



Federal Ministry
of Food
and Agriculture



Results

Conference Policies against Hunger

Human rights-based approaches to food systems transformation
27/28 June 2023 in Berlin, Federal Foreign Office

14th Policies against Hunger Conference

Human rights-based approaches to food systems transformation

Food is a fundamental human right, and the adequacy, accessibility and availability of food are essential for a life in dignity as well as for human development and well-being. However, this basic right is often not fully respected in the current food systems. At the same time, unsustainable food systems have become a main contributor to global environmental degradation, thus contributing to future violations of the right to food.

At the invitation of the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), experts from politics and administration, international organizations, civil society, the private sector and academia came together in Berlin on 27 and 28 June 2023 for the 14th “Policies against Hunger” conference. Under the title of “Human rights-based approaches to food systems transformation”, about 200 participants from 28 countries discussed what guidance for food systems transformation could be derived from a human rights perspective. Human rights-based approaches consider the impact of food systems on the enjoyment of human rights, including the right to food, the right to health, the right to work, and the right to a healthy environment. They focus attention on the situation of particularly marginalized persons and groups and on how their human rights should be prioritized in food systems and food systems transformation.

Cem Özdemir, German Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture, opened the conference. **Tobias Lindner**, Minister of State at the Foreign Office and **Jochen Flasbarth**, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, welcomed the guests.

The chair of the conference, CFS Chairperson **Gabriel Ferrero de Loma-Osorio**, held a keynote, followed by **Michael Windfuhr**, Vice Chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In the subsequent panel discussion, **Michael Fakhri**, UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food, **Elisabetta Recine**, President of the National Council for Food and Nutrition Security in Brazil (CONSEA), **Martin Frick**, Director of the World Food Programme’s Berlin Office (WFP) and **Beth Bechdol**, Deputy Director-General at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), set the scene for the two conference days.

Claudia Müller, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and Conference Chair Gabriel Ferrero closed the conference.

Discussions focused on the following issues:

1. Crises resilience of food systems
2. The role of smallholders in food systems transformation
3. Better governance to transform our food systems
4. The role of CFS in advancing the right to adequate food

In four parallel working groups, each dedicated to one of these topics, participants discussed what it means to take a human rights-based perspective with regard to developing policies on the given topic.

In a first step, messages were developed in the working groups. In a second step, the feedback from other conference participants on these messages was expressed in world-café discussions.

The results of these discussions are provided below. They do not necessarily represent a consensus of all conference participants but are seen as relevant contributions to the debate on fostering human rights-based approaches in food systems transformation. They may be used to be fed into international processes to advance food systems transformation, e.g. into work on the 2030 Agenda, the follow-up to the United Nations Food Summit and the work in the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS), as well as national policy-making.

WG 1

Crises resilience of food systems

Results from the working group

1. Localization is a key strategy to build resilience. For the food systems, this includes leveraging indigenous knowledge, investing in local value chains, developing solutions for local problems, and building skills and local capacity development efforts. Investing in local value chains will minimize the negative impact of conflict on the food systems.
2. Prepare for, respond to, and recover from shocks in ways that build the resilience of the system. Scale up early warning/early action, and fund anticipatory responses at a scale where they can deliver on their promise, deliver integrated responses that put affected people at the center, channel responses through local organizations for greatest impact.
3. Gender transformation and the economic empowerment of women are critical to build the resilience of the food system. Women are at the center of the food system – in the fields, on the farms, at the markets, in the schools and in the homes.
4. Governance: Build on existing frameworks that promote the right to food. Protect this right from violence and conflict and strengthen the implementation of Security Council Resolution 2417, the Malabo Declaration and the Voluntary Guidelines on the right to adequate food. Unequal power balances within the market systems drive inefficiencies, perpetuate marginalization and undermine food system resilience. Bringing groups together to work on food system outcomes can be a powerful tool to create the conditions for peace.
5. Inclusivity - the special and specific needs of youth, smallholder farmers, the elderly, people living with disabilities and other groups living in both rural and urban areas must be considered, less we perpetuate existing power imbalances.
6. Food sovereignty is key to minimize the disruptive effects of local and international conflicts on food and nutrition security. This includes seeds and seed banks legislation, and appropriate and sustainable agro-ecological practices.
7. Water security must be put at the center of food systems transformation. This is key for the health of ecosystems that will foster biodiversity and mitigate impacts of natural disasters (NBS) and for the welfare of plant and animal species that form part of the food system.
8. Social protection investments can prevent large-scale suffering and deprivation and are most cost-efficient for governments in the short, medium and longer term. These instruments should be designed to increase access to food and adequate nutrition.
9. Donor funding must be de-politicized and serve only the agenda of food security and food system resilience. Existing climate finance must be directed where it is needed most, including to adaptation. This financing must be allocated transparently, equitably and with full accountability, and must be accessible to local and civil society.

Reflections during world café discussions

In the discussions, participants stressed the connection between climate adaptation, biodiversity and food security and highlighted the need to make efforts to reduce emissions and to prevent further loss and damage as a basis for sustainable food systems. In relation to “localization”, it was specified that community-based management of resources (seedbanks, community kitchen, etc.) contribute to strengthening resilience. Also, participants called for strengthening capacities of local governments to translate research into action. It was highlighted that policies should target the most vulnerable groups. Farm workers were identified as being part of these groups.

With regard to humanitarian assistance, participants called for de-politicization of (donor) support. In addition, external humanitarian assistance should rely, to the extent possible, on local/regional production. In terms of transitioning from acute crisis support towards mid-term stabilization, a better coordination of actors and instruments was called for.

Price control as well as public food supply were mentioned as instruments to prevent and secure access to food and nutrition. Speculation with commodities was seen as risk for resilience.

Finally, participants pointed to the CFS Framework for Action for Food Insecurity in Protracted Crisis (CFS-FFA), which provides guidance on how to mitigate the threat to food security and nutrition and supports the progressive realization of the right to adequate food during protracted crises.

WG 2

The role of smallholders in food systems transformation

Results from the working group

1. The working group highlighted the importance of strengthening the agency of small-scale producers and family farmers within food system governance and of promoting the human rights, food sovereignty and voice of small-scale producers. The group emphasized the need for stronger accountability for the implementation of international agreements that protect and ensure the rights of small-scale and family farmers (e.g. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), UN Declaration on Peasants' Rights (UNDROP), United Nations Decade of Family Farming (UNDF), International Treaty on Plant and Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Maputo Declaration).
2. The working group highlighted the importance of promoting inclusive and sustainable agriculture approaches that empower and enable the agency of small-scale food producers, and particularly the rights of women and youth. This includes sustainable approaches such as agroecology and organic agriculture (as food systems approach). The working group further recommended that additional support for capacity building on sustainable agricultural approaches, particularly agroecology, is given to small-scale food producers.
3. Recognize the critical role that indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers play in protecting and conserving biodiversity and natural resources that are critical for people and the planet. Increase the amount and availability of global climate financing, not only for mitigation but also for adaptation efforts and ensure that more of this financing is accessible to small-scale food producers.
4. The working group specifically emphasized the importance of land governance and agrarian reform to provide access to land and stronger property rights to small-scale and family farmers and to prevent land grabbing and agricultural land conversion.
5. The critical importance of empowering women and ensuring their participation in decision making and leadership, and of protecting their reproductive and sexual rights was emphasized. It was noted that women's huge contribution through domestic care was not adequately recognized from a policy, social or economic viewpoint. This needs correcting.
6. The engagement of youth is critical for global food security and the future of agriculture and the transformation of food systems. Investment is needed to make rural areas and agriculture more attractive to create incentives and jobs for young people to engage in agriculture and to make food systems inclusive and sustainable.
7. We need new and reinvigorated partnerships between public, private and non-government partners. These partnerships need to be based on mutual trust and focus on protecting our planet and leaving no one behind. Old models and ways of thinking will not provide new results at a time of crisis.
8. Agri-culture: stronger emphasis is needed on the CULTURE of agriculture, respecting and leveraging traditional and indigenous knowledge and appropriate innovation and technology.
9. Social protection schemes need to be expanded, both to provide a safety net for vulnerable small-scale and family farmers in the face of a climate catastrophe and also to provide a platform for transforming food systems and for human-right approaches to food systems transformation.
10. The working group highlighted the inequities in global agricultural trade and access to local markets. Urgent international focus must be placed on the impacts of the externalities of harmful subsidies and their distortion of food systems for small-scale and family farmers.

Reflections during world café discussions

During discussions, it was called for the focus to be broadened with regard to a systems approach. The importance of supporting self-organization of farmers/smallholders to strengthen their agency was highlighted. Accessibility and affordability of green technologies, adapted to the local context, was highlighted.

On financing, the need for major investments to directly support small-scale food producers was underlined. With regard to tenure, stronger protection for the customary, community and collective land rights of small-scale food producers was discussed. Ideas to develop a framework on “seed governance“ were put forward.

With regard to means and methods of production, there were calls for a strong reference to be made to innovation, mechanization and digital agriculture for small-scale farming.

On partnerships, participants underlined that power within food systems needed to be more equitable. Imbalances needed to be overcome by concentrating on the needs of rights holders. The need to build and strengthen local markets, market access, market infrastructure and food processing was again highlighted as well as the role of farmers’ organizations in this respect.

Minimum support prices and the value of insurances were discussed, as well as ways to repurpose subsidies based on true cost accounting. Finally, strengthening smallholder producers was identified as a backbone of crises management and resilience.

WG 3

Better governance to transform our food systems

Results from the working group

1. The Right to Food is the principle framework to enhance policy coherence among and between governments at multiple scales and diverse local contexts, enabling international cooperation and sustainability.
2. Right to Food and human rights-based approaches provide mechanisms for implementation including legislative instruments, monitoring, food policy councils, public procurement, public awareness campaigns, etc.
3. Enabling environments are essential for realizing the right to food and require: transparency (incl. on value chains and government spending), food sovereignty, right to information, capacity building on regulation, legal empowerment, accountability (for both public and corporate sectors), including the fundamental right to land and territories, access to financing/credit, seeds, water, social and cultural rights.
4. Gender equality is paramount for governance and the right to food because there is insufficient progress in transforming food systems without women's rights.
5. Supporting and enabling effective, inclusive participation is key to governance at all scales. The key principle is respecting people's self-determination and food sovereignty.
6. Restructuring power dynamics will rectify inequalities in global trade, finance, energy, and the UN system. This will empower peasants, workers, pastoralists, fishers and Indigenous peoples especially women, people with disabilities, children and racialized people.
7. Making the CFS the coordinating institution/hub for the transformation of food systems at the UN – bringing the inclusiveness of the CFS to other organizations – making the UN more inclusive.
8. Local government increasingly plays a key role in food systems governance and needs to be nationally and globally supported.

Reflections during world café discussions

The practical value of enshrining the right to food in national constitutions/legal frameworks was highlighted. In this regard, participants observed a lack of recognition and implementation of the right to food both in the Global South and the North.

At international level, inequalities and double standards in global trade were blamed for creating obstacles to inclusive and sustainable development.

Discussions also revealed several issues with regard to knowledge and research: recommendations included promoting farmer-led research and monitoring as input for better-informed and inclusive decision-making processes, as well as the recognition of indigenous knowledge and the inclusion of this knowledge in policy frameworks.

The need for more transparent data generation, disclosure and management, as well as improved access to data was stressed.

With regard to institutional matters, discussions revealed a general perception that structures and coordination needed to be simplified in order to produce coherent policies.

Participants highlighted that effective implementation of the right to food required putting in place grievance mechanisms to follow up on complaints.

Concerning the Committee on World Food Security, it was proposed to systematically engage parliamentarians in CFS matters.

WG 4

The role of CFS in advancing the right to adequate food

Results from the working group

1. Strengthening the CFS as the foremost inclusive coordinating platform for reflective and normative policies and deliberations, centering the voice of marginalized groups, and enhancing accountability and ownership.
2. Upholding the role of the CFS as a coherent, legitimate and effective UN platform among the existing UN organizations dealing with FSN.
3. Continued raising of awareness and promotion of the use and application of CFS policy products (guidelines, policy recommendations), in close collaboration with the Rome-based agencies and other international organizations.
4. Promoting direct engagement with governments, particularly national parliaments to enhance awareness and influence of CFS policy products.
5. Promoting the influence of CFS policy products through a sustainable budget and political commitment of Member States.
6. Enhancing collaboration among food systems stakeholders (civil society, Indigenous Peoples, private sector, academia, Member States) through enabling inclusive participation and co-creation in knowledge generation and innovation, including technology, social innovation, indigenous knowledge and experiences.
7. Strengthening the implementation of the CFS Innovative Monitoring Mechanism.
8. Enhancing collaboration with national human rights institutions, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other regional UN institutions, based on human rights obligations enshrined in CFS products (perspectives) (e.g. Right to Food).
9. Using the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food in 2024, to assess progress in realizing the right to food, to renew the commitment and to shape the future agenda of the right to food, taking into account the intertwined multiple crises.

Reflections during world café discussions

The important role of the CFS as the key platform for food systems transformation was again emphasized. Moreover, its coordination function was underlined, highlighting its important role with regard to crisis responses and food governance. The participants stressed that the CFS should be strengthened financially and politically in order to be able to fulfill its role efficiently and comprehensively. In this context, the concern was raised that the creation of new structures would weaken the inclusive work of the CFS.

Besides that, it was pointed out that the local level (e.g. local governments and civil society organizations) should be better targeted in the advertisement of the CFS products to improve awareness and implementation. In addition, the concern was raised that the financial limitations of the CFS should be acknowledged when debating the expansion of the current task portfolio and addressing the demands for better execution of the current tasks. The availability of human resources for the execution of the tasks should be taken into account when deciding on the programme of work. Another aspect raised concerned the need for better interpretation and translation, which is deemed necessary to further strengthen the participation in the CFS. Finally, better monitoring of the use of CFS products was underlined as another important element.

For further information, presentations, speeches impressions and a conference result video, please go to: www.policies-against-hunger.de