Note to the CFS Bureau

Possible themes for the HLPE report to be presented to CFS in 2024

HLPE Steering Committee – 2 March 2022

HLPE reports are normally requested by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) under its Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPoW) and linked to planned policy convergence processes as determined by the Membership. The current MYPoW covers the period 2020-2023, including for HLPE reports, while the next MYPoW (2024–2027) will be discussed from October 2022 until its adoption by CFS plenary in October 2023. However, as the development of an HLPE report follows a cycle of approximately 18 months, CFS will have to decide on the subject of the HLPE report for 2024 at its next ordinary plenary session, in October 2022. Below, the HLPE Steering Committee outlines three critical issues identified as *potential themes* for the 2024 HLPE report. It is to be noted that a particularly strong consensus arose among HLPE Steering Committee members on the relevance and urgency of the first of these possible themes: "Building resilient supply chains for food security and nutrition".

This note is an early outcome of the development of the third "Note on critical, emerging and enduring issues", which will be presented to CFS ahead of the October 2022 plenary and will inform the MYPoW process throughout the following year. The HLPE recommends that the next MYPoW also address the topic of the HLPE report to be presented in 2028.

1. Building resilient supply chains for FSN

Rationale

The COVID-19 pandemic caused chaos for food supply chains around the world, revealing vulnerabilities in the current systems designed to ensure that food moves smoothly from farm and fields to plates (HLPE 2021). Food supply chains have become increasingly complex in recent decades, characterized by growing cross-border trade in food products and the reliance on millions of food system workers to supply inputs, grow, process, move, market, and prepare food. Food supply chains also depend on well-functioning transportation systems, require vast quantities of water and fossil fuel energy, and rely on regulations to ensure safety and quality. In the case of globally oriented food supply chains, smooth channels of international trade are vital to their functioning. The risks associated with disruptions can be multiplied when food supply chains rigidly rely on only global, or only local, supplies and labour or when there are multiple shocks affecting food systems at the same time (FAO et al. 2021). Food supply chain dynamics also vary in different regions and countries, depending on their structure and organization (Nchanji and Lutomia 2021).

In the decades prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, food supply chains in many parts of the world had become increasingly organized around a "just-in-time" approach, often dominated by just a handful of large firms, in order to achieve economic efficiencies (Clapp and Moseley 2020). But as became clear during the pandemic, this efficiency-focused model is characterized by rigidities due to a lack of diversity that can undermine their resilience – i.e. their capacity to recover, adapt and transform – in the face of shocks. Food supply chains became strained when any one of the factors that were required to make it function properly was affected negatively, such as the availability and mobility of healthy and safe food system workers, open channels of trade and transportation, and the availability of water and energy supplies (Klassen and Murphy 2020; Battersby 2020).

Food supply chains risk disruption from many different types of shocks, including conflict, climate vulnerability, financial shocks, and local disasters (e.g. Davis *et al.* 2021; Béné 2020). These types of shocks have the potential to negatively impact multiple dimensions of food security, and can result in: uneven food availability due to lack of inputs and labour, higher food prices that diminish food access, unstable markets due to trade and transportation blockages, shortages of nutritious foods, wastage and excessive resource use, weakened food system livelihoods and a diminishment of people's ability to interact with food systems on their own terms – including producers, workers, traders and consumers (HLPE 2021).

Given the growing potential for shocks from a range of sources, it is imperative to take a deeper look at the types of vulnerabilities facing food supply chains, and to suggest ways to make them more diverse and resilient so that they are able to function to support all six dimensions of food security, even in the face of shocks and crises.

Key questions that could be addressed in this report:

1. What are the main features and types of food supply chains that dominate within food systems around the world?

2. What are the trade-offs between efficiencies and resilience within different types of food supply chains?

3. What are the main vulnerabilities facing food supply chains, especially in relation to different kinds of potential shocks?

4. What are the benefits and costs of shifting toward more territorial forms of food supply chains as a strategy to increase diversity and resilience?

5. What types of policy changes are needed to enhance the resilience of food supply chains, including consideration of environmental sustainability and human rights?

6. What is the regulatory role of states in building more resilient food supply chains?

2. Strengthening urban and peri-urban food systems

Rationale

Sixty percent of the global population currently lives in cities (UNDESA 2018), which are engines of growth and employment, producing over 80% of the global GDP (World Bank, 2020). The increase in urban population will be particularly stark in Africa and Asia, where all megacities are located, with the 15 fastest-growing cities all located in Africa. Alongside this urbanization, there has been a "geographical decoupling" (Langemeyer *et al.* 2021:2) of cities from sources of food supply, with urban and peri-urban land use being reoriented for higher-value uses. Cities are fast losing peri-urban agricultural lands, which have historically provided them with fresh food. Cities are also experiencing higher rates of extreme weather events as well as growing inequalities (Pelling *et al.* 2021). These trends mean that cities also concentrate risks for food security and nutrition, as became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, cities are resourceful and are hubs for education, health and social services.

The informal food sector is critical to the food security of poor urban households in most rapidly growing towns and cities in the Global South. The informal food economy comprises a complex network of suppliers, transporters, hawkers, retailers, and street and market food vendors, in addition to the farmers, making food more accessible and affordable to urban consumers. Yet they mainly rely on their own resources and capital and have very little policy support for strengthening their enterprises alongside ensuring quality.

The strategies chosen will shape FSN, locally and globally, across the rural-urban continuum. Cities can play a vital role in shaping food system policies to bolster resilience sourcing locally or regeneratively grown food where appropriate, avoiding food waste, and designing and marketing healthier food products, amongst others. A recent survey indicates that municipal governments play an enormous role in identifying and connecting food systems actors to foster innovative community-based initiatives to bolster food security and nutrition (FAO 2020). In the face of the dramatic consequences of the pandemic, for example, initiatives by family producers for home delivery services of baskets of fresh food have multiplied, as have initiatives for food donations to low-income communities. These experiences point to the importance and viability of the territorial dimension of food systems for the realization of the human right to food (Recine *et al.* 2021).

Urban and peri-urban agriculture is one option which has potential positive impacts on dietary diversity, the quality of city spaces and community action and empowerment. Yet there is little state support for urban and peri-urban agriculture in most cities, especially in the global South. During the COVID-19 lockdown, it was only home gardens which provided some nutritious and healthy food supplements to the urban middle classes (Lal, 2020). Many poor people in urban areas, especially migrant workers, were forced to go to food banks and charities, with great harm to their rights, dignity and agency.

Given the social and economic significance of urban areas, it is imperative to address the challenges of urbanization and rural transformation to 'build back better' in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic – addressing poverty and inequality, building resilience and social inclusion and fostering sustainable lives.

Key questions that could be addressed in this report:

1. How can urban food supply chains, formal and informal, local and global, be made more resilient and equitable to ensure food security and nutrition within mega-cities, in particular for food system workers in the informal economy?

2. What changes are needed in urban planning to better support all dimensions of food security – including support for rights and agency as well as sustainability, especially for the most vulnerable?

3. How can national and municipal governments strengthen the potential for low-carbon, inclusive, relatively self-sufficient and resilient cities to drive improved food security and nutrition in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

4. What are the most appropriate policies along the rural-urban continuum to address issues of land tenure, migration to cities and the growing competition for natural resources?

5. What are the potential benefits of territorial markets for strengthening food security and nutrition within cities?

6. How can climate change policies be brought to the city level, while guaranteeing food and nutrition security?

3. Conflicts and the fragility of food systems

Rationale

Conflict is one of the major drivers of hunger and malnutrition, and at the same time, hunger is one of the major causes of conflict. The ongoing dire situations of conflict and post-conflict countries and regions – including Yemen, South Sudan, North-eastern Nigeria, Afghanistan and most recently Tigrey Ethiopia – have increased the incidence of extreme hunger and malnutrition (Global Hunger Index 2021). There are more than 30 million people in over three dozen countries who are just one-step away from a declaration of famine (UN 2021), a number that has continued to climb in the last several years. Fragile states in particular are in a dire situation. When conflict meets with the climate emergency, infectious diseases, and competition over access to valuable resources like water and arable land, severe food insecurity deepens (FAO & WFP 2021).

Without a lasting peace, the international community is unlikely to reach the goal of zero hunger. Conflict adversely affects all six dimensions of food security (HLPE 2020). It can displace farmers, destroy agricultural assets, disrupt markets, increase food prices, and undermine food system livelihoods, resulting in severe hunger and malnutrition, especially for an already vulnerable section of society, such as smallholder and subsistence farmers, women, children indigenous peoples, and minorities. In conflict situations, severe hunger and malnutrition often spreads quickly to neighbouring places, creates forced displacement and migration. Without an urgent response, conflict-driven hunger not only kills people, but also destroys entire food systems.

Short term, emergency response from humanitarian organizations is vital, yet ultimately not enough. Such operations are typically meant to address immediate crises, rather than installing long term peaceful and sustainable food systems. Moreover, humanitarian organizations are already beyond their capacity to solve even immediate emergencies because of limited financial resources (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2021).

Long term development assistance and investment is key to breaking the vicious cycle of hunger and conflict, but without peace building, such efforts are hindered. The international community has an obligation to respond to such a human tragedy given the United Nations Charter, founding principles of Rome based institutions, and international human rights commitments.

There are examples around the world where effective development policies have helped to solve conflict, giving hope to peaceful recovery and restoration of food systems that are sustainable and equitable (FAO 2016). A long-term, holistic approach is necessary for solving structural problems relevant to food insecurity such as political and economic shocks, depleted natural resources, and social exclusion that result from conflict.

Key questions that could be addressed in this report:

1. How is the right to food compromised in conflict situations?

2. What are the main challenges for humanitarian action in ensuring access to food of vulnerable populations in situations of conflict including in its complex relationship with other crises such as climate change, and pandemic?

3. What are the most promising policies to support local agrifood systems, food security and resilience in contexts of high insecurity and conflict?

4. How can local people be made part of the transformation rather than passive receivers in time of humanitarian assistance?

5. How can the international community promote the formula of humanitarian development and peace nexus to prevent conflict-related hunger crises?

6. How could policies and laws help to pre-empt the use of starvation as a weapon of war?

7. What are the consequences of unilateral economic sanctions on human rights in conflict and post conflict societies?

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