

Critical and Emerging Issues for Food Security and Nutrition

HLPE Concept and Process Note¹

9 January 2014

Summary

This document describes the context and purpose of the work of the HLPE, towards a Note on Critical and Emerging issues for Food Security and Nutrition, requested by the CFS.

As for other HLPE studies, a central element of the evidence-based work will consist of documented inputs by the scientific community and a wide range of knowledge networks and knowledge holders, through a public inquiry.

The documents for the inquiry (notice and questionnaire) are attached to the present note and available online at www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe.

Replies to the questionnaire are expected by **15 March 2014** at cfs-hlpe@fao.org.

The Committee on World Food Security, the foremost intergovernmental and international evidence-based and multi-stakeholder platform related to food security and nutrition, mandated its High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) to “*identify emerging issues, and help members prioritize future actions and attentions on key focal areas*” (CFS reform Document, 2009).

At its plenary session in October 2013, the CFS requested the HLPE to produce a **Note on critical and/or emerging issues in the area of food security and nutrition**. This request came in the context of the CFS’s own ongoing discussion on the selection and prioritization of its activities².

¹ The present document has been developed by the Steering Committee of the HLPE. The HLPE would like to thank warmly the following experts having provided useful comments on an earlier version of this document: Ousmane Badiane, Joachim von Braun, Jonathan Brooks, Joanne Daly, Shenggen Fan, Charles Godfray, Bernard Hubert, Richard Mkandawire, Martin Pineiro, Jules Pretty, Rudy Rabbinge, Maruja Angelica Salas, Tom Wakeford and Michael Windfuhr. The HLPE alone is responsible for its final contents.

² In the CFS context, a clear distinction needs to be made between (i) issues of relevance to food security and nutrition, which are the object of the present knowledge-based exercise by the HLPE, and (ii) CFS activities, which are not the object of the present exercise as they are discussed and decided upon at the level of the CFS, by its own, distinct processes.

The present document describes the process by which the HLPE will prepare the Note, and especially:

- The inputs the HLPE is seeking from the scientific community and from a wide range of knowledge-holder organizations, institutions, networks, and individuals. A questionnaire to capture the input is described and included in this document, and available to download in word format at www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe.
- The expected contents of the final product of this work by the HLPE, including how the input received will be used.

The objective of the work of the HLPE is to provide a comprehensive, transparent, rigorous, knowledge-inclusive and evidence-based perspective on Critical and emerging issues for food security and nutrition, informed by a diversity of knowledge-holders. The related HLPE *Note on critical and/or emerging issues in the area of food security and nutrition* will be submitted to the CFS, with the aim to be a useful background to inform CFS 41 Plenary (October 2014).

Given the nature and specificity of this request from CFS, including related calendar constraints, the HLPE will follow a slightly different procedure, hereby described, than the one followed for preparing other thematic reports. The key principles that guide all HLPE reports will of course be respected: transparency, openness to diverse forms of knowledge, solicitation of inputs through open inquiry, and expert peer review prior to finalization and adoption of the note by the HLPE Steering Committee.

I) Context and challenges of the work

Food insecurity and malnutrition is a global and persistent issue, recurrently highlighted by crises. It manifests itself in various ways in the different regions of the world and it has a vast variety of complex and interdependent underlying causes. It is interlinked with many other problems and factors from local to international levels, ranging from questions of social protection to much larger development issues. Ensuring food security and nutrition requires first understanding many different issues and how they relate to each other, and second, tackling them at different levels in a coordinated way.

A growing number of institutions are engaging with these debates as food security and nutrition rises on the agenda of governments, civil society organizations, social movements, research organizations, and bilateral and multilateral aid and development agencies. This is not without often difficult political confrontations, especially when it comes to allocating policy priorities and resources, as different interest groups might have different priority concerns.

What can science and knowledge contribute to such debates? What are the issues of critical importance for food security and nutrition from the point of view of science and knowledge, given available evidence and methods? How to identify them from an evidence-based perspective?

Critical and emerging issues for food security and nutrition are those issues that have an important impact on one or several dimension(s) of food security and nutrition (availability, access, utilization/nutrition and stability). “Issues” can be very diverse. They include both challenges and opportunities, as impacts can be potentially positive or negative. They potentially

include clear and present dangers, medium-term emerging issues that need immediate consideration, and/or persistent but overlooked issues. They include trends and drivers of the food and nutrition system, changes that increase vulnerabilities (e.g. climate change). Those issues can be local or global, short-term or long-term, nascent or persistent. They can be systemic or relevant to one or more critical points in the system. They can include new developments, such as technologies. Policies – either directly related to food security and nutrition or in other domains – can in themselves constitute a critical or emerging issue, challenge or opportunity for food security and nutrition. Due to the very nature of food insecurity, issues that have an impact on vulnerable people and groups are of particular concern.

Identifying, from an evidence-based perspective, critical and emerging issues in the area of food security and nutrition comes with specific challenges.

First, to start with an academic point of view, there are many disciplines involved in the identification and framing of relevant issues, and there are many different ways to relate them to the four dimensions of food security. Issues vary by discipline, from environmental or food sciences and agronomy to economics, political sciences and other social sciences. Each discipline further brings its own vision, focus, concepts, and interpretation of food security and nutrition issues, framed and focused by specific methodologies and approaches. Reinforcing, but also diverging views can emerge from this confrontation of disciplinary approaches.

Second, agriculture, agricultural knowledge, science and technology, food security and nutrition have often been considered detached from other sectorial issues (environment, transportation, energy, etc.) since several decades, but are now, in practice, increasingly interacting with them: issues can emerge specifically due to increased interdependencies.

Third, issues can emerge in the future – therefore needing to be anticipated, and not only dealt with ex-post. This requires the use of specific methods to identify them, such as foresight tools.

Fourth, contexts are continuously changing and issues vary over time, as well as the knowledge about them, sometimes unexpectedly. Any attempt to identify, at one point in time, a range of present or foreseen issues, will thus have to be recurrently updated. Finally, knowledge on important and emerging issues comes from science and academia, but also from evidence-based knowledge of social actors, and from field practice. The HLPE recognizes the need to acknowledge and work with distinct, evidence-based, knowledge systems, while accepting the real challenge this objective presents, inter alia when it comes to assess the quality and validity of such knowledge.

Any process is always limited by constraints of time and resources. This process and its level of detail have been crafted and optimized to fit into the tight calendar ahead of CFS 2014 Plenary meeting. The process also takes into account workload capacities of the HLPE Steering Committee and Secretariat.

Grounded in a spirit of continuous learning and reflection, the HLPE will consider how this initial experiment might be subsequently improved. A key dimension of this reflection will be how to improve access to inputs from knowledge-holders whose issues are often overlooked or ignored by more formal knowledge holders or researchers (for example in government or the academy), and who, despite being encouraged to do so, may not be able or interested to present their

knowledge in the form of answers to a questionnaire. Their experience and understanding is nonetheless vital to the work of the HLPE (and the CFS), as reflected in the HLPE mandate to explicitly seek out such forms of knowledge.

II) Inputs

The HLPE is seeking evidence-based, rationally inducted and documented inputs on critical and emerging issues for food security and nutrition through the form of a questionnaire, primarily directed to the scientific community as well as to the diversity of knowledge networks and knowledge holders: institutions, organizations, knowledge networks and individuals. Unless requested otherwise by the respondent, each reply will be made available to the public as part of the inquiry proceedings. The results will inform the work of the HLPE Steering Committee.

The questionnaire will be used in two ways:

- The HLPE will formally seek inputs from some major institutions, organizations, of global and regional knowledge networks in the area of food security and nutrition.
- As is HLPE practice with other work streams, contributions from a wide range of knowledge holders will be sought through a public online electronic inquiry.

Importantly, through the questionnaire, the HLPE is not inviting opinions or advocacy on issues but specifically requesting documented evidence in support of the issues brought forward.

The questionnaire is available in the attached HLPE inquiry notice.

Respondents are requested to first describe the issue in just a few lines (section 1 of the questionnaire), as well as the underlying methodology and approach used for its identification. Further evidence and references are also important and can be added in a specific field at the end of the questionnaire (in section 6).

The issues brought forward in the questionnaire might be either “challenges” or “opportunities”, or both, simultaneously, depending on the specific context, for example depending on the region or kind of impact studied. Whether the issue is a challenge and/or an opportunity, the questionnaire allows the respondent to propose one or more “solutions” which in the respondent’s view would lead to overcoming the challenge or taking the opportunity.

In section 2, respondents are invited to categorize the issues according to the following broad typology: (i) is the issue an external driver or internal to food systems; (ii) what is the primary dimension of the issue itself, and (iii) what is the primary dimension of the impact on food security and nutrition. For these two questions, respondents are invited to precise the main category according to the classic dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social, governance (including institutions and rights) or environmental dimensions, or to specify one other main dimension.

In section 3, respondents are invited to detail how, and to which degree, the issue affects different aspects of food security and nutrition. This section helps to characterize the issue: first, by indicating whether and how much the issue affects one or several of the four “classical” dimensions of food security, and second, by giving information on additional attributes:

- Whether the issue affects food and nutrition systems as a whole or specific, critical parts?

- The breadth of the issue — how many people are affected?
- The scale of the issue: local, regional and/or global?
- The effects of the issue on already marginalized and vulnerable peoples or groups.
- Whether there are gender specific effects, any specific effects on mothers, on children?

In section 4, the questionnaire asks about the time scale of both the issue raised and the actions needed to address it (short, medium and/or long term)?

In section 5, the respondents are invited to provide an estimation of the degree of confidence on the above assessment: this is an evaluation of the quality of the understanding of the issue presented and its impact on food security and nutrition, in terms of the currently available evidence.

Finally in section 6, respondents can provide additional supporting information, such as references, indication of knowledge gaps.

III) Expected outcomes

The HLPE's objective is to develop a map of the most relevant issues (both opportunities and challenges) in relation to food security and nutrition, from an evidence-based perspective. It will aim at situating the issues and their causalities, given their multiplicity, in relation to the different ways they can impact food security and nutrition, in relation to how their impact and effect is more or less pregnant according to the various attributes of food security and nutrition, whether these effects are direct or indirect, local or remote, whether they are of particular concern for specific populations, including gender, age, marginality considerations, etc.

The analytical work will also aim to describe how the issues are linked to one another, and interact. Such an effort would seek to understand how various approaches to strengthen food security and nutrition now and in the future could relate to each other. Which would have the most effect, and of which nature? The mapping will also help identifying and addressing dependencies of issues, which will be useful to try to assess consistencies, or sequencing, in attempts to tackle them.

The analysis will also consider the issues according to their level of specificity, a quality which we call "granularity". For example, the question of investment in agriculture, as opposed to the more specific question of investment in small-scale agriculture, as opposed to the yet more specific question of constraints on investment in small-scale agriculture all reflect different degrees of granularity. As levels of granularity are difficult to define in advance for all potential issues, the distinctions will be introduced not in the questionnaire but at the time of doing the synthesis, based on the material collected. The analysis of issues needs to be done within a comparable class of granularity, to be coherent.

The HLPE will prepare its note to the CFS as follows: Once inputs have been received, the HLPE Steering Committee, with the support of the Secretariat, will identify/determine broad thematic areas based on the descriptions of the issues and their types of impacts and effects, as well as based on the attributes described above. Issues received will be classified within thematic, and, as relevant, sub-thematic areas. This will be completed by the information

provided on methodology, evidence/data, reference, and the description of each issue. A first synthesis of inputs received will be produced by the HLPE Secretariat, under the guidance of the Steering Committee, for discussion at the HLPE Steering Committee meeting in April 2014. The HLPE Steering Committee will use its own expertise, and its knowledge of recent exercises, to build a critical analysis of the breadth of inputs submitted. The final note will undergo expert peer review prior to finalization and approval by the HLPE Steering Committee.

The HLPE Steering Committee reiterates its commitment to use this process as a learning exercise, with a view to improving the methodology for the future, in particular to find the best adapted methods to reach other forms of knowledge and other knowledge systems than those based in academia and research institutions. The HLPE recognizes that the inclusion of other forms of expertise than scientific expertise to approach issues, and to devise concepts and methods for describing them and making them understandable, is in itself one of the critical issues for food security and nutrition today.

The HLPE Steering Committee

9 January 2014

Attached

HLPE Inquiry Notice and Questionnaire

Provisional timeline

	<i>Expected dates</i>
Sending of this document to the CFS Bureau and Advisory Group	10 January 2014
Inquiry	15 January – 15 March 2014
Exploitation of the results and preparation of the note	15 March – 15 June 2014
Expert peer review	15 -30 June 2014
Finalization and approval (HLPE StC)	1-15 July 2014
Note published and sent to CFS	15 July 2014