

Mr. Qu Dongyu
Director General
Food and Agriculture Organization
United Nations

Re: International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty response to the agreement between the
FAO and Croplife

20 November 2020

The International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) is an autonomous and self-organized global platform of small-scale food producers and rural workers organizations and grassroots/community-based social movements whose goal is to advance the Food Sovereignty agenda at the global and regional level. More than 6000 organizations and 300 million small-scale food producers self-organize themselves through the IPC, sharing the principles and the six pillars of Food Sovereignty. Since 1996, it has developed an effective dialogue with FAO. It signed a formal exchange of letters with FAO in 2002, encouraging several thousand small producers and their organizations in FAO's institutional activities.

The IPC facilitates dialogue and debate of small-scale food producers and actors from civil society, governments and other actors in the field of Food Security and Nutrition, creating a space of discussion autonomous from political parties, institutions, governments, and the private sector. For this reason, the IPC holds an Exchange of Letter with FAO that started in 2003 (with Mr. Jacques Diouf, 16 January 2016, TCD-DG/03/55) and renewed in 2013 (with Mr. Graziano Da Silva, 24 July 2013, OPC-DG/13/924) and again in 2017 (with Mr. Graziano Da Silva, 23 May 2017, OPC-DG/17/405) and last time in 2019 (with Mr. Graziano Da Silva, 3 April, 2019, PSP-DG/19/301).

The Exchange of Letter with the IPC highlights the need to strengthen the principles present in the FAO Strategy for Partnership with Civil Society, which specific objectives are: a) to engage a broad and equitable range of CSOs in partnership with FAO, ensuring balanced geographic representation; b) to ensure that the views of the poor and marginalized are brought to FAO policy discussions through their CSOs; c) to encourage inclusive processes for policy dialogue, technical management, and sharing of expertise and knowledge; and d) to improve FAO's knowledge and capacity to work in partnership with CSOs, in line with the guiding principles of this Strategy.

The IPC, with this letter, would like to address to the Director General its concerns on the new agreement between FAO and CropLife as a threat to the safeguard of the multilateral space, since it represent a clear conflict of interest in such space.

The Constitution of the FAO of 1945 is clear about the role of the Director General, who, “subject to the general supervision of the Conference and the Council, [...] shall have full power and authority to direct the work of the Organization”. This clearly means that FAO is an intergovernmental space in which countries have to decide on the direction and the decision of the organization. Article XIII of the Constitution states that “the Conference shall make rules laying down the procedure to be followed to secure proper consultation with governments in regard to relations between the Organization and national institutions or private persons”.

In 2013 the Council of the FAO approved the “FAO Strategy for Partnerships with the Private Sector” (CL 146/LIM/5) which clearly states that “taking into account FAO’s intergovernmental nature [...] the Organization has a policy to grant opportunities for the private sector to be heard, as observers, and to encourage the private sector to engage in the implementation of these standards, while ensuring adequate safeguards and guaranteeing the full independence of FAO’s decision-making processes”. Moreover, “to ensure that partnerships will not compromise FAO’s neutrality and impartiality, this Strategy foresees a risk assessment process and a monitoring and evaluation system to measure outcome and impact of collaborations”. This means that in the case that the FAO signs any agreement with private entities, the member countries should assess the partnership and evaluate its probable impacts.

Hundreds of millions of small farmers today produce in both developed and developing countries over 80 percent of the world’s food in value terms, working on 53% of agricultural land (FAO, 2014. The State of Food and Agriculture. Innovation in family farming, Rome, FAO). The peasant agroecology practiced by most of them is their secret. It is based on the traditional knowledge and innovations of peasant and indigenous communities who daily enrich their soils with carbon and use only natural preparations instead of wasting fossil fuels and poisoning human food and the environment with toxic pesticides. These small farmers lack resources because they feed the populations thrown into poverty by monopolizing 99% of the available wealth by the wealthiest 1%. Agro-ecological food systems do not need to be reshaped, but to be supported and developed first by an equitable distribution of wealth and resources among all.

CropLife International brings together the transnational corporations that supply industrial agriculture with millions of tons of toxic pesticides and genetic technologies that destroy biodiversity by violating the natural barriers of evolution. This industrial agriculture produces only 1/4 of the food available on the planet using 3/4 of the available land and water resources, and immense amounts of fossil fuels warming the earth. Not very productive per unit area, it destroys soils, forests and the climate. Digital technologies will only help it throw millions of peasants into unemployment and misery to be replaced by robots designed to rationalize this destruction of everything that allows human life. As heavy consumers of fossil fuels and rare earth, they will only aggravate climate change and environmental destruction. The main objective of digital agriculture is to give a tiny number of transnational corporations the ability to control the entire food chain from genetically modified seeds and animals to the means of payment of solvent consumers to whom it will impose increasingly artificial food. In this way, it wants to offer these corporations, which are much more powerful and more prosperous than most states, control over all public food policies. Their shareholders' endless greed heralds the multiplication of food crises deliberately generated by financial speculation on the monopolization of digital data, land, and access to water, on licensing rights to use seeds and "improved" animals on futures markets and food stocks. FAO's partnership with CropLife International brings the wolf back into the fold to enable it to more quickly destroy multilateral food governance, global food security, and peoples' food sovereignty. More generally, the role that the growing presence of international industries that dominate the control of genetic resources, digitalization, and the global agrifood value chain, erases any aspiration to FAO neutrality, neutrality necessary to protect the interests of member states, particularly those of the poorest countries.

The globalized industrial food chain must not be transformed, reshaped, or strengthened by the dematerialization of economic life. It must be removed to make way for the development of peasant

agroecology. Life, natural evolution, and biodiversity can neither be reduced to digital data nor modeled. Artificial "intelligence" can certainly offer some indications, but they must be continuously rectified because they are never exact. It is illusory and dangerous to imagine that it can govern the living. Proper knowledge of natural and agricultural ecosystems of the living organisms that evolve in them and of the natural phenomena that impact them is in the hands of the peasant and indigenous communities that live, work and develop daily within them. This knowledge is inaccessible to the disembodied beeps of numerical algorithms incapable of sensing its complexity.

The future of food depends on the protection of peasant knowledge and innovations and their development, not on reducing them to a few sequential digital patented information to prohibit peasants from continuing to use, exchange, and sell them.

To eradicate hunger and malnutrition, political commitment and significant alliances with key stakeholders are crucial. However, only through effective collaboration with governments, civil society, organizations representing food producers, mainly small-scale, private sector, academia, research centers, and cooperatives, and using each other's knowledge and comparative advantages, can food insecurity be defeated. This agreement with CropLife, like a more central role of the private sector in FAO, is going entirely in the direction of unbalance that will create obstacles in fighting hunger.

Civil society in all its various forms - social movements, member-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, and formal and informal associations - has demonstrated its ability to mobilize, campaign, and launch initiatives that seek social justice, respect for human rights, and a life with dignity without poverty and hunger. But besides their work on advocacy, civil society organizations have technical and grassroots knowledge that is both context-specific and globally important. Their concerns and work often coincide with FAO's work and mandate.

Evidence has shown that creating more inclusive fora where stakeholders' voices are expressed has helped certain countries make strides in hunger-reduction. These fora have enabled greater participation, transparency, inclusion, and plurality in policy discussions, leading to increased ownership of decisions made to affect people's future ultimately. These kinds of agreements with powerful and dominant private companies will break this plurality in favor of particular economic interests that will destroy the multilateralism that characterizes the FAO and its credibility.

For these reasons, with this letter, the IPC would like to transmit the following recommendations to the Director General:

- The agreement between FAO and CropLife should be withdrawn, requesting an official assessment of the member countries of the FAO about its contribution to the objectives of the FAO and the respect of the ongoing processes.
- The FAO should respect and implement the FAO Strategy for Partnership with Civil Society, as well as the FAO Strategy for Partnership with Civil Society.
- The FAO and its member states should remind that small-scale food producers do not fall under the scope of the private sector, even if in principle, food producer organizations will fall

under the private sector strategy; however, small-scale food producers organizations comply with the criteria for CSOs.

- The new FAO Strategy for partnership with Private Sector should be implemented respecting the strategy chosen in 2013, and without creating conflict or contradictions with the FAO Strategy for Partnership with Civil Society.

Mr. DG, we look forward to hearing from you and are always ready to present our concerns in defense of the multilateral space of FAO and its mandate.

Rome, 20 November 2020

The Facilitation Committee of the IPC