

## **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 Foundation, Global Alliance for the Future of Food

## References

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