



**Committee on World Food Security**  
Mary Robinson – Keynote Speech, 13 October 2015  
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*Title: Food Security and Nutrition in the Post 2015 Development  
Agenda – Goals, Action and Outcomes*

I am delighted to be here in Rome to be part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Committee on World Food Security, particularly at this point in 2015 as we enter a new era committed to sustainable development.

I was last in Rome this July, for a conference organised by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and CIDSE to discuss the Papal Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Under the theme of Respect for our Common Home, as articulated in the Encyclical, we considered how to meet the needs of people, and in particular those living in situations of vulnerability, while also safeguarding the earth and its resources. Pope Francis sees no distinction between the '*cry of the poor and the cry of the earth*'. If we deprive people of their rights, of their dignity, we can be sure that we are treating the earth, our common home, with a similar lack of respect. The Post 2015 Development Agenda reflects this connection between people and planet that is at the heart of sustainable development.

Back in 2000 we set ourselves the goal of halving, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. Progress has been made:

Levels of hunger in the developing world have declined by more than one-quarter since 2000<sup>1</sup> and the target of reducing extreme poverty rates by half was met five years ahead of the 2015 deadline.

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<sup>1</sup> Global Hunger Index 2015

However, despite the progress made, 795 million people still go hungry, more than one in four children are affected by stunting, and nine percent of children are affected by wasting. The 2015 Global Hunger Index reveals that levels of hunger remain ‘serious’ or ‘alarming’ in 52 of the 117 countries with GHI scores. This is unacceptable - we need to do much more.

The Sustainable Development Goals give us a fresh chance to demonstrate political leadership and to strengthen international food security policy. Last month member states of the United Nations committed to work together<sup>2</sup>, and in partnership with civil society, business and other stakeholders, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere and to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. These are SDGs 1 and 2 – they come at the top of the list of 17 because they are critical to human dignity. But they cannot be achieved without progress on the other 15 goals which address both the drivers and the outcomes of poverty, hunger and nutrition.

The drivers of food and nutrition insecurity include climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, gender inequality, water scarcity, over fishing, over consumption, lack of access to electricity, conflict and inequality. Each of these is addressed by an SDG – so making progress on goal 2 requires progress on all of the others. The experience of the MDGs has shown that addressing the goals in isolation, and addressing the environmental, social and economic aspects of development separately, limits success. This time round we need to be steadfast in our commitment to make equal progress on all of the goals, conscious of their interdependence and the co-benefits to be captured through coherent approaches. Because we know that if we make progress on food security and nutrition we will create co-benefits for SDG 3 on health and for SDG 4 on education.

The SDGs are of course universal and they bind countries together, regardless of their level of development. All countries are challenged to end malnutrition - even the most developed are still home to people who are undernourished. Given the interconnected web of global trade our food system is complex, making all countries interdependent. Countries need each other and will have to work together if they are to achieve and sustain the new global goals. A well-functioning food system will also provide opportunities for decent work (SDG 8), reduce inequality (SDG 10) and contribute to cities that are healthy and sustainable (SDG 11).

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<sup>2</sup> TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Everything is linked. Importantly this does not mean that it is too complex to manage. It means that the opportunities to catalyse transformative change are immense when we get behind the right actions and engage people fully in their implementation.

For me there are some critical elements at the heart of making the SDGs an effective set of tools through which to achieve transformative change. These are gender equality, action on climate change and human rights.

These critical elements are central to realising climate justice - that is, achieving a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.

We must ensure that people are at the centre of all action to achieve the sustainable development goals. This may sound obvious but we must learn from lessons of the past. Sometimes – I would say all too often - the very people we seek to help are excluded from the decision making that affects their lives.

The Post 2015 development agenda must leave no-one behind. It is, after all, a commitment to realising a world where the ‘dignity of the human person is fundamental’ and where, in the words of the Declaration, ‘we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first’. This focus on meeting the needs of people in the most vulnerable situations is at the heart of climate justice, which seeks to amplify their voices and ensure their full participation in all aspects of development.

This takes me to the first critical element of the SDGs: gender equality. If we are to achieve SDG 2 and end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture we have to empower women and girls. The FAO has furnished us with the latest evidence – if women were given the same access to productive resources as men, they would increase yields by 2.4-4%, which according to estimates would reduce the number of hungry people by 12-17%<sup>3</sup>. Empowering women to be at the heart of all action on nutrition would have positive impacts for both women and their families; when women have more influence over economic decisions in the household they allocate more income to food, health, education and children’s nutrition<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> FAO, 2010- 2011. State of Food and Agriculture. Women in Agriculture.

<sup>4</sup> CFS multiyear programme of work 2016-2017

Undoubtedly gender equality is easier to talk about than it is to achieve. Over the last few years I have been championing women's empowerment and gender equality in my role as a member of the Lead Group of the SUN movement. A recent evaluation of the Movement was upfront in revealing the real world challenges of putting a commitment to gender equality into practice on the ground in SUN countries. It noted that cultural norms, competing policy priorities and capacity and resource constraints can impede progress. The next phase of the SUN Movement's work will address this challenge head on, and seek to support SUN country governments, civil society, UN, donor and private sector partners to make gender equality a cornerstone of how the Movement achieves its goals.

I am pleased to see that women's empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition will be on the agenda for a CFS Forum in 2017, building on the policy recommendations on gender, food security and nutrition adopted by the Commission in 2011.

Clearly there is a need to share examples, learn lessons, develop best practice as well as to identify the additional supports needed to achieve gender equality and ensure that all food and nutrition actions are gender responsive.

When my Foundation held a conference with the Government of Ireland in 2013 on Hunger-Nutrition –Climate Justice one of the case studies that informed the meeting was from the Maradi region of Niger. It showed that when women were able to access information about their rights and subsequently realise their land rights – they were able to grow food to provide for their families and to earn an income. Aichatou Salaou, who presented the case study at the conference, told the story of Rahamou, from a village called Sarkin Yamma. Married with eight children when her father died Rahamou did not know that she had rights to his land. When she learned about her rights she was able to claim her share of the land from her brothers and grow millet, sorghum and beans to feed her family. The women in Rahamou's village were also empowered through access to training and microfinance which enabled them to adopt new farming practices and improved seeds to increase their resilience to drought –droughts that are becoming more frequent and more extreme due to climate change.

Climate change, covered under SDG 13, is the second critical element I would like to highlight. Action on climate change will have direct implications for the achievement of SDGs 1 and 2. Left unchecked, climate change has the potential to wipe out the development gains of recent decades.

The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) tells us that climate related hazards will exacerbate the challenges faced by the poorest and most vulnerable people by negatively affecting their livelihoods. In the context of food security and the right to food, the Fifth Assessment Report finds that all aspects of food security will be threatened, including production, access and price stability. To quote the IPCC ‘the climate threat constrains possible development paths, and sufficiently disruptive climate change could preclude any prospect for a sustainable future’, therefore, ‘a stable climate is one component of Sustainable Development’.

The Committee on World Food Security has been conscious of the links between climate change and food security for many years and adopted policy recommendations on food security and climate change in 2012. The negotiations on a new climate agreement that will conclude at COP 21 in Paris later this year will set the parameters for future action on climate change in countries around the world. This will include both measures to adapt to the impacts of climate change as well as measures to reduce emissions from the agriculture and food production. A large number of countries have already submitted their national contributions to climate action, called INDCs, and in many cases these include activities in the agriculture sector. Likewise the adaptation plans of LDCs, SIDS and other developing countries consistently prioritise actions in the area of food security and agriculture.

As countries develop climate policies in response to the new climate agreement, and as countries develop their plans to implement the SDGs, there will be opportunities to integrate food and nutrition into climate action and climate into policies on food and nutrition, health and agriculture. In this way country plans for the SDGs have great potential to accelerate action on climate change so that emissions peak in 2020 and that resilience is built to cope with climate risk. This is the scale and urgency of the action needed to avoid global temperature rise in excess of 2°C. To exceed this upper limit of warming is to undermine the rights of people around the world – to further compound the injustice many are already experiencing due to climate impacts they have no part in causing.

Although climate change has not traditionally been approached through a rights lens, being for many an environmental issue, this is changing as a climate justice narrative develops around the world.

The grounding of the SDGs in human rights also helps to place climate impacts and climate action in the context of rights. In the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development the countries of the world envisage *‘a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.’*

The CFS is equally guided by human rights. The 2009 reform document states that the CFS *‘strives for a world free from hunger where countries implement the voluntary guidelines for the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.’*

The challenge now is to ensure that, in the implementation of the SDGs, human rights inform all development and climate actions both to avoid any undue harm and to maximise the benefits of the actions to people.

My Foundation has been documenting examples of human rights informing sustainable development and climate actions to allow experiences to be shared and lessons to be learned. One such example comes from the livestock sector in Costa Rica where a constitutional commitment to the right to a healthy environment informs a programme to reduce emissions. Critical to the success of the programme is the realisation of the rights to participation and to access to information. With knowledge of the benefits of the programme and access to training and credit, the farmers can engage meaningfully in the programme. We learned about the benefits to farming families, like Eduardo and Janet Obando who run a small family livestock farm near Puntarenas. These families experience improved food security and nutrition as their livestock thrive, they receive a more stable income to fund their children’s education, their resilience in the face of drought increases. They are both contributing to and benefiting from a healthy environment.

In the complex and often fragmented architecture of the intergovernmental response to food security and nutrition it can be challenging for those looking in to understand the different complementary roles played by the various institutions. One opportunity in the new era is to communicate clearly the role of the different players in the field of food security and nutrition. As the CFS has a governance role in this regard it is well placed to create the right

enabling environment for stakeholder coordination and collaboration, and to communicate this to the wider world.

Looking at the remit of the CFS I see three strands of your work that need to be harnessed to deliver the post 2015 development agenda.

The first is the bridging role you play between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals at the international level and the work by UN agencies, countries and regional organisations, civil society and the private sector to deliver food security and nutrition on the ground. The CFS can play an important role to enhance coordination between all actors. With numerous initiatives working on a shared challenge it will be important that duplication is avoided and cooperation maximised so that the people who need assistance receive it in a timely and sustained fashion. Where necessary this may involve making tough proposals on ways to reduce fragmentation and enhance the effectiveness of the global governance architecture for food security and nutrition.

The CFS can also support other actors by informing the indicators for food security and nutrition in SDG 2 as well nutrition related indicators in the other goals. The six World Health Assembly (WHA) Nutrition Targets, have already informed the design of SDG 2, but a more complete representation of these targets in the indicators for SDG2 and other goals, such as SDG 3 on health would strengthen their effectiveness for measuring progress. CFS will also play an important role at the international level tracking progress on SDG 2 as well as progress on nutrition related targets and indicators in the other goals.

The second strand is in the area of coherence and standard setting. CFS work to date on voluntary guidelines and principles will be even more pertinent in the SDG era, as countries and their development partners strive to develop new more sustainable approaches to agriculture, food processing, nutrition and the global food system. As these approaches develop, guidelines will be needed to ensure that human rights are respected, that services reach the most vulnerable and that policies to address one SDG do not inadvertently undermine progress on another.

Some ideas that come to mind include tailoring the Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems to Climate Smart Agriculture, for example, and possibly creating an accountability mechanism to accompany the Principles based on the protect, respect, remedy framework of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

It is also clear that we need to continue to make progress on women's empowerment and gender equality – I wonder, therefore, if there is a need to evaluate the use of the policy recommendations on gender, food security and nutrition from 2011 and see how they might be strengthened and their implementation enhanced?

The third strand is in the area of knowledge. The Committee on World Food Security will need to continue to play a role, supported by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition, in addressing emerging issues and challenges for the sector.

I know from interactions with climate and nutrition policy makers, that many of them are in early stages of understanding and integrating rights based approaches into their work. As a result case studies and experience could be documented and shared – adding to the evidence base and sharing good practices. For example, it would be useful to add the knowledge base on rights based approaches to resilience building in the food system – both in the context of climate change and global economic shocks. The recent report of the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) on Water, Food Security and Nutrition provides an excellent foundation for this work, emphasising as it does the need, to realise rights to land and water to ensure food security and nutrition.

The CFS can also support the critical work that starts now at a country level to plan for, implement and measure progress towards the SDGs. It would be helpful to research and provide support to countries on national level planning and the design of indicators for SDG 2 and other food and nutrition related goals and targets. While there is no one size fits all set of indicators, a list of potential indicators could assist countries to select those measures most appropriate to them.

There is a lot of work to be done between now and 2030. It will require unprecedented human solidarity and cooperation between actors at all levels to succeed. The Committee on World Food Security has a primary responsibility to support countries and UN agencies to achieve this goal. As the intergovernmental body with overall responsibility for food and nutrition – the Committee will need to demonstrate clear political leadership to strengthen international food security policy and deliver results for people everywhere.

Nelson Mandela consistently reminded us of the impacts of poverty and hunger on human rights and human dignity. His words at the UN General Assembly in 1998 are worth remembering.



"The very right to be human is denied every day to hundreds of millions of people as a result of poverty, the unavailability of basic necessities such as food, jobs, water and shelter, education, health care and a healthy environment."<sup>5</sup>

We cannot any longer live in a world where hunger and undernutrition undermine human dignity – all people have the right to adequate and nutritious food - let's meet the SDGs not just on time – but ahead of time.

Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> At the 53rd UN General Assembly, New York, 1998