

FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCES
CONSULTATIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

February, 25th to 27th, 2019 in Harare - Zimbabwe

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction: Civil Society participation in FAO Regional Conferences

Since 1996, civil society organizations (CSOs) have been progressively more active in FAO conferences, policy dialogues and technical committees in a number of areas, including family farming, nutrition, agroecology, fisheries, genetic resources, at all levels (national, regional and global).

The FAO Regional Conferences are the highest governing bodies and fora of the Organization at the regional level, and are normally held once every biennium in non-Conference years. The main functions of the Regional Conferences are to:

- a) Provide a forum for consultation on all matters pertaining to the mandate of the Organization within the region;
- b) Provide a forum for the formulation of regional positions on global policy and regulatory issues in relation to the mandate of the Organization;
- c) Advise on and identify the specific problems of their respective regions and the priority areas of work which should be taken into account in planning the program of work and budget of the Organization, thus promoting regional policy coherence;
- d) Review and advise on plans, programs and/or projects carried out by the Organization which impact upon the region;
- e) Review the performance of the Organization in the region and advise on desirable changes.

In recent years, civil society organizations have been able to participate, with spokespersons, in FAO Regional Conferences, during the technical and ministerial sessions.

Due to this participatory role, regional civil society consultations have been regularly organized in conjunction with FAO Regional Conferences to ensure broader engagement and support for FAO policy discussions and decision-making at regional level. From past experiences, it became clear that CSOs, by providing governments with their analysis of regions' challenges linked to FAO's strategic objectives, were

enriching the debate for FAO Members decision-making regarding regional priorities and the agency's action planning with the countries.

Since 2014, the Regional Civil Society Consultations became part of the Conference process.

Civil Society Consultations in preparation for 2020 FAO Regional Conferences

1. Facilitation of the CSOs consultation

Civil Society Consultations are meetings organized autonomously by and for Civil Society actors in the region prior to the Regional Conferences, meant to gather small food producers organisations and others civil society organization, representing both constituencies as well as countries, in order to discuss specific agenda items of the Conference and key topics pertinent to the region.

In the last rounds (2012 and 2014) of the Regional Conferences IPC played a crucial role, in different regions, in facilitating participation of representatives of small food producers organisations. IPC (International Committee of the Food Sovereignty) is an autonomous, self-organised global platform of 45 social movements and civil society networks worldwide representing more than 800 organizations. Its members are grassroots organisations of small-scale farmers, landless, fisher folk, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, forest dwellers, urban poor, consumers, rural youth, food and agriculture workers and rural women.

In addition, NGOs with expertise and a long history of engagement with social movements through action and advocacy on issues related to food sovereignty and agriculture provide support on specific topics¹.

In the renewed FAO-IPC Exchange of Letters in 2014 was agreed that “steps will be taken to reinforce the participation of IPC and other civil society organization and social movements in future session of the FAO technical committees and other governing bodies, in particular its regional conferences”.

¹ Since its formalization in 2003, IPC has facilitated the participation of more than 2500 representatives of small-scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples organisations in the FAO regional conferences and technical committees, where their voice were previously absent from these political forums.

IPC has participated in all negotiations for the renewal of CFS, as key player leading the recognition of small food producers organisations and other social movements as relevant actors in the CFS work and decisions and also worked on the proposal for the creation of the CSM, (Civil Society Mechanism) the representative body of CSOs for the CFS, as an original instrument to guarantee an effective and organized participation of CSO and social movement at the CFS work.

Furthermore IPC has played a leadership role in the negotiation of the "Voluntary Guidelines on responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security".

In accordance with this commitment it is foreseen that IPC facilitate the constitution of an ad hoc committee with different organizations (IPC and non-IPC members) acting as facilitators for the consultation where the division of responsibilities should be agreed upon by these organizations.

The Organizing Committee will prepare a concept note indicating the background and justification of selected themes, the composition of the organizing committee, methodology, agenda and programme of the consultation as well as the list of participants based on agreed criteria (see the participants section ahead for more information).

The Organizing Committee will appoint a local organization with logistical mandate.

a. Definition of the agenda and program

The agenda of the consultation must be aligned with the agenda decided upon for the Regional Conference. The purpose of the consultation is precisely to prepare civil society positions for the agenda items of the Conference. While there may be space in the agenda of the consultation to discuss other issues which are important to CSO actors in the region, these should be secondary to the issues to be discussed during the Conference.

b. Criteria for participation

The consultation will allow for strengthened coordination of CSO actors, therefore a wide net should be cast to bring as many different CSO actors who work in the area of food and nutrition security as possible, respecting FAO's Guidelines on Balance Representation of CSO actors, therefore achieving balance of constituency, geography, gender and organization type (i.e. a mix of social movements, member-based organizations, and NGOs).

c. Specific criteria:

1) Relevance to FAO's Mandate and to the debate area:

The CSO has expert knowledge on the debate area of the Regional Conference related to food security and nutrition and is committed to FAO's mandate to reduce poverty and eliminate food insecurity worldwide. The CSO has a demonstrated commitment to be a major player in dealing with agriculture, food security and nutrition issues.

2) Representativeness:

The CSO is representative of one or more specific sectors of the population who share common interests, with particular reference to the most vulnerable and isolated groups, whose livelihoods and food security and nutrition are likely to be most directly affected by the negotiated policies. The CSO is able to position the interests of the constituency in the policy debate transcend national boundaries by continuously envisioning links from the local to the global and vice versa, and promote unity in diversity among actors experiencing common issues in different contexts.

3) Independence:

The work of the CSO is autonomous and not subject to external influence. Its sources of funding are transparent and free from any stringent condition that could weaken its action and undermine its legitimacy as an independent actor of change.

4) Transparency:

The CSO demonstrates a consistent pattern of making decisions and implementing actions in accordance with internal rules, norms and regulations that are known and understood by all concerned. Adequate information about decisions and actions is freely and constantly provided in accessible ways and in forms that are easily understood by all concerned.

5) Balanced representation:

A balanced representation in terms of geography, gender, age and - for CSOs - constituencies represented, in accordance with the Guidelines for ensuring balanced representation of Civil Society in FAO meetings and processes will be sought.

6) In general terms, priority will be given to people representing small-scale food producers (including farmers, fishers, artisans, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, landless, rural workers, with special attention to women and youth).

d. Outcomes of the CSOs Consultation

- The selection of CSO spokesperson per agenda items to participate and intervene in the FAO Regional Conference. Spokespersons will be allowed to participate in the senior officers and ministerial segments of the Regional Conferences and interact with member states at any time, if agreed upon at the onset of the Regional Conference. Spokespersons will be seated in a clearly designated area near the observers but separate enough for the Chair and Member States to visibly see them and identify them as spokespersons.
- Consolidated CSOs specific inputs, to the pre-session document and positions on the issues to be discussed during FAO Regional Conference
- Civil Society statement or declaration that will be read by one of the spokespersons during the Ministerial Segment of the Regional Conference,

preferably on the first day, and not at the end as was customary in the past. The presentation of the Civil Society Consultation final declaration/statement will be included in the agenda/timetable of the Regional Conference. The declaration needs to be presented early enough on in the conference for its content to be taken into consideration during the intergovernmental discussions.

- All CSO statements to the agenda items during the Regional Conference, including both their interventions in the course of the debate and their statements addressed to the Conference, need to be captured in the proceedings and in the report of the Regional Conference, if there is no objection from members states of the region. It is in this way that the Civil Society Consultations are linked to the Regional Conferences. Where positions cannot be fully captured in the main body of the report, the CSO declaration/statement should be attached as an annex, with any other key CSO positions included.
- All above mentioned outputs are contributing to an increased coordination not only among civil society actors themselves but also improving the collaboration between these CSOs and the FAO regional offices.

Place and participants:

This regional consultation of regional CSOs will be held in Harare, Zimbabwe with the participation of key representatives of civil society (farmers, artisanal fishers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples, landless workers in the middle rural, particularly women and youth).