



Report Card from Reform School **The Committee on World Food Security Passes a Test,** **but...**

Rome, October 14-17, 2009

The food and fuel crisis that only became apparent to OECD governments in early 2008 arrived as the Rome-based UN agencies (FAO, WFP, IFAD) were responding to external and internal evaluations that found all three organizations wanting. Most severely criticized was FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization). In April 2008, the UN Secretary-General took advantage of the crises and the institutional weaknesses of the Rome agencies to establish a High-Level Taskforce involving 22 UN and Bretton Woods institutions to develop a Comprehensive Framework for Action to address the crises. Almost simultaneously, President Sarkozy of France called for a Global Partnership of intergovernmental institutions, the private sector, mega-foundations, and civil society to come together to ensure coordinated action. Sarkozy also proposed the formation of an expert group at FAO that could guide intergovernmental action. By the time the G-8 convened in July 2008 there were still other proposals to create a new financial facility to support agricultural research and development. The very vagueness of the proposed Global Partnership and the prospect of new financial mechanisms rang alarm bells among the beleaguered institutions in Rome. FAO's Director-General countered with the suggestion that the UN/FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) could be transformed into a coordinating body for the UN system in general and the Rome agencies in particular. At a major food conference hosted by Spain in Madrid at the end of January 2009, FAO's DG. and the UN's SG faced off over the alternative proposals. FAO won and it was agreed that, at least for the time being, the CFS would be given a chance to reorganize itself into a stronger inter-agency instrument. Thus began a negotiating process that culminated October 14-17 in Rome at the annual meeting of the Committee on World Food Security. At stake was not so much the future of the CFS as whether or not leadership on food and agricultural issues would remain within the UN system and among the Rome-based agencies -- or, whether some undefined new partnership of public and private interests would take over and possibly move the focus from Rome to New York or Washington. What follows is a brief summary of the events that took place in Rome last week.

When the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was gavelled to a close midday last Saturday, the mood in FAO's Green Room was distinctly celebratory. The Argentinian ambassador who chaired the meeting was beaming from the many well-deserved messages of congratulations delivered during the closing minutes. More surprisingly, the new US ambassador seemed not only happy, but a little emotional and, perhaps, a bit shocked. CSO representatives who had scolded the US two days earlier were queuing up to congratulate her on both the changed US position and the way her delegation worked with other countries. Perhaps the broadest smile in the room belonged to the ambassador from the Dominican Republic who had (somewhat theatrically) warned the meeting late Thursday night that, as chair of the G-77 and China and especially as an ambassador with two cabinet ministers and his country's first lady looking over his shoulder, he couldn't

make any more concessions. Beside him, the Brazilian ambassador (who privately joked that he might have to seek political asylum in the United States) was also full of smiles. From the perspective of most of civil society, neither man had risked anything

While there were no sad faces among the delegations or among the civil society organizations present, the "happy face" on the reps from the World Food Program and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) might have been a trifle forced. Then, too, Dr. David Nabarro, the UN Secretary-General's coordinator for the High-Level Taskforce on Food had already left the night before without making his own assessment known.

The annual meeting of the CFS was the culmination of an eight-month on-going negotiation through the Committee's Bureau and through its specially-crafted contact group. On the Wednesday morning, when the Committee convened, the prospects for a happy ending three days later seemed remote. First of all, despite the months of energetic negotiation, there wasn't really any document to debate. The bureau, without any alternative possibility, did put forward a brief text for the restructuring of the CFS but even that text, authored by a small and not very representative group, came with several critical "square brackets" of disputed text. Surveying the scene on opening day, the gathering convened by the IPC (International NGO-CSO Planning Committee) and other concerned development NGOs, saw several major hurdles...

There didn't seem to be any agreement on either the scope or the mandate of a reformed CFS. Although countries agreed that the new CFS should be country-driven with a bottom-up approach to problem solving, OECD states wanted to freeze the bottom from going up to the global level. Language that went beyond national or regional activities was bracketed. Similarly, the OECD didn't want the CFS to make decisions, monitor decisions, or hold others accountable for agreements reached within the CFS. Far from being an influential coordination body, most OECD states saw a reformed CFS as a "forum" or, as one CSO suggested in the light of the OECD's reluctance to give the CFS a global overview, a "small talk" forum. Meanwhile, the G-77 and China wanted to both think and act locally and globally.

Beyond scope and mandate were also critical issues around structure. The G-77 wanted the CFS to remain as a body of FAO, led by a secretary drawn from the ranks of FAO and answering to the Director-General. Members of the secretariat, however, could be seconded from WFP and IFAD. Conversely, OECD states -- while prepared to let the secretariat be domiciled within FAO -- wanted the position of Secretary to be rotated between the three Rome-based organizations. For administrative purposes, the secretary could even become a temporary employee of FAO.

Underlying many of the concerns was the specter of the G-8's Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security -- an initiative endorsed by the UN Secretary-General and the bright light at the end of David Nabarro's tunnel. Much of the angst around the future form and structure of the CFS was really about the future of France's President Sarkozy's proposal for the Global Partnership and whether or not a reformed CFS could also claim

to be the theoretical global partnership. Jacques Diouf, FAO's Director-General, was insisting that the CFS could do the job while Ban Ki-moon's David Nabarro, was far from enthusiastic. While several OECD states see the Global Partnership as misguided and confusing, they also see the CFS as a creature of FAO -- a body they have come to distrust led by a man they privately vilify. The last thing many countries want to do is give more power to FAO as it struggles through its own reform process.

The mirror reflection of this perspective could be found in the Group of 77 and China. They may not be wild about FAO but they prefer the organizations one-country-one-vote vote decision-making apparatus as far better than the weighted voting systems found at World Food Program (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) or any of the other IFI's (International Financial Institutions) waiting in the wings to take over the leadership role in food and agriculture. The operating assumption by governments from all regions was that if the CFS reform process faltered, the UN Secretary-General would scoop up the G8's proposal to create a hybrid forum -- perhaps in New York -- that would bring together not only the Rome-based agencies and the World Bank but also 19 other UN bodies, private agribusiness, and the philanthro-capitalist foundations such as Bill and Melinda Gates.

There was a growing -- but not complete -- consensus that the reform CFS should be structured to allow an extraordinary level of participation from civil society organizations, especially social movements. Indeed, throughout the eight months of contact group negotiations, CSOs had contributed actively to all levels of negotiation leading up to the October meeting. Nevertheless, the consensus support for CSOs was fragile. Whenever the topic came up, China looked a little green around the gills and the US fidgeted. Across the regions, a fair number of other countries also seemed less than thrilled by the presence of CSOs.

So, the battle in the Green Room was drawn into three camps: the "anyplace but FAO" camp; the "only FAO" camp; and the (motley and divided) "Global Partnership/Reformed CFS" camp. The delegates spent most of the first day (Wednesday) shadow-boxing. CSOs intervened several times to try to bring clarity and reality to the debate with limited success. On the second day, the US delegation walked into the plenary room with its own proposed reform text. Neither the Swedish delegation (holding a EU presidency) nor the Canadian delegation (arguably closest to the US both geographically and politically) claimed to have seen the US document in advance. While the text did leave open more than one language option, it was clearly intended to turn the CFS into the much-feared "smalltalk" forum with only a regional and national mandate to make suggestions and propose evaluation methodologies. The CFS would have no mandate to make decisions. It could only offer suggestions and develop voluntary guidelines and only then at the national or regional level.

By mid-morning, the US realized it had gone too far and began to insist that it was not really proposing alternative text -- only responding to the request of some governments to put its general views in writing. Somewhere during the course of the day, a man who was introduced to CSOs as being from the White House quietly appeared within the US

delegation and the tone -- which had never been hostile -- became more friendly and conciliatory. A contact group was cobbled together that included the full participation of civil society. The group worked extremely effectively until evening when it moved back into the plenary Green Room. For all practical purposes, the working group was the plenary but it kept on working on the Bureau's draft (the US text was long forgotten) very efficiently until well past midnight. Much to their own surprise, the delegates had a reformed CFS. And, the reformed Committee looked much more like the creature proposed by the Group of 77 and China than anything conceived by the OECD. Saturday morning, the reform report was adopted, en bloc, unanimously. Somehow, everybody seemed happy.

Except, perhaps, David Nabarro and civil society. The following day -- World Food Day -- meant a suspension of the CFS negotiations to be continued on Saturday. In a side-event organized around the Right to Food, Nabarro was pointedly asked if he was content with the outcome of the CFS negotiations. During a long, rambling, and sometimes impassioned response, Nabarro effectively sidestepped the question. The message was, clearly, that he was not a happy camper. He was on an airplane before World Food Day rang down.

The IPC's reactions (along with others in civil society) were more mixed. The reform of the CFS was never intended as an exercise to strengthen FAO. FAO is in desperate need of major changes and the process of change within the organization has moved erratically. Reform is also needed among the other Rome-based agencies and all would benefit from a strengthened CFS that could really hold them all to account. CSOs also wanted to add the fourth Rome-based agency -- the Consultative of Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) which also has a beachhead in Rome and is considering moving a portion of its new secretariat to the city. Several countries supported the inclusion of the CGIAR -- and the spokesperson for Bioversity International in the room was quite enthusiastic -- but the CGIAR does not appear as the fourth agency in the final text.

A somewhat shifting group of about 20 CSOs attended the CFS and met often twice a day under the general leadership of the IPC. The group worked very well together and had no difficulty identifying spokespersons and representatives capable of speaking on behalf of everyone during the three days of meetings. CSOs participated actively in the plenary debate but also had three representatives inside the contact Group as well as "silent observers" in the drafting committee. Government delegations from all perspectives were impressed by CSO participation which was reserved and balanced. While we were generally in solidarity with the G-77, we also made it clear -- more than once -- that we disagreed with the G-77 on the position of the future Secretary to the CFS. CSOs wanted the position rotated among the Rome-based agencies. We were also adamant that the World Bank and other IFIs should not be included in the CFS secretariat. The final text does not make space for them.

This is not the end of the reform process -- neither for the CFS nor FAO. The report of the CFS will go to the FAO Conference November 18-23. It is unlikely -- almost

impossible in fact -- for any substantial changes to be made to the report at the conference. However, the FAO Conference can still influence personnel, timetables, and other institutional issues that could significantly impact the substance of the work ahead. En route to the FAO Conference lies the World Food Summit (November 16-18) which will comment on CFS reform and, possibly, on the future of the Global Partnership and even the High-Level Task Force. Anything the summit says about any of this could have repercussions.

The CFS process leaves us with some outstanding questions. Why did the US government change its position so quickly? Is it really true that OECD states have decided to support the CFS reform process as the "hub" (to use David Nabarro's words) of the world's structural response to the food crisis? Why was there such close collaboration between Brazil and the United States?

Although there are rumors to the contrary, it is most unlikely that the White House suddenly sent a staffer to Rome to straighten out US negotiators over the reformed CFS. This just doesn't make sense. It is possible, however, that the White House had someone in Rome -- or coming to Rome -- anyway in order to negotiate details around the World Food Summit and, catching wind of divisions in the Green Room -- stepped into make sure feelings of peace and love will reign during the Summit. In fact, the presence of someone from the White House stimulates speculation that either the US President or the Secretary of State will attend the Summit. Brazil may have to been responding to loftier affairs of state. A new DG will have to be elected in June 2011 and it is taken as an article of faith that the next FAO leader should come from Latin America (the only region that has never had the post). Within GRULAC (Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries), the operating assumption is that the candidate will be somebody from Brazil -- either the Brazilian ADG for Latin America (a buddy of Lula's) or Lula himself -- a man soon without a job. If Brazil wants the DG post it may also want progress on reform in Rome and the support of a friend in Washington.

So, is the reform process in the CFS well on its way? Basically, yes. But it is simply not true that OECD states are content to strengthen FAO at this time. The deal that was brokered in Rome short days ago is not geopolitically logical or institutionally balanced. The CFS will revisit some of the structural decisions at its next meeting. In the meantime, David Nabarro still has a mandate to support a Global Partnership somewhere in the world; the World Bank is still going to soak up the lion's share of the \$20 billion promised by the G20; and a whole flock of presidents and prime ministers are about to descend on Rome to tell the world's one billion hungry that they feel their pain.

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