

DISAPPOINTING OUTCOMES OF NEGOTIATIONS ON NUTRITION

STATEMENT BY CSO DELEGATION TO THE OPEN ENDED WORKING GROUP OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NUTRITION 2

Governments met in the FAO Headquarters in Rome from 10-12 October to finalize the Rome Political Declaration and the Framework for Action for the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). After 22 years, civil society organizations (CSOs) were expecting significant progress to address the urgent problem of the more than 200 million children who suffer from acute and chronic malnutrition, the 800 million suffering from undernourishment and the 500 million adults with obesity. CSOs consider the outcomes of this negotiation to be totally inadequate to confront the root causes of malnutrition and call into question the lack of commitment of the States to make a real step forward in the fight against malnutrition in all its forms.

The ICN2 negotiations failed to recognize that the current hegemonic food system and agro-industrial production model are not only unable to respond to the existing malnutrition problems but have contributed to the creation of different forms of malnutrition and the decrease of the diversity and quality of diets. Unfair trade agreements, lack of investment in small-scale food production and support to agro business models, have led to displacement of small-scale producers all over the world. Marketing of ultra-processed products, high in energy, sugar and salt, has contributed to the surge of obesity in the world. At the same time, unethical practices by breastmilk-substitute producers continue to undermine the life-saving practice of breastfeeding. The conference also failed to recognize gender inequality and women's rights violations (child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, violence against women, inter alia) as one of the root causes of women and child malnutrition.

How can we expect a political declaration based on such a flawed diagnosis to serve as the basis for an effective and coherent framework for action?

CSOs engaged in the ICN2 preparation repeatedly urged Member States to re-affirm that all food and nutrition related policies must be coherent with the realization of the right to adequate food and nutrition as well as the full realization of women's rights. They also requested governments to implement policies that are consistent with food being the expression of values, cultures, social relations and people's self-determination and sovereignty over their land and natural resources. CSOs repeatedly stressed that the primary response to the challenge of malnutrition in all its forms must be embedded in local food and agricultural systems based on food sovereignty, small-scale food producers, agro-biodiversity, deep ecological foundations and sustainable use of natural resources, native seeds and traditional knowledge as well as local markets. Furthermore, such responses must be coherently articulated with policies and strategies to ensure access to decent jobs and living salaries, universal access to quality health services, water and sanitation services, rights-based social protection, and other related ones, such as climate change resilience and mitigation.

The voices of CSOs went mostly unheard. Governments did not set the bar any higher than that set by the first International Conference on Nutrition in 1992. They ignored major developments of the past 22 years such as the increase of unaccountable power of transnational corporations and their undue influence in policy processes. The ICN2 outcome documents profoundly frustrated CSO expectations due to the nature of their weak and non-binding recommendations.

We are deeply concerned that the ICN2 outcomes leave a large normative vacuum in the quest to protect and enhance people's right to food and nutrition. In this context, we are profoundly worried to hear of the possible establishment of some sort of a "UN Nutrition" entity without any transparent disclosure and democratic discussion exactly as Member States debate the ICN2 proceedings. We therefore urge Member States and UN bodies which might be planning such a change in nutrition governance structures to transparently state the nature and objectives of their plans. We fear this might lead to the fight against malnutrition being limited to product-based approaches and offer another avenue for the increase of undue corporate influence within and via the United Nations.

Delivering food and adequate food supplements, in timely fashion, in association with basic quality health services is fundamental to saving the lives of acutely malnourished infants and young children. Similarly, the treatment and prevention of chronic malnutrition might require a set of integrated measures, including better-coordinated donor-funded initiatives and programmes. However, beyond limited crisis, the promotion and protection of good nutrition is not something that can be effectively and sustainably deliver through these means. It rather requires a political, normative and regulatory action to strengthen people's based and fully owned local solutions, with Member States and the UN system acting in peoples' interests rather than corporate ones. We therefore urge that any attempt to establish such "UN Nutrition" entity be immediately halted and we call for the follow-up of the ICN2 to be unambiguously located within the governance, normative and regulatory frameworks of FAO and WHO and their Member States.

In this context, we reaffirm the CFS role as the foremost inclusive government-led global platform on food security and nutrition with a specific mandate to establish coherence and coordination among all concerned actors and request that it incorporates nutrition in all its discussions, in accordance to its stated mandate. In this context, we also call for WHO to be integrated in the CFS Secretariat. At the same time, we urge Member States to develop clear safeguards and rules on conflict of interest to prevent undue influence of private corporations in all global policy-making processes related to food and nutrition, including the CFS.

Rome, Italy, 14th October 2014

This statement has been prepared by the CSO delegation to Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) of the International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2). The CSO delegation is the expression of a large platform of approximately 150 civil society organizations that have been engaged in the preparatory process of ICN2.

For more information, please contact Flavio Valente (flsvalente@fian.org), Stineke Oenema (Stineke.Oenema@icco-cooperation.org) or Stefano Prato (stefanop@sidint.org)