

Commentary on CFS50, FAO Committee on Food Security

The undisputed food crisis the world is submerged-in calls for swift actions that are more than cosmetic and pat solutions. There is a universally accepted entity inside FAO to deal with and to coordinate UN agencies and member states to address food security issues, namely the Committee on Food Security. It is the foremost inclusive UN body mandated to tackle global food security issues. This committee is unique in the UN system in that it allows participation of non-state actors in its deliberations. There is a Private Sector Mechanism (PSM) and a Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism (CSIPM, with more than 300 member organizations, worldwide) both allowed to participate and speak at meetings, but not to vote, which is done only by member states. WPHNA is a member of the CSIPM and has, for years, been involved in various of the relevant discussions on the table. Over the years, the CSIPM has had many disappointments, seeing the veto power of powerful Northern member states that have mostly disregarded its constructive, people-centered proposals. But this year, what is at stake is the lives of millions. So CSIPM lived up to its responsibility towards its constituency and made specific recommendations for dealing with the current food crisis. But this year's session -- even given the urgency of the situation at hand, was unfortunately no exception, as you can read below.

The recent 50th session of FAO's Committee on Food Security (CFS50, September 2022) was hijacked by geopolitical interests and stolen by governments that want to cripple this Committee. There was no discussion in the plenary about what the CFS should do to address the global food crisis between now and the CFS51 in October 2023. All of this was ignored. Instead, the discussion remained stuck in an effort to accommodate all sides and find an acceptable wording.

While hunger increases at an alarming rate, the CFS50 Plenary ended on 13 of October without agreeing on how to address the global food crisis. Hours and hours of intergovernmental negotiation were used to find a compromise between two geopolitical blocs fighting on words around war and sanctions. These precious hours were lost while people are dying from hunger, from climate change and from increased inequalities between people and countries. Due to this deadlock, the CFS was unable to conclude the session and, therefore, to take a decision on responding to the growing food crisis. It will reconvene end of November.

The participants agreed that the results of the 50th Plenary Session represented another blow to the CFS and to the CFS Chair. The intention of this geopolitical conflict was to weaken the CFS, and Russia and the US were aligned on this objective. They hijacked content and discussion of structural causes of the crisis, the next steps needed, and what the CFS's role ought to be. It was clear that the decision-making actually took place at member states' capitals level.

The final so-called compromise text presented on the crisis response ignored the substance of the Civil Society and Indigenous People Mechanism (CSIPM) proposal to develop globally

coordinated policy guidance addressing the food crises. Instead, it opted for a weakened CFS unable to address relevant issues such as human rights, trade, or food systems transformation. It became clear that the most powerful countries do not have any interest in addressing the crisis, as this would change the status-quo and jeopardize the dominant food and economic system. Opposing them, member states from Africa and Latin America, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, strongly supported the need for a globally coordinated policy response led by the CFS. FAO and the World Food Program (WFP) continue to profile themselves as the main UN agencies responding to the crisis, but are limited in their scope and adopt problematic approaches such as linking up with the outcomes of the contested 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. Indeed, on top of the prominent role of FAO, the UN Food Systems Summit ongoing 'national pathways' and the existing Global Crisis Response Group there have been other factors attempting to weaken the CFS. A debate anchored in the human rights approach and democratic principles is urgently needed, one that will allow the most affected countries and constituencies to relevantly participate in defining the responses.

In the meantime, the CSIPM agreed that what was needed is to strengthen itself and more vocally denounce the actors that have undermined the CFS during Plenary50. In this sense, there was agreement to:

1. **Make public one statement regarding the outcomes of this year's CFS as quickly as possible.** This will launch a campaign that revives the idea of denouncing the actors that undermine the CFS (Argentina, Brazil US, Russia). The slogan for the campaign will be "*You do politics, we go hungry*" and once the statement is released, the CSIPM will disseminate it broadly for signatures.
2. **A Press Release** will accompany the launch of the campaign.
3. **CSIPM will reach out to Member States, not only delegates in Rome but also at capitals level.** The campaign will be successful if members of the CSIPM mobilize from the bottom up. Letters for reaching out to governments at capital level have been drafted explaining the dire situation.
4. **Accompanying the denouncing strategy, CSIPM will send a different and separate letter to the USA and the Russian Federation blaming them as the main member states responsible for the CFS debacle last October.**
5. **Start writing up the CSIPM ideas about how the CFS coordination function on the food crises should work.**

Adapted by Claudio Schuftan from the CSIPM response to CFS50