

**Written inputs from the Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism on  
priority issues to be included in the Zero Draft of the Policy Recommendations on Reducing  
Inequalities for Food Security and Nutrition**

**23 January 2024**

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) once more reconfirms its recognition of the relevance of the workstream on "Reducing Inequalities for food security and nutrition". We welcome that the CFS is addressing this issue, being informed by an HLPE report. We welcome the general direction of the HLPE report providing an extensive analysis on inequalities in food systems, their deep, systemic drivers, and the ways in which they affect food security and nutrition outcomes. The report very prominently acknowledges power imbalances, e.g. unequal power dynamics between large food corporations and peasant food producers, and outlines a strong focus on the concept of agency as key to reducing inequalities in food security and nutrition.

For the upcoming negotiations, we would like to emphasize the following points, which we consider particularly important to be reflected in the policy recommendations.

**1. Following a strong rights-based approach for addressing power imbalances**

Human rights are essential to the policies of the CFS and the approaches of states. They inherently speak to inequalities as they put those who are most marginalised at the centre of decision-making in terms of processes, and in terms of outcomes that should be rooted in the realities of the most vulnerable. A major gap identified in the human rights-based framework used within the inequalities report is that it fails to discuss the role that international obligations play in achieving the right to food. According to the first Special Rapporteur on the right to food, "to comply fully with their obligations under the right to food, States must also respect, protect and support the fulfilment of the right to food of people living in other territories".

The Policy Recommendations must recognize, based on the analysis of the HLPE Report, that there is rapidly growing inequality both within and between countries, and that structural, external drivers of inequity, such as the unjust global trade and financial system that are outside food systems, are key drivers of inequalities within the food system. These lead to a systemic violation of the right to food and other human rights. Rising levels of hunger and malnutrition are the outcome of unequal, unjust and unsustainable systems. Inequality in the food system must first be challenged by prioritising support for the most marginalised. The greatest divider of them all is the economic divider, so well-articulated by Brazil at the presentation of the report at CFS 51. The report fails to address the fiscal viability of its recommendations where food security is highest and fiscal capacity of governments is least available.

Inequality in the food system cannot only be challenged by supporting the most marginalized to improve their conditions but must include redistribution of resources and address the way in which resources, assets, value, and power are unequally distributed and concentrated, both within the food system and across society as a whole. A central aspect of international human rights and climate obligations is the recognition of common but differentiated responsibilities and the fulfilment of socio-economic rights must go hand in hand with addressing inequalities and imagining a more egalitarian world. Therefore,

international obligations require us to recognize that addressing inequalities is only possible by addressing the conditions that have contributed to high levels of wealth and income concentration at the same time as transferring resources and creating the conditions for the most marginalized to achieve autonomy and their human rights. Crises and marginalisation do not stand alone, but are the flip side of concentration of wealth and power, profit, speculation, financialisation and profiting from an unjust and unequal food system.

Policy instruments that aim to reduce inequalities must therefore address these power imbalances, e.g. between peasant food producers and large corporations, between high and low income countries as well as between the Global North and the Global South, the unequal distribution of value across the food systems and of land, seeds and water as well as compounding factors such as age, gender, disability, indigeneity, race, ethnicity, and caste. In particular unequal distribution of resources must be looked at through the prism of the duty bearer of human rights and the common but differentiated responsibilities. The recommendations must recognize the different histories of the marginalization and colonization of certain countries, regions, and populations and taking an intersectional lens on inequalities along with a clear commitment to reparation, restoration and common but differentiated responsibilities. We strongly call for ambitious policy recommendations that support a transformative, redistributive and human rights-centred approach based on agreed UN language and CFS products and aim to challenge the existing exploitative system, instead of using unclear expressions like “equity-sensitive” approaches. We call for a transformative approach that tackles the root causes of inequalities by moving beyond individual responsibility to transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce inequalities. The policy recommendations must be based on a strong human rights framework for ensuring the realisation of the rights to food, water, healthy environment, land, housing, social protection, health, education, freedom of speech, decent work and workers’ rights, as all human rights are indivisible. We would also like to underline the importance of the rights and access to information and inclusive participation in decision-making processes, as procedural rights that make the realisation of substantive rights possible.

## **2. Addressing the structural drivers of Inequality**

### **Gender inequality**

Women score less on every single marker of human development from mortality to violence. According to a UN Women Report on gender equality we are 131 years away from achieving gender equality. Women as peasants but also women as caretakers have the responsibility to put food on the table. One of the results of women being responsible for ensuring the family’s access to food is that they put their own safety, health and personal access to food as a secondary issue. This has significantly impacted women’s health and safety, specifically in zones of wars, earthquakes, floods, famine and other natural disasters.

Women’s participation in food production is not being acknowledged, due to the fact that it is perceived as an integral part of their reproductive chores.

Refugee women face additional challenges: access to food is reduced due to the dire economic situation in which most of them live. This is witnessed through the quality of food they can access: their diets shifted from fresh vegetables and fruits, cooked at home, to ready-made canned food, and an accumulating loss of their traditional cooking habits and culture.

Older women also experience additional challenges in crisis settings; due to their longevity, they are more exposed to disasters and conflicts and more at risk due to a lifetime of disadvantage in relation to social, economic, and health factors.

### **Reproductive and care labor**

- Imposed on women as a natural responsibility/inclination, reproductive and care labor/work has been limiting women's lives, livelihoods, movement and spaces (unpaid work). Nonetheless, it has also absolved men and society as a whole from a responsibility that no one individual should carry.
- The gendering of reproductive and care labour has also relieved states from large expenses - refer to available numbers.
- The unequal distribution of reproductive and care labour has meant that not only it is invisible, but that it is carried by one part of the society, which removes reproductive and care labour from the commons.

### **Colonialism, race, racism**

Colonialism, race and racism that built the global food regime need to be addressed. Colonialism resulted in underdevelopment, poverty, hunger and malnutrition for many, while a few countries reaped the benefits and thrived in their diets and industrial food systems. 1.05 billion people in Asia-Pacific region, over 270 million people in Africa experience moderate to severe food insecurity today that cannot be dissociated with the historical construction of the food system and the unequal distribution of opportunities and resources. Denied any reparation and restoration for the violence of the past, nearly 3/4 of African governments have reduced their agricultural budgets. The MENA region's agricultural sectors have been destroyed by wars, occupations, cartels, imposed policies and international corporations, and the food security of the region is fragilised by the coerced reliance on food imports and the mechanisation and modernisation of food production. Racism impacts 170 million people of African descent in the diaspora, which includes poor access to work, housing, medical services and food. 56.5 million in Latin America and the Caribbean experience moderate or severe food insecurity. It totals to exactly 7.2 million for the Caribbean population.

### **Disability**

It is estimated that 15% of the global population suffers from a disability. This proportion is likely to sharply increase in humanitarian crises and, outside of the emergency context, approximately 46% of older people have some form of disability. Disability affects access to living incomes through work or welfare. Persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and to experience food insecurity. In Europe it is estimated that persons with disabilities are twice as likely to experience food insecurity. There is a lack of data globally.

### **Age**

Age as an important dimension when assessing inequities and inequalities both within FSN systems and in related systems. Older people are an often neglected and marginalised segment of the global population, despite the demographic trend of ageing. It is estimated that by 2050 20% of the global population will be aged at least 60 years old, with 80% of the older people located in low and middle income countries.

Older people experience inequality across different domains (e.g., economic, political, environmental, and social), which deny them of equal access to health services, decent work, livelihood opportunities, with repercussions on their food security and nutrition. Recent compounded economic shocks, coupled with the combined effect of climate change, conflicts and instability, as well as pre-existing levels of inequities and inequality, are having a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods and wellbeing of some segments of the global population, including older people, and as a consequence in the access to adequate and nutritious food. Older people, and especially older women, are consistently at risk of

having their rights denied and their basic needs unmet in times of crises, including in terms of access to food. This can have a knock-on impact not only on their health, but also on the wider household, given the care-giving responsibilities for younger household members that women, and especially older women, often undertake.

### **Climate Crisis and Biodiversity loss**

Yet despite agriculture's importance to food security, livelihoods and environmental health, the percentage of climate finance for agriculture stands at a paltry 3%. Even worse is the fact that less than half of this finance is targeting small-scale farmers while a tiny fraction of this support is being directed towards transformative and innovative approaches, such as agroecology.

Small-scale agriculture contributes little to historical and actual greenhouse gas emissions. Yet it is bearing the brunt of these changes. Changes in temperature, rainfall and extreme events have a major impact on agricultural yields. Farmers, who paradoxically, are the first victims of hunger, are therefore on the front line of the effects of climate change. Those who suffer the most from climate impacts are those who contributed least to it.

Faced with this injustice, international financial flows to help farmers adapt to climate change are largely insufficient and do not sufficiently reach the most vulnerable groups. Over the period 2019-2020 only 4.3% of climate finance was dedicated to food systems. When we zoom in on this funding, small-scale farmers only received 0.8% of all climate finance.

In order to tackle this huge and ongoing inequity, besides stopping fossil fuel consumption, there is an urgent need to increase international flows to help peasants and communities adapt. Agroecology principles are key here to deliver sustainable food systems that are resilient to climate change, halts biodiversity loss and stops fueling the climate disaster.

It is also urgent to simplify access for local communities, farmers' organisations and civil society to these international funds. To achieve this, we need to improve participation in climate decision-making, particularly for farmers' organisations, indigenous peoples and the most vulnerable groups. Additionally, the policy recommendations must acknowledge that climate solutions have an important effect on inequalities, with multiple solutions increasing land grabbing and affecting the rights of the most vulnerable.

## **3. Committing to structural approaches for addressing inequalities**

### **Intersectionality as the guiding principle**

As addressed in the HLPE report, the policy recommendations need to address the multiple disadvantages in FNS defined by social groupings and their intersectionality, also in developed countries. Intersectionality should not be used as a void word to avoid addressing root causes of oppression, but must become a prism to engage with marginalised groups in a complex and interconnected way that current policies and legal systems do not do. The Recommendations must also mention gender and gender diversity related inequalities through patriarchal norms, along with the invisibilities of care labour and reproductive labour that are central to the construction and maintenance of secure food systems. The policy recommendations need to embed a time and finance dimension into the overall framework with the adoption of a life course perspective, acknowledging that multiple intersectional inequalities and discrimination experiences can occur at any given point in time, and they can have a cumulative effect at an old age. A life course perspective recognises the increased need to intervene during specific

periods of vulnerability along the life course. These vulnerabilities typically focus on key periods of vulnerability such as pregnancy, the first 1000 days and adolescence and old age.

### **Ensure control over resources like land, seeds etc.**

Redistribution means not only access but also control over resources such as land, seeds etc. The understanding must go beyond ownership to address full consideration of access and control particularly for women and Indigenous Peoples. Challenges with regard to land ownership such as land tenure, unequal distribution of land, gender disparities, power imbalances as a driver for unequal land distribution, land grabbing need to be tackled. This cannot take place unless we approach land, water, and natural resources as a collective right and not a commodity, and unless the sanctity of private property is questioned, and replaced with the need for a communal use of the resources as Commons. Hence the importance of the Commons discourse within any critical report on existing inequalities.

### **Agroecology rather than market-driven approaches**

The policy recommendations need to acknowledge agroecology and its principles as the fundamental approach for reducing inequalities. Agroecology has the potential to overcome power imbalances within the food systems by placing people and their agency at the centre of food systems and ensuring that nature is the core of our conception of agriculture.

In contrast, a strong focus on production for value chains and related inequalities such as finances, lack of access to loans, unequal farm sizes, market access, inputs, no or little access to “modern” value chains, technologies, information etc. reinforce existing inequalities rather than following principles of social, political, and economic transformation as well as collective forms of financial support. The policy recommendations should not focus on the question of how different groups participate in the current food system but focus on the potential of an inclusive, agroecological food systems transformation for reducing inequalities.

### **Challenging the Neoliberal paradigm**

The role of neoliberalism / capitalism / free market ideology in deepening and sustaining inequalities of class, social status or caste within countries and widening the gap among countries needs to be addressed by the policy recommendations. This should also include elements referring to inequalities and malnutrition in developed countries. In France in May 2023, according to a study carried out by the CREDOC, 16% of the population were estimated to be suffering from malnutrition; this is estimated to be specifically affecting women and youth as well as the elderly. The CSIPM has therefore in its previous comments suggested locating the contradictions generated by capitalism and the current neoliberal model. Because the overarching issue lies in fact that the very nature of the neoliberal economic system is based on maximizing profit for shareholders rather than collective respect for the needs of people and planet and the governance thereof. Regulatory policies that support the redistribution of wealth and income such as taxation, financial market regulation need to be emphasized. As the current inequitable system is based on a neo-liberal economic system, it should also take the ILO’s 2022 (International Labour Organisation’s Conference) Conclusions on the role of Social and Solidarity Economy on Decent Work and specifically refer to last April’s UNGA Resolution on Social and Solidarity Economy A/RES/77/281 into account. Social and Solidarity Economy are based on human rights principles, redistributive logic and collective rather than individual wealth. SSE can take the form of workers’ cooperatives or other equitable structures, and places people and planet before profit. It can cover all sectors and activities such as Community Land Trusts, Community seed saving, Community health and electricity or water management etc and local/community finance through local currencies and some forms of finance for development.

### **Overcoming Power imbalances, market concentration and the financialization of food systems**

HLPE Member Jennifer Clapp and others have demonstrated how the global industrial food system is characterised by high levels of economic and power concentration. This has repercussions on access to markets, competitiveness of small-scale farmers, salaries, and the distribution of value across the food systems. Overcoming inequities requires challenging concentration as a mechanism that reproduces hierarchies, dependency and the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities. Within the global food system, it means sanctioning unfair trading practices, facilitating unionisation, the creation of cooperatives are some priorities to fix and workers' collaboration, and to making the payment of living income and living wages mandatory throughout the whole chain. However, addressing concentration and power imbalances also means supporting the consolidation and establishment of new food systems that are not organized around lead firms and a few main players, like the case of global trade in grains. Therefore, aligning with the need to foster local, self-sufficient, and secure food systems.

Concentration and power imbalances are strongly connected to the financialization of the food system. Financial capital, including speculative actors, are attracted by large food actors who control large shares of the market and can extract high levels of rent. However, this reinforces existing inequalities because it directs capital to those players that are already in a position of economic power and widens the gap with smaller players. On the other hand, financialization implies that a significant part of the value produced in the food system is distributed to shareholders and investors, and therefore taken away from workers, farmers, and the people who are making food systems possible. It is therefore essential that the Recommendations clearly and strongly address the ongoing financialization of the food system, with particular attention to the role of future commodity trading and index speculation in leveraging price shocks and intensifying situations of food insecurity.

Fighting inequality in the food system also means challenging the continuous privatization and the patenting of food and nature. New Genomic Technologies (NGTs) represent the newest frontier in the process of privatization and commodification of food, and they shall not be considered compatible with the purpose of strengthening democratic, participatory and equitable food systems that fulfil the collective good and regenerate ecological processes. In particular, NGTs may expand the ability of private actors to patent seeds, plants and food varieties. A recent report by European environmental organisations shows that a search for the term "CRISPR-Cas plant" in international patent application databases yielded no less than 20,000 results. These are often broad patent applications covering all plants with a particular trait, regardless of how the plants are obtained – including via conventional breeding techniques. Countries that are committed to food security and the right to food should thus reconsider their position on NGTs, and embrace the precautionary principle, the public nature of food and human rights as a guideline, rather than privatization and intensification of unequal dynamics.

### **Redistribution to overcome indebtedness**

Present inequality is also the product of historical decisions that limit the political space of countries. In particular, international debt contracted in the past by countries in the Global South acts as a Damocles' sword on many governments, reducing their possibility to protect, respect and – above all – fulfil human rights. It is therefore essential that the Recommendations specifically target the issue of debt and make it clear that inequality and indebtedness are closely correlated. In this sense, the recent work of IPES-food represents a valuable guideline to address issues of countries' debts as an obstacle to the realization of the right to food and food security.

On the other hand, the Recommendations must be clear that more debt (public or private) cannot be and is not the solution to the ongoing inequality. The marginalization and dependency that are often experienced by peasants, fisherfolks, workers and eaters cannot be solved by increasing their personal debt and creating new forms of dependency and subordination towards loan agencies and the global

financial sector. Such policy options must be seen in open contrast with the idea of addressing inequality and challenging the root causes.

It has proved that the use of debt to promote agrarian transformations is often used to link farmers to specific companies and forms of production, intensifying dependency, territorial tensions and inequality. So, we consider it essential that the Recommendations recognise that the way forward cannot be indebtedness but must rather favour redistribution and a strong form of public support to small-scale peasant and marginalised producers and eaters to build local and strong food systems.

About 60% of low-income countries, and 30% of middle-income countries, are now considered at high risk of (or already in) debt distress. As debts spiral out of control and the world's poorest countries struggle to meet the basic needs of their populations, today's rapidly rising rates of hunger and poverty could soon become a tidal wave, reversing decades of progress, and sparking further instability and conflict. Comprehensive debt relief must go hand-in-hand with food system transformation, to build a basis for sustainable public finances in low income countries and durable progress in the fight against hunger and poverty.

### **Establish robust Social Protection systems**

Beyond a shift to universal age-sensitive and gender-responsive or transformative social protection systems, there is a need for social protection measures that are well targeted, flexible and shock responsive. Social protection measures need to be adequately designed and implemented throughout their lifecycle to avoid the risk of perpetuating existing inequalities and to achieve their transformative potential.

Weak social protection systems combined with already high levels of poverty in low-income countries result in impossible choice options for individuals and households who must decide between buying medicines and food, thus often having to skip meals or eat poor quality food. Shock responsive social protection systems are necessary in contexts where economic and climate change related shocks disrupt value chains, undermine livelihoods, and further exacerbate food insecurity. In France in several cities there are several current experiments with **food social security**, whereby Local Governments are working with producers to ensure access to healthy food for marginalised groups. A central issue in developing social protection programs in low and middle-income countries is fiscal space within those countries. While it is difficult to argue with the recommendations for chronic hunger of chapter 5, without redistribution of resources implementation of recommendations such as social protection and universal health care will remain aspirational for the most food insecure people in the world. The report does make clear the need for strong social protection across multiple sectors to ensure FSN, however it does not address that globally we are seeing a shift of decreased social protection – both in terms of the amount of funds going to programs or to programs becoming more restrictive with regards for who qualifies. In addition to leaving many people “out”, State regression on these duties also paves the way for corporate/private entities to take up what should be public services, or public responsibility. Governments / public authorities have the responsibility to uphold HR obligations, and social protection measures are an essential component to ensuring support for persons experiencing marginalization and discrimination which often shows up as poverty, hunger/food insecurity, and homelessness. It is impossible to speak of social protection in terms of food explicitly in a vacuum- because this does not reflect the reality experienced by people or the indivisibility of human rights.

Solutions consistent with human rights require public policies that address and overcome structural food access barriers that people face. Food and nutrition policies should be designed to overcome the need for emergency food by ensuring that food is consistently adequate, available, accessible and sustainable.

In the context of crisis and protracted crisis, if surplus food redistribution infrastructures are required to meet this goal, these should be destigmatised, universally accessible, connected to regional food provisioning systems, the localisation of food systems, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and governed by local community development interests and goals, not those of distant corporate actors.

### **Address situations of protracted crisis**

Work on inequalities must address situations of protracted crises, acute hunger and malnutrition, conflict, occupation, and war— and the Framework for Action on food insecurity in protracted crises should be a core basis for this since it has HR based guidance, that was agreed in consensus by the CFS, but has incredibly weak uptake and implementation.

An essential part of addressing inequalities in crises is not to simply have endless and permanent states of aid, which focuses on short-term thinking rather than long term people's sovereignty; to create the conditions where people and communities can realize their right to food and other rights- to feed themselves and their family in dignity. In doing so approaches in such situations should consider short term humanitarian interventions embedded in long term human rights goals. Interventions in crisis should also address underlying causes of crises – in particular for those who are most marginalised. Violence and conflict undermining people's agency, socio-cultural drivers. A focus on the most affected by hunger and malnutrition must include the groups of people affected by chronic hunger as well as people experiencing acute and extreme acute food insecurity particularly in fragile settings which is increasing globally. Emphasis needs to be put on contexts characterised by conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies and the interplay between the responses to emergencies and inequalities in FSN. For instance, there is no mention of emergency responses by humanitarian agencies, which play a fundamental role for the preservation of food security in these circumstances.

### **Secure the Right to Housing**

Increasingly viewed as a commodity, housing is most importantly a human right. Under international law, to be adequately housed means having secure tenure—not having to worry about being evicted or having your home or land taken away. It means living somewhere that is in keeping with your culture, and having access to appropriate services, schools, and employment. Securing the right to adequate housing needs to be seen as central for reducing inequalities. Collective solutions such as Community Land Trusts and housing cooperatives should be part of the answer, as they avoid speculative approaches.

### **Establish fair and equal trading systems**

The global trade system has cemented long-standing inequalities, benefiting state and corporate actors that already have good access to resources, credit and infrastructure over the historically disadvantaged. It resulted in the concentration of corporate power throughout the food system, facilitated by the global trading and financial systems. The recommendations need to aim for a multiplicity of regional food systems based on the human-rights principles of dignity, self-sufficiency and solidarity.

It is therefore of pivotal importance that the Recommendations engage with the role that international trade and investments have had in creating the current conditions of inequality, and challenging states' attempts to rethink the food system according to the needs and rights of their people. As recognised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Michael Fakhri, "The past 25 years have shown that these exceptional, ameliorating Agreement on Agriculture provisions do not ensure fair international markets nor do they make domestic markets stable. [...]They continue centuries of patterns of trade in which formerly colonized States, indigenous peoples, agricultural workers and peasants are denigrated by the trade system."



We therefore consider it a priority that the Recommendations address the existing structure of international trade in food, and recognise the need for a change in the premises and goals of international trade, along with the importance of building regional food systems that address needs and rights rather than economic efficiency, and that recognises that both labour and food should not be distributed and valued according to competitive principles, race to the bottom or the financial capacity of the buyer.

Similarly, the Recommendations should not ignore the chilling effect that trade agreements and investment agreements have vis-a-vis public policies that aim at addressing the social and environmental inequalities that characterize the global industrial food system. The recent case of the Mexican government, summoned before a trade dispute panel for its decision to prevent human consumption of genetically modified corn and products containing glyphosate, raises significant concerns with regards to the policy space that is left to countries in the attempt to promote food systems that are fairer, healthier, more sustainable, and therefore less unequal.

### **Support Solidarity economy**

Without an economic paradigm change, inequalities can not be structurally overcome. The important work that has been done by the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy, the 2022 Conclusions of the ILO Conference on Decent Work and Social and Solidarity Economy, the groundbreaking UN General Assembly Resolution "Promoting the social and solidarity economy for sustainable development" (A/RES/77/281) on April 18th 2023 must be taken into account in the CFS policy framework. The Social and Solidarity economy places people and planet before profits and also collectivises outcomes for the community. This framework is human rights-based and reaches beyond just food, to cover an equitable community approach to land, seeds, water and energy management.