

Policies against hunger 2013: Land ahead!

Welcome address by Maryam Rahmanian, Conference Chair

11 June, 2013

Minister Aigner, Minister Niebel, thank you for your words of support for the implementation of the Guidelines.

I would like to begin by thanking the organisers of the conference for giving me the honour of chairing this important forum. This is a particular honour because the first international conference I ever attended was the very first Policies Against Hunger conference here in Berlin in June 2002, which took place just before the World Food Summit: five years later in Rome.

At this conference in 2002, and at the summit, I met civil society organisations and social movements working for food sovereignty and I joined them in calling for strong multilateral governance for food and agriculture under the UN system. Our call was seen as irrelevant at that time. There were still strong expectations that the World Trade Organisation would respond to governance needs and that it could achieve food security through market mechanisms.

The world has changed dramatically since then. As you all know, there was an international consensus that the lack of suitable governance mechanisms was one of the contributing factors to the 2008 food crisis. This led to the reform of the Committee on World Food Security in 2009 in order to transform the CFS into the “foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform” for food security.

The food crisis also led to a renewed interest in investing in agriculture...and to land grabbing. The CFS, taking up its ambitious new mandate, responded by developing the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security. Many of you are here today because you played a key role in their negotiations.

The Guidelines are the first and still most important example of what the CFS can achieve and why it is needed. The reformed CFS proved its capacity:

- First, to tackle key and contentious issues in the fight against hunger, such as access to land;
- Second, to involve the communities most affected by hunger on an equal

footing; and,

- Third, to forge intergovernmental agreements within a reasonable period of time.

For those of us who believe in the necessity of multilateral governance of food and agriculture, the implementation of the Tenure Guidelines is a therefore a crucial test. We are all gathered in this conference because we agree that implementation is important.

But what it means to implement the guidelines is a contested issue.

This is natural.

Different actors, with their different interests, perspectives and ways of working, have different ideas of what it means to implement the guidelines. For instance, some actors emphasise the voluntary nature of the Guidelines, while others point out that they are built on existing human rights *obligations* of States. Some give equal or even more importance to instruments to govern land tenure developed by other bodies, while others give top priority to the CFS, pointing to its mandate as the most inclusive and central policy space. All agree on the need to invest in smallholder agriculture, but there are different visions of the future of smallholder agriculture.

You will spend the next two days sharing your different perspectives on implementation and trying to build on those areas where there is convergence. I would like to offer one thought to help us navigate through the maze of different perspectives and hopefully contribute to finding convergences.

It is quite simple. We must always keep in mind that the ultimate aim of the Guidelines is the achievement of food security and the right to food. The lack of adequate and secure access to land and natural resources by the poor is one of the main causes of hunger and poverty in the world. The Guidelines are a testimony to a very broad international consensus that eradicating hunger means assuring fair access to natural resources.

This aim of food security and the right to food has implications for how we approach the implementation of the guidelines.

As you know, investment was one of the most contentious topics during the negotiations, and it continues to be a focus of the work of the CFS through the current process to define principles on responsible agricultural investments.

Investments must be viewed through the lens of their impact on food security and the right to food. The guidelines are not meant to facilitate investments in general, or those that maximise profit from agriculture, but those that maximise food security and the realisation of rights.

What kind of investments lead to greater food security? This is a complex issue, involving not only production – how much food is produced? – but also complex social, political and economic realities: who has access to that food? This issue is addressed in the most recent study of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the CFS, of which I have the honour of being Vice-Chair.

The summary and recommendations of that report, Investing in Smallholder Agriculture for Food Security, are already available and the report itself (as well as the report on biofuels and food security) will be launched and in Rome on June 26 in an full day event that includes dialogue among all CFS stakeholders. It will also be webcast¹.

The report recognises that the development trajectory that has worked in the past may not respond to the needs of the future. The structural transformation that occurred in Western countries was grounded on intensive and unsustainable use of natural resources, and on the capacity of these economies to create jobs in other sectors, and on the possibility of massive migration.

The situation is quite different today and the capacity to create sufficient jobs in non-agricultural sectors, or to absorb massive new influxes of migrants, is not the same. These realities put a different light on the significance of smallholder agriculture.

The report shows that smallholders are the backbone of global food security and that they themselves are the major investors in their own production systems. Other investors need to support the massive and ongoing investments made by smallholders.

The report finds that the major investments that are needed for food security are to be made by the public sector, including not only investment in activities directly related to agriculture, such as extension and research, but also in important basic services such as education and health, as well as investments in establishing institutions and markets that respond to the needs of smallholders, such as local markets and short-value chains that directly link consumers and producers, as well as public procurement programs.

The Tenure Guidelines state that both public and private investments are essential to improve food security, but do not differentiate among them. The HLPE report highlights the fact that public and private investments are not the same. The public sector not only has the major role in investing for food security, but also in regulating the investments of private actors, which are of course also needed.

1 The link for the webcast will be available at <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/en/>

I know that this flies in the face of the major policy orientation of the last few decades during which we have seen a targeted dismantling of the role of the State, but as I said, the world has changed dramatically over the last few years.

The ultimate aim of food security and the right to food also has implications for how we approach the monitoring of the Guidelines. Without monitoring there is no accountability and without accountability the Guidelines will never be implemented effectively. To know whether the implementation of the Guidelines is contributing to the realisation of the right to food means that monitoring of their implementation must be human rights-based, including all that that entails.

It also means that we need to place special emphasis on monitoring the outcomes of land governance, in other words, tenure security and actual access to natural resources by rural communities. Monitoring institutional structures and policy processes is also important, but the true test of responsible governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise, or the outcome, of a world free from hunger.

To monitor policy and programme outcomes, benchmarks and indicators must be developed and reliable and relevant information gathered. Monitoring of outcomes of governance has mostly been done by civil society organisations. Their insights into the challenges and requirements of this important work should be shared as a contribution to the efforts to monitor CFS decisions and instruments.

The reform of the CFS is an important experiment in democracy. This reform was fuelled by the conviction that decisions that are made by the few in the name of the many will never benefit the many – even with the best of intentions. We all know that giving life to the “foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform” for food security is challenging. It requires time, resources, learning to work with groups with sometimes totally opposed interests, and efforts to equalise power imbalances among actors.

In short, democracy is difficult, but the alternatives are much worse and must be avoided.

Efforts to take an integrated approach to complex and inter-related problems have concluded that the views of different actors are essential for getting a picture of the whole. In other words, participation is not only a political right, it is also a key methodology for understanding complexity. Decisions that are not shared by all stakeholders will only lead to more misguided policies, more wasting of resources and eventually more poverty and hunger.

I hope that this conference will play its part – perhaps small in the grand scheme of things, but not insignificant, I believe, in making sure that this does not happen.

Both the government of Germany, and its civil society organisations, have played an important role in the realisation of the Guidelines. Now they are taking up their role in its implementation, and their efforts deserve to be recognised. As Chair of the conference I take the liberty, on behalf of all participants, to thank them for the commitment.

I wish you all a productive and enriching conference. Thank you.