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Kate Eklin, Ingrid Finess Evensmo, Ioana Georgescu, Victoire Hubert, Jimmy Le, Tehminah Malik, Sébastien Treyer, Matthieu Brun

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## The Committee on World Food Security reform: impacts on global governance of food security

Kate Eklin, Ingrid Finess Evensmo, Ioana Georgescu, Victoire Hubert, Jimmy Le, Tehminah Malik (Sciences Po Paris), Sébastien Treyer, Matthieu Brun (IDDRI)

### A POLICY FORMATION PROCESS THAT GENERATES A DIVERSITY OF OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

The Committee on World Food Security was created in 1974 as an intergovernmental forum. The evolution of food and nutrition security issues and the renewal of interest from international institutions globally pushed the CFS bureau to propose a reform in 2009. This reform allowed room for involvement by both civil society and a science-policy interface in the CFS policy cycle to facilitate the production of global guidelines on the various aspects of food security. The CFS should now enter the second phase of reform, based on developing accountability and shared best practices.

### A USEFUL MECHANISM BETWEEN CONTRIBUTIONS BY THE HLPE AND NGOS/CSOS

The science-policy interface represented by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition produces two reports a year on topics chosen by the CFS. These reports facilitate, clarify and structure the debates in the Committee. Civil society is self-organized through the Civil Society Mechanism, a coordinating committee that intervenes in the CFS session as a non-voting stakeholder. Civil Society also participates through a virtual commenting platform during the redaction period of the HLPE reports.

### A NEW INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE : LESSONS LEARNED FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

The reformed CFS now represents a new way of considering food security global governance by involving all stakeholders and a science-policy interface in the discussions in this field. The second phase of the reform could mean even more in terms of developing new governance practices. This unique institution must now reflect on what it has built over the last four years and enhance the institutional culture it has created in order to maintain its position as the main forum on food and nutrition security issues and inspire new governance experiences. This paper makes an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the institution based on qualitative interviews with CFS stakeholders.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS), created in 1974 as an intergovernmental forum to review food security policies, underwent reform in 2009 (CFS 2009). Like many international issues, policy preferences and focal areas for food security governance have evolved over time. While international financial institutions played a key role in international agendas and trade issues were at the heart of debates concerning the food security agenda from the 1980s to the mid-2000s, in more recent years civil society has been drawing attention to new issues such as food sovereignty and the right to food (McKeon 2011). From 2005, the possibilities for institutional change and policy reform re-emerged. Key agricultural organisations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), underwent external reviews, the Doha trade round was unable to move forward due to agricultural issues, and the World Bank's 2008 World Development Report focused again on agriculture, a topic largely ignored since their 1982 report.

The 2007-2008 food price crisis then highlighted the pressing need for an improved global governance of food security issues and triggered specific actions. First, the UN High-Level Task Force composed of relevant UN bodies and Bretton Woods institutions was launched in 2008 by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, as a technical and non-political initiative. A Global Partnership on Agriculture and Food Security was also proposed in 2008 by the G8 and was both important in terms of political impetus and largely rejected by other governance institutions, as it was seen as an effort by G8 countries and the private sector to bypass the UN (McKeon 2011).

Finally, the CFS reform was an initiative taken by the CFS Bureau that enabled both governments

and civil society to be involved in a UN framework. The two major outcomes of this reform are the inclusion of civil society as active participants in the CFS and the creation of a science-policy interface, the High Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition (HLPE). The reform was intended to be a two-phase process, with the first phase focusing on policy coordination at the global level and support to countries and regions, while the second phase is intended to step up the national and regional involvement of the CFS as a facilitating accountability mechanism that promotes best practices with regard to global food security (CFS 2009).

The CFS reform was fostered not only by the institutional context, but also by a profound transformation of the nature of the food security issue. Changes in trade patterns and the resulting globalisation of markets have meant countries are now unable to control all the variables linked to food security. Furthermore, the scope of the issue has been broadened from simply increasing food production to include both economic and social access to food and the sustainability of agricultural systems, which is increasingly challenged by climate change, nutritional issues and other dimensions. According to the FAO World Food Summit held in 1996, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

The development of global guidelines on food security is facilitated through the CFS Plenary, which is held annually with members, participants, and observers. The annual plenary session is the conclusion of the work carried out throughout the year during intersessional meetings. Member status is reserved for countries and enables voting and decision making on the CFS

output. Non-governmental actors, such as civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector, engage with the CFS as participants with the ability to intervene and contribute to the agenda setting process and the production of formal proposals. Observer status may be granted through CFS invitation and can include regional and local authorities. Debates, discussions and coordination take place during the annual meeting. As a result of the reform, CSOs are able to participate in all activities, including the Plenary, through the speaking slots granted to them (CFS 2010:10). According to various documents produced by the CSM and to the CSO representatives' interviews, in reality, during the CFS week, civil society organisations are granted five speaking slots identified for each agenda item/session and then communicated to the chairperson of the session beforehand. The purpose of the five speaking slots is to communicate the common positions developed by the CSOs through the CSM (CSM 2012:6). Although the plenary sessions take place in October in Rome, the CFS may also meet to discuss specific issues at other times of the year. Furthermore, open ended working groups (OEWG) allow members, participants, and observers to address specific topics, as has been the case for land tenure, the principles for responsible agricultural investments, monitoring and the agenda for action in protracted crises.

The Bureau, which is described as the executive arm of the CFS, consists of one chairperson and a rotating composition of 12 member state representatives. The Bureau seeks the advice of the Advisory Group, which includes representatives from the UN bodies, CSOs/NGOs, relevant research institutions, financial institutions and the private sector. The composition of the Advisory Group must necessarily include representatives from all the CFS participant categories, but is not weighted equally in terms of representatives per participatory category.

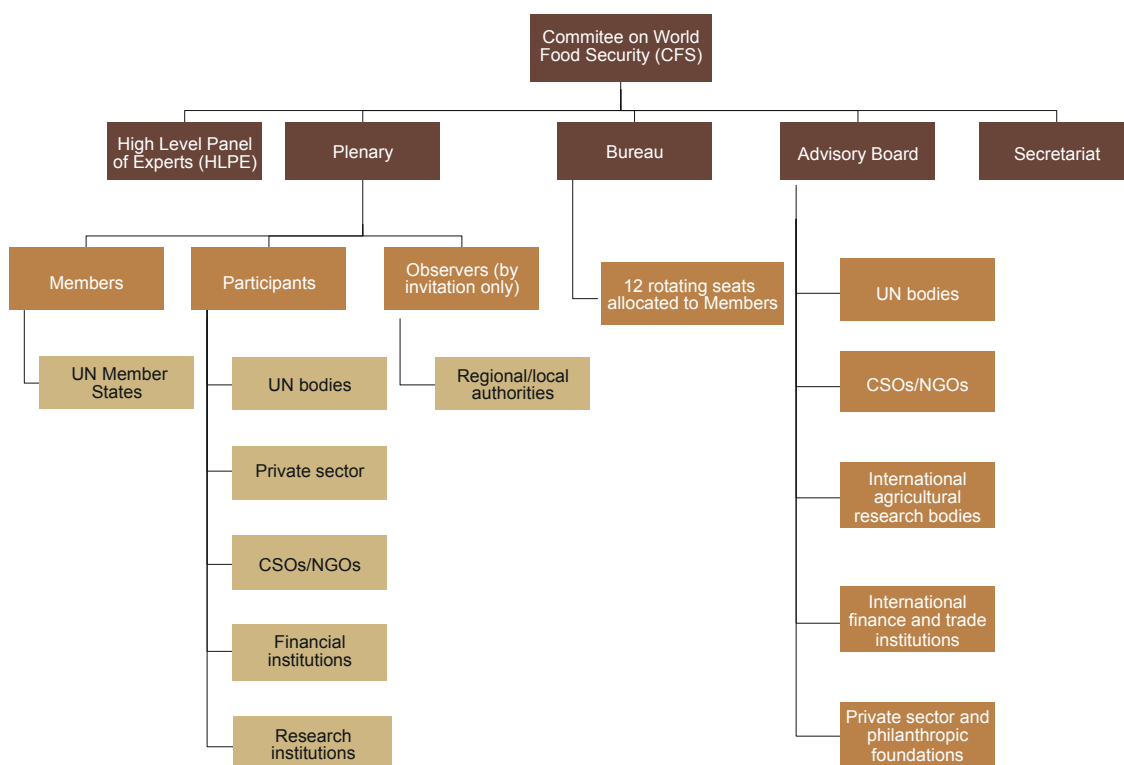
Although the CFS is still officially part of FAO as a committee, alongside other entities such as the Committee on Commodity Problems or the Committee on Fisheries, it has gained higher political importance, especially since the reform and the participation of the CSOs, meaning it is considered by many as a partly independent body (FAO 2013: 123). The status of the CFS was upgraded, since it reports annually not only to FAO during its conference, but also to the General Assembly via the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (De Janvry 2013). The CFS Secretariat is located in FAO Rome and is tasked with the facilitation of the annual Plenary and supporting all intersessional activities, as well as providing relevant support for the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group.

The HLPE prepares scientific policy-oriented reports based on topics chosen by the CFS Plenary. Since the establishment of the HLPE in 2010, two reports are presented at each CFS Plenary for discussion and policy debate. This high-level body of experts on food security is composed of a Steering Committee and teams of experts that are appointed for each report. Civil society, governments, other researchers and the private sector participate in the drafting of the report through two commenting periods (one to frame the topic, and another to assess the first draft and to provide feedback on it). Once the report is finalised, it is reviewed by external experts and the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee pays close attention to the report recommendations to ensure that they correspond to the mandate given by the CFS, and will edit recommendations if they fall outside this mandate. Member states do not review the report before it goes to the Plenary. The report is presented to the CFS, which then conducts its policy debates and prepares its own recommendations based on the analysis and the recommendations proposed by the HLPE. The main role of the HLPE as a science-policy interface is thus to facilitate the debate within the CFS and to inform the discussions held during the policy roundtable at plenary sessions with a scientific basis and to provide a comprehensive, scientifically balanced view on existing controversies, as well as a starting point for debates.

With regard to CSO participation, the reform has established a formal space for CSOs as active participants in the CFS through the allocation of five speaking slots provided at the yearly Plenary. In order to encourage efficient participation by CSOs, the reform document encourages the autonomous creation of a coordination mechanism (CFS 2009). This is the basis for the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), which is an autonomous, self-organised mechanism to facilitate ongoing civil society participation in CFS-related events and processes at the global, regional and national levels.

While recognising that the reform process is ongoing and has not yet been fully completed, the purpose of this paper is to provide an initial progress report on the CFS reform while focusing on the newly created HLPE and the inclusion of CSOs as active participants in the CFS. We use the goals of the reformed CFS as a tool to gauge reform progress.

**Figure 1.** Organisational structure after the 2009 CFS reform



Source: Authors conceptualisation

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

This report is based on semi-structured interviews, conducted largely by telephone, Skype and email between January and May 2013. An initial round of exploratory interviews were conducted with actors such as the French Ministry of Agriculture, the French Development Agency (AFD) and NGOs such as Action Contre la Faim and GRET on general food security governance issues that highlighted the importance of the reformed CFS. An additional 46 interviews then focused specifically on the CFS reform. Interviewees consisted of civil society organisations (CSOs), the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM), the CFS and HLPE Secretariats, United Nations (UN) staff, private sector representatives, financial institutions, members of the HLPE Steering Committee, researchers participating in the HLPE reports and government officials from France, Norway, Switzerland, Brazil and Zimbabwe. Materials used in the analysis include HLPE reports, CFS rules and procedures, and academic literature. The insights into the role of the HLPE and CSO involvement in the CFS after the 2009 reform are thus based on comments and understandings of the reform provided by

representatives of major CFS stakeholders. A list of interviewees and interview questions can be found in Annex 2.

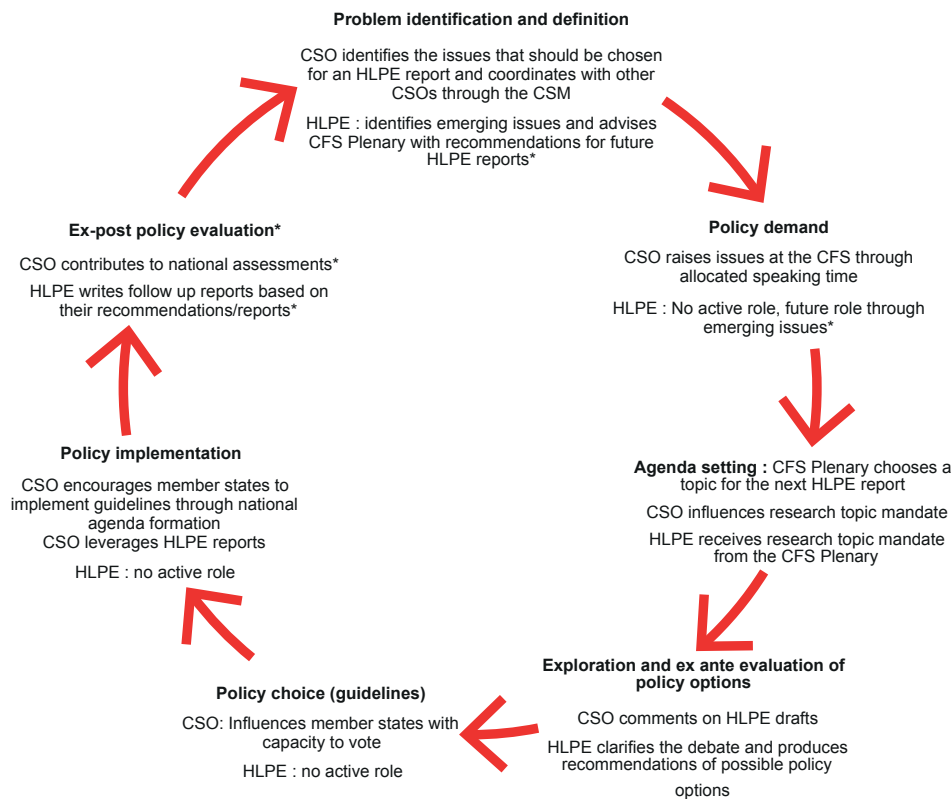
Our framework for analysing the CFS reform draws on traditional public policy making cycles, the principles of discursive institutionalism and the production of “usable knowledge.”

### 2.1. Policy cycle

In political science, public policy formation is traditionally described as a cyclical process. Originating in the early days of policy analysis with the studies conducted by Harold D Lasswell (1956) and Charles O. Jones (1970), the literature on the subject focuses on the stages through which ideas and proposals move before becoming public policy in order to “unravel how the policy process works” (Jones 1970: 9). The stages approach gives the researcher a set of tools to classify and prioritise the types of issues, mechanisms, actors, and timeframes of public policies. Lasswell first designed a conceptual map of seven functional steps that policy tends to go through: intelligence; promotion; prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal (Lasswell 1956). Drawing on the original model, a conceptualisation of the CFS



**Figure 2.** Potential interventions of the HLPE and CSOs in the CFS policy cycle



Source: Authors conceptualisation

Note - Roles and steps envisioned : This visual representation of the policy cycle is a proposal to attempt to identify both current interventions by the HLPE and CSOs in the CFS policy making process, and also potential or planned interventions. It is not intended to be exhaustive, but is rather an invitation to distinguish the numerous phases and the various roles science and civil society can play at these different stages. It should be noted that through active involvement in the CFS working group for its Programme of Work, the Advisory Group and Plenary CSOs can promote CFS work streams that do not necessarily result from HLPE reports.

policy making process and the respective possibilities for intervention by the HLPE and CSOs at each stage was designed in order to analyse the involvement of CSOs and the role of science in the elaboration of standards, norms and guidelines on food security (see figure 2).

While the policy formation cycle is a useful tool for visualising the possible interventions by the HLPE and CSOs within a reformed CFS, it is important to remember the potentially limited role of the CFS in classical policy making. Traditional public policy initiatives will be undertaken by individual national governments, and are defined by Cochran et al. as “rooted in law and in the authority and coercion associated with law” (2009: 2). The CFS itself has no power over individual states’ national policies. However, the CFS does play a key role as a public policy forum to produce international non-binding norms on food security policy. As defined by Fouilleux, public policy forums help to elucidate the heterogeneity of existing ideas about public policies and the plurality of

representations, ideas, values and worldviews, thereby enabling policy makers to inform their choices (Fouilleux, 2000: 279). The production of guidelines and recommendations can potentially be incorporated into national policy making, while binding rules may hamper progress on an issue by prompting negative reactions from states wishing to protect their sovereignty. In addition, the ability of member states to implement guidelines varies, and country-specific legal obstacles are often not taken into consideration at the global level. Thus, the flexibility of non-binding rules may be a useful tool to offset these challenges.

The reformed CFS includes intervention by the HLPE and CSOs at various stages of the CFS policy process (see figure 2). These interventions differ in nature between the HLPE goal of clarifying and structuring the scientific debate in order to facilitate agenda setting and discussions during the CFS Plenary, and the CSOs’ intention to influence the debate and its outcome. CSO involvement at the agenda setting level and the exploration of

possible policy options reflect the inclusiveness of the reformed CFS and its potential for greater policy impact. Throughout the policy making cycle, CSOs can invest varying degrees of time and effort to promote their understanding of the issues that may have a direct impact on the policy options considered and ultimately implemented by the CFS. This paper addresses how these interventions by the HLPE and CSOs, and therefore their discourses in the policy making process, have until now been able to influence the dynamics of the CFS policy making cycle and what the different stakeholders consider to be the outputs of the CFS.

## 2.2. The role of ideas

The renewed CFS institutional framework enables a greater number of actors to interact in the CFS policy cycle on a deeper level, and to do so more frequently. This intensification may subsequently produce greater discursive confrontation. Discursive institutionalism emphasises the way in which institutions shape the discourse and the exchange of ideas between actors and, in return, how discourses may also trigger changes in institutions and norms. Through interaction with others, the different actors redefine their interests and values. As described by Schmidt (2008), discursive institutionalism is the analysis of the link between “policies” and “politics”. The evaluation of discourse goes beyond simply addressing the ideas presented (what is said), and also assesses the context (where, when, how, why, and to whom it was said) of the process in which ideas can be conveyed and communicated. From this perspective, this paper also assesses the normative and prescriptive nature of the ideas and discourse presented by NGOs and the HLPE within the CFS in order to understand their potential influence on the decision-making process, at the global level of international norms and regulations as well as at the national and regional levels.

## 2.3. The production of usable knowledge

Science and civil society interact in the reformed CFS with the goal of producing usable knowledge about food security. “Usable knowledge” is defined as relevant information used in the policy making process that is credible, salient and legitimate (Haas 2004). Cash et al (2002) highlight the challenges of creating a balanced space where credible, salient and legitimate information can be produced, and note that science-policy interfaces have often disproportionately focused on producing credible information in which scientific

rigour takes precedence. Saliency refers to the relevance of information to the target audience, which in the case of the HLPE would be the CFS and other stakeholders. Legitimacy is linked to the fairness of the process used to produce the information and whether or not it considers the perspectives of diverse actors. Even if the three criteria best apply to the science policy interface, which means the HLPE itself, they can also apply at the scale of the whole CFS policy cycle. The involvement of CSOs in the CFS policy cycle may be seen as a tool to increase the overall legitimacy of the CFS. The reform process, in its varying stages, has impacted the credibility, saliency and legitimacy of the CFS process. While increased inclusion may create greater legitimacy, it can also pose challenges for credibility. This paper will assess the tensions between elements of usable knowledge that are particularly relevant to the HLPE process, as the production of salient reports must strike a delicate balance between saliency, credibility and legitimacy.

## 3. CIVIL SOCIETY PARTICIPATION IN THE CFS: THREE YEARS AFTER THE REFORM

### 3.1. Introduction

The CFS provides a unique platform for civil society to directly engage with countries in global decision making on food security as participants in the CFS Plenary sessions and intersessional work in the Open Ended Working Groups, Task Teams and Advisory Group. By elevating civil society involvement to a participant status, the reformed CFS envisages an enhanced two-way exchange with these stakeholders at the international, regional, national and local levels. Furthermore, it expects to improve coordination between member states in order to ensure a more rapid identification of food security issues as they arise and to incentivise mobilisation in times of emergencies while enhancing the implementation of forward-looking policies.

The renewed participation of civil society in the CFS reform document is largely seen as the result of the targeted efforts by some member states and three international organisations: Oxfam, the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) and Action Aid. The CFS reform document stipulates that CSOs shall organise themselves ‘autonomously’, in a manner that allows them to voice concerns in a coherent and unified way, while ensuring that diverse views can also be

**Figure 3.** Organisation of the Civil Society Mechanism



Source: CSM 2013

heard. The Civil Society Mechanism, a unique body of this kind in the UN system, was created in 2010 in response to this clause. The CSM Secretariat is small (three people) and interacts with a larger coordination committee (41 people), which oversees sub-regional committees and NGO constituencies (see Figure 3). There are 11 constituencies, each with two coordinators, which bring together and reflect the people most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition in core groups (the landless, the urban poor, women, youth, consumers, pastoralists, etc.). Being part of an NGO constituency would mean that an organisation participates in civil society interactions with the CFS and is able to nominate NGO constituency members of the CSM Coordination Committee. Together, they facilitate the work of the mechanism. In addition to coordinating civil society participation, the CSM is attempting to reach out to organisations working on food security, in order to broaden its participation base and to thereby increase its saliency and legitimacy in the eyes of the other stakeholders involved in the CFS.

The civil society organisations included in the CSM are very heterogeneous, ranging from international non-governmental organisations and development organisations to grassroots organisations, social movements and food producers'

unions. This paper makes a distinction between organisations whose work is of global or international scope (these are termed NGOs) and organisations of national or local scope (CSOs). This distinction is not generally recognised, and there may be overlaps between CSOs and NGOs, but we consider this distinction for the purpose of this paper.

### 3.2. Expectations of CSOs and NGOs and their contribution to the policy making process

Civil society involvement is present at various stages of the CFS policy making process, in an attempt by CSOs and NGOs to assist in the norm development process and to encourage a thorough implementation of CFS guidelines.

#### 3.2.1. Problem definition

As stated by the CSOs interviewed, one of the most important contributions of CSM members thus far has been that of problem (re)definition. Civil society representatives have been responsible for highlighting issues (such as responsible agricultural investment) that have previously been ignored or marginalised in the policy making agenda of governments involved in the CFS. They have also been able to bring new evidence

and fresh arguments, succeeding in reopening discussions on issues on which governments had previously agreed, which lead to different policy outcomes after renegotiation.

The civil society rationale to include discussions of new topics such as trade and climate change emphasises their view that the CFS mandate to eradicate food insecurity and hunger is impossible to achieve without also discussing interlinked topics that have direct consequences on the appropriate solutions. This position may be related both to the fact that civil society perceives the CFS as a legitimate and perhaps more efficient place to address these issues, and that civil society representatives do not have the same opportunity to have their voice heard on these topics in other forums. Many member states, on the other hand, have been reluctant to discuss in the CFS topics such as trade-related issues that are being discussed in other global institutions. Such conflicting views about issues to be debated at the CFS, related to its mandate as a UN institution, might be a critical point in future discussions.

### 3.2.2. Problem formulation and agenda setting (framing the issues)

Civil society representatives have been active participants in the policy debate, framing the issues brought to CFS discussions in a rights-based manner. As one of the interviewees pointed out, for CSM members, it is not sufficient to request the discussion of certain topics in the CFS; they must also attempt to provide a specific understanding of each topic, and encourage CFS participants to adopt that understanding. Other stakeholders involved in the CFS appreciate this approach and believe it enriches the discussion. For example, the Project Team responsible for the HLPE report on Social Protection was proud to be given the opportunity to work with a researcher who was knowledgeable about public nutrition and its relationship to human rights.

The rights-based approach is common to all NGOs and CSOs involved in the CSM and, along with the concept of food sovereignty, enables them to reach a consensual understanding of each topic discussed and, subsequently, to speak with a common voice in the CFS Plenary. Some farmers' organisations focus on a more specific subset of rights, those of peasants, as formulated in the "Declaration of Rights of Peasants - Women and Men" adopted by Via Campesina in 2009. This is also visible in their active commenting on HLPE report topics that directly concern farmers, as seen in the HLPE reports on smallholders, social protection and climate change (see also HLPE section). Yet their more focused approach blends in

well with the more general, human rights-based approach of the other CSOs and NGOs.

Jointly pushing for the adoption by the CFS of the rights-based approach in its work not only enables civil society representatives to speak with a louder collective voice in the topic demand process, but also appears to be crucial to civil society representatives in their attempts to contribute to the implementation of CFS guidelines at the national level, and to hold their governments accountable for proper implementation. The civil society strategy is particularly skilful considering that CFS guidelines are non-binding, and one way to help civil society to force governments to implement the guidelines is to give them a rights-based format.

Most civil society representatives are content with the agenda being set by the CFS and focus their intervention on re-framing the issue in order to push for their own understanding of it to be adopted in CFS documents and guidelines (which is a sufficiently challenging task for them). However, certain large NGOs and a few CSOs (mainly regional representatives that have been involved with the CFS since the beginning of the reform process) want and attempt to intervene in the CFS agenda setting, by pushing for the discussion at the CFS of certain topics they consider important. Although it is not clear through what channels this intervention can be achieved, it is certain that in order for it to be successful, it requires excellent coordination of all civil society representatives, so that they speak with one voice.

The most important and open channel for civil society to impact CFS agenda setting and problem formulation is by influencing the topic choice for the HLPE reports. Most CSM members perceive that they have a real influence in the choice of report topics. Civil society representatives use the HLPE reports and commenting process as a way of steering the discourse towards the controversial subjects they find to be most relevant. The choice of climate change for a 2012 HLPE report, despite protests from a number of governments, was viewed by civil society as an important accomplishment. In addition to climate change, the reports on biofuels, price volatility and social protection are mentioned by CSOs as responding to their demands. One CSO interviewed noted the exception of the topic chosen for a 2014 HLPE report on "food losses and waste in the context of sustainable food systems", instead of which the CSM had originally proposed and expected a report on sustainable food systems.

Civil society involvement in these reports is primarily motivated by its eagerness to discuss within the CFS topics – climate change and trade, for



instance – that are currently being addressed by other international institutions, such as the G20 or WTO. However it is important to note that civil society’s formal influence over the HLPE output is limited, as it does not make the final decision about the topics to be analysed. While some CSM members believe they have an indirect influence on the topic, it is difficult for them to measure it.

### 3.2.3. Exploration of possible policy options and choice of policy

In the next two policy stages, the exploration of possible policy options and the choice of policy (guidelines), it is mostly the NGOs that intervene, with apparently little CSO involvement. Intervening in the policy making stage requires specific skills that CSOs often lack, as well as experience of international negotiations. Although some capacity building processes have occurred between NGOs and CSOs in preparation for political negotiations during the CFS Plenary, currently most CSOs do not have enough preparation to intervene and shape the discussion at this stage. This limited capacity to follow up on policy making is mirrored by the commenting process on the HLPE reports (see HLPE section), where CSOs, unlike NGOs, comment far more on the scope of the paper topic than on the content of the first draft.

CSOs have come to measure the importance of this knowledge and skills gap, and the fact that it puts them at a disadvantage in the negotiation process. They thus insist on the importance of closing this gap, first by stressing the need for the southern CSOs, which are currently involved in the Rome-based discussions, including the CFS Plenary, to continue their involvement, so that they can profit from the interaction with NGOs and strengthen their internal capacity. Second, they point out that more CSM funds should go towards organising regional preparation and topic discussions, in order for the other CSOs that are not participating directly in Rome to also build their capacity so that they can provide quality inputs for discussion and participate in the commenting and feedback process on CFS guidelines and HLPE reports.

However, given current time- and resource-related constraints, CSOs leave most of the guideline formulation negotiations to NGOs, whose human rights-based approach and respect of the food sovereignty concept mean some of their requests can be integrated into the CFS output (which is corroborated by the fact that all CSOs are happy with the voluntary guidelines on land tenure).

Civil society influence in the policy option exploration stage is most clearly expressed and formalised through the speaking slots assigned to civil society through the 2009 reform. Though the slots

are formally assigned to civil society, interviewees raised concerns that the limited space is unable to capture the plethora of concerns and that the formal space is not always respected by the chairs of meeting. These concerns must be taken seriously and addressed appropriately if the full implementation of the reform is to be successful, as they have implications for the extent to which civil society is motivated to continue its involvement in the CFS (as its limited resources mean it must allocate time and financial resources in the most efficient manner possible).

Given the current constraints they face, CSOs are forced to prioritise their interventions in the CFS, and it appears that their main priorities are pushing for their understanding of CFS-proposed issues to be adopted in the discussions, and intervening at the other end of the policy cycle, in the implementation and monitoring of CFS guidelines at the national level.

For those organisations that do manage to get involved in the guideline formulation stage, they need to analyse CFS guidelines and proposal documents and try to strategically change the language to introduce key words in the phrasing of policies. This requires a huge amount of detailed-oriented work in a short space of time, as well as skilful negotiations with the other actors involved (mostly with diplomats belonging to national delegations). During the interviews, numerous CSOs expressed their desire for greater interaction with government representatives, despite the existing procedures and joint meetings. They have asked for more formal solutions to promote dialogue and interaction.

### 3.2.4. Implementation and monitoring

Involvement in the implementation of CFS guidelines is the single highest priority that civil society representatives, and especially those of CSOs, have for their future involvement in the CFS. Most organisations, and particularly CSOs, chose to get involved in CFS discussions in the hope that this involvement would foster positive developments in terms of fighting hunger in their respective geographical areas of intervention. While larger NGOs aim to ensure better coordination of food security policies at the global level, and are thus content with CFS achievements so far (producing guidelines and conducting global discussions on food security-related topics), most CSOs do not see these developments as tangible progress, and will only consider their involvement with the CFS as a success when they are able to use CFS guidelines to influence national policies and tilt them in favour of the hungry and marginalised populations they serve.

In order to encourage the implementation of CFS guidelines at the national level, these guidelines need to be adapted to specific regional contexts. For example, a group of European NGOs, including Via Campesina, are working on adapting the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure of Land to the local context, as these cannot be directly applied, but might, if reformulated, contribute to solving certain tenure-related issues in Western countries. This adaptation process is also important because states may be reluctant to implement guidelines that do not seem locally relevant, especially if they are to be monitored on their implementation and compared to other regions. So far, the CFS has not designated those responsible for the adaptation of its guidelines to regional contexts, but this is an area that requires reflection, and should be included in the general discussion on monitoring.

Monitoring and encouraging the enforcement of its guidelines will help the CFS gain more credibility in the international arena, at a time when its role as a policy coordinator on food security issues is being questioned by powerful international organisations and groups such as the G8 and the G20, which some even consider more powerful than the CFS.

The issue of monitoring is currently being discussed in a CFS Open Working Group, and was again raised in a round table discussion at the 40<sup>th</sup> CFS Plenary in October 2013. According to an interviewee, the role of clarifying the monitoring process within the CFS will arise from a collective understanding of what is possible, given the “limits” of the CFS as a global governance institution. The main questions to be addressed are: Who will be responsible for developing indicators and collecting data? Where will the results be discussed? How will they be benchmarked? Several suggestions have been put forward as to how this could be achieved, and at which level – including the proposal to organise peer reviews at the regional level (supported by regional economic cooperation organisations), a proposal to delegate the coordination of the monitoring process to FAO regional offices (although their capacity and political will to accept this responsibility is questioned by certain actors in the CFS), and the proposal of a few states and international NGOs to carry out such national assessments within the CFS.

There is no unified position within the CSM on a preferred model, and the decision making process still appears to be in its infancy. However, most civil society representatives express a clear interest in being involved in any future monitoring process, in order to ensure that the rights of populations are respected and fulfilled. Unless the role civil society will play in the monitoring process can

be clarified, the CFS risks losing the engagement of NGOs and CSOs in the long run.

For such monitoring to involve civil society members, the process needs to take into account regional disparities in terms of the political legitimacy organisations possess, so as to give them appropriate roles in each region. Different degrees of CFS endorsement also need to be provided to local organisations so that their role as monitors is accepted and their input is valued by national policymakers. Monitoring should also consider that member states are sceptical about a peer review system, unless it is carried out at a regionally relevant scale, using specific area indicators.

In addition to CFS guidelines, HLPE reports could also be used directly by civil society organisations to influence and improve national policy making on food security issues. Some NGOs already mention their attempts to use HLPE reports to push for government action in a national context. Whether this is widely practiced is difficult to say, and it will most likely depend on the capacities of each organisation.

### 3.3. How do CSOs and NGOs assess their current influence through the CFS?

The current space for civil society representatives in the CFS Plenary, Open-Ended Working Groups, Task Forces and HLPE is largely viewed as satisfactory by civil society. CSM members openly recognise that their space in the CFS is unique compared to other global governance institutions, and that the reform has provided them with a greater voice in the debate on food security at the global level. The current rules and practices for civil society engagement are generally accepted, and CSM members do not view it as crucial to bargain for more space within the institution at this time. Discussions within civil society and the CSM instead appear to be focused on how to secure the space they now have in the CFS and to utilise it in the most efficient way. Some CSM members are worried that the space is not yet institutionalised and could therefore be threatened by member states as the CFS gains importance.

Civil society’s own perception of being an active participant in the CFS is confirmed by representatives from member states, the UN and the private sector. Without exception, these stakeholders view CSM members as active participants both in the CFS Plenary and in the intersessional work. They are also perceived as being well prepared for the discussions and as able to clearly voice their positions. From the viewpoint of these stakeholders,

civil society manages to speak with one voice at the CFS and appear to be very well organised.

By and large, civil society representatives are satisfied with the fact that controversial topics such as price volatility, climate change and biofuels have been explored by the HLPE and discussed in the CFS over the last few years, and believe that their own participation contributed to this achievement. However, there is concern that the non-binding nature of the guidelines produced may be toothless. Some of our interviewees perceived that the existing framework produces fragmented pieces, since comments and opposition to certain formulations by individual member states are incorporated. Desires were voiced during the interviews to orient the HLPE in a direction where it may produce fully holistic reports, as opposed to the current output.

Topics mentioned by CSM members as being given too little space for discussion in the CFS thus far are food sovereignty, sustainable agricultural practices and food security in conflict and protracted crisis areas, even if this is already a CFS work stream through an Open Ended Working group chaired jointly by Kenya and the US. There are clear ambitions among many to push for inclusion of these topics on the CFS agenda in the future. There is a general perception among other stakeholders that civil society input is indeed contributing to and shaping the discussions in the CFS Plenary and intersessional work.

### 3.4. Functioning of the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM)

There is general optimism about the functioning of the Civil Society Mechanism among civil society groups. Stakeholders acknowledge that the mechanism is still new and in the process of development, and that one cannot therefore expect it to be functioning to its full potential yet. Civil society representatives believe that the CSM coordination committee supported by the CSM Secretariat is doing its best to take the process forward. The CSM is recognised as being open to anyone who wants to be involved and there is no criticism regarding CSM guidelines. However, there is broad agreement among small CSOs and larger international NGOs alike that social movements and vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples, landless peasants, the urban poor and farmer-producer groups are currently not participating in the CSM or the CFS to the degree that is envisaged and desired.

With respect to the food producer group, certain actors have voiced the concern that the CSM may not be the appropriate mechanism to represent their interests, as they are both part of civil society

but also, by the nature of their activity, producers and providers of goods, and therefore also part of the private sector. Certain farmers' organisations, especially smallholders, are comfortable being part of the CSM, although they do point out that they encounter certain difficulties in voicing their concerns through the CSM. For example, they cannot respect the stringent time constraints imposed by CFS work as effectively as NGOs can (due to lack of practice and unequal capacity compared to NGOs). But other farmers' groups (especially groups of medium-scale and large-scale farmers or farmers from industrialised countries) may not be as comfortable in the CSM. One CSO interviewee mentioned that industrial farmers' groups from the European Union had attempted to integrate the CSM, but had to give up their participation as their opinions were too different to those of the other CSOs.

Another issue that might affect industrial or conventional farmers' representation in the CFS is the fact that most do not identify themselves as such, the category being too vague or controversial, and, as a result, they do not organise themselves or send representatives to speak on their behalf at the CFS. Some of them are represented in the Private Sector Mechanism through the World Farmers' Organisation. It should not be forgotten, however, that their input in discussions on food security questions is crucial, yet under-represented. There is a call from all CFS participants for a solution to the representation of this group to be found (current suggestions being to include them in the Private Sector Mechanism or to design a special mechanism for farmers' groups), as they are key players in ensuring food availability and thus key contributors to food security.

With respect to vulnerable groups and some smallholder farmers' groups, one major obstacle identified is the time constraints they face, which make it difficult for them to allocate their time to participating in global policy processes. Many struggle to sustain their daily activities, and for the social movements, their priorities are first and foremost ensuring results at the local and national levels. Commenting on CFS proposal documents throughout the year and travelling to the CSM annual forum or CFS Plenary sessions in Rome may take time away from other issues these groups view as more pressing.

A general barrier to the work of the CSM is the lack of resources<sup>1</sup>. Many civil society representatives, although not all, believe there is currently

1. Financing for the CSM is to be provided by "participating governments and where possible, better resourced NGOs" (CFS 2010: 10)

enough money in the CSM to finance the travel of representatives from CSOs in developing countries to attend the CFS Plenary and CSM annual forum, and for the CSM Secretariat to operate. However, several criticise the fact that this funding is only provided on a yearly basis and not for longer periods of time, making it difficult for the CSOs to plan and prepare their participation ahead of time. Sometimes the CSOs are informed that they have been given the financial means to attend the CFS Plenary only a few weeks before the sessions, making it difficult to organise travel (let alone to ensure proper preparation for CFS discussions) for representatives from the most vulnerable groups. CSM members are therefore requesting that financial contributions from member states become more stable and predictable in order to facilitate planning and mobilisation of grassroots participants.

Funding is also viewed as insufficient for achieving the CSM vision of conducting consultations at the national and regional levels throughout the year. CSOs view such consultations as crucial for developing good, well-founded positions for civil society to take to the CFS Plenary. Many point to the fact that it is easier for the poorest and most vulnerable people to participate in national or regional meetings than to travel to Rome for the CSM annual forum and CFS Plenary sessions. The two above-mentioned funding challenges are also acknowledged by some of the contributing member states, which also call for more countries in the CFS to contribute with funding to CSO participation.

Another obstacle in the work of the CSM to reach out to the most vulnerable groups is that many of the consultations are currently conducted by internet, facilitating the participation of many but also effectively excluding a significant proportion of the people concerned by such issues, who do not have access to such equipment.

Furthermore, language can be a barrier to the participation of certain groups at the CFS Plenary sessions in Rome. It is difficult for the representatives to follow the negotiations unless they speak the languages used at the UN. The CSM is working to improve its communication in different languages, but is also facing challenges when many of the documents that are sent from the CFS have not yet been translated from English, and translation into other languages may come months later. This is a problem when deadlines for civil society to comment on such documents are often short.

Finally, there are structural differences with regard to the ability of organisations to coordinate priorities and concerns within the CSM and at a regional level. This may be exemplified through the Eastern European civil society, which is described

as poorly organised due to financial and time constraints. CSOs from this particular region are faced with what is seen as opposition from member states, making it difficult to establish a solid basis that can be further expanded and developed. This also has consequences for the influence of external NGOs, where interviewees have expressed the existing discrepancy between the ability of CSOs and NGOs to establish themselves in a national context and to formulate agenda. In essence, the issue may be best expressed as member states being more responsive to established and large NGOs, which hampers the work of smaller CSOs that focus on specific concerns.

This concern is not specific to Eastern Europe, as CSOs express the fear that international NGOs capture the attention of member states more efficiently, at the expense of local concerns. This is an issue to which the larger NGOs are sensitive, and which they try to accommodate by actively engaging with CSOs. One effect of the difficulties in mobilising the social movements and the most vulnerable to participate in the CSM and the CFS is that the larger international NGOs with more resources and capacities often fill the space and take the role of speaking on behalf of civil society. This trend is recognised by all CSOs interviewed as well as by some representatives of member states, UN bodies and the private sector. While many respondents see the CSM and these NGOs as trying their best to promote the concerns of the poorest and most vulnerable, some also maintain that NGOs are not always able to voice the interests of the social movements. Regardless of the view on the intentions of international NGOs, there is general agreement that this situation is not ideal. Both smaller CSOs and the larger NGOs themselves say the focus of the CSM should continue to be increasing the level of participation so that the most marginalised groups are represented directly and not indirectly.

### 3.5. CSO/NGO perceptions of other actors' involvement

#### 3.5.1. Member states

Civil society representatives see the level of involvement of member states in the CFS as mixed but increasing. Many of them have the impression that governments are now more likely than previously to see the CFS as an important arena for discussing and deciding on global food security policies. However, many CSM members also express the fear that some countries are working to delegitimise the CFS and to move actual decision making on food security to other international forums like the G8 and the G20. They therefore believe it is



crucial to maintain pressure on member states to address food security issues within the CFS and to ensure that governments see this as the only legitimate forum for such decisions.

Within the CFS, some civil society representatives perceive that countries are increasingly listening to and taking into consideration their opinions and input when making final decisions. The Voluntary Guidelines on Land Tenure and the Global Strategic Framework are given as examples where CSM members feel that their voices have been heard by the member states. However, many southern CSOs report that they have very little interaction with governments when they are at the CFS, and suggest that there should be more formalised room for meeting with government officials. International and western European NGOs are more positive about the level of engagement with governments at the CFS, and state that they have the opportunity to meet with governments and to create alliances through informal channels at the CFS sessions.

In general, CSM members from western Europe and Latin America also report that they have effective discussions with their own governments about the CFS topics before travelling to the Plenary. Some countries (including France, Brazil, Switzerland and Norway) have developed special mechanisms for consulting with civil society and reaching common positions where possible before the CFS. Brazil is an example where the role of CSOs has become more active since the reform. Brazilian CSOs are involved in the pre-meeting process through advisory meetings, and they participate fully through engagement with task teams and drafting policy proposals. Regarding the African continent, the African Group – made up of African Permanent Representatives to the Rome-based Agencies – signed a memorandum of understanding with the Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO). According to an interviewee, views are regularly shared on the CFS agenda items between the PAFO and the African Representatives in Rome.

Some civil society representatives express hopes that the CFS will provide incentives to develop such partnerships in more countries. Organisations in Asia, Eastern Europe, North America and the Middle East are, however, not yet convinced that increased civil society participation in the CFS will have any effect on the dialogue with their governments at the national level. Many report current interaction with their own government as low or non-existent. Some do, however, mention that the CFS and the CSM are useful in opening up a space that enables civil society to organise itself and work together at the regional level. In this

context, the FAO regional conferences are mentioned as tools that could help to further open up this space.

However, some CSOs stated that there are certain topics relating to agriculture and food, such as nutrition, health and climate change, that some states are simply unwilling to discuss. While this is not true for all states, China, Russia, the Netherlands, the US, Canada (and some Latin American countries for specific issues) were named by various CSOs as being particularly challenging for civil society engagement on these issues.

### 3.5.2. Private sector

Civil society representatives see the current participation of the private sector in the CFS as limited or weak, a view that is shared by government representatives and UN bodies. A majority of CSM members consider that it is important for the private sector to be present and to participate actively in the CFS. However, due to conflicting views on a number of topics, most CSOs are unwilling to negotiate directly with the private sector. There is concern that if the private sector does not engage in the CFS, it will instead try to influence decision making processes through other less formal channels. CSM members view institutionalised and transparent private sector participation through the PSM as an ideal option. Private sector involvement in food security with alternative institutions, such as the G20, is seen as a pressing issue, as this would imply policy formation without civil society input on topics that directly concern it.

Some international NGOs are more positive about developing partnerships with the private sector than many southern CSOs. Likewise, the private sector states that it finds it easier to build a constructive dialogue with the larger NGOs based in Europe than with many of the southern NGOs and social movements with which it says it does not very often share common views.

### 3.5.3. Financial institutions

Civil society representatives see the level of participation in the CFS by financial institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and private financial investors as inadequate or non-existent. This view is shared by several member states and other UN representatives. A majority of CSM members think participation by financial institutions and regional development banks should be increased, not only because of their ability to provide funding, but also because of their capacity to influence the global policy making process. International financial institutions have a strong but less visible influence, and this should instead be made transparent

by increasing their participation in the CFS instruments. “Responsible investment” is a topic currently discussed in the CFS, and is mentioned as an area where the involvement of financial institutions is particularly relevant.

World Bank representatives see their participation in the CFS as satisfactory. Today the World Bank is a member of the CFS Advisory Group and contributes with reports when requested. Beyond this, World Bank representatives participate whenever they are invited, but their participation tends to be ad-hoc, depending on requests by the committee. Given that the CFS is not a decision making body, and that it is formally under the jurisdiction of FAO, the World Bank prefers to have FAO as the major multilateral agency that deals with the CFS, and interferes only at the request of the CFS.

### 3.6. Final recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the suggestions made by interviewees, and on the analysis presented in the former paragraphs.

#### 3.6.1. For the CSM

While it is too early to draw conclusions about the efficiency of the CSM, consolidating civil society involvement is crucial for maintaining the legitimacy and the quality of the CFS output. It is thus important for the CSM to:

- distribute its resources wisely, with more attention to be given to the funding of regional and topical discussions
- ensure that grassroots participation is broadened,
- ensure that there is a capacity building process among the CSOs involved
- ensure that regional coordination is maintained and improved

#### 3.6.2. For the CFS

By opening the global debate on food security issues to a variety of stakeholders (ranging from civil society and academia to the private sector) that were previously not included in such a formal manner, the CFS has gained international attention and recognition in a relatively short amount of time and has generated remarkable progress in policy discussions on key topics such as land tenure, climate change and price volatility. The CFS reform provided momentum for the issue of food security, but has been criticised over the last two years. This is an indication of the increasing importance and weight of the CFS in global governance, which may be seen in a positive light as an increase in efficiency and relevance. In order to maintain stakeholders’ interest, to increase their

level of commitment and to ensure the saliency of the CFS so it is unequivocally recognised as the pre-eminent forum on food security, the CFS needs to advance in its envisaged role to supporting and advising countries and regions on food security matters and on promoting accountability and sharing best practices at all levels (CFS 2009).

In reality, this requires:

- increasing awareness of CFS outputs at the national and local levels;
- improving the linkages between the CFS and the national and regional levels, and ‘marketing’ CFS decisions to other institutions, member states and other stakeholders;
- designing and applying an appropriate framework for monitoring the implementation of CFS guidelines, with careful attention to developing relevant indicators for each region and an appropriate benchmarking system that encourages progress, and finding the right partners to work with in the monitoring process;
- presenting and ‘marketing’ the work of the CFS at the level of the international institutions and organisations (such as WTO, World Bank, G8, G20, etc.), in order to avoid overlapping, and to guard the CFS mandate as the main forum for discussions on food security issues;
- improving the logistics and management of the CFS, in terms of funding (finding stable and diversified sources), safeguarding the involvement of all stakeholders (particularly CSOs), enforcing Plenary rules to make sure all stakeholders can participate fully in the discussions (especially in the Plenary; i.e. speaking slots to be respected),
- increased incentives for the private sector, member states and financial institutions to participate.

## 4. THE HIGH LEVEL PANEL OF EXPERTS: THREE YEARS AFTER THE REFORM

### 4.1. Introduction

Alongside the incorporation of civil society, the HLPE is the other major innovation of the 2009 CFS reform. One of the main elements of the reform was to include all relevant stakeholders in the decision-making process. Due to the complexity and politicisation of food security (McKeon 2011: see general introduction), the creation of the HLPE was necessary to facilitate, clarify and structure the CFS debates, what the HLPE Secretariat coordinator Vincent Gitz calls the creation of a

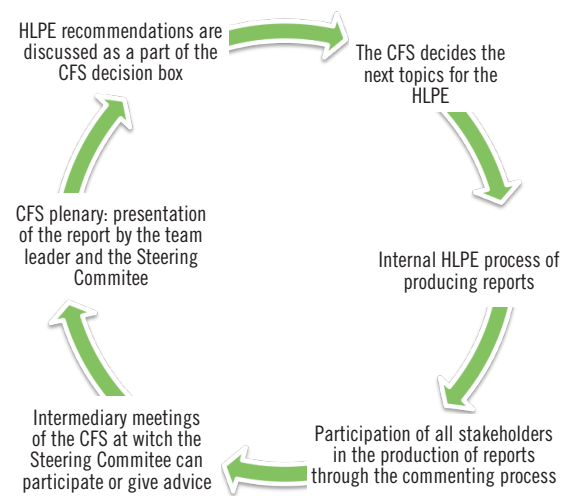
“common understanding” of issues before they are discussed in the CFS Plenary (Gitz and Meybeck, 2011). Indeed, through the reports, the HLPE provides a scientific basis and a clarification of the existing controversies on which political negotiations can be built. The functions of the HLPE, as described in the founding documents, are to:

- “i. Assess and analyze the current state of food security and nutrition and its underlying causes.
- ii. Provide scientific and knowledge-based analysis and advice on **specific policy-relevant issues**, utilizing existing high quality research, data and technical studies.
- iii. Identify emerging issues, and **help members prioritize future actions** and attentions on key focal areas” (HLPE 2013).

The HLPE represents a new science-policy interface in the field of food security. Science-policy interfaces have become increasingly “fashionable” for managing the interaction between science and policy and can be defined as a “social processes which encompass relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, and which allow for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making” (van den Hove 2007: 824). The creation of the HLPE was inspired by two references: the IPCC, the most well-known and successful scientific body linked to policy making on climate change; and the IAASTD, an assessment process on agriculture that brought experts together with diverse stakeholders, including civil society (Gitz and Meybeck 2011). The HLPE has been created and entrusted by the CFS to produce usable knowledge. This new body of experts represents a multi-disciplinary scientific advisory body organised into a two-tiered system consisting of two parts: a 15-member Steering Committee composed of highly recognised experts in the field of food security and nutrition, and 4- to 6-member Project Teams working on a “project-specific basis”, which are managed by the Steering Committee. For each report, a Team Leader and subsequent project team are chosen, generally from a roster of experts managed by the CFS Secretariat, although team leaders do play a role in proposing names of experts for project teams. A convener, who is a member of the Steering Committee, is chosen to convene the oversight of the Steering Committee to the work of the Project Team. The HLPE is fundamentally designed to leverage existing organisational structures and is not charged with creating a new administration; instead members work with minimal external intervention, support or guidance (Swaminathan 2011).

The HLPE works in close collaboration with the CFS, which defines the topics that the HLPE

**Figure 4.** Interactions between the HLPE and the CFS



Source: Authors conceptualisation

This visual representation is a proposal to attempt to identify interactions between the HLPE and the CFS. It was built on the last HLPE reports- production cycles and may need adjustments.

reports will cover and uses the final reports for its plenaries and policy making. Figure 4 below shows the interactions between the HLPE and the CFS, and thus between science and policy making.

The HLPE has an internal project cycle for each report. A graphic taken from the HLPE Rules and Procedures detailing the report cycle can be found in Annex 1. The report writing process is designed to be inclusive, with two open commenting periods and a review by external experts. While governments and political organisations can openly comment on the HLPE reports, the process is not designed to promote interaction with governments, but rather to produce the best possible policy-relevant research that will be useful to a wide range of stakeholders.

This section is mainly based on the interviews conducted with the researchers involved in the HLPE, and the HLPE Secretariat. It is structured according to the HLPE report writing process timeline. We will first focus on diversity among researchers, but also on the diversity of knowledge used. We will then analyse the mandate given by the CFS to the HLPE for each report, the role of researchers as key actors in the success of the HLPE, the commenting process and the report recommendations. The final section addresses emerging issues, which is a function of the HLPE that has still not been implemented, despite being in its mandate.

## 4.2. Diversity: a key issue for the selection of experts and the functioning of collective expert processes

The HLPE brings together a broad range of experts in food security and nutrition. Through studies based on existing research, this body creates a science-policy interface that gives advice on urgent policy-relevant questions (CFS 2010). Taking into account the growing complexity of food security issues and the increasingly fragmented approaches at hand for dealing with such issues, opening up discussions to a wider spectrum of disciplines in order to properly address emerging challenges can provide real added value. It has already been argued that food security can only be understood after recognising this notion of complexity and diversity because the focus constantly shifts: “There is a need for a new food policy, including food security issues but also food safety, obesity and nutritional related health issues” dealing with changes in food systems (Gitz and Meybeck 2011).

The focus on diversity within the HLPE and Project Teams may highlight potential tension between the credibility, saliency and legitimacy of research produced. For analytical purposes, we have categorised these forms of diversity as either “academic and geographic” or “knowledge-based”

### 4.2.1. Academic and geographic diversity

Academic diversity refers to representativeness among experts in the Steering Committee and Project Teams, in terms of geography, gender, academic specialties and research interests. The current Steering Committee is composed of 15 experts, both male and female, drawn from more than 10 different countries. Aside from their role as food security experts, these researchers work not only in academia, think tanks and private firms, but also in politics, policy making, and civil society. They make a declaration of commitment and a declaration of interests indicating either the absence or the details of any interests that might be considered prejudicial to their independence.

According to an expert from a project team interviewed, there is no specific criterion for “diversity” of team members, but the Steering Committee, which is sovereign in the choice of these members, does try to ensure balance and may refuse a person proposed for reasons of diversity.

Academic diversity gives a more comprehensive picture in terms of both writing and framing the report, and presents an opportunity where, for example, a nutritionist or climatologist with a technical background can come together with

sociologists trained in qualitative research (Gitz and Meybeck 2011). The end result is a more diverse body capable of addressing a broader range of topics in multiple dimensions to produce policy-engaging reports.

In spite of the richness that it brings to the HLPE, academic and geographic diversity also presents logistical challenges that complicate the internal workings of both the Steering Committee and the Project Teams. Although it is acknowledged that there is a considerable amount of exchange by email, researchers from both tiers have described how there were few opportunities to meet in person and to work out differences in worldviews or understandings of a problem that might lead to differences in the scientific assessment of a situation due to distance and time. The need to build trust among diverse teams was frequently cited as a challenge.

### 4.2.2. Knowledge-based diversity

Interviewees have noted that the HLPE must be diverse in order to set itself apart from past panels, seen as having been too uniform. As pointed out by M. S. Swaminathan, Chair of the Steering Committee, different actors from their respective fields “carry competing interests that are often sustained by different streams of knowledge that may lead to diverging viewpoints” (Swaminathan 2010). It is therefore useful for the Steering Committee to gather experts from different streams of knowledge. One interviewee challenged our questions regarding the level of diversity to ask if perhaps the real question is not whether or not the HLPE is diverse, but rather, if it is diverse *enough* and in the “right” way. As a recommendation for the selection process for the next Steering Committee, Vice Chair M. Rahmanian suggested that the diversity of “approaches and knowledge systems” should be favoured over simple academic diversity.

Sources of diverse knowledge are currently incorporated into the report writing process through commenting and bibliographic references. During the publication process, two rounds of commenting are opened up to the public for feedback on the topic scope and the content of the first draft. This commenting process, which will be discussed in detail later in this paper, adds an additional layer of knowledge diversity, as contributions come not only from research institutions and government agencies, but also from the private sector, NGOs, lobby groups and the rest of civil society. Regardless of how these comments are incorporated into the HLPE writing process, they remain a tool for pooling knowledge from the outside.



Second, “grey” knowledge can be found in the HLPE reports. Grey knowledge refers to non-peer-reviewed literature such as reports produced in the field by CSOs. For example, it is not uncommon to find briefings and newsletters published by advocacy groups like GRAIN and the Action Group on Erosion, Technology and Concentration among publications from peer-reviewed sources such as the *Journal of Development Studies*. The inclusion of these types of grey literature in HLPE reports demonstrates the willingness of the Steering Committee and the Project Teams to expose and expand existing debates. Although this information, which often stems from local or regional organisations, does not necessarily meet all scientific criteria, the inclusion of case studies, testimonials and specific examples from local experiences provides new material based on “experimental forms of expertise” (Gitz and Meybeck 2011). This inclusion of what the HLPE calls “social knowledge” ensures the representation of diverse stakeholders and can increase the legitimacy of the production of usable knowledge. Their input, according to the Rules and Procedures, supports decision-making “to provide answers to policy-relevant questions, quantifying the level of confidence where possible and document controversies as appropriate” (CFS 2010). The experiences of the communities affected by the issues covered in the reports are often not captured in peer-reviewed journals, and grey literature therefore offer local insights and approaches. Although there are potential risks when using non-peer-reviewed sources, other similar research bodies that have employed grey knowledge, like the IPCC, dealt with the issue by having them assessed by the report author (Gitz and Meybeck 2011). The inclusion of local and traditional expertise may stray from standard scientific procedure, yet through the HLPE report process, it ultimately expands participation in the CFS by other actors.

Although supplementary feedback through online comments and social knowledge from grey literature bring diversity into the reports, too much involvement and intervention from external actors is not always positive. An open method of soliciting knowledge diversity may potentially be more distracting than constructive. In one reported case, a group of civil society organisations went outside the commenting procedures to address their concerns regarding a draft directly to the Steering Committee. These types of interventions can create an extra burden on researchers during an already time-constrained process. The purpose of the HLPE reports is not to satisfy single stakeholder groups, but to produce broadly usable knowledge for policy making. Likewise, non-reviewed sources could be error-prone and

questioned by the scientific community. Thus, researchers using them must take more time to investigate the methodology and assess associated risks when using them in conjunction with scientifically-sound data.

The extension of participation to other actors including civil society organisations suggests that the CFS is interested in knowledge diversity not only in the Steering Committee and the Project Teams, but also throughout participation in the commenting process. Although this may add an additional burden to the writing process, it helps to provide a better understanding of the divergent and emerging worldviews and offers more comprehensive policy advice.

### 4.3. Producing useful knowledge through a demand-driven approach

The HLPE is mandated by the CFS to give advice on food security and nutrition and then to prioritise issues identified by the CFS to develop a Global Strategic Framework (Labbouz, Treyer and Louafi 2011). HLPE project teams do not produce new research; instead, they draw upon existing knowledge (HLPE 2013). Using this information, the HLPE has produced two reports annually until now. Although the HLPE receives instruction from the CFS and directly reports to this body, recommendations and advice must remain independent from the CFS and government bodies and agencies.

Adopting a “demand-driven” model, CFS research mandates focus on controversial issues under a very tight time frame. The relatively strict nature of this mandate process has been considered by many HLPE parties as “good and necessary”, because it ultimately ensures that the HLPE reports produce policy-relevant information. A key trait of salient and useful information is that it responds to the needs of decision makers (McNie 2007). Employing a roster of experts managed by the CFS/HLPE Secretariat, the Steering Committee constructs a Project Team for each report (Labbouz, Treyer and Louafi 2011). In some cases the Project Team leader also plays a more active role in research team selection. Given the vast field of uncertainties present in each topic and the need to produce a short policy document, a concise agenda is required to guide the report writing process.

However, certain Steering Committee members have highlighted setbacks due to the strict nature of mandates. While the Steering Committee has some flexibility to adjust the terms of reference for each report, some members have called for the ability to propose and write their own reports. However, others have noted that considering the

diversity of Steering Committee members and the difficulty in reaching consensus, it would be difficult in practical terms to agree upon research topics outside of the narrow mandate. Steering Committee members have a clear understanding that if a report is seen as unwelcome or unnecessary, then the CFS will not use it. While the HLPE has the freedom to produce reports that could influence the debate outside the CFS, the founding principle is still to respond to CFS requests. The production of salient, usable knowledge is crucial.

Second, the mandate theoretically calls for two reports per year, but, in practice, it comes with many logistical challenges. Judging from feedback from both the Steering Committee and the Project Teams, forming the teams and recruiting a leader usually take more time than anticipated. Again, to account for diversity, researchers come from all over the world and from numerous fields; this adds a level of richness to the reports but can come at the cost of efficiency. The diversity of teams could ultimately be a distraction from the research task at hand, with disproportionate amounts of time spent trying to cooperate and coordinate within the team.

#### 4.4. Researchers as key stakeholders

The second plank of the HLPE mandate is to “provide scientific and knowledge-based analysis and advice on specific policy-relevant issues, utilizing existing high quality research, data and technical studies” (CFS 2010). The Steering Committee is therefore responsible for providing “scientifically sound, comprehensive, clear and concise written reports/analyses” (CFS 2010). The reports produced by the HLPE could be considered as the key deliverable of the organisation. In order to fulfil this responsibility, the HLPE selects a Team Leader and Project Team members to write the reports. By producing the reports, whose scope and modality are defined by the HLPE Steering Committee, the project leader and team are key to the success of the HLPE as a whole.

Haas (2004:278) identifies conditions for effective international science policy interfaces that are “effective for mobilizing networks of scientific expertise.” Evaluating the HLPE and its relationship with research teams as it relates to Haas’ criteria may reveal potentially critical issues for the future of the organisation. While the Project Teams are diverse and come from a wide variety of institutions, the opportunities provided to researchers and efforts made to help them participate in the dissemination phase are seen by experts as limited at present. They do not feel like they participate in a broad network of experts to the benefit of the

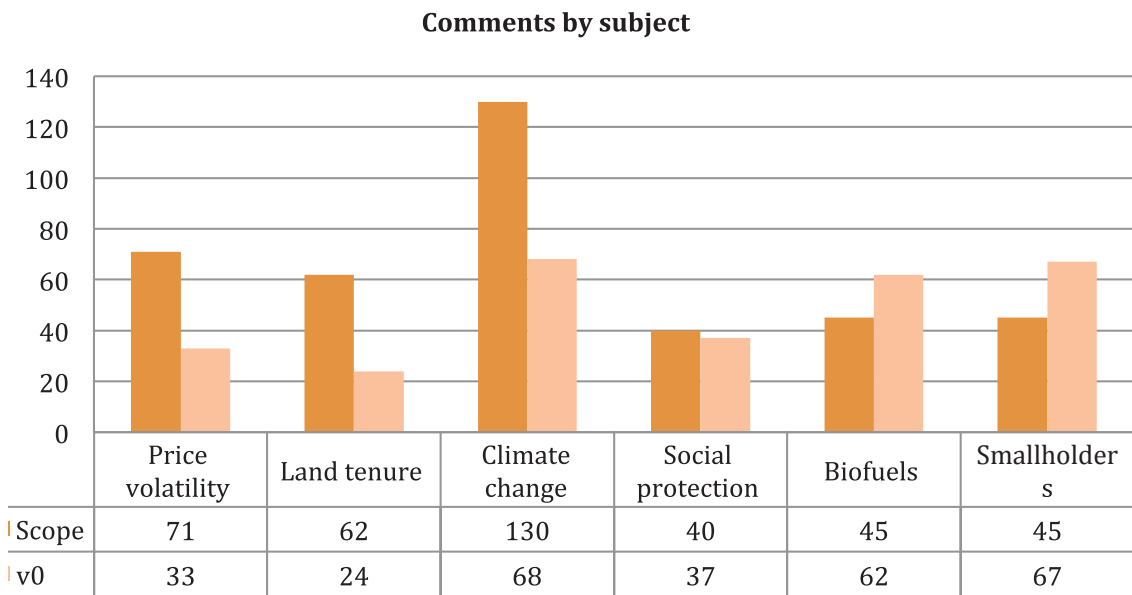
HLPE, but consider their participation in a Project Team as a time-bound exercise.

Although the relationship between the HLPE and the CFS is a two way process, it appears to some stakeholders interviewed that it is a one way relationship between the Steering Committee and the project teams. Rather than a collaborative process of equals, a top-down relationship between the Steering Committee and researchers was perceived in some teams. The Project Team also faces difficult working conditions with extremely tight time constraints to produce the reports. Teams are geographically diverse (five people, five continents) from potentially very different backgrounds (sociologists and hard scientists, for instance) and are often unable to meet in person during report writing. Considering the complexity of managing this type of team, there could be a role for team leader mentorship, where former leaders could provide their advice and feedback on how to best manage this complex process.

Interviews with researchers highlight the limited interaction they have with the HLPE after report publication. Although there is certainly considerable visibility in the publication of HLPE reports, researchers from the Project Teams still consider they lack tangible benefits from their engagement in terms of future research or publications. Some interviewees are afraid that the life of the reports after publication might be too “short”. Interviewees hold the view that dealing with the dissemination of the former report while already working on the next one is a challenge for the future, especially when more and more reports will be added to the list of HLPE publications. They also note that “once done, we start over,” and attention shifts immediately to the next report. Experts from the Project Teams have described this as “unfortunate” considering the work and time spent on producing the report. Though there is a lot of discussion, Steering Committee members feel that this disconnect could be a weakness in the process.

Interviews show that the Steering Committee should also take advantage of the process of drafting reports and the involvement of experts from different scientific areas to produce an inventory of academic communities in their respective fields. A mechanism to provide feedback from Project Team members as well as from Steering Committee members could be useful for the food and nutritional security scientific community to understand which topics are well covered and well-funded by the research community and which key areas may be underserved. Potential critical issues in identifying relevant researchers for Project Teams on some areas could therefore be better anticipated.

**Figure 5.** Number of comments for each report, on scope and V0 draft



While researchers interviewed expressed their interest in participating in a new policy platform and their desire to potentially reach new audiences with their work, over time and depending on the reputation of the HLPE, there might be a risk concerning the capacity to motivate and capture the best research talent.

#### 4.5. Commenting process

During an HLPE report cycle, there are two rounds of comments, one on the scope and another on the Vo draft (see timeline of the report writing process in Annex 1). According to the internal procedures for the work of the HLPE, the study process starts with an open electronic consultation for feedback and comments on a proposed draft scope of the study. Interviewees confirmed the fact that this round of comments appears to be a critical moment, as it is related to the “problem framing” stage in the policy process presented in the introduction, on which CSOs and NGOs are focusing a considerable part of their attention. This scope is then used to define the Terms of Reference given to the Project team. The project team prepares a first draft, called the Vo draft, which is submitted for comments on the CFS webpage (see timeline of the report creation). Any type of stakeholders can submit a comment. At the time of our study, there have already been four final papers published (the final reports on biofuels and smallholders were not yet available), allowing us to study the number and structure of comments over time. We

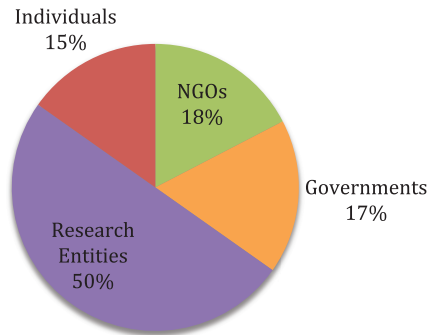
have chosen a quantitative method for the analysis of comments in three steps. First, we counted the number of comments for each report, for the two commenting periods, to see if time and possibly a greater number of people informed of the existence of the HLPE would have an impact on the commenting process (Figure 5). We then chose three reports (one for each year) and made a quantitative analysis of the proportion of comments from governments and national agencies, CSOs/NGOs, researchers and UN agencies. Once again, we attempted to determine whether time, but also topics, had an influence on who comments (Figure 6). Finally, because the CSO/NGO category is quite broad, and to make a link with our first section on greater inclusiveness of the CFS, we focused on this category and classified the CSO/NGO comments of each commenting round into three categories: northern, southern, and international (Figure 7). The only qualitative input of our study of comments is a case study on the report on price volatility to attempt to assess how much of the input from comments can be found in the Vo draft for the scope comments and in the final report for the Vo comments.

##### 4.5.1. Number and distribution of comments

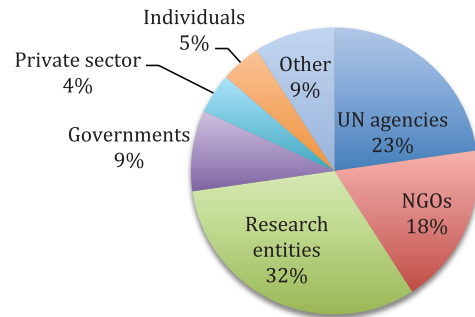
Apart from the report on climate change, which was an exceptionally controversial topic, the number of comments remains relatively constant between report topics over time (Figure 5). What we can observe, however, is a shift in the distribution of comments between the scope and the

**Figure 6. Nature of comments on scope and VO draft in three reports**

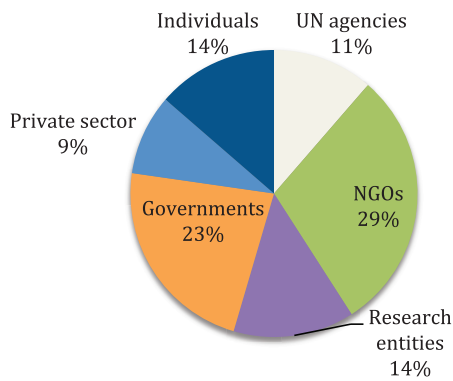
**Land tenure scope**



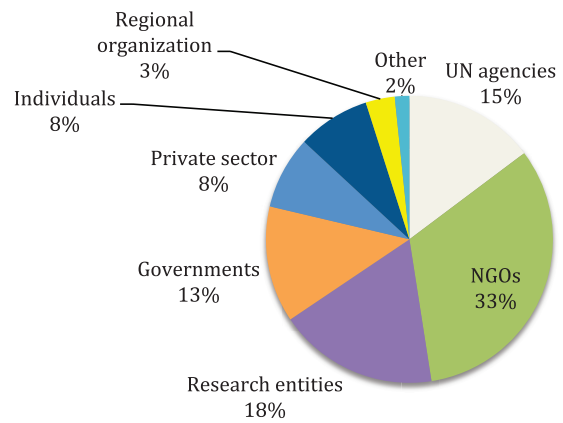
**Land tenure v0**



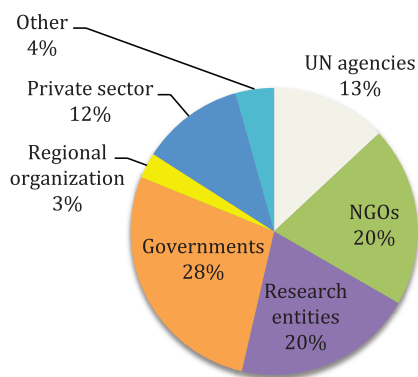
**Smallholders scope**



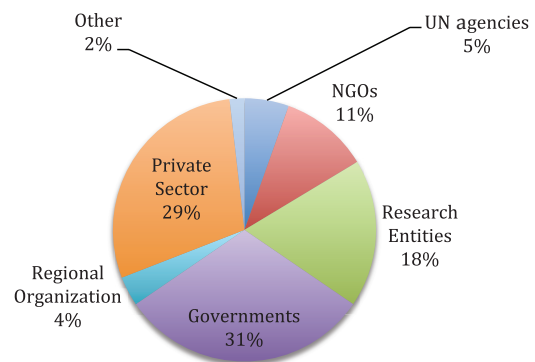
**Smallholders v0**



**Biofuels scope**



**Biofuels v0**



Note: The categories of actors participating in the commenting processes have been defined by the authors. The classification is subject to the authors and may give a biased picture of the reality of actors involved in the processes.



Vo drafts: while the first two reports had significantly more comments on the scope than the Vo, the latest reports reflect the opposite trend. One potential explanation could be that as the HLPE becomes more influential, commenting on the Vo draft has gained importance as these comments have a greater chance of influencing the final version.

#### 4.5.2. Origin of comments

The origin of comments depends largely on the topic. For example, in the report on biofuels, the private sector accounts for nearly 30% of comments on the Vo draft, while in other reports, private sector engagement is limited. For other reports, the prevalence of researchers, NGOs and governments as commenters is not surprising since they are the main stakeholders. The presence of governments and national agencies as well as the private sector in the commenting process could be an indication of the influence the HLPE has gained.

A closer look at the diversity of commenters in three of the HLPE reports is shown below (Figure 6).

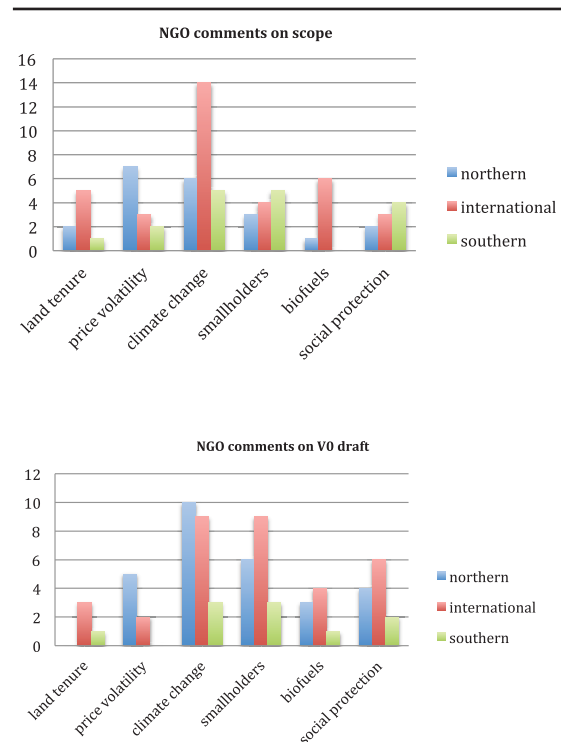
#### 4.5.3. Diversity assessment: CSOs/NGOs in the commenting process

One of the main objectives of the CFS reform with the creation of the CSM and the HLPE was to make it a more inclusive body. The research teams not only use peer-reviewed literature, but can also draw upon “grey” literature. Moreover, the CFS is not responsible for building consensus, but rather serves to expose and clarify existing debates. Therefore, the comments provided by civil society should be particularly valuable, as they reflect different types of knowledge.

One of the main difficulties is to ensure that the comments received represent a range of stakeholders and geographic areas.

Figure 3 focuses on the type of CSOs/NGOs that have participated in commenting, showing that they are mainly northern-based or international NGOs (having offices both in the North and the South) and are thus likely to be able to mobilise more resources. Logistical constraints (language, Internet and time) seem to be a strong hypothesis to explain the reduced participation of Southern NGOs and CSOs and why they tend to comment more on the scope than on the Vo draft. Commenting on the scope requires less time and fewer language skills since there is no extensive document to read and the comments can be on broader themes. However, the lack of comments by Southern NGOs and CSOs may highlight not only a symbolic but also a geographic distance between

**Figure 7.** Types of NGOs that commented for each report, on scope and Vo draft



Note: Classification criteria defined by authors. International NGOs are organisations and networks that have offices and/or members in both Northern and Southern countries. Northern NGOs may have operations in the South, but do not have permanent offices in these countries.

a global institution located in Europe such as the CFS and local Southern CSOs that would expect their engagement with HLPE to be more beneficial to their daily action.

#### Case study on comments (scope and Vo draft) on the price volatility report

A detailed examination of a specific HLPE report and commenting process was undertaken for the price volatility report. This case study is entirely qualitative; the following observations must therefore be considered with care. Quantitative tools could be useful to further investigate the regularity of the use of comments, but would require a rigorous analytical framework and a study of all reports, which lies beyond the scope of this paper. The indications presented here are intended not so much to reveal how research teams work in order to take the variety of comments into account, but rather to identify critical points in the commenting process.

#### Scope comments:

Although it would be impossible to produce precise statistics on the exact number of scope

comments that have actually been used in the process and appear in the Vo draft, it is possible to identify some more general trends. This is especially difficult as these comments were used for the Steering Committee Terms of Reference and not directly for the Vo draft. Indeed, the comments are first and foremost used by the Steering Committee to set the Terms of Reference that are then passed on to the Project Teams. Although the initial Scope of the proposed HLPE report is available online, the Terms of Reference used to guide the Project Team, which take into account the Scope comments, are not made public. Thus, it is only possible to analyse the impact on the Vo draft.

When reading the price volatility Vo draft, there are elements indicating that the comments on the scope of study have been considered. This is particularly clear when specific examples or references found in the comments are used in the subsequent draft. For example,

- The ECOWAS decision to build regional stocks was present in several comments<sup>2</sup> and quoted in the Vo draft<sup>3</sup>.
- The role of ASEAN in establishing regional rice stocks was present in the comment of the Institute for Agricultural and Trade Policy<sup>4</sup> and quoted in the Vo draft.<sup>5</sup>
- Suggestions to use specific bibliographic material may have contributed to their use in the Vo<sup>6</sup>.

A strong drawback of this method of analysis is that it is impossible to determine whether the references were taken from the comments, integrated into the Terms of Reference and then used in the Vo, or whether the researchers thought of the same examples and sources. Only access to the Terms of Reference could answer this question.

However, the use of comments in the Vo draft, albeit not in a precise manner (as with the use of references and examples) makes it clear that they were first designed for the Terms of Reference. Indeed, comments that seem not to have been used, in their majority, conveyed the same ideas, showing that some choices had to be made on the structure of the report when defining the Terms of Reference, excluding some of the ideas or issues proposed in the commenting period on the scope.

The Vo draft did not focus on the local level and on direct support to smallholders, for instance. Innovative ideas to act at the community level were not retained (insurance for smallholders, training, access to markets, etc.). No comments on the nutritional impact of food volatility were considered. Another concept that was recurrent in several comments (mainly from civil society) was food sovereignty; however it was not discussed in the Vo. These choices to limit the scope of the topic show that decisions have been made after reading the comments. Framing the scope has to be considered a sovereign decision of the HLPE Steering Committee. But comments on the scope might nevertheless be of crucial importance in the way the Project Team and the Steering Committee envisage the state of controversies and the competing framings that are present in the public debate, in order to make such choices in an informed manner. Comments on the scope might nevertheless also be useful for the Project Team, as some ideas proposed on the scope could inspire interesting ideas and suggestions even if they fall outside of the chosen perimeter.

#### *Vo comments:*

Some comments appear to have been used during the writing of the final version. For example, FIAN underlined the lack of definition of “excessive price volatility”, a section that was further developed in the final version (comment n° 11). Switzerland mentioned the Rome principles, and these are quoted p. 16. Finally, the participatory processes evoked by the Japan Center for Agricultural Sciences are present p. 44 under the same formula. These hints are quite clear, as well as some references used, such as a UNCTAD report and a paper by Jones published by the World Development Movement (comment n°29). One of the comments clearly noted that their previous comment for the scope was used in the Vo draft (comment n°13).

By reading the Vo draft and the comments on the scope, it is clear which choices have been made on the use of comments. The comments used in the writing period deal with similar themes that were clearly rejected from the scope of the study when defining the Terms of Reference because they were not considered relevant. This choice cannot be seen when reading the comments on the Vo draft and the final report. This is partly due to the fact that the Vo draft is narrower than the scope. Some comments continued to point out missing topics that were already underlined in the first round of comments, such as the lack of focus on nutrition. Some new criticisms appeared that have not been integrated into the final version, particularly on

2. Sibiri Jean Zoundi from SWAC/OECD (comment n°2) and O. de Schutter, UN special rapporteur on the right to food (comment n°66)

3. Page 70 of report

4. Comment n° 31

5. Page 69 of report

6. Suggestions to use Galtier (comment n°4); Irwin and Sanders (comment n° 36), Gilbert (comment n°36), Phillips and Yu (comment n°58) as well as O. de Schutter papers.

the absence of links between price volatility and political unrest.

Further studies on comments could be very useful for CSOs, which could then decide in which round of comments they need to invest more energy to be most useful to the process and also most efficient.

The recommendations that emerge from this case study on the first report follow the trend observed in figure 5: it would be advisable for NGOs to focus on the Vo draft because it is more likely that these comments will be directly integrated. This is what Figure 5 shows: from the report on social protection, the balance of the number of comments between the scope and Vo drafts has changed. There are now more comments on the Vo draft.

But it is also clear that NGOs may also try to influence the framing of the problem, as this might often be the stance that is at the heart of what they see as their relevance; in such a case, their comments could fall outside of what the HLPE Steering Committee decides as being relevant enough with respect to the strict mandate given by the CFS.

#### 4.5.4. Managing the comments and making the process sustainable

Although the case study on the price volatility report and interviews conducted with the Project Team have shown that the comments were at least partially used, there is apparently still room for improvement for a more efficient and productive use of comments. It is worth noting that this is the first time a science-policy interface has used such an open commenting procedure. The innovative nature of such a process lies not only in the fact that it is open to a broad spectrum of stakeholders, but also in the fact that it involves different stages. Traditionally, other bodies such as the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment have used reviewing processes.

The length of the document consolidating all the comments (usually around 100 pages) and the number of references that each commenter suggests for inclusion in the report leads to the perception by Project Team members of the practical impossibility of reading and processing all comments. For example, a single comment on the Vo on biofuels was 23 pages long and comments of nearly 10 pages are not uncommon. Limitations on the commenting process could therefore be beneficial. For example, there could be a limit to the length of comments and number of contributions per person or organisation, which is currently not specified in the commenting process.

The current process allows anyone to submit a comment by email, and it is not necessary to specify organisational affiliation, which leads to a large number of comments from individuals with uncertain credentials and affiliations. While the openness of the commenting process could be considered to be a strong or unique characteristic of the HLPE, the possibility of the commenting process becoming increasingly dysfunctional cannot be ruled out. The establishment of an electronic form could be helpful to oblige commenters to clarify whether they are writing on behalf of an institution or civil society organisation or whether they are simply a concerned citizen. This form could also set a maximum length for comments.

While it was clear from the outset that not all comments would receive an individual response, especially given time constraints, actors participating in the commenting process might ask for an effective mechanism to ensure that comments are considered and taken into account. One solution would be to make references to the comments in the final version through footnotes. Since comments are online and generally very detailed with references, this could enable both authors of the comments to ascertain that their opinion has been taken into account and readers to identify the origin of the idea and to search for more information. However, a balance has to be found between the interests of the readers and those of the commenters. If the only goal of the comments is to show commenters that their inputs have been integrated into the reports, every comment needs to be referenced, which would be absurd since anyone can comment, even without competences or experience on the topic. On the other hand, the reader will favour comments that are long and well referenced. A balance must be found between the two, but even a referencing process made for the sake of readers, which means enabling access to further analyses and information, would also show commenters that their comments are read and used.

Whatever the choices made on limiting comments and on accountability, making the comment process smoother is likely to require additional funding either to increase the size of the Project Teams in order to accommodate comments or to increase the administrative capacity of the Secretariat or other supporting entities.

#### 4.6. A critical step: the formulation of recommendations in HLPE reports

The format of each HLPE report requires a summary section and recommendations followed by the main report. While the recommendation

section is not subject to any additional review process, due to its role in policy making it is naturally closely examined by the Steering Committee and the CFS itself.

Recommendations are generally only made publicly available in the final paper. The first four initial “Vo” drafts produced and submitted to comments did not contain recommendations, which were only present in the final published document. However, the most recent Vo on biofuels already included policy recommendations with a disclaimer that they were tentative and only to be used for discussion and feedback. As the biofuels final report has not yet been publicly published, it is impossible to compare the evolution of recommendations from the Vo draft to the final document. The debate and evolution of recommendations between the Vo and the final draft for previous reports is not publicly available.

From interviews, it is clear that choosing final recommendations can be a difficult process. Although the official function of the Steering Committee is to guide, oversee and approve reports, researchers from Project Teams have expressed frustration that recommendations were removed from final reports during what they see as a reviewing process by the Steering Committee. However, the Steering Committee has a clear understanding of the mandate and is keen to closely follow the CFS requests. Steering Committee members have noted that “unrequested recommendations may not be welcomed”.

#### **4.7. Emerging issues: a missing piece of the HLPE mandate?**

The third component of the three-pronged mandate of the HLPE is to “identify emerging issues and help members prioritize future actions and attentions on key focal areas” (CFS 2010). This is expected to take place first through the publication of HLPE reports where Steering Committee members can highlight emerging issues related to the specific topic of the report.

However, the Steering Committee has not produced any specific documents that highlight emerging issues. These briefs or updates on emerging issues could be a useful source of information for the CFS, particularly in relation to choices of future report topics. While some dialogue is already taking place between the HLPE Chair and the CFS Bureau, the identification of emerging issues is not achieved through the formal production of a specific paper. For example, the lack of discussions on fisheries was highlighted by the HLPE Steering Committee and then later chosen by the CFS as a report topic.

Due to the diversity of expertise within the Steering Committee, members have noted difficulty in reaching consensus on new topics that could be addressed. Considering the workload of producing two reports annually, there was agreement among interviewees that additional reports would go beyond their capacity. Steering Committee experts have also noted some confusion within the panel regarding their role as it relates to identifying emerging issues, and what exactly they should be producing. The strict mandate-driven process of the HLPE was seen by Steering Committee members as a helpful and productive way to narrow down the discussions and to provide a clearer working structure.

Some public and international organisations such as the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have horizon scanning procedures to identify emerging issues. If we consider that the CFS has a very precise and detailed procedure to describe what constitutes a “report”, there is in contrast very little specificity regarding the method of dealing with emerging issues. The lack of structural procedures concerning the identification of emerging issues could therefore be a critical challenge for the HLPE as it moves forward. A potential solution would be to ensure greater clarity on the logistics of this emerging issues process, if it is seen as an important contribution to the CFS. The 2010 version of the HLPE Rules and Procedures mentions the role of emerging issues, but lacks any detailed explanation as to how the HLPE should go about identifying these, how often they should be discussed, and the format for presenting these issues to the CFS. In order to properly operationalise the way in which emerging issues are addressed, a more clearly defined structure needs to be outlined in these guidelines.

#### **4.8. Final recommendations**

Through the creation of the HLPE, there is now a clearly defined body of experts with a given mandate to improve policy making through independent analysis and advice on specific topics affecting food security and nutrition. Three years after its creation, this science-policy interface has quickly gained in popularity and importance through the drafting of reports and the dissemination of their recommendations, which have been acknowledged as very useful for fostering the debate within the CFS (see former section on CSO perceptions of their capacity to participate in the CFS), and also more widely as useful references. Bearing in mind the practical limitations of the process, there are nevertheless margins of



progress in order to ensure the sustainability of the HLPE, to keep the engagement of researchers strong, and to maintain the credibility and legitimacy of the reports. Some practical suggestions are listed below, based on ideas proposed by interviewees and on analyses presented in the former paragraphs:

- Shorten the initial steps of the report cycle in order to leave enough time for researchers.
- Consider the diversity of knowledge systems and approaches rather than focusing on credential diversity in terms of scientific expertise to promote a more comprehensive coverage of the complex issues studied by the HLPE.
- Recognise the challenges posed by diversity for the functioning of working groups such as the Steering Committee, Project Teams, etc. Providing funding and above all time for researchers to meet face to face could facilitate better Project Team functioning and learning processes among diverse members.
- Enable the HLPE chair to vote on future report topics in the CFS Plenary to give her/him a formal say in the choice of topics.
- Although the capitalisation of experiences is organised through the Steering Committee and the Secretariat, it would be useful to invest in former team leaders so they can facilitate the process for new leaders. Mentoring or building connections between current and former HLPE participants could also be extended to the Steering Committee, particularly for leadership roles such as Chair and Vice Chair.
- Improve administrative capacity and resources to promote and disseminate reports after publication.
- Cultivate the engagement of researchers having participated in former reports, for instance by providing them with additional opportunities for publication.
- Leverage research team and Steering Committee knowledge of research fields and research gaps for greater understanding of the research environment and opportunities.
- Limit the length of comment submissions.
- Require commenters to identify relevant organisational affiliations.
- Make the identification of emerging issues simpler by providing clearer guidelines on the exact deliverable that the HLPE should produce.
- Increase the diversity of HLPE funding sources to increase sustainability.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Although it is too early to judge its efficiency on the matter, the CFS has been making significant progress in terms of including in discussions the most vulnerable communities and those groups most directly-affected by food crises (i.e. civil society). The CFS further enriches and structures this discussion with scientific advice and expertise on selected topics concerning global food security and nutrition issues. All of this draws from the reform of the CFS, which has broadened the scope for stakeholder involvement. The existence of the HLPE, the CSM and the PSM creates an inclusive environment where ideas and feedback can be expressed and properly addressed in the CFS policy formation process. Not only are civil society and private sector actors represented as participants in the CFS Plenary, but the commenting process for HLPE reports is publicly open to all stakeholders, thus strengthening inclusiveness. Specific policy outcomes such as the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests and the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition, highlight the effective functioning of the CFS in producing usable knowledge that is relevant to policymakers. The interviews conducted for this study clearly show that respondents consider the CFS as a very interesting global policy forum, in which there is no doubt it is worth engaging.

Civil society engagement was of considerable importance in the institutional reshaping of the CFS in 2009, and civil society representatives are increasing their investment in the CSM. For these groups, through the CSM, their voices are being heard and their contribution helps move the debate forward in the CFS. Many stakeholders recognise this achievement and are optimistic about the future roles of the CFS. If we develop the scenario of these optimistic stakeholders, thanks to the legitimacy given by the intervention of different actors in the decision process, the CFS could become, if not a decisional body, at least a major forum for negotiations and debate on all issues related to food security, including the most complex ones such as trade. In such a scenario, the CFS could be considered as far more legitimate than other organisations such as the WTO thanks to its inclusiveness. Such a scenario would need to openly address conflicts about the HLPE mandate with governments and other institutions.

Others insist on their vision that the CFS reform should be seen as an ongoing process and consider that momentum for continued change still exists. The CFS is actively developing its own organisational culture, especially within the Secretariat

and the other Rome-based structures. This new culture gives it more independence from FAO and also enables greater agreement between participating actors in the CFS plenary because they are now more familiar with one another. It is also leveraging existing FAO institutions, for example in the organisation of regional conferences and workshops on the topics discussed in the Plenary.

However, the reformed CFS also has several weaknesses, such as the lack of solid linkages to the regional and national levels, the inadequate promotion of its outputs and the insufficient involvement of financial institutions and the private sector. Barriers to participation also remain a challenge for the poorest groups and some Southern governments. Language barriers, a lack of sufficient and timely financial resources and a heavy CFS workload make it difficult for participants to meet tight deadlines while still delivering high quality outputs. All these issues exacerbate the participatory divide between NGOs and CSOs in the CSM.

By broadening CSO representation in the CSM and diversifying the HLPE knowledge base, the reformed CFS now sheds light on important and previously marginalised topics, and is becoming a reactive body to tackle emerging issues on food security. As the HLPE is expanding its scope of work, Steering Committee members may also have an opportunity to play a key role in identifying emerging issues for the CFS.

Although the CFS develops guidelines and recommendations, it remains unclear to what extent they will be implemented and how they will have an impact on the ground, which is going to be a key issue in the future, both to confirm at the global scale the effectiveness of the norms discussed

within the HLPE, and to ensure that CSOs continue to see it as a forum worth investing in. An opportunity also remains for CSOs to use the HLPE reports as leverage for agenda setting purposes at the national and regional levels. However, a possible response to the increased use of HLPE reports for national policy purposes may be strategic intervention by member states to block sensitive topics from being put at the CFS agenda, and more particularly on that of the HLPE.

Future opportunities may be identified in the creation of accountability mechanisms developed to assess the impacts of CFS outputs at the regional or national levels. The creation of such mechanisms would avoid overlapping discussions on issues related to food security in other forums, such as the G20, and might also prevent other negotiation arenas, such as WTO negotiations, shifting the focus of NGOs away from the CFS.

The CFS is at a critical junction: it is important that it succeeds in capitalising on its recent successes and on the reform momentum, but that is also addresses what may be considered as weaknesses or margins for improvement. This would enable the CFS to minimise the risks of losing its status as the main global forum for food security issues. A key strategic contribution of the CFS reform was generated through multi-stakeholder involvement supported by an efficient science-policy interface, and can only be sustained as long as the participation of all stakeholders is safeguarded. This is not only critical for advancing discussions on food security at the international level, but could also be used as a new global governance model to balance legitimacy and credibility while still providing timely and policy-relevant information to shape international decision making. ■

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## ANNEXES

### Annex I:

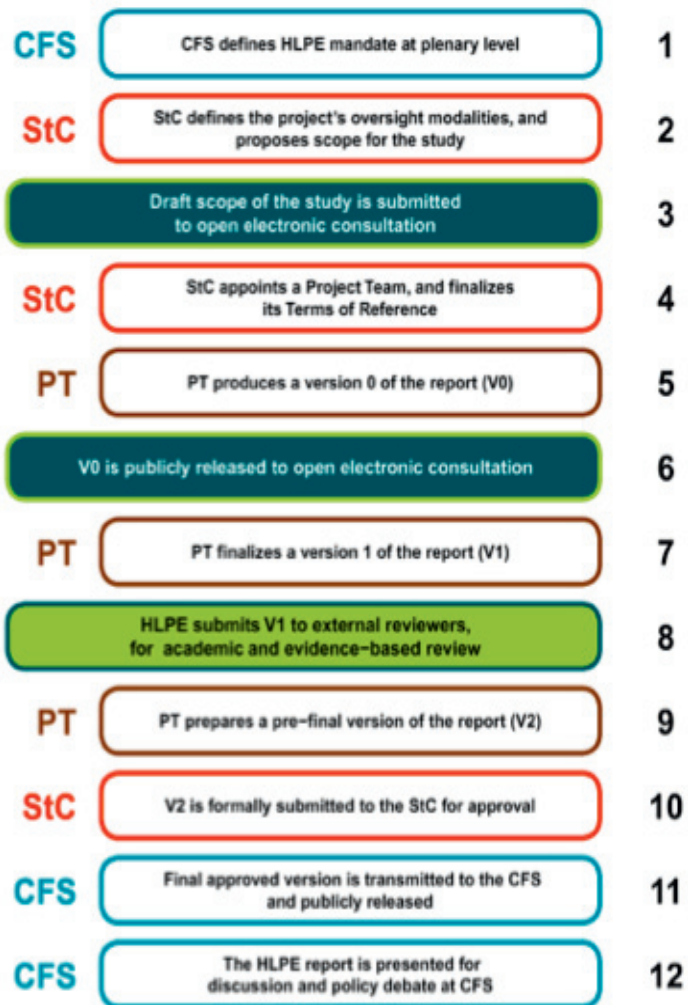
#### SWOT analysis of the CFS

Building on the interviews and on analyses presented in the former paragraphs, we try to assess in the SWOT matrix below current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/challenges involved in the ongoing CFS reform process. This matrix can inform subsequent steps in moving the reform forward; it is not intended to be exhaustive, but is rather an invitation to consider the dynamics of science and civil society participation in the CFS reform process.

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <p>Optimism, most stakeholders involved are satisfied with the way the CFS works and its outputs</p> <p>There is still momentum from the reform</p> <p>The institutional culture of the CFS is developing (while leveraging existing institutions - FAO)</p> <p>Inclusiveness of the CFS forum</p> <p>Existence of the Civil Society Mechanism and coordinating capacities</p> <p>Existence of the HLPE</p> <p>Existence of the PSM</p> <p>Openness: all ideas can be expressed, feedback (comments) is welcome</p> <p>Shedding light on important issues (some of which had previously been marginalised)</p> <p>Reactivity of the HLPE to CFS questions</p> <p>Capacity building processes among CSOs for the negotiations</p>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <p>Existence of barriers to participation (language, means of communication used)</p> <p>Lack of sufficient financial means (timing for funding is also not always appropriate)</p> <p>Very tight deadlines, time constraints severe given the heavy workload</p> <p>Planning of activities/organisation not always smooth</p> <p>Lack of involvement of financial institutions</p> <p>Insufficient involvement of private sector</p> <p>Unequal participation between NGOs and CSOs</p> <p>Insufficient campaigning and marketing of CFS outputs and promotion of HLPE reports</p> <p>Inflation of comments + anonymity of comments (HLPE)</p> <p>Weak linkages to the regional and national levels</p>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>HLPE Steering Committee new cycle</p> <p>Formation of an HLPE institutional culture</p> <p>Monitoring the impacts of CFS guidelines (perhaps in the form of national assessments – see Rio+20 declaration)</p> <p>Discussing emerging issues as a new function of the HLPE</p> <p>CFS and HLPE contributing to the trade agenda and other controversial topics</p> <p>Broadening CSO representation, and HLPE knowledge base (increasing representativeness)</p> <p>Use of CFS decisions and HLPE reports by the CSOs at the national and regional levels (to influence domestic policy processes)</p>	<p><b>THREATS/CHALLENGES</b></p> <p>Risk of lack of sufficient and diversified funding (public budgets are constrained)</p> <p>Losing some member states' involvement because they disagree with certain topics to be discussed in the CFS</p> <p>Stakeholders preventing strategic topics being put on the agenda (trade, or other controversial issues)</p> <p>Losing engagement of private sector</p> <p>Guidelines not having an impact on the ground, therefore losing the engagement of CSOs</p> <p>CFS and HLPE mandates could be narrowed down</p> <p>Capture of CFS by FAO rather than it developing its own institutional culture</p> <p>WTO negotiations shifting the focus and energy of NGOs</p> <p>CFS losing its status as the main forum for discussions on food security issues (role taken over by G8 or G20)</p>



## Annex 2: HLPE report cycle (Source HLPE 2013)



## Annex 3: Interviews

### *First round of interviews (October-December 2012)*

This initial round of interviews was part of an exploratory phase to determine the specific aspect of food security to be investigated. There was therefore no common questionnaire for all interviewees, as these interviews were closer to an open discussion regarding key food security issues and the opinion of the interviewees on the relative importance of these themes. Efforts were made to include a group of stakeholders.

#### **Interviewees in the first round:**

- Eudora BERNIOLLES, graduate student intern, Ministère des Affaires étrangères - Chargée de mission sécurité alimentaire, conférences internationales du G8 et du G20
- Christian CASTELLANET, agronomist and ecologist, Gret, Paris.
- Isabelle OUIILLON, Direction générale des politiques agricole, agroalimentaire et des territoires (Department of agricultural, food industry and territorial policies), Ministère de l'Agriculture (Ministry of Agriculture), Paris.
- Jean-Christophe DEBAR, agronomist, FARM Foundation, Paris.
- Jean-Luc FRANCOIS, Director of Department, Développement rural, Biodiversité (Agriculture, Rural Development, Biodiversity), Agence Française de Développement, Paris.
- Myriam AIT ASSA, Research Manager, Action Contre la Faim

### *Second round of interviews*

The second round of interviews focused specifically on the institutional innovations of civil society involvement and the creation of the HLPE.

#### **Interviewees linked to increased CSO inclusion:**

- Sonali BISHT, Founder and Advisor to the Institute of Himalayan Environmental Research and Education (INHERE), India
- Christina BLANK, Deputy Head of the Permanent Representation of Switzerland to FAO, IFAD and WFP in Rome
- Mark CACKLER, Manager, Agriculture and Environmental Services Department, The World Bank
- Luca CHINOTTI, Economic Justice Senior Policy Advisor, Oxfam International
- Bruce COGILL, Programme Leader, Nutrition and Marketing of Diversity, Bioversity International
- Morgane DANIELOU, Director of Communications, International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA)
- Olivier DE SCHUTTER, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
- Natalia FEDERIGHI, Director of Public Affairs, Yara International ASA
- Stefano Di GESSA, SUN Movement Secretariat / Coordination team of the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis
- Ujjaini HALIM, Institute for Motivating Self-Employment, India
- Hans HERREN, President and CEO at the Millennium Institute, President of the Board and Founder at Biovision Foundation, Switzerland
- Césarie KANTARAMA, Farmers' Organisation Representative, Rwanda
- Gertrude KENYANGI, Director of SWAGEN (Support for Women in Agriculture and Environment) Uganda
- Chris LEATHER, Secretariat Coordinator, International Food Security & Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism (CSM)
- Jostein LEIRO, Ambassador Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN organisations in Rome, FAO, WFP and IFAD
- Mark MC GUIRE, CFS Secretariat
- Alexandre MEYBECK, Senior Policy Officer on Agriculture, Environment and Climate Change, FAO
- Mary MUBI, Zimbabwe Ambassador to the UN
- Margaret NAKATO, World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers, Uganda
- Aksel NÆRSTAD, Co-coordinator of More and Better, Senior Policy Adviser in The Development Fund, Norway
- Stineke OENEMA, Chair of the CONCORD European Food Security Group (EFSG)
- Antonio ONORATI, International Focal Point, IPC for Food Sovereignty
- Erminsu David PABON, Instituto Mayor Campesino / Andean Coordinator of the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM)
- Claire QUINTIN, Secretary General of the International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC)

- Ruth RAWLING, Vice President Corporate Affairs EMEA, Cargill Europe
- Candice SAKAMOTO VIANNA, Permanent Representation of Brazil in Rome
- Geneviève SAVIGNY, European Coordination Via Campesina
- Desmond SHEEHY, Managing Director, Duxton Asset Management
- Christina SCHIAVONI, Why Hunger
- William SCHUSTER, Eco Ruralis Romania
- Cristine TON-NU, Permanent Representation of France to FAO
- Etienne DU VACHAT, Action Contre la Faim, France
- Abdelhamid ZAMMOURI, Remadel Network (Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia), Tunisia
- Razan ZUAYTER, Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, Jordan

#### *Interview guide - CSOs:*

- I. 1. Is your organisation able to express its concerns and put them on the agenda in the CSM?
2. Are there any NGOs/groups that you think should be present at the CSM but are not?
3. How do organisations interact with each other within the CSM?
4. What is the room for manoeuvre for CSOs in the CFS?
5. Do CSOs manage to have a coherent strategy at the CFS?
6. Can CSOs influence the agenda and output of the CFS?
7. How do policy makers interact with CSOs at the CFS?
8. Do you see (now or in the future) CSOs present at the CFS as evaluators of food security policies adopted by member states (CSOs carrying out monitoring)?
9. How much do you think CSOs weigh in the choice of topics for the HLPE reports?
10. In what way have the HLPE reports been useful to the CSOs? Do HLPE reports enable CSOs to open up the discussion on 'sensitive' topics that were generally avoided in other international forums?
- II. 11. How do CSOs interact with private actors?
12. What role do you think the private sector and financial institutions should have in the CFS?
13. How do you see the relationship between the G8/G20 and the CFS?
14. How do you see the relationship between the CFS and the WTO?
15. Do you feel member countries are committed enough when they participate in the CFS?
16. What would be the room for manoeuvre for CSOs in an ideal CFS?
17. One of the pillars of the CFS reform was flexibility. To what extent is the CFS still changing and adapting? Can CSOs still bargain for more space within the institution, or is that space already fixed?
18. For your organisation, has the reform of the CFS lived up to the expectations you had in 2009? How do you think the CFS could be more efficient in reaching its goals?

#### *Interviewees linked to the HLPE:*

- Prem BINDRABAN, HLPE Team Member – Land tenure and international investments in agriculture
- Benoit DAVIRON, HLPE Team Leader – Price volatility and food security
- Stephen DEVEREUX, HLPE Team Leader – Social protection and food security
- Vincent GITZ, CFS Secretariat
- Renato MALUF, Member of the HLPE Steering Committee
- Gerald NELSON, HLPE Team Leader – Food security and climate change
- Sergio SAUER, HLPE Team Member – Land tenure and international investments in agriculture
- Olivier DE SCHUTTER, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food
- Rudy RABBINGE, Member of the HLPE Steering Committee
- Maryam RAHMANIAN, Vice-Chairperson of the HLPE Steering Committee
- Camilla TOULMIN, HLPE Team Leader – Land tenure and international investments in agriculture

#### *Interview guide - HLPE:*

1. What have you perceived as the strengths and weaknesses of the CFS since its reform?
2. What are your motivations for working on the HLPE report?
3. What happens once the reports are published? Do you still have a role in promoting and using them? Do you have time to do so or do you put all your energy and time into the next reports // Impact of the reports.

4. Was the commenting period useful for making revisions? Did you have enough time to review and incorporate these comments into the reports?
5. Do you like the report format as a literature review? Did you feel that you had the freedom to write what you wanted?
6. Do you think that the relatively strict mandate given by the CFS regarding report topics is too restrictive? Should there be a role for the Steering Committee to adjust the question?
7. How would you assess the efforts made to have a diversity of profiles in the HLPE? Diversity of disciplines? Diversity of approaches?
8. How do you see the role of civil society in the reception of the reports? Do you have any specific comments on the interaction with civil society during the report drafting process?
9. Are two reports too many? How much time does the entire planning/writing process take?

# The Committee on World Food Security reform: impacts on global governance of food security

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IDDRI'S PUBLICATIONS

- Brun, M., Treyer, S. (2014). "The Committee on World Food Security: moving the reform forward", IDDRI, *Policy Briefs* N°02/14.
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