibility to develop the operating principles and priorities which the trust fund needs.

There are three main UN agencies related to food security: the Food & Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund



An African farmer at the 2009 World Food Summit in Rome

² op cit, ¶4

for Agricultural Development (IFAD). All three are involved in the running of the CFS. The three organisations are represented in the CFS Advisory Group and the small Secretariat for the CFS includes staff from all three organisations.

The role of the CFS

The role of the CFS is still evolving. It could include:

- building on CAADP at the continental level in Africa to connect it into a global strategic framework for food security and nutrition³
- setting global policy priorities for international and multilateral action and financing for food security, developed through its democratic decision making
- enabling regional development of policies and regulations to address cross-border food security issues
- supporting the development of national food security plans through advice and guidelines developed from lessons learned and best practice across the world
- ensuring donor funding for food security is channelled through such national food security plans without conditionality
- facilitating in-country monitoring and accountability on implementation of policies and use of funds
- taking over the lead, as a more democratic body, in reform of the Food Aid Convention to ensure that food aid is not a disguised form of dumping and is able to support local agricultural production
- establishing binding guidelines on food security for other intergovernmental bodies such as the WTO, IMF and World Bank to avoid 'schizophrenia' in global policies

However the CFS should not be limited to just these areas. It must be able to take a visionary and ambitious role, and now it is the time to establish its vision.

How is the Committee on World Food Security structured?

The CFS is a global forum for international stakeholders to work together towards the

elimination of hunger to ensure food security and nutrition for all human beings.

At basis, the CFS is an intergovernmental committee. It is open to all countries that are members of the UN, whether or not they are members of FAO, as well as members of WFP and IFAD.

The committee is also open to participation by:

- UN bodies
- civil society organisations and their networks
- CGIAR and other international agricultural research networks
- World Bank, IMF and other international financial institutions
- private sector organisations
- philanthropic organisations

These participants can take part actively in the work of the committee but decisions are made solely by the member countries.

The CFS will have a High Level Panel of Experts to provide state-of-the-art studies and analyses to guide the committee in its work.

The CFS meets in Rome. Between meetings its work is headed by a Bureau and Advisory Committee. The Bureau consists of representatives from 13 countries, following common UN practice on regional representation.

The Bureau's Advisory Committee is made up by representatives of FAO, WFS, IFAD and representatives of the participant groups above.

The CFS is supported by a small secretariat which can be contacted at cfs@fao.org

CFS Bureau members

The current member states of the CFS Bureau are:

Algeria	Guatemala
Australia	Japan
Belgium	Jordan
Brazil	Malaysia
Egypt	Philippines
Equatorial Guinea	Russia
	USA

The chair is Philippines.

³ *op cit*, ¶16

What does this mean for African governments?

Food security is still high on the international agenda at the moment. The new CFS lays the foundation for effective governance of the global food system, but it is up to governments above all to build it into something real.

At the moment the role that the CFS will play, the way in which it will operate, the tasks it will undertake and the authority with which it will speak are all to be determined. African governments must take a lead in shaping the CFS into a forum in which the needs and priorities of the African continent can be recognised, supported and fulfilled. At this early stage it is particularly important to assert the central political role of the CFS, in which all African governments are represented, in leading the Global Partnership.

It is important African governments to take part in the CFS meetings in Rome at a high, decision making level, and to work with the countries representing Africa in the Bureau, Algeria and Equatorial Guinea, between meetings.

What does this mean for African civil society?

The CFS is innovative and thus far unique in the extent to which civil society are able to participate. Civil society are not just observers to the CFS, as in other UN organisations, they are able to participate in debates, contribute to CFS documents and submit proposals.

The CFS gives priority to the participation of: “organizations representing smallholder family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, herders/pastoralists, landless, urban poor, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, consumers, Indigenous Peoples, and International NGOs”⁴

This is an incredibly valuable opportunity to bring the knowledge and experience of the grassroots right into an international decision making body. African civil society must make the most of this chance to help shape global food security policies that are truly for the people.

The current (interim) civil society representatives on the Advisory Committee are:

- Mamadou Cissokho, ROPPA (Réseau des Organisations Paysannes & de Producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest)
- George Dixon Fernandez, MIJARC (Mouvement International de la Jeunesse Agricole),
- Beatrice Gasco-Verdier, IPC (International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty)
- Chris Leather, Oxfam International

The mechanism by which civil society will engage with the CFS is currently being drafted. More information can be found from:

- cso4cfs@gmail.com

⁴ *op cit*, ¶11



Tomatoes drying in Mauritania



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