

# Bridging the Divide

## The reform of global food security governance

**Governments are legally bound to ensure the right to food for all. Nevertheless, today there are one billion hungry people in the world and millions more are food insecure. The 2009 World Summit on Food Security offers a unique opportunity to develop a system of global food security governance that bridges the divide between the conflicting visions and interests of global political, financial, and technical mechanisms. In particular, world leaders should ensure the active participation of governments and civil-society organisations representing the poorest and most vulnerable people. At the Summit, world leaders must stop acting in narrow national and corporate interests, and start acting in the interests of international food security, peace, and stability.**

# Introduction

Another World Food Summit is being held in Rome to discuss world food security, in the midst of a chronic global food crisis in which one billion (one in six) people go to bed hungry every day of their shortened lives.<sup>1</sup> During the two-and-a-half days of the Summit, more than 60,000 people, 70 per cent of them children, will die of hunger-related causes.<sup>2</sup>

Governments are legally obliged to ensure the right to food for all.<sup>3</sup> In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), governments have also committed to reduce by half the proportion of hungry people in the world by 2015. However, they are seriously off-track in meeting these existing goals and commitments.

One significant reason highlighted by Oxfam<sup>4</sup> and others to explain the inability to reduce hunger and malnutrition, is the failure of global food security governance. The governance system should:

- Provide an enabling international environment for the promotion and protection of the right to adequate food;
- Develop effective and coherent global policies and regulations to address the trans-boundary causes of food insecurity;
- Ensure the provision of co-ordinated policy, technical, and financial assistance in support of regional and country-led processes.<sup>5</sup>

The global food price crisis has highlighted to many governments that global institutions and forums are failing to perform these roles. There is a need for radical reform, especially if the world is to meet a near doubling in demand for food by 2050, in the face of added risks from climate change.

Reform of the global system of food security governance is a major topic of discussion at the Summit. This briefing note exposes some of the key problems with the current system; looks at ongoing reform processes; and proposes improvements for urgent consideration during the Summit.

## 2

# Unfit for purpose

*Existing global inter-governmental forums are failing to develop effective and coherent policies and regulations to address global determinants of food security.*

In an increasingly globalised world, many determinants of food security are trans-boundary and require multilateral agreements if they are to be addressed. Among these determinants are climate change, natural resource management, trade in food, agricultural subsidies, speculation and price volatility, market concentration, land outsourcing, and management of food stocks. Increasingly, the policies of one country impact upon food security in others.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) was established in 1945 as a neutral forum to address such policy issues. However, according to an independent external evaluation, its 'role in global governance has declined in comparison with that of others [global forums]'.<sup>6</sup> For example, 'trade in agricultural and food products has become principally the purview of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, FAO remains the only organisation with the mandate to address many issues, especially those to do with agricultural production and the management of natural resources. However, its membership has generally failed to give serious consideration to its global governance role.<sup>8</sup>

One of FAO's technical committees, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), was intended to serve as a forum for the review and follow-up of policies concerning all aspects of world food security.<sup>9</sup> However, it has lacked high-level political involvement, it has not adequately considered ways of improving food access and utilisation in addition to availability, and it has failed to adequately involve other UN agencies and civil society.

As the role of FAO and its technical committees has declined, the influence of other organisations has increased – but often in ways which have contributed to, rather than reduced, food insecurity. Historically, the WTO, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have forced developing countries to rapidly open their markets, undermining local production and trade through cheap imports, and resulting in increasing dependence on global markets. Global institutions have encroached on the policy space of developing countries, while failing to ensure that the policies of rich countries do not impact negatively on food security. Agricultural subsidies in rich countries, combined with unfair trade rules, have destroyed livelihoods and contributed to increased hunger and malnutrition in poor countries.<sup>10</sup>

In the power vacuum created by an absence of effective global food security governance, according to Oxfam's analysis,<sup>11</sup> powerful trans-national companies have been left free to engage in investment, trading, and employment practices that contribute to poverty and food insecurity. These companies are unrestrained by anything other than weak voluntary guidelines.

Countries are already obliged to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and to ensure the right to food for all. But most have not committed to a date by when they are going to do this. MDG 1 is a commitment to reduce only by half the proportion of hungry people by 2015.<sup>12</sup> Even if this is achieved, millions of people will still be hungry and malnourished.

*There is a failure to translate global commitments into co-ordinated and coherent action at country level and to hold all governments and global institutions to account.*

Despite the development of FAO's *Voluntary Guidelines on the Progressive Realisation of the Right to Adequate Food*,<sup>13</sup> few developing-country governments have produced national strategies or plans describing how they intend to honour their international commitments. Food security has not been a priority within overall national development plans and budgets, and responsibility is dispersed across different government departments. Civil-society organisations (CSOs) comprised of, or working with, small farmers and other food insecure people have not been adequately involved in national food security governance mechanisms.

In the past 20 years, smallholder agriculture and other sectors relating to food security have been massively under-funded by developing countries and international donors. Most African countries are failing to honour the Maputo Commitment to devote 10 per cent of their expenditure to agriculture. Donor governments decreased their aid to agriculture by 58 per cent in real terms between 1980 and 2005. The share of agriculture in total official development assistance (ODA) fell from 17 per cent in 1980 to 3.8 per cent in 2006, and the same trends have been observed in national budgets.

*There has been chronic public under-investment by governments and donors in small-scale agriculture and social protection in developing countries.*

The provision of food aid has expanded to partially fill the gap left by the erosion of countries' social protection mechanisms. Despite significant shifts in policy, emergency and safety-net programmes are still dominated by international, in-kind food aid. There is relatively little funding for direct cash assistance to buy food locally, for local procurement programmes, or for livelihoods protection and recovery. The Food Aid Convention (FAC) should guarantee annual, predictable disbursements of food aid, but it has been fairly ineffective in doing so over the four decades of its existence.<sup>14</sup> There is no mechanism to ensure that the resources allocated under the FAC are prioritised for the neediest countries or are of the right kind – for instance, cash or agricultural inputs. Nor is there a means to ensure that donors honour their commitments.

Accountability mechanisms are inadequate to monitor the delivery on commitments and obligations by all governments, rich and poor. The CFS was intended to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action adopted by the 1996 World Food Summit. However, reporting by governments has often been tokenistic and there has been little follow-up on reports. UN agencies and civil society have critical roles to play in monitoring delivery on commitments, but have not had the opportunity to participate actively within the CFS.

## Reform: a work in progress

A number of initiatives are under way in an attempt to improve the functioning of global governance. They include: the reform of the CFS; FAO reform; the 'L'Aquila Food Security Initiative'; the reform of the FAC; World Food Programme's (WFP) strategic shift to become a food assistance (as opposed to a solely food aid) agency; the High Level Task Force (HLTF) and the Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA); and proposals for an emergency food security cluster. Oxfam welcomes many aspects of these ongoing reform processes but is also concerned that there is a lack of integration between the initiatives.

Oxfam appreciates the renewed political emphasis on food security, particularly small-scale agriculture and social protection, within a comprehensive approach. It also appreciates the desire to see rapid, accountable disbursement of the \$20 bn pledged in 2009 in support of country-led programmes. However, the world's hungry and food insecure people have heard many promises that have never turned into resources in their hands or food on their plates. Well below fifty per cent of the \$20 bn is likely to be new money<sup>15</sup>.

*Reform in whose interests?  
Rich countries and trans-  
national agribusiness or  
small scale food producers  
and poor consumers in  
developing countries?*

There is a risk of widening fault lines between the political, financial, and operational components of global governance that are contributing to the world's failure to ensure the right to food for all. In particular, there is a divide between the initiative to reform the CFS into the effective political hub of the system of global governance, and the L'Aquila Initiative, focusing on increased financing, partly through a new trust fund overseen by the World Bank.

Oxfam is concerned that some rich countries may seek to hinder the implementation of the CFS reform, preventing it from becoming the foremost political mechanism of global governance. The exclusion of developing-country governments and civil society from the governance of the proposed World Bank trust fund, as well as the lack of linkages to the CFS in the early drafts of the fund's plan, suggests that this is business-as-usual rather than the necessary radical reform. Oxfam is also concerned that allocation of funds will be conditional upon further liberalisation of developing-country economies, opening them up to the benefit of trans-national agribusinesses rather than small-scale producers and traders in poor countries.

### Different views ...

Various proposals for reform have been made, often with the promise of a 'global partnership'. The first of these was made in mid-2008 by President Sarkozy of France, for the establishment of a global partnership consisting of political, technical, and financial pillars. This was criticised by some developing countries and by CSOs because it was G8-led and risked excluding them from decision-making processes. Different governments have different visions of what a

reformed system of global food security governance should look like. Some developing countries, such as Brazil, see a reformed CFS as the basis for an inclusive global partnership. Some G8 countries prefer to see a global partnership as a 'coalition of the willing', unencumbered by complex, multilateral discussions.

## ... and different interests

The different views reflect, to some extent, the old divides between rich and poor countries. Developing countries want a leading role for UN institutions, which they see as being more supportive of their interests, especially FAO. In FAO and the CFS, one country equals one vote, while in the World Bank and IMF votes depend upon dollars contributed. Many rich countries do not like a system where they are the major contributors but not the decision-makers.

Some of the Latin American and Caribbean (GRULAC) group of countries have already made strong commitments to the eradication of hunger and malnutrition, and are keen to play a leading role on the world stage; a reformed CFS would provide an excellent platform for them. There are other high-burden countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, which have remained silent in the debates, in part because they are unwilling to be held accountable for failing to reduce hunger without the guarantee of long-term, predictable support from donors.

*Underlying the failures of global food security governance and concerns about reform processes is a crisis of multilateralism.*

Some rich countries, such as France and Italy, are more favourable to the Rome-based agencies (FAO, WFP, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD]) than the World Bank and IMF. While recognising its major failures and limitations, they are supportive of a radically reformed CFS as the only chance to build a strong political pillar within a global governance framework. Key conditions of their support are that the CFS addresses all aspects of food security, and that it effectively reports to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the governing bodies of other UN institutions in addition to FAO.

Since July 2008, the L'Aquila Initiative has shaken the political landscape. This initiative has one thing that the CFS does not have: money. At the meeting hosted by Hilary Clinton and Ban Ki-moon at the UN on 26 September 2009, there was active participation from some African countries likely to benefit financially from the strong pledges of support to national programmes.<sup>16</sup> Those countries that most need donor support may be forced to align themselves with the money.

There is a disconnect between the statements of principle of the L'Aquila Initiative and the content of the proposals that some donor governments are promoting. On the one hand, developing countries are being encouraged to develop national plans but on the other some rich countries appear intent on imposing policy conditions and governance mechanisms of their own choice, rather than through the reformed CFS.

# Recommendations: bridging the divide

Quick fixes, like setting up a new global fund, will not address the systemic problems which have hampered efforts to ensure food security until now. The World Summit on Food Security is a unique opportunity to forge a new system which bridges the divide between the political, financial, and technical pillars of global food security governance and supports countries to eradicate hunger and malnutrition and realise the right to food for all. See Annex for a diagram suggesting relationships between the different components of the system described below.

World leaders must promote reform based on the following principles:

## 1. Commitment and ambition

*Renew their commitment to MDG 1 (to halve hunger by 2015), and endorse a global goal to eradicate hunger and malnutrition within an ambitious, realistic, and specific timeframe*

An eradication goal should encourage an intensification of efforts to achieve MDG 1 and move beyond it to the complete eradication of hunger and malnutrition. Governments should not just rely on hand-outs to feed people. There is a need for a 'triple-track' approach which addresses people's immediate food needs, promotes sustainable livelihoods, and ensures people's right to food. If the world wants to end hunger and malnutrition forever, it has the financial and technical means to do so, but there must be the political will and action *now*.

*Turn the global goal into country-specific objectives by each country agreeing to sign a National Declaration of Commitment (DoC) to achieve MDG1 by 2015 and to eradicate hunger and malnutrition in its territory within an ambitious, realistic, and specific timeframe*

Governments must turn the global goal into country-specific, time-bound objectives against which they can be held to account by their citizens and the international community. The DoC should represent a reaffirmation of existing commitments and obligations to promote the right to food and additionally state country-specific timeframes for reduction and eradication. The DoC should be endorsed by development partners at national level and provide a means of formalising national food security and nutrition frameworks involving mutual obligations to work together towards the common, national goal.

## 2. Action and accountability

### *Commit to implement comprehensive National Plans of Action for food security and nutrition*

Promises to end hunger are not enough. Commitments should be backed up by comprehensive, costed National Plans of Action which specify the actions that the government and partners will take to achieve the national goals and to implement the FAO *Voluntary Guidelines for the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food*.<sup>17</sup> Plans should be integrated with wider national development plans and budgets, and should specify the individual roles and commitments of different stakeholders to enable in-country monitoring of delivery. Wherever possible, donors should support national plans by channelling aid through government budgets as general- or sector-budget support and guarantee funds for a minimum of three years.

### *Agree to deposit National Declarations of Commitment and Plans of Action in an International Public Register of Commitments (IPRC)*

To ensure accountability, all governments should deposit their Declarations of Commitment and Plans of Action in an IPRC, to be administered by the reformed CFS Advisory Group and agree to in-country monitoring of the delivery of commitments. The IPRC would provide information on the commitments, plans, and expenditure of national governments; the international financial and technical assistance required by each country; and the country -specific commitments and disbursements made by donors and multilateral institutions in support of national plans.

## 3. Participation, co-ordination, and leadership

### *Endorse reform of the Committee on World Food Security in order that it can become the central high-level political pillar of global food security governance*

Member States should endorse the reform plan agreed during the 35th Session of the CFS and empower the Bureau to move ahead with rapid implementation. During implementation, the scope and limits to the role of the CFS and its relationship with other global institutions, forums, and mechanisms need to be more clearly defined. The CFS should deal with issues that cannot be addressed by Member States and regional entities alone. The CFS should be responsible for developing effective and coherent global policies and regulations to address the trans-boundary causes of food insecurity in the interests of food-insecure people in ways that no other global political forums are doing. Based upon lessons learnt from local level and high level expert advice it should endorse enhanced guidelines on the realisation of the right to



food; inform, and be informed by, member institutions of the HLTF and civil society through the Advisory Group; and inform the allocation of financial assistance in support of regional and country plans. The CFS should oversee the IPRC and facilitate in-country monitoring. In order to ensure flexibility and efficiency, the Bureau and Advisory Group should be empowered to undertake tasks between plenary sessions.

*Ensure that international funding mechanisms respect key governance principles and are informed by the CFS*

Existing and new funding mechanisms should have governance structures which allow the participation of developing countries, and CSOs as well as relevant UN agencies and programmes. Selected representatives of the CFS Bureau should participate in the steering committee of any new fund and members of the CFS Advisory Group should be involved in the Technical Advisory Committee. Plans and reports on the allocation of funds should be submitted to the IPRC. The CFS Bureau and Advisory Group should facilitate in-country monitoring of the use of funds and report to CFS plenary sessions. Disbursements should not be conditional on specific policy measures, but should be based on needs and on the existence of credible national and regional action plans.

*Endorse the reform of the Food Aid Convention (FAC) into a Food Assistance Convention*

The FAC should be reformed in order to improve the effectiveness of food assistance so that it supports, rather than risks undermining, local agriculture and trade. It should ensure the provision of long-term, predictable, untied resources to support emergency food assistance and hunger safety-net programmes. Such commitments should be binding, as with the current FAC, and should be reported in a standardised format to the proposed IPRC. The Food Aid Committee of the FAC should be taken out of the International Grains Council and put under the umbrella of the reformed CFS becoming the norm-setting body for food assistance activities. The CFS Bureau and Advisory Group should facilitate the involvement of recipient governments, UN agencies, and civil society in the FAC governance mechanism.

*Ensure that FAO has the money it needs to reform with growth, and encourage its senior management to speed up the reform process*

As recommended in the Independent External Evaluation, it is vital that FAO is reformed with growth, in order that it can play its distinctive role in the governance of food security, particularly in relation to agriculture and natural resources. However, FAO's senior management must work harder to increase the speed and effectiveness of reform and ensure that the organisation works in collaboration with other institutions.

*The role of the UN HLTF should be clearly defined, its mandate extended, and its co-ordination capacity enhanced*

The HLTF should provide a co-ordination mechanism which:

- Ensures coherent global advice to governments through the participation of its member institutions in the CFS Advisory Group;
- Ensures the co-ordinated provision of political, financial, and technical support by its members to regional and country-led processes;
- Facilitates the monitoring of national funding requirements, informs the allocation of international financing, and monitors the delivery and impacts of international assistance.

In order to ensure efficiency in co-ordination and implementation, the HLTF should continue to be led by the UN Secretary-General.

*Invite CSOs, NGOs, and their networks to autonomously establish a global co-ordination mechanism*

The CSO/NGO co-ordination mechanism will facilitate participation in the CFS, its Advisory Group, and other mechanisms of global governance, such as technical advisory committees of funds and conventions. Civil society, particularly organisations of farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, landless peoples, urban poor, agricultural and food workers, women, youth, consumers, and indigenous peoples, has a critical role to play in informing the development of global policies, regulations and financial decision-making as well as monitoring and reporting on progress at national, regional, and global levels.

*Request that FAO, WFP, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), other relevant UN agencies, and NGOs discuss the establishment of an Emergency Food Security Cluster*

There is a need to consider an emergency food security co-ordination mechanism that would bring together the UN, the Red Cross movement, and NGOs, and ensure co-ordination with national governments. The mechanism would ensure the provision of emergency food security assistance and enable its membership to work together to improve performance, notably by assessing needs, prioritising, and filling gaps in the provision of aid. It would facilitate integrated plans and responses thereby improving the coherence between food assistance (food aid, cash transfers, and vouchers) and agricultural and other forms of livelihood support in emergencies.

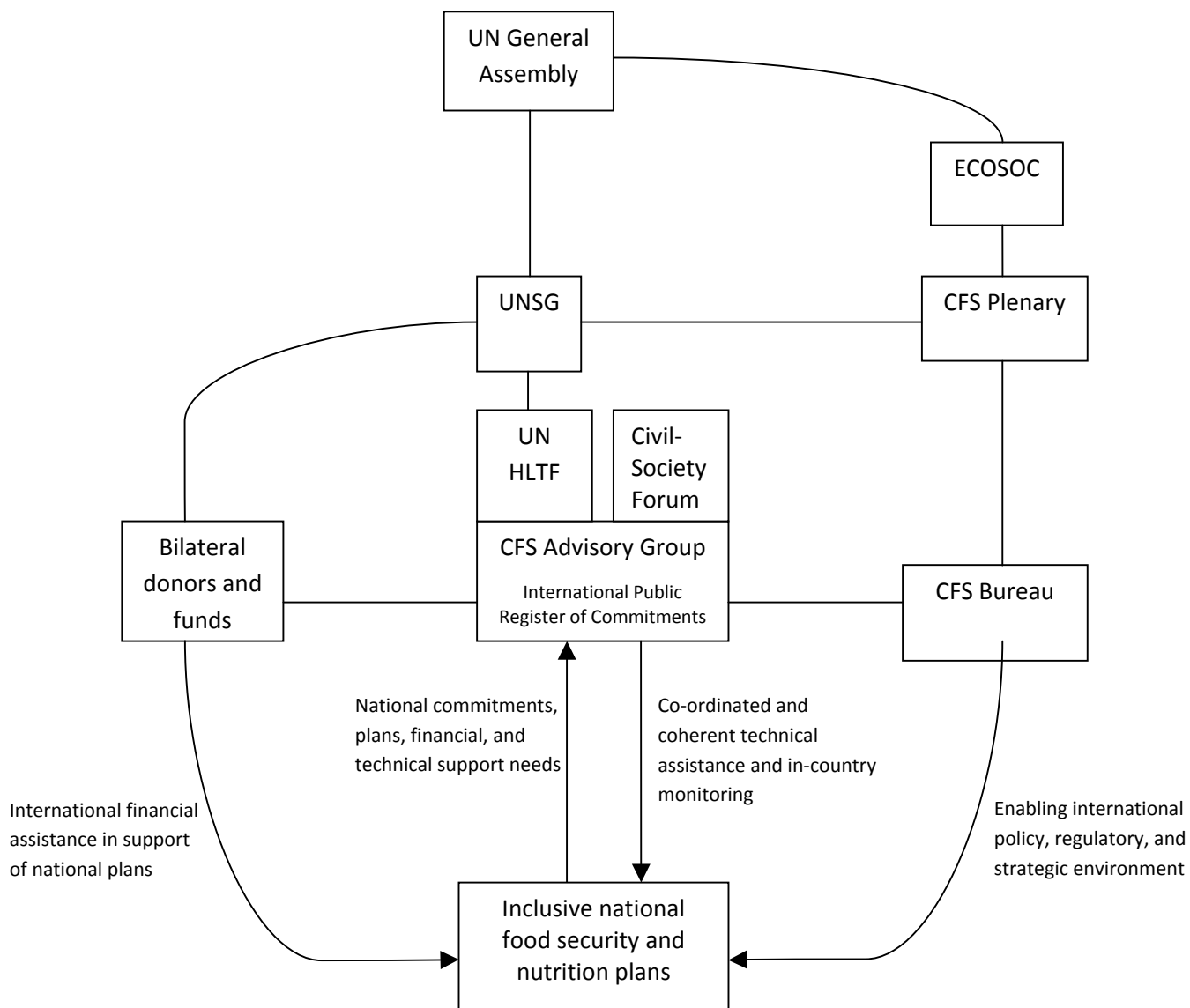
*Request the UN Secretary-General to take the lead in co-ordinating and strengthening the UN system in support of effective global food security governance*

The UN Secretary-General, through the UN Special Representative on Food Security and Nutrition, must provide strong leadership in order to facilitate coherent system-wide support to the reformed CFS and help bridge the divide between the political, financial, and technical

pillars of global food security governance to enable countries to realise their commitments and obligations to ensure the right to food for all.

# Annex

## Towards an effective system of global food security governance?



# Notes

<sup>1</sup> FAO (2009), '1.02 billion people hungry', FAO, 19 June 2009.  
[www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/20568/icode/](http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/20568/icode/)

<sup>2</sup> WFP, [www.wfp.org/hunger/stats](http://www.wfp.org/hunger/stats).

<sup>3</sup> Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has the right to adequate food and to be free from hunger. Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights makes this commitment a legally binding obligation.

<sup>4</sup> The main determinants of food insecurity described are, at national and sub-national level: lack of investment in small-scale agriculture in developing countries; erosion of social-protection mechanisms; conflicts; natural resource degradation; lack of sensitivity in policy-making to the circumstances of women and girls; and marginalisation of poor people in decision-making. At global (trans-boundary) level, they are: the impact of structural adjustment programmes; inadequate assistance for agriculture and social protection; unfair trade rules; agricultural policies of rich countries; the practices of agribusiness and other transnationals; and the marginalisation of poor governments, countries, and people in decision-making. See: Oxfam International (2009) 'A Billion Hungry People', Oxford: Oxfam, [www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp127-billion-hungry-people](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp127-billion-hungry-people); Oxfam International (2008) 'Double-edged Prices', Oxford: Oxfam, [www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp121-double-edged-prices](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp121-double-edged-prices); [www.oxfam.org/en/policy/the-time-is-now](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/the-time-is-now); Oxfam International (2008) 'The Time is Now', Oxford: Oxfam, Oxfam International (2006), 'Causing Hunger', Oxford: Oxfam, [www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp91\\_africa\\_food\\_crisis](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp91_africa_food_crisis).

<sup>5</sup> A global food security governance system should fulfil the following functions:

Goals: defining specific, measurable, time-bound global development goals.

Strategy: developing the global strategic framework to achieve the eradication of hunger and food security for all, describing the needs to be addressed, when, and by whom.

Policy and regulation: developing effective, coherent, and empirically informed global policies and regulations for addressing the trans-boundary causes of hunger and food insecurity.

Technical: providing co-ordinated technical and operational assistance in support of regional and country-led processes.

Knowledge: ensuring that policies and programmes are informed by scientifically rigorous knowledge.

Financial: providing adequate financial resources according to national and regional requirements.

Accountability: monitoring delivery against commitments and progress in national programme implementation.

<sup>6</sup> Independent External Evaluation of FAO, p.173.  
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/012/k0827e02.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> CFS was established as a result of the food crisis of the 1970s, following recommendations from the 1974 World Food Conference.

<sup>10</sup> Oxfam International (2002) 'Rigged Rules and Double Standards', Oxford: Oxfam, [www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/papers/tradereport.html](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/papers/tradereport.html).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/).

<sup>13</sup> [www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM](http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM).

<sup>14</sup> Oxfam International (2009) 'A Billion Hungry People', Oxford: Oxfam, [www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp127-billion-hungry-people](http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/bp127-billion-hungry-people)

<sup>15</sup> HLTF Coordinator Consultation with NGOs and CSOs, 6 October 2009.

<sup>16</sup> In particular, national programmes under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), as part of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) of the African Union.

<sup>17</sup> [www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM](http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/009/y9825e/y9825e00.HTM).

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