

“Civil society action at world level: participation to the Committee on Food Security and the European Union's position”

Policy note elaborated within the project “EU Trade & Agriculture Policy and its implication on poverty reduction (MDG 1) – Promotion of coherence by Civil Society”

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

In response to the unrelenting race for land and to the land-grabbing by governments and large companies, farmers strengthen their own networks and associations to protect their right to the land and to promote a democratic administration of common goods, from local to global level.

The struggle for land is transnational now and international organizations cannot ignore it. For the first time since 2009 the Committee on Food Security, founded by FAO, IFAD and WFP, includes farmers and civil society organizations – they are not only observers, but active participants to the discussion; they can propose motions and build partnerships in defence of common goods with concerned countries.

This way new guidelines are created to recognize farmers' rights and to open the discussion to agriculture sustainable methods. Such guidelines are only voluntary though, so a strong social pressure is necessary to ensure their enforcement by governments.

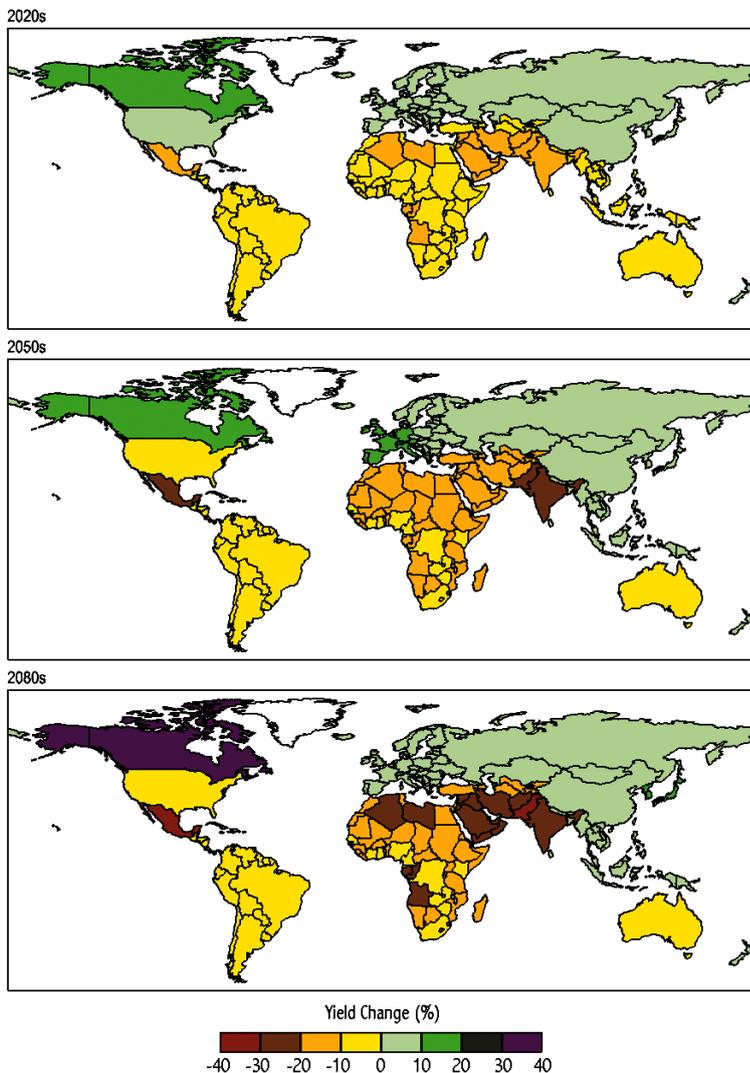
Now more than ever NGOs have the duty to get inside decision rooms, to make lobbying activity, to tackle issues, to build a global and democratic civil society. Cooperation projects are in this case a proof of concreteness, of new models that will help to influence and change policies. NGOs must begin to think big and to act big.

During the week-long negotiations organized by the Committee on Food Security in October 2012 (<http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/cfs39/en/>), the parties (representatives of more than one hundred country's governments, multilateral and international organisations, civil society and private sectors) discussed the new principles linking **social protection** policies to food security, as well as

policies to ensure food production and food access, and to confront the new challenges posed by **climate change**. Experts discussed their analysis and recommendations; the latter were consequently adopted by the Committee as guidelines for member countries. The discussion centred also on food insecurity in countries with **ongoing crisis**. All discussed papers are available at: <http://www.fao.org/bodies/cfs/cfs39/en/>.

Referring to the climate change, the increase in the global temperature due to the carbon emissions is bringing land and biological system degradation. This causes a reduction in the agricultural production, damaging especially african rural communities, as it clearly emerges from the following charts.(source: Parry et al., 2005), with reference to grain, corn, rise.

African agriculture dramatically depends on rainfalls, then it is more vulnerable to climate change, precipitations reduction and variability. Desertification is increasing and territories already fragile risk to deteriorate faster and deeper. Agricultural productions and outputs fall off and the external dependence raises, combined with increasing prices, with a consequent reduction to food access for the poor population.



The **strategic global framework** for food security was thus reformed. It consists now of a dynamic policy paper that will be updated on a yearly basis to ensure a consistent approach to the complex interconnection of different issues. It will also ensure a convergence among all the actors.

Moreover the Committee convened to start a two year long process of consultations, at regional and global level, on **responsible investments in agriculture** to set new guidelines. It is about the definition of new rules so that transnational companies and states recognize the role of family farms as the first and most important investors in food security and land protection. The guidelines should reduce the social and environmental negative impacts of the land grabbing phenomena.

The Committee discussed also a working program to **monitor the enforcement of guidelines** on land use regimes and on the current principles. In this regard at least three issues emerged that are crucial for the meaning of this whole process.

The first issue is about the **rigid sectorial division of global agendas** due to different political priorities that stem from different national interests. This is particularly evident in the relationship between food security principles and trade principles. Some countries (major food exporters) believe that it is important to keep the agendas separated because they do not consider trade freedom dangerous for food security; therefore, if the latter is promoted by the Committee, the first should be enhanced by the World Trade Organization's agenda. Other actors, notably civil society representatives, promote instead the concept of food sovereignty, that implies the priority of the right to food over the principles of free trade. It is clear that policy consistency is hindered by the conflicting interests of different countries and lobbying groups.

The second issue is about the **ambiguity** of some priorities and food security guidelines whose interpretation is at the country level and, therefore, it depends on different local power frameworks. We should consider the interplay of different agricultural systems – from intensive agribusiness to organic farming to the different value chains that support or exploit small farmers. The various principles and their enforcement may differ from country to country based on the prevalence of some power frameworks instead of others.

The third issue is about the **actual enforcement of principles**. This requires a great effort to provide the means and resources necessary to monitor and support the exchange of good practices. It is therefore crucial to build a strong partnership among a multilateral system (particularly among international food agencies like FAO, WFO and IFAD), countries, civil society and private sector. We have to ensure the building of networks of interested people and of monitoring and lobbying capacities, at the national and local level, to discuss the enforcement of the principles and to promote an interpretation that is closer to the needs and interests of the most vulnerable. Civil society organizations have a clear and crucial role to ensure a democratic enforcement of the principles.

The **European Union** has a driving role inside the Committee on Food Security. It participates actively to the Committee's works, supports small farmers and is willing to finance the enforcement of the voluntary guidelines on land tenure regimes. On the other hand, as we have already seen, there is still some ambiguity and contradiction among the policies that reflect the different stances among different actors and interests in the EU – small and large farm businesses; agriculture and agroindustry; agriculture and companies that invest in green energy; food producers and consumers; domestic trade oriented companies and export oriented companies; the different member states. Therefore it is crucial for civil society organizations to promote a more open and democratic debate inside the European Union to support first of all the right to food of the most vulnerable groups in the world, as well as the access to land through more democratic land tenure regimes.