

# The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster

## Terms of Reference

### as part of the NGO Major Group<sup>1</sup>

(Draft – 4 October 2018)

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<sup>1</sup> These Terms of Reference draw verbatim from the NGO Major Group Terms of Reference, Final 11 February 2016 except where they needed to be adapted for the work of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster.

## I. Background

“We acknowledge the role of civil society and the importance of enabling all members of civil society to be actively engaged in sustainable development.”<sup>2</sup>

1. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster is part of the NGO Major Group, a member of the Major Group and other Stakeholder system established by UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290. The cluster supports agroecological approaches as the critical foundation to the needed transformation of current food systems to become more sustainable. Agroecological approaches have a relational framing, are holistic and farmer-centered, and are where production aligns with nature's restorative power. Agroecological approaches account for the social, economic, and environmental effects and recognize the need to balance power relations. Agroecological approaches and their relational frame seek to empower farmers and meet the food needs of all by enriching soil, maintaining and developing agricultural biodiversity, conserving water, and contributing to climate solutions. The Cluster's entry points are human-rights based approaches to support subsistence and smallholder family farms, landless farm and food workers, pastoralists, fishers, and Indigenous Peoples who produce upwards of 70% of the food consumed in the world [hereinafter referred to as smallholders.] The cluster works with its members to bring the experiences from civil society, in particular smallholders, to the review process to portray progress and challenges in efforts to implement the SDGs. The cluster does not believe in a dualistic model where industrial agriculture sits side-by-side with agroecological approaches, but rather believes only a holistic, integrated approach will support achieving SDG2.

2. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Major Groups, members of civil society and relevant stakeholders<sup>3</sup> were given significant roles and responsible mandates throughout the Rio+20 Outcome Document<sup>4</sup> agreed upon at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. Various rights, obligations and tasks with relevance to NGOs, Major Groups and civil society are interspersed throughout the Outcome Document and an entire chapter is devoted to these groups.<sup>5</sup> The decisions expressed by the Rio+20 Outcome Document build on earlier positive experiences shared by the entire UN family, including intergovernmental processes and with reference to practices developed at the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), paragraph 84 states that: “We decide to establish a universal intergovernmental high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission.” Fourteen processes were initiated by decisions taken at UNCSD, and among these was the agreement to establish the High Level Political Forum (HLPF)<sup>6</sup> which has now replaced CSD. The UN General Assembly resolution that established the HLPF<sup>6</sup> in 2013 emphasizes that Major Groups and other relevant stakeholders, while respecting the intergovernmental nature of the processes, are integral to the implementation and delivery of its ambitious mandate.<sup>7</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 43 of “*The Future We Want*” –the Rio+20 Outcome Document

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Major Groups, stakeholders, civil society and NGOs are often used synonymously in writing but there are significant differences between these concepts.

<sup>4</sup> Also “the Future We Want” – see footnote 2

<sup>5</sup> Paragraphs 42 through 55 in the Future We Want.

<sup>6</sup> A/RES/67/290 of 23 August 2013

<sup>7</sup> See “Participatory democracy – HLPF laying the basis for sustainable development governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Modalities for major groups, Non Governmental Organisations and other stakeholders’ engagement with the high level political forum on sustainable development” a study for UNDESA by Jan-Gustav Strandenaes <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1564>

is expressed through a number of participatory rights for Major Groups formulated by this resolution. The HLPF is now the focal point for sustainable development at the UN, the home of the SDGs (see below) and will coordinate implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is also the basis for the Major Groups' work at the UN in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. Another of the fourteen processes initiated by Rio+20 was the development of the Sustainable Development Goals, (the SDGs), which were developed through the Open Working Group process on the Sustainable Development Goals (the OWG SDG). The SDGs are seen as the major elements of the Post 2015 Development Agenda, and the OWG SDG terminated its work in June 2014 agreeing to 17 SDGs. The increased interest in sustainable development in general, and in the SDGs in particular, put pressure on the existing Major Groups structure including the Organizing Partner (hereinafter referred to as "OP") system and resulted in a call for more inclusivity as reflected in the "other relevant stakeholders" phrase found throughout the Rio+20 Outcome Document. A United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Division for Sustainable Development (hereinafter referred to as "DESA/DSD") commissioned paper on the Major Groups<sup>8</sup> resulted in nineteen recommendations, one of which was to improve governance structures, to ensure transparency and openness. Another was to further support the NGO Major Group.

## II. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster roles, functions and responsibilities

The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster is self-organized with roots dating back to the mid-1990s. The Food and Agriculture Cluster is **open to all civil society organizations**, interested actors and social movements; efforts should be made to ensure that the priorities of smallholders and those most affected by food and nutrition insecurity are prioritized. Given the range of participants from across civil society, the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster operates in a fluid way to allow for expert participants to engage as needed:

- based upon issue areas that include the SDGs as well as other cross-cutting issues related to food and agriculture, for example, among other issues, the Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition, Agroecology, Urban Rural Linkages, Agricultural Biodiversity.<sup>9</sup>
- based upon issue areas concerning constituencies that may include but are not limited to the "other stakeholders" identified in the Rio+20 Outcome Document<sup>10</sup> and A/RES/67/290.<sup>11</sup>

The cluster facilitates collaboration and engagement at the UN in New York on food and agriculture issues across major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS). The cluster works to bring commonly determined messages and priorities forward through the multiple avenues for civil society engagement presented at the UN Headquarters level. The cluster is an informal association of civil society organizations and networks from around the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Adams and Pingeot: "Strengthening Public Participation at the United Nations for Sustainable Development: Dialogue, Debate, Dissent, Deliberation" 2013, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1926desareport.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1565>

<sup>10</sup> Paragraph 43 of "The Future We Want" –the Rio+20 Outcome Document

<http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/727The%20Future%20We%20Want%2019%20June%201230pm.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 16 of A/RES/67/290 of 23 August 2013 [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/290&Lang=E)

## II.A. Role of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster

4. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster provides input to the OPs including their Major Groups in the context of the HLPF as they fulfill their role under the Terms of Reference for the NGO Major Group (Final, 11 Feb 2016) Section II A, 'Role.'

5. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will support the NGO Major Group OPs in its role as described in the NGO Major Group Terms of Reference.

- a) Consultation with the NGO Major Group
- b) Communication, outreach and advocacy;
- c) Resource mobilization;
- d) Liaison with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in particular its Division for Sustainable Development;
- e) Coordination and communication with other Major Groups/Stakeholder Organizing Partners & Focal Points for the HLPF and other intergovernmental bodies.

The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will support the OPs in facilitating participation by drawing "on contributions from Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) including among others, social movements, local authorities networks, youth movements, selected private sector actors, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities"<sup>12</sup>

6. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will support the NGO Major Group OPs in their roles that also includes identification of and reaching out to new member organizations within global and regional networks, and ensuring appropriate engagement at the global and regional levels.

7. The Food and Agriculture Cluster will continue to develop so that it can engage required expertise, build capacity including youth development and enable effective transitions.

## II.B. Functions and responsibilities of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster

8. Consistent with the NGO Major Group Terms of Reference, Paragraph 11(1, v) that outlines The NGO Major Group Organizing Partners and consultation with Major Groups and other Stakeholders, the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will be open to guidance from the NGO Major Group and support it in its function to:

- a) coordinate and facilitate the registration and participation of NGO representatives at the HLPF and other relevant UN sustainable development processes; be responsible for the selection of NGO speakers during the meetings;
- b) develop an annual 'roadmap' that would provide strategic direction and technical guidance so NGOs and their development partners will be able to maximize their preparation and participation in all UN sustainable development negotiations and processes;

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<sup>12</sup> At the UN Summit Sustainable Development Summit 2015, 25-27 September, governments adopted the Declaration, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," on a "comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets."<sup>11</sup> The outcome document affirms that the HLPF "will have the central role in overseeing follow-up and review at the global level." Moreover, governments are encouraged to "conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels," to "draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities."

- c) consult with global/regional/national NGO networks to prepare written inputs to the intergovernmental process in the form of position papers and priorities for action papers addressing the themes of sustainable development under discussion, including cross-sectoral themes that reflect views on progress made, outline obstacles and constraints to implementation, and identify emerging issues and new challenges;
- d) identify NGO expertise in the field of sustainable development and channel best practices, expert advice, and policy recommendations to relevant intergovernmental processes;
- e) ensure the provision of guidance for working structures as necessary.

### III. Thematic Clusters

9. The Facilitation Committee shall recognize thematic clusters duly constituted by the members of the NGO Major Group. The Food and Agriculture Cluster recognizes that in keeping with NGO Major Group Terms of Reference (11 Feb 2016) that:

- a) all thematic clusters must consist of at least 10 ECOSOC NGOs;
- b) all thematic clusters will present a statement of purpose to the Facilitation Committee;
- c) all thematic clusters will present an annual report to the Facilitation Committee describing the activities and issues covered by the thematic cluster;
- d) the Cluster will participate in all themes relevant to food and agriculture in the annual HLPF thematic review process.

### IV. Nominations and Elections of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinators

#### IV.A. Thematic Cluster Coordinator(s)/Advisors

10. In the case of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster, to share tasks, support regional participation and for gender balance, there can be up to five coordinators leading the cluster. There will be one coordinator who serves a three-year term, with the other coordinators appointed as needed based on required expertise, capacity building including youth development and to enable effective transitions. Advisors who can provide guidance based on experience, history or specific knowledge may be appointed by coordinators as needed.

11. Given the crosscutting relevance of food and agriculture to all the SDGs, the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster through its Coordinators is prepared to be part of the process in a permanent role with the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee (see section V). In order to sit on the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee, at least one of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinators should have:

- a) an established office or address (headquarters) with an executive officer with statutes that are transparent and accessible and, if a network, preferably a democratically adopted constitution;
- b) a representative structure and possess appropriate mechanisms of accountability ;
- c) experience in proposal writing and fund raising;
- d) sufficient financial and human resources to be able to engage in the policy process for at least 3 years.

In addition to the specificities above, at least one Thematic Cluster Coordinator must possess:

- a) expert knowledge, concrete experience and understanding of sustainable development, intergovernmental decision-making processes and procedures of the work of the UN in general, and of the HLPF, and the several outcomes of the Rio+20 process, in particular “the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”;
- b) must possess the organizational capacities (i.e. time and resources) to perform the required tasks and responsibilities associated with the position without monetary compensation from the UN or the NGO Major Group.
- c) must have the backing and support of their own organizations and an explicit written guarantee from their organizations that he/she will be allowed to prioritise work as OP or Thematic Cluster Coordinator during his/her term of office.
- d) represent an organization with proof of its independent juridical personality and non-profit and/or tax-exempt status in a Member State of the United Nations, preferably in consultative status with ECOSOC or has been specially accredited to a major UN conference or summit on sustainable development. Preference will be given to international or regional networks of organizations.

12. In addition to a nomination, an application to be a coordinator would include the following components:

- a) biographical information, proven experience in the domains of UN processes and Sustainable Development;
- b) responses regarding motivation, experience, and vision of a successful NGO Major Group including service to support inclusion/representation by those directly impacted by policies;
- c) two reference letters (not from a family member or friends);

These criteria can be modified as needed.

13. Thematic Cluster Coordinators will:

- a) serve up to a 3-year term;
- b) be elected or selected by the members of each thematic cluster;
- c) after completion of two terms of service, a lapse of least one year is required before that person can be re-nominated to serve as a thematic cluster coordinator.

## IV.B. Resignations

14. If the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinator finds that he or she is unable to continue to carry out his/her duties, he/she may voluntarily resign by informing the NGO Major Group Organizing Partners and his/her own constituency. The resigning Coordinator will prepare a report on his/her activities related to fulfilling his/her Coordinator responsibilities.

15. If this person is no longer available or not complying with the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Terms of Reference, the OPs will decide if that Coordinator needs to step down following due process. It is up to the OPs to decide if they call for special elections or wait to the next period of elections.

16. If the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee and/or the NGO Major Group Constituency considers that the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinator is unable to carry out his/her duties, the Facilitation Committee will be asked through a hearing process on whether that Thematic Cluster Coordinator should be required to resign. The Thematic Cluster Coordinator will get an opportunity to present his/her case during a call or meeting with the Facilitation Committee. Arguments listed during the hearing must be considered as serious and relevant to the final decision. This issue should at the outset be considered as an internal administrative matter for the NGO Facilitation Committee to handle.

## V. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster and its role in the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee

17. The Facilitation Committee is the body that coordinates and facilitates the activities of the NGO Major Group. Its structure and membership are described below.

### V.A. Structure of the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee

The NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee shall be comprised of global OPs, regional OPs, and Thematic Cluster Coordinators. The Food and Agriculture Cluster will participate as appropriate in the Facilitation Committee duly constituted by the NGO Major Group.

As appropriate, the Food and Agriculture Cluster will participate in and contribute to regular briefings by the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee on the work of all the Major Groups to ensure Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster participants and related groups are informed of modalities of engagement with the UN, relevant UN processes etc.

### V.B. Thematic Cluster Coordinator Participation in the NGO Major Group Facilitation Committee

18. According to the Terms of Reference for the NGO Major Group, up to 5 Thematic Cluster Coordinators shall represent the views of all thematic clusters recognized by the Facilitation Committee duly constituted by the NGO Major Group. Given its longstanding, cross-cutting role, the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will participate in this process as needed to ensure that food and agriculture issues are given due consideration.

One Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinator will meet requirements of and be available to sit on the NGO Major Groups Facilitation Committee (see Section VI.A paragraph 11.)

## VI. Meetings and decision making

19. Regular meetings led by the Thematic Cluster Coordinator will be guided by an agenda and minutes recorded where decisions are taken. Decisions shall be taken on the basis of consensus. If consensus is not possible, then a vote shall be taken. While reservations may be expressed and recorded in the minutes, once a decision has been reached by consensus or a vote, this becomes the position of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster.

20. Officer positions and sub-group leads shall be decided by the members of the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster as needed.

21. Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster participants will send a representative to important meetings as needed.

## VII. Interaction with the HLPF

### A. Preparing for the HLPF

22. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster shall meet once during the HLPF and by conference call on a quarterly or monthly basis as often as needed to complete its agenda.

23. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster shall organize an Annual Meeting within one week of the HLPF. The Meeting Agenda shall include:

- a) an announcement of election results by the Nomination Committee;
- b) reports by the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster Coordinator;
- c) membership consultation.

24. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster will provide input into the position paper for the NGO MG community prepared for the HLPF.

### B. During the HLPF

25. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster participants should set aside ample time to organize a policy meeting whose purpose is to go through the position paper to prepare for the meetings with the NGO Major Group.

26. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster should also initiate meetings as needed exclusively reserved for the Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster constituency to discuss matters of policy nature pertaining to the HLPF agenda.

27. The Food and Agriculture Thematic Cluster participants will take part in the morning Major Groups information meeting. The meeting is a service to all participating representatives of the Major Groups, and is co-hosted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Division for Sustainable Development (hereinafter referred to as "DESA/DSD"). It has a set agenda: DSD informs about the agenda of the day, and what will take place and where the different meetings will take place (break-out groups, plenaries etc.), questions about logistics etc. should be dealt with; there should be report backs from the participating individuals from the various official meetings so all present feel updated; information about side events should be given; contentious issues may be informed about, and if the participating members so wish, key representatives from delegates could meet briefly with the major groups community.