



Why the UN's Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is critical to eradicating hunger

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Almost one billion people – one in seven of humanity - go to bed hungry every day. Global food prices are set to remain high and highly volatile. The scramble for land in developing countries risks undermining the ability of poor communities to feed themselves and make a living. Without major policy changes, the impacts of climate change and depletion of natural resources are set to turn the current food crisis into a human catastrophe.

Fixing the global food system and ensuring that everybody has enough to eat today and in the future requires a radical change from the way we tried to tackle hunger and malnutrition in the past. The good news is that we have solutions but we need bold collective and coordinated action and coherent policies by governments and international organisations. The UN Committee on World Food Security is the only place where everybody, including poor communities, has a voice and collectively can take the decisions needed to eradicate hunger.

What is the Committee on World Food Security?

The CFS is the centre for the global governance of food security, agriculture and nutrition and is the only truly global body responsible for tackling hunger. It was reformed in 2009 when the number of hungry people in the world went above one billion for the first time and it was clear that the existing policies and governance were inadequate to solve the problem.

The CFS is the only place in which all governments, civil society, international institutions and the private sector can formally negotiate and coordinate measures to eliminate hunger and ensure food security for all. The CFS holds our best hope of ushering in a new era of cooperation – a system of multilateral rules that will enable governments to act collectively in the global interest, resolve conflict, align policies and allocate resources effectively.

2011 is the first year, after the reform, that the CFS is in the position to fully focus on delivering concrete political decisions to tackle hunger. It will focus on a number of crucial issues including food price volatility, land tenure, gender equality in agriculture and investment in small-scale food producers.

The CFS is composed of the Bureau, made up of a Chair and 12 member governments; the Advisory Group made up of international organizations such as the World Bank and World Trade Organisation, research institutions, civil society and non-government organisations including those representing farmers, landless, consumers and women, and the private sector; and the High Level Panel of Experts, an independent scientific body that provides advice to ensure that CFS decisions are evidence based. The annual Plenary, which takes this year from 17 – 22 October, is where major decisions are made.

Why the CFS is the place to tackle hunger

The CFS is the global forum where major decisions should be made to tackle hunger. A number of initiatives have been undertaken internationally and nationally to tackle the food crisis and food price volatility but the CFS is the only body that can ensure that incoherence and duplication are avoided.

Ministers attending the CFS must agree what all governments must do to tackle the issues of food price volatility, land grabbing, gender inequality and investment in agriculture and then implement them. Civil society organisations and other international organisations actively participate at the CFS. Civil society plays a crucial role in holding governments to account.

The CFS takes place this year just before the G20 Summit and the Climate Change Conference in Durban. The CFS should make clear recommendations to the leaders of the most powerful countries on the actions they must take to reduce food price volatility and set us on a path toward the eradication of hunger. The G20 and other international fora can contribute significantly to ensuring that everybody has enough to eat today and in the future, notably by contributing to the implementation of the decisions made at the CFS.

The decisions the CFS should take in 2011

Land tenure and land grabbing

From 10 – 14 October, the CFS will meet for the final round of negotiations on the Guidelines on Responsible Governance on Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, before their formal adoption at the CFS Plenary on 17 October. These guidelines are an important first step in stopping the growing problem of land grabs.

On 22 September, Oxfam launched a major new report, *Land and Power* highlighting the growing pace of land deals brokered around the world, with as many as 227 million hectares sold, leased or licensed in large-scale land deals since 2001. Some of the deals are in fact 'land grabs' where the rights and needs of the people living on the land are ignored, leaving them homeless and without land to grow enough food to eat and make a living, as illustrated in the ongoing cases highlighted in the report.

In order to prevent investments causing such crises, Oxfam is calling for a robust set of guidelines on land and natural resource tenure. In particular the guidelines must ensure that:

- all investment that affects land use rights obtains the free, prior and informed consent of the affected communities
- women have equal access to and control over land and other natural resources
- all policies that have an impact on land, including biofuels, climate mitigation, trade and investment policies do not directly or indirectly undermine access to and control over land by local communities
- provisions are included for the effective and transparent implementation of the guidelines at a national level through the participation of affected communities.

As well as ensuring the adoption of strong guidelines, Oxfam along with other concerned organisations is calling on governments to take immediate and affirmative action to stop land grabs.

Food Price Volatility

Since 2006, international food prices have twice risen sharply. After the food crisis of 2007/2008, prices fell in the second half of 2009 and increased again from mid-2010 reaching their highest ever levels in February 2011. High and volatile prices are expected to remain in the coming year if no coordinated responses are developed.

The World Bank estimates that 44 million people fell below the poverty line in the second half of 2010 due to high food prices, and research for Oxfam's GROW campaign indicates that the price of staple foods such as maize could more than double in the next 20 years. Poor households which spend up to three-quarters of their income on food are worst affected by the crippling price hikes.

Financial markets that should be helping food growers and processors to manage their risk are adding to the problem. Deregulation and secretive agricultural commodity derivatives markets have attracted huge sums of speculative money, and there is growing evidence that they deliver distorted and unpredictable food prices.

If we want to avoid hunger spinning completely out of control in the next decades the CFS needs to agree on urgent and ambitious responses to reduce volatility and enhance resilience to shocks. Support must be given to vulnerable countries to strengthen their food security and agricultural policies by investing in sustainable smallholder agriculture, while calling for global responses to address climate change and regulate market failures.

Oxfam Media Briefing

Oxfam is calling for specific policies to address the root causes of food price volatility, to improve global governance of markets in a coordinated and coherent way, and to protect against future food crises. In particular, governments should take immediate action to:

- scrap biofuels targets and subsidies which are diverting food into fuel (All the international organisations and the CFS's scientific expert panel agree on this but the EU and US are opposing because of the interests of the biofuels sector)
- help poor countries to build up their local, national and regional food reserves so that they can cope with extremes in food price volatility
- regulate commodities markets in order to curb excessive speculation.

Gender equality

Women produce up to 80 percent of food in some poor countries yet are less likely to own their own land, often toil the least productive areas and receive little financial or agricultural support.

Investing in women food producers could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent, feeding up to 150 million additional people. But the solution is not just about investing in agricultural productivity. It also requires improving literacy rates and social services in rural areas so that women can participate more actively in the rural economy and contribute to decision-making. Governments must also ensure that women have the same rights to land, resources and opportunities as men.

While welcoming the CFS focus on gender equality, Oxfam believes that it must be integrated throughout all issues discussed at the CFS to ensure that women's rights, priorities and specific needs are not marginalized or addressed in isolation.

Oxfam is calling for concrete action to promote gender equality and the rights of women food producers and to close the gender gap in agriculture.

Investment in Small-scale Agriculture

While demand for food is increasing our capacity to increase food production is declining. The average growth rate in agricultural yields has almost halved since 1990 and is set to decline to a fraction of one percent in the next decade.

The 500 million small farmers and food producers in developing countries that are currently feeding one third of humanity, offer the greatest potential for tackling hunger. With effective, ambitious government support, and the right investment from companies, productivity can soar. Governments must also recognise the impact that climate change is having on agricultural production and help farmers adapt.

Investment in developing country agriculture has fallen substantially over the last 20 years - in 1984 agriculture made up 20 percent of all foreign aid spending. By 2006 it had dropped to 3.7 percent.

Oxfam is calling for increased support as well as agreement on clear guidelines for governments and investors to ensure that both public and private investments support small-scale sustainable agriculture that does not undermine communities' efforts to feed themselves. In particular:

- Investments must address the constraints faced by small farmers and producers including land, basic infrastructure (roads, water and irrigation), access to finance, and agricultural support and information to increase productivity and cope with the changing climate and shrinking natural resources.
- Governments must provide the \$22 billion in agricultural aid they pledged at the G8 in L'Aquila in 2009, assistance needed to help kick-start productivity and improve food security.

Oxfam's GROW campaign is calling for global action to fix a broken food system where 925 million people already go hungry every day. This could get worse in the face of dwindling natural resources, like land, the gathering pace of climate change and increasing food price volatility. Find out how we can help prevent this from getting worse at www.oxfam.org/grow