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HLPE Consultation on report scope - Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition

Contribution of the Agroecology Fund, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Global Alliance for the Future of Food

Dear HLPE Steering Committee and the Project Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the report's scope "Reducing inequalities for food security and nutrition".

This is certainly a timely topic in the context of the numerous crises and instabilities that food systems are currently facing. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how current models of production and consumption have tended to exacerbate the concentration of wealth and income with alarming consequences for food security and nutrition. The three organizations which subscribe to this comment are gathering analytical resources to jointly contribute to the different phases of the Report production. At this stage, we would like to point to three main issues that we consider of fundamental importance to be addressed in the Report:

1. We welcome the Report in ambitiously tackling both inequalities originating within food systems as well as the drivers of power asymmetry that cause and perpetuate inequality in the broader political, social, cultural and economic environments which affect food systems. This seems aligned with previous efforts of the HLPE to maintain a systemic approach and comprehensive overview of issues.

In this regard, we propose that the research team could be sharper in the definition of "good governance" and/or "strengthened governance" (as in **c. ii.** and **g.**). Governance and inequalities are intrinsically linked, and the qualification of which governance arrangements in food system governance leads to less unequal political processes featuring democratic decision-making among multiple stakeholders with clear mechanisms to include historically marginalized people, enshrining rights to participation through transparent consultations (abiding by the protocols of FPIC, fair distribution of resources, etc.) could illuminate insightful contributions and recommendations.

As references, the Global Alliance for the Future of Food calls for governance that addresses the structural inequities in food systems as "*participatory, integrated, rights-based approaches... building processes and policy platforms on principles of transparency, inclusive participation, and shared power. This ensures policies driven not only by evidence, but ethics and public interest*" (GA, 2021). The UN Food System Summit Policy Brief on Governance of Food Systems Transformation also addressed ways to "*Enhance equitable and inclusive multi-stakeholder processes (from engagement to collaboration)*" (UNFSS, 2021) and the HLPE itself has advanced a number of proposals on how to build more equal food governance in numerous Reports (e.g.,

the HLPE Report on Multistakeholder partnerships). More specifically to the topic of multistakeholder governance, a recent study by the One Planet Network on Sustainable Food Systems analyzed 10 cases of national and sub-national partnerships, which also shed light on the qualifications of governance that generate less unequal policy processes (Biodiversity et al. 2021). In summary, the literature on governance, participation, inclusivity, power concentration, legal and policy interventions to regulate power asymmetries, conflicts of interests, and how all of these issues affect inequality is mushrooming and the Report would greatly contribute by reviewing it with a view to produce sharp policy recommendations.

2. We also welcome the report in reviewing the impact of different trends - e.g., assets, infrastructure and technology, market structure, access to information, demographic trends - and how these affect inequality (**4. a.**). Linked to those, a key objective question that the Report should try to address is “which kinds of income distribution dynamics are associated with which kinds of food system transformations, and where?”. A review of this fundamental question and its corollaries could form the basis of an opening Chapter that sets the existing evidence for the consecutive parts of the Report.

We observe a growing and needed interest of global institutions - from Rome and Geneva-based to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund - to tackle inequality. However, we believe that there is a need for a clear research agenda, data collection on the ground and harmonized research agendas and datasets. This alignment between the different global research agendas on inequality could lay the analytical groundwork for effective policy recommendations. We invite the Report Team to review the existing global datasets that could suggest important lessons on tackling inequality as a way to identify the gaps which would require this extra effort of alignment from the global community. While in some areas, for example land inequalities, there seems to be a years-long community of experts accumulating knowledge with these issues, we believe other areas (ex. Labor dynamics in food system transformation) there is still much potential to be explored.

3. We would welcome a comparative exploration of how industrial agriculture and agroecology (and other approaches as well) each approach inequalities. What does the evidence say about how each might exacerbate or diminish inequality and under what circumstances? A historical and political and socio-economic approach to this analysis is important since the emergence of a food system is based on the suite of laws, policies and programs that undergird it. A few case studies on specific food systems exploring who designed them with what intended and unintended outcomes could prove illuminating. A commitment in this report to true cost accounting would seem to be absolutely fundamental - if this is not used, for example, claims can be made that industrial agriculture reduces inequality by boosting yield and lowering prices without accounting for the socio and environmental costs of production borne by all.

We remain at your disposal for any further clarification.

Yours sincerely,

Agroecology Fund, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations, Global Alliance for the Future of Food

References

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According to the HLPE 2nd Note on Critical and Emerging Issues (2017), increasing risks to food security and nutrition can be linked to high levels of **income concentration, corporate concentration** in food trade, transformation and distribution, as well as to **uneven distribution of agricultural assets and access** to natural resources (CFS MYPoW 2020-2023). In addition, unequal endowments in agricultural assets and access to natural resources (such as land) together with income inequality deeply affect food security and nutrition. Unequal access to food and adequate nutrition further deepen inequalities through lost opportunities in health, education and jobs. Sustained **disparities** between vulnerable and other social groups – reflecting inequalities between and within countries - can **slow growth and lead to political instability** and conflict, migration flows, with related adverse consequences on food security and nutrition (HLPE, 2017). Stark inequalities in access to basic services and assets, but also in terms of food security and nutrition, affect households' prospects for overcoming poverty, and ultimately perpetuate food insecurity and malnutrition (Ibidem). One of the starkest trends of recent years has been the **growing concentration in food-related production, industries and services, which has affected power relations** between different actors in food systems and fuelled inequalities (HLPE, 2020).

The HLPE (2017, 2020) has stressed the importance of addressing food security and nutrition through a food systems approach, highlighting the linkages between supply chains, food environments, consumers' behaviour and the resource, economic, social and institutional systems that connect to food. **Inequalities affecting food systems' drivers can be transmitted to all components of food systems** and ultimately affect food security and nutrition outcomes. Furthermore, HLPE (2021) stressed the importance of using an intersectionality^[1] lens in analyzing and addressing inequalities: different dimensions of inequalities, based on individual, household, community and country characteristics, intersect and are mutually reinforcing. **Reducing inequalities requires addressing the different dimensions of inequality holistically and simultaneously, being aware of the complex power dynamics that generate and sustain inequalities.**

COVID-19 has further exacerbated existing inequalities, as the brunt of the economic, social and health impact are being borne by the most vulnerable individuals, communities and countries. The estimated impact of the pandemic is an increase in the average Gini index for emerging and developing countries by 6 percent (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>). Human rights are at the core of the 2030 Agenda, which with the motto "No one left behind", recognizes the severe consequences of inequalities on the attainment of sustainable development. Agenda 2030 has two goals specifically concerning inequalities (SDG 5 and SDG 10), in addition to including inequality reduction in a number of targets and indicators (<https://sdgs.un.org/>). To reduce inequalities, it is fundamental to ensure comprehensive legal frameworks and governance systems able to uphold human rights, including the right to food.

The report will focus both on (a) **inequalities originating within food systems** and concerning nutrition and (b) **inequalities in the political, social, cultural and economic environment** around food systems, which have a bearing on unequal outcomes regarding FSN.

The report will document the **scale, the multidimensional, dynamic, intergenerational and intersectional aspects of inequality** regarding food security and nutrition, how individuals are affected depending on their characteristics (age, gender, location, social group - class, ethnicity, race, migrant vs. native status), within households, communities, local and national levels, and between countries. **Inequalities often depend on the priorities and choices of private and public investments**, or legal status, and more generally, on the political balance between urban and rural areas or different regions, particularly if there are religious and/or ethnic differences within a country. Particular attention needs to be given to conflict areas and fragile States. The report will also deal with

market power at different levels in food systems, driving inequality throughout supply chains from production to food processing, transport, distribution and trade.

The response to such multi-dimensional and multi-actor inequality calls for a holistic and integrated approach for fair and equitable development (HLPE, 2021). **Broadening the definition of food security**, as proposed by HLPE (2020) provides a framework to comprehend the nexus between inequalities and social, economic, and environmental sustainability in food systems. The report will explore how inequalities originating within food systems can be alleviated, learning from good practices in existing policies, legal frameworks, approaches and interventions. Support for agroecological practices, small scale agriculture, territorial/local market initiatives, as well as alternative educational methods including the use of digital tools and platforms accessible to all, are among the options that have been identified as promising development pathways for transforming food systems and promoting food security and nutrition for all (HLPE, 2020 and 2021).

These developments need to be put in context, taking into account the concentration of market power in global food systems. **The report will develop the concept of “agency”** as a lens to address the issue of structural barriers to obtaining economic resources and of inequalities in food security and nutrition, and **define the right to food as a legal entitlement towards equality** through upholding all relevant human rights, raising living standards, and eliminating intergenerational inequality for all.

Questions to guide the e-Consultation on the scope of the report

With this e-consultation, the HLPE Steering Committee is seeking your feedback. In particular, you are invited to:

1. Share your comments and suggestions on the objectives and content of this report:

- a. Defining inequality within the context of food systems and for food security and nutrition
 - i. *What does ‘inequality’ mean through a food security and nutrition perspective;*
 - ii. *Trends within and between countries (data collection, measurement tools);*
 - iii. *Links between health and nutrition inequalities and labour productivity, educational attainment, economic growth and human wellbeing;*
 - iv. *Commitments to reduce inequality (SDGs), efforts to improve measurement;*
 - v. *Relationship between inequality and inequity.*
- b. Identifying drivers of power asymmetry that cause and perpetuate inequality
 - i. *Concentration of economic, social, and political capital within the food systems;*
 - ii. *Structural barriers to equality for historically disadvantaged and poor populations (women, people of colour, rural and urban poor, indigenous communities, peasants, migrants, refugees, etc.).*
- c. Paths toward equality
 - i. *Human Rights Based approach - “equality” as a human right principle, relevance to the right to food;*
 - ii. *Good governance to rebalance power and influence;*
 - iii. *Legal and policy interventions to regulate the influence of corporate actors (and those with concentrated power), and remove structural barriers and increase capital (for those with diminished resources).*

2. Share good practices and successful experiences on policy, legislation, interventions and initiatives that have proven successful at:

- a. reducing inequality gap and its potential impact on food security and nutrition outcomes;

- b. ensuring the effective legal framework to guarantee equal rights to access land and other productive resources, basic services, and the right to food to reduce inequalities;
- c. enhancing food systems' role in the reduction of inequalities (through income and livelihoods generation, while contributing to healthy diets and environment, among others);
- d. empowering the role of small farmers', producers' and workers' organizations in making food systems more equitable and accessible;
- e. addressing capacity gaps in generating and using data and other new technologies in policy-making processes, monitoring and reporting on inequalities for FSN.

3. Share the most recent references that should be considered in this report.

4. Provide feedback on the following questions, to guide the development of the report:

- a. How do food systems drivers affect inequalities? And specifically what are the different impacts of trends in:
 - i. *assets, land, other natural resources and finance*
 - ii. *infrastructure and technology, including ICT*
 - iii. *market structure in input provision, logistics, processing, transport, distribution of food*
 - iv. *access to information and data*
 - v. *demographic trends including migration and urbanisation*
 - vi. *socio-cultural factors around gender, ethnicity, religion, caste, race, language and their intersection*
 - vii. *political and economic factors (presence/absence of a legal framework to ensure equal rights to key resources and services and the expression of agency)?*
- b. How can social inequalities impact FSN outcomes?
- c. How can the reduction of inequalities in food systems' drivers foster sustainable economic and social transformation and improve FSN? Which different pathways should be considered? Which policies and practices have proven to work in reducing inequalities in FSN outcomes? Are there livelihood systems that are more successful at reducing inequalities and enhancing empowerment?
- d. How can the reduction of inequalities through sustainable food systems and better FSN contribute to conflict prevention and peace building?
- e. How can gender and youth mainstreaming approaches, as well as adopting an intersectional lens on inequalities, taking multiple identities together in the analysis (including gender and youth) in food systems contribute to social justice and better FSN?
- f. What are the main knowledge and data gaps hindering the understanding of how inequalities determine FSN outcomes? What could be improved in data collection and analysis tools for FSN inequalities?
- g. How can strengthened food systems' governance contribute to the reduction of inequalities in FSN outcomes?
- h. Which legal frameworks can guarantee equal rights to land, basic services, but also the right to food, and do they contribute to reducing inequalities?
- i. What is the role of political economy in reducing inequalities in food systems and in reducing other inequalities that have an impact on FSN outcomes?

We look forward to a rich and fruitful consultation!

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