

50th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 50)



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Philanthropy in times of crisis: A new approach with the CFS

Side Event - Tuesday 11 October 2022 - 08:30-09:45 CET

Summary

The side event discussed how private philanthropic organizations are shaping their responses to food crises with a view to contribute to CFS through a new Philanthropic Foundations Mechanism (PFM).

The side-event, in a hybrid version, was very well attended both in person and virtually, with active participation, and an interesting and animated discussion. CFS constituencies were represented, with the exception of the CSIPM, which excused and canceled the participation of the appointed speaker due to last minute involvements in negotiations of the CFS agenda. The event also counted with the presence of three former CFS Chairs (two speakers and a moderator), suggesting the relevance of the topic.

Oliver Oliveros (Global Alliance for the Future of Food) introduced the session mentioning the diversity of philanthropic organizations, their broad purposes and great freedom of action, and the possibility that they take risks in flexible settings responding to the needs of different actors: *“In other words, foundations have the privilege, the responsibility, and the opportunity to leverage resources and networks to advance sustainable food systems on the political, economic, social and environmental agenda”*.

Panel 1: Philanthropic foundations responding in times of crisis

Neil Watkins (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) commented about their excitement to observe more philanthropic interest in the CFS. He mentioned an increased sense of urgency and need of action due to the current crisis, and the possibility of actors with divergent views to come together showing a model of collaborative work even where there is no consensual agreement on all issues. According to him, this current crisis needs more action, more investments, and to keep the humanitarian angle is needed, though it is also imperative to focus on the long-term issues that can build resilience. He concluded by saying that philanthropies can not replace the critical role of governments, but can signal significant areas that need further investment.

Daniel Moss (Agroecology Fund) commented that being so inclusive, the CFS plays a critical role in advancing global policy debates in food systems, making the Fund excited to participate in this new Philanthropic Foundations Mechanism. Daniel affirmed that philanthropies should not lead policy debates, but through trust based philanthropy strengthen representation from indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, women, youth, afro descendants, consumers, etc., which they

have been doing by contributing ten of millions of dollars to grassroots processes, to scale agroecological food systems, across territories, and strengthen participatory research.

Matheus Zanella (Global Alliance for the Future of Food) described what will be expected of this new body to coordinate the participation of the philanthropic sector in the CFS: facilitate input from private foundations to negotiation and consultations, ensure contributions from the sector to the High-Level Panel of Experts process, and contribute to CFS decision-making by participating in all inter-sessional activities and the CFS Annual Plenary. It is currently being founded through a collaborative process between the Agroecology Fund (AEF), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, but participation will be opened to private foundations interested in engaging with the CFS.

Panel 2: how a Philanthropic Foundations Mechanism can contribute to the CFS?

Ambassador Mario Arvelo (Dominican Republic) presented the perspective of a former CFS Chair, distinguishing the inclusivity of this body compared to other intergovernmental bodies. He mentioned that the opening of participation of non-governmental actors changed the dynamics of the Committee: *“this philanthropic foundations mechanism is one-step forward in our long-walk to really having a platform that is inclusive in a absolutely manner; we still need parliamentarians, academics, true participation; and existing mechanisms still need to open-up further”*.

Rich White (Private Sector Mechanism to the CFS) commented that there is no better time than now to welcome more actors concerned with food insecurity and malnutrition, and all actors need to work on partnerships that are built on principles and values that are shared at the CFS. He commented that philanthropic foundations play an important role in their own right, as this represents how *“profits from business can be deployed in development work in a non-for-profit manner”*. He concluded by looking forward to understanding in greater detail how different categories of philanthropies can have space within the mechanism.

Ambassador Yaya Olaniran (Nigeria) congratulated BMGF for welcoming new partners in their engagement at the CFS, commenting that many more might join in the future. The commented that the 2009 Reform of the CFS greatly energized the Committee, with more actors, perspectives, and progress in a number of critical issues. This movement represents a continuation of that spirit of inclusivity.

Discussion and conclusions

Moderated by Gerda Verburg (Scaling Up Nutrition Movement), participants had the chance to discuss the implications of the PFM to action on the ground. Topics discussed included support to orphan (minor) crops, support to youth engagement and entrepreneurship, reduction of fertilizer dependency and long-term resilience building. Panelists also commented on specific issues about the operationalization of the PFM.

The moderator concluded that this is a great initiative, but one that needs to be shaped further: *“it is important that this go through the frictions, debates, heated debates, so it develops a vision and a consensus to have a principle-based platform; and the need to make those principles public to serve the inclusivity”*. According to her, philanthropic support is not only about funding, but also data, knowledge, capacity strengthening, technology, etc., which have to express the needs of countries and participants that are working to transform food systems.