

# Conference Report

Policy Lunch July 2018

sef:

## Global Food Governance. How can the EU lead the way?

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**Enough food is produced worldwide to feed humanity, yet more than 815 million people in the world are undernourished. What is the global vision for food and nutrition governance? What initiatives and reforms are being implemented? What role can the EU play? sef: and CIDSE – International Alliance of Catholic Development Agencies hosted a Policy Lunch in Brussels on 12 July 2018 to debate these questions.**

In 2007 and 2008, food prices increased dramatically after years of stable, low prices. The global food price crisis that ensued caused economic instability and social unrest in countries of the Global South and North. The crisis revealed a critical vacuum

in global food governance. In the following years, a number of reforms were initiated, as Nora McKeon, Lecturer at Rome 3 University, pointed out. However, these reforms did not necessarily target the root causes of the crisis: “The High-Level Task Force on Global Food and Nutrition Security aimed to improve coordination of UN action. But it was not made to solve the political problem. The G8 wanted to boost investment in agriculture. But they did not look into what kind of investment would be helpful for better food security,” she criticised.

### The reformed Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

A number of G77 and European countries lobbied for a reform of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS). These efforts were accompanied by strong civil society advocacy. In 2009, the UN approved a reform of the CFS into an inclusive policy forum in which political solutions could be negotiated.

According to McKeon, four outcomes are most significant: 1. The reform recognises that causes of hunger and malnutrition are structural. The solution to any food crisis is not to produce more but to create fairer access to food. 2. The CFS is rooted in a human rights framework, recognising that food is a human right, not merely a commodity. 3. The CFS is a place of inclusive governance, not “multi-stakeholderism”. Priority is given to those suffering most from hunger and malnutrition. In the end, govern-



Nora McKeon, Geneviève Savigny, Leonard Mizzi and Patrick Leusch (Chair) (l.t.r.)

ments decide and can be held accountable for their decisions. 4. The CFS is grounded in an evidence-based approach, supported by a pool of independent experts, practitioners and farmers.

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### Plenty of corporate power, lack of political will

At the same time, McKeon sees major challenges in the fact that corporate power and corporate concentration continue to increase. This leads to a commercialisation and financialisation of food and land. The changing development narrative assigning an increasing role to the private sector may pose a threat to global food governance as well: “As if private companies had the same objectives as the public sector,” she criticised. McKeon warned not to underestimate the weakened political will of many governments around the world. The EU should position itself as a bulwark against this.

Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit, Rural Development, Food Security, Nutrition in the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development at the European Commission, also valued the CFS as an innovative and inclusive policy forum. In his view, the CFS has achieved a great deal on voluntary guidelines regarding land tenure and similarly difficult topics. The EU, too, is highly committed to food security and to supporting the CFS. It has prioritised agriculture and food security in the portfolio for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2014-2020, spending € 1.5 billion in these areas in 2017/2018.

On the engagement of the private sector, Mizzi took a different and more critical stance: “Currently, there is a lot of private sector bashing. To achieve food security, there is a financial gap of € 180 billion. It will not be the governments who solve this problem,” he said. The CFS should look into how the private sector could be involved more effectively in the current governance model. Small and medium enterprises should have a seat at the table besides the large corporations.

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### Who represents the private sector?

Geneviève Savigny, a small farmer from France who is active in European Coordination Via Campesina, countered that small-scale farmers are in fact recognised as civil society organisations in the CFS. Therefore, the definition of the private sector is not as obvious as it seems: “What is the private sector? Who represents it?” Savigny asked. It is not usually small and medium-size enterprises which are selected to represent the private sector in institutions like the CFS. “We do not set the scene. That is done by big players,” she criticised.

She explained that Via Campesina’s approach is based on food sovereignty: it adds the perspective that food security is not only based on trade. Those who produce and consume the food should also participate in the formulation of food production and distribution policies. “Agriculture is more than a business. It is a fulfilment of the human right to food,” Savigny explained.

Nora McKeon also stressed the importance of small-scale farmers’ engagement: “They produce 70% of the food consumed all over the world. They are responsible for 90% of the investment in agriculture.” Investment, to her, is not only about money. “Farmers invest their knowledge and their commitment to the global food market,” McKeon said.



Geneviève Savigny and Nora McKeon (l.t.r.)

Leonard Mizzi conceded that this is true; over the next 40 years, however, this model will not hold. “We will need to discuss the role of supermarkets, e-commerce, ICT in agri-business and other issues,” he said. “Many people in the Commission even say that agriculture has no role to play in the solution, that it is a solution of 10-15 years ago.” Mizzi explained how extremely complex agricultural policies are as they touch issues of gender, migration, environmental degradation, climate change and much more.

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### “Policy split personality”

On that note, Nora McKeon pointed to the “elephant in the room”, as she called it: the incoherence of EU policies. She has been trying to coin a new term for this: policy split personality. “It is not only about two policies being incoherent. Most of the time, there are two opposing but desired policy outcomes like stopping migration and pushing agro-business,” she explained.

The debate focused particularly on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as it touches on many aspects of global food security. For Leonard Mizzi, the CAP is mainly an internal policy. But as he explained, the CAP has come a long way: "There are still many misconceptions about its impact in West and East Africa," he said. Furthermore, the various directorates-general have started internal discussions to understand each other's policies better and harmonise more.

Geneviève Savigny took a different view. "At the moment, the CAP is mainly about the distribution of money to compensate farmers for low prices that were set in the 1970s," she criticised. As the CAP



Dr Ricardo Serrão Santos MEP and Patrick Leusch (Chair)

makes EU farmers more competitive on the global market, "it is by no means an internal policy". If the EU can enter markets in Africa and other continents

at points of overproduction, this will cause great difficulties for local markets in those regions. Not only is food security threatened by the current European policies: "If you push countries to import, they will lose their food sovereignty," she said.

## Voluntary guidelines or mandatory standards

In the discussion, another question was raised: should the CFS and the EU produce voluntary guidelines or mandatory standards in order to achieve better food security? Leonard Mizzi reported that many civil society organisations want the EU to move from voluntary approaches to mandatory standards in its food policy. The CFS should definitely look at how to define criteria for mandatory guidelines, e.g. with regard to standards for deforestation-free production. This would, however, bring about further challenges: "Mandatory approaches risk putting a lot of people into the informal sector," he said.

For Nora McKeon, this is not a yes-no question. "At UN level, only the Security Council and the World Trade Organization have the power to impose mandatory standards. The entire human rights framework, however, is not mandatory, neither are the CFS guidelines," she explained. It would be unreasonable to think that the CFS would magically be able to negotiate mandatory conventions. This, in her view, would not be a good idea anyway as the different stakeholders would only agree on the lowest common denominator. She expressed the firm conviction that: "If inclusive and equal fora like the CFS manage to reach good voluntary guidelines on touchy issues like land tenure, this can orchestrate a tremendous push for change as well."

## Imprint

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