

## **Updates from Rome November- December 2021**

*The writing of this piece of Updates from Rome coincided with the 168<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Council. The elected Chairperson to lead the drafting committee has been assigned to Canada, while the members of the drafting committee were elected as follows: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Canada, China, France, Luxemburg, Peru, Russia, Spain, and Sudan.*

### Adjustments to the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) 2022-2023

The members of the council expressed the need for a greater balance between the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social, environmental) and for the adoption of concepts, approaches, and languages that are multilaterally agreed upon. A large part of the negotiation revolved around the use of controversial or descriptive language in the draft document of the PWB. In particular:

- Regarding the term “blue food systems”; it was argued that the term comes from ideas that do not correspond to the real color of many aquatic systems, and it was suggested to replace the term with “aquatic food systems”
- Regarding the term Geographical Indication (GI) and its link to sustainable agricultural production; there is no multilateral agreement upon basis or normative background to make such a link. Promoting geographical indications as an instrument to improve crop-production systems to improve efficiency and the use of resources is incorrect. GI is a tool that is related to Intellectual Property, highlights the quality of certain products mainly with their place of origin and it does not certify that it was produced in a sustainable way

In brief, the members expressed satisfaction towards the drafted document and the reallocation of USD 1.2 million to strengthen science and innovation, including moving forward the Science and Innovation Strategy and with no impact on the overall budget.

### Rural Youth Action Plan (RYAP)

The RYAP was developed to confront the economic, cultural, and environmental decline of rural areas. It sets to make rural areas more attractive to rural young women and men by creating an enabling environment that equally empowers rural youth, facilitates youth engagement in the decision-making process, and contributes to the realisation of the SDGs. The RYAP presents a five-year Action Plan (2021-2025) aligned to five thematic areas:

- Strengthen the agency of rural youth by creating Integrated Landscape Approaches<sup>1</sup> (ILAs) that integrate the needs and aspirations of rural youth through participatory processes. The institutional and legal framework will be developed to foster improved natural resource management and to ensure land rights are respected.
- Provide policy guidance and technical support to governments for transforming agricultural sectors by generating new value chains and promoting youth-sensitive sustainable jobs.
- Strengthen young women and men's capacities, especially in the field of ICTs and innovation, and entrepreneurship, through youth-sensitive educational and training programs.
- Promote youth entrepreneurship and investment through increased access to financial and land acquisition services, market information, e-commerce, e-banking, and advisory services on enterprise development.
- Building FAO institutional capacity to address rural youth area of work by integrating the RYAP, and more specifically the theme of Youth, into corporate mechanisms. FAO acknowledges that certain technical areas still need to be strengthened to ensure they are youth-sensitive. Therefore, FAO commits to strengthening partnerships with relevant organisations in view of the creation of a specific youth engagement network.

#### Update on the development of the new FAO Strategy on Climate Change

The Office of Evaluation (OED) submitted an assessment report urging FAO to formulate a new strategy on Climate Change. A draft of a five-year Action Plan was developed including a *Theory of Change* that will take FAO beyond business as usual through the implementation of the following strategic pillars:

- **It will strengthen climate policy and governance at the global level** by leveraging FAO's global and regional advocacy.
- **It will scale up climate action at the country level** by providing concrete support for countries in implementing and monitoring their climate adaptation strategies.
- **It will build capacity at the farm level** through innovative packages of inclusive, low-carbon, sustainable solutions.

The new strategy on Climate Change (FAO SCC) takes on an agri-food system approach to underscore the need to look at the entire value chain when developing an encompassing and integrating climate action. It rests on a set of clear guiding principles:

- It is informed on the latest scientific evidence while also including Traditional Ecological Knowledge of food producers, indigenous people, pastoralists.

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated landscape approaches fulfill a central role in the RYAP in that they are context-specific and they are well suited to meet the needs of people that live in a given territory while addressing ecological challenges ()

- It embraces innovation. Through new partnerships, solutions, and financing, it will explore and scale up innovative and context-specific solutions in all areas of agri-food systems.
- It adopts evidence-based decision-making and an open data approach.
- It will integrate gender equality and social inclusiveness perspective in all of FAO's work on climate change.
- It will build efficient monitoring, reporting, and communication system that will make FAO transparent and accountable for its climate-related work.

**During the 168<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Council, the climate change strategy has undergone significant scrutiny from the members:**

- It was noted the importance of developing a context-based strategy, underscoring that there is no “one size fit all” solution regarding climate change. The strategy should consider the local-level specificities, the ecology of the regions, vulnerabilities, exposure, and response capacity. At the same time, the strategy needs to be ambitious, meaning that it should support countries by bringing the best of technology and innovation without overcoming local knowledge.
- It was recognized FAO's key role in designing international carbon markets related to the full breadth of agriculture and the design of inclusive carbon markets.
- The strategy should adopt a systemic approach, in that it needs to consider how climate change interacts with food, agriculture, and other sectors. However, FAO should be careful of aligning its strategy with the outcomes of COP26 and the UNFSS. This is because, in the absence of a negotiation process, no agreement or consensus was achieved during the UNFSS. On the other hand, the agreements at COP26 go beyond FAO's mandate. Therefore, the new FAO strategy needs to be informed by documents only in reference to food security and nutrition, without exceeding its mandate.
- It was noted that no reference to the international trade of food has been made. In this regard, it is important to adopt the principle of **common but differentiated responsibilities**. For example, the Agro-bio industry is strongly affected by climate change and for this reason, countries like Argentina who has low responsibilities for GHG emissions have the right to continue producing and providing food to the countries that need it to support social-economic development.

The final draft of the FAO SCC will be submitted to the 169th session of the Council in June 2022 for its consideration.

## Gender Action Plan

Gender, together with inclusion and youth, is part of the three cross-cutting themes identified by FAO in all its Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), which contributes to mainstreaming the four objectives of the policy on Gender Equality across the FAO's new Strategic Framework. Through the establishment of twenty PPAs, the Gender Action Plan aims to build an enabling environment to ensure adequate implementation of gender-related work and monitoring of progress towards the achievements of the objectives of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality. The Plan comprises two sections:

- **A stand-alone Programme Priority Area on gender equality and rural women's empowerment** that actively confronts the greater obstacles women face in agriculture through the implementation of "accelerators" such as ICTs, institutional and social innovations, increased availability of sex-disaggregated data, and gender-sensitive policy reform.
- **A mainstreaming of gender across all Programme Priority Areas:**
  - **PPA1.** Enhance women's voice, leadership, and decision making in rural institutions and organisation
  - **PPA2.** Promote equal rights, access to and control over natural and productive resources
  - **PPA3.** Promote rural women's economic empowerment through decent work and access to services and markets
  - **PPA4.** Reduce women work burden in unpaid care and agricultural work

## The Food Coalition

The food coalition was launched in November 2020 as a response to COVID-19 to offer a flexible coordination mechanism to provide political leadership. It became the vital element of the food security agenda of the G-20 held in Matera. On this occasion, FAO launched an official "Food Coalition – Call for Proposals" designed around four priority areas: poverty reduction, food loss, and waste reduction, food systems transformation, global humanitarian response plan. Ten projects were selected and will be presented to members as a successful example for interested countries and partners that wish to offer their political, financial, and technical support.

## UNFSS

The Rome-based agencies have been tasked to lead the follow-up to the UNFSS. For this purpose, FAO will host a Coordination Hub that is expected to be in place at the beginning of 2022. The work, the mission, and the structure advanced by the HUB seem to be strongly organised:

- The implementation is overseen by a powerful alliance that sees RBAs officials, UNEP, the UN development Coordination Office lined up with the Chairs of RBA Governing bodies and the CFS.
- The hub will operate through decentralized offices, liaising with Resident coordinators and UN country teams to ensure a coherent approach.
- The HUB can count on a whole (scientific) ecosystem of support that works closely with the High-level Panel of Experts of the CFS, regional and national science groups, and builds on the work that is prepared for implementation.
- Parallel to the ecosystem of support, the hub is supported by a Stakeholder Advisory Group that includes, among others, the World Food Forum and Global Hub for Indigenous People hosted at FAO.

**The outcomes of the UNFSS have sparked extensive deliberation during the 168<sup>th</sup> session of the council.**

Members reiterated that no multilateral agreement was reached within the Summit. Thus, they deemed it inappropriate to talk about the follow-up of the UNFSS and preferred to refer to a post-summit phase, where members can evaluate and decide which proposals are conducive in supporting the national pathways and improving their work. Additional remarks have been noted as follow:

- Countries were concerned about the creation of a Coordination Hub to lead the follow-up of the summit, which was created without the consensus of members. It was reiterated that every coordination exercise should be conducted without or minimum organizational changes, or without new staff nor with any diversion of human and material resources to avoid any duplicating structures. Members believe that the RBAs have already the necessary resources to follow up the process and that activities should aim at helping countries with political and technical assistance only.

In response to that, Member states have made it very clear the RBA should present a shared vision on how the RBAs can coordinate the follow-up of the UNFSS, without a new structure and while ensuring a continuous member states oversight. A written description of the UNFSS coordination hub has been requested, including a proposal on how member states can provide support and oversights. Moreover, detailed information has been requested concerning how FAO plans to fund the Hub and how responsibilities will be assigned.

- Countries stressed that the coordination of the follow up of the UNFSS should be taken up by the high-level political forum (HLPF), responsible within the UN system, for assessing in New York the advancement for the achievements of all the SDGs.
- Members were surprised in seeing mentions to UNEP both in the proposal charts and in the report while other important INGOs, considered more essential for the consecution of the goals purported by the UNFSS, were not included.

- The CFS is regarded by nearly all members as the most inclusive, intergovernmental platform regarding issues to food security, and more close cooperation between the CFS, the HUB, and the HLPE has been suggested.
- However, the “inclusion” of the HLPE of the CFS in the scientific ecosystem for support is not within its mandate, which is restricted and relates only to food security and nutrition, not to food systems. Instead of modifying the mandate of the programs of the CFS, FAO should priorities capitalizing on policy convergence and voluntary guidelines developed by the CFS. The value and the future of CFS should not be tied to the post-Summit phase, it should be hinged on the committee’s current program which contributes to the development of documents and guidelines for the voluntary to overcome food security. The CFS must continue its mandate.
- Mentions of informal non-members platforms such as the world food forum and the hub for indigenous people should be avoided.

During the 168<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council, there was an intervention by FAO’s Chief Economist Maximo Torero, where he explained the rationale behind the creation of a Coordination Hub to follow-up the results of the UNFSS:

According to the Chief Economist, there have been three main huge results from the Summit:

1. The agri-food system approach is extremely complex and interlinked
2. The country-level dialogue for transformation which would be at the core of the follow-up activities
3. Opening the cooperation through the creation of coalitions and means of implementation.

The key principles behind the hub are the following:

- It will not replicate the structure of existing UN functions and capabilities. On the contrary, it aims to create synergies and complementarities.
- It will not be an implementing agency nor a gatekeeper. On the contrary, the job is to facilitate among UN agencies, with the collaboration of the ecosystem of support.
- It will not advocate by itself as an entity, it will empower transformation pathways led by the countries.
- It will not develop heavy reporting and structure. It will be linked within existing structures.
- It will be inclusive, maintaining, expanding, and deepening the global inclusivity of the global ecosystem and diverse stakeholders that are supportive of the transformation of food systems at all levels.
- Its objective is to support the national government and accelerate transformative actions within the food systems to advance progress on the SDGs.
- Its second objective is to sustain a consistent, compelling, and contextualized narrative around food system transformation for the SDGs that all stakeholders can amplify and embrace.

**The decision to host the Coordination Hub at FAO** has come from the UN secretary-general in recognition of the key role FAO plays in bringing together the assets of the UN system to support countries in achieving national pathways for food system transformation.

The hub will not create new administrative or programmatic structures and will not replicate the existing program of work on Food Security. The hub will have a light structure that will use existing assets and infrastructures of the participating agencies to leverage expertise, knowledge, and support to members. We also expect CFS will play an important role within its mandate as clearly stated by the members.

The Hub will be placed at the FAO's SDGs office. As per the agreement, the existing OSG director will assume the leadership of the HUB. Placing the hub under the OSG makes sense from two points of view:

- **Technical:** provides with the opportunity to ensure alignment of the HUB works and the 2030 Agenda and facilitate synergies and complementarities. In addition, the OSG is a coordination office under the supervision of the DG and that also aligns with the coordination role the HUB should provide.
- **Administrative:** The OSG is already part of the FAO organigram and the transition from the UNFSS secretariats to the hub can happen efficiently.

**The budget implications for FAO:** all the staff that will be needed to support the work of the Hub will be deployed through secondment from other UN agencies. In this way, there will be no need to hire new staff. Additional operational costs will be covered within the PWB resources, and the existing UN trans fund administered by the WFP will also continue to exist and serve the operation of the hub.

### Civil Society Mechanism

**During the 49<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the UN Committee on World Food Security held on 11-14 October 2021**, the CSM presented a position statement reiterating the key role the CFS should play in leading the follow-up of the Covid-19 food crisis. In this respect, the Group of Committed CFS MSs developed a proposal to include into the CFS decision of the Plenary, where it is proposed to establish a Covid-19 task force with the scientific support from the HLPE and the coordinated support of the RBAs, MSs, PSM, and CSM, with the mandate to:

- a) Prepare a high-level special event on developing a globally coordinated policy response to COVID19 in the first months of 2022
- b) Building on the outcomes of the event and existing expert evidence and advice, prepare a draft policy coordination document in response to the food security and nutrition crisis exacerbated by COVID-19, for discussion and adoption by CFS 50.

The CSM further reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening CFS and democratising global food governance and called out Member states and the CFS to take their role and responsibilities seriously.

The CSM has criticized the lack of ambition of the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches which were recently approved by the CFS. Allegedly, poor outcomes were reached due to the online modality of the negotiations and the time pressure to reach consensus. Furthermore, Southern delegations struggled to participate due to connectivity issues and lack of translation. As such, the policy recommendation fell short in the following points:

- It does not provide a normative framework to effectively guide the urgently needed overhaul of food systems. On the contrary, the Policy Recommendations seem to normalise existing power dynamics in which the interest of agri-food corporations and large exporting countries are protected.
- The Policy Recommendations fails to recognise, prioritise and mainstream human rights. The UN Declaration on the rights of Peasant and Other People Working in Rural Areas and other important conventions were not used to shape the direction of the policy.
- The Policy Recommendation downplays the importance of Agroecology, putting it at the same level as other “innovative approaches” that do not enjoy multilateral agreement. Moreover, the fact that pests use optimization is part of the recommendation contradicts existing UN agreements and policy frameworks on pests use.

According to the CSM, the results of the Policy Recommendations are reflective of the deeper and appalling trend of corporate capture, that is currently taking place at all of United Nations spaces.



## **FAO Regional Conferences 2022**

In preparation for the upcoming FAO's CSO regional consultations, below is reported the Agenda for each region:

<b>Regional Conference</b>	<b>Date</b>
Regional Conference for the Near East (NERC) 36th Session	7-11 February 2022
Regional Conference for Africa (ARC) 32nd Session	21-25 February 2022
Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC) 36th Session	8-11 March 2022
Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean (LARC) 37th Session	28 March-1 April 2022
Regional Conference for Europe (ERC) 33rd Session	10-13 May 2022