# The Governance of Farmer-Led Agricultural Research: Experiences from the Committee on World Food Security and Governance

Luca Colombo (FIRAB- Italian Foundation for Research on Biological and Biodynamic Agriculture)focussed his presentation on highlighting the trends in ARD governance systems with increasing recognition of transforming knowledge and ways of knowing – specialist versus non-specialist knowledge. Further, he explained the achievements of CSO involvement in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

He gave background to participatory research and growing trends in farmer-led research aimed at democratising research, pooling together specialist and non-specialist knowledge. The approach is making progress in reshaping scientific mentality to progressively accept farmers – with their opinions, suggestions and criticisms – as partners with equal rights and respected know-how. Luca gave examples from Italy, where farmers share information, unlike scientists who keep information as intellectual property.

The farmer-to-farmer exchanges in organic farming have been recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and organic farming shall be included in the MoA’s next planning, thus increasingly informing national decision-making.

He gave a historical perspective to the development. After the 2007–08 food crisis, a High Level Task Force G8-G20 Global Partnership formed the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). This underwent reforms in 2009, transforming it into an inter-organisational governance body reporting to the United Nations (UN) Assembly as opposed to FAO (Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN) and allowing involvement of different actors including CSOs. A Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) under the CFS was thus established last year and offers a number of lessons for INSARD. It has a matrix composition constituting regional and global constituencies.

The final CFS reform proposal includes important points:

* The vision of CFS defines it as “the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform” for a coordinated effort to attain food security and makes explicit mention of the right to adequate food.
* The principle of “subsidiarity” (decisions should be taken at the lowest appropriate level) is recognised.
* There is a totally unprecedented level and quality of participation foreseen for civil society, with particular attention to organisations representing small-scale food producers, women and other key constituencies.
* Voting rights will continue to be reserved for member governments, but CSOs will be full participants with the right to intervene in plenary and breakout discussions, to contribute to the preparation of meeting documents and agendas, and to present documents and proposals.
* The reform document recognises the right of CSOs/NGOs to autonomously establish a global mechanism to facilitate their participation in the CFS.
* The proposal for a High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE), which will provide technical support for the work of the CFS, recognises the value of “knowledge from social actors and practical application” and foresees the participation of civil society representatives in the selection committee.
* The proposal recognises that “resource mobilisation strategies to cover the costs of participation by CSOs/NGOs from developing countries will need to be addressed.”

The CSO mechanism facilitates CSO participation in three main ways:

 1. It proposes civil society to participate in the **CFS plenary sessions** (annual meetings where decisions are made).

2. The same applies for **intersessional activities (**interacting with the Bureau via the Advisory Group).

3. CSO representation in the **Advisory Group** (the Bureau’s Advisory Group is a group made up of all the non-voting “participants” of the CFS, with the role to bring in the views of the participants).

A trust fund was established to facilitate participation of CSOs in meetings, in project teams, as experts etc.

 The activities of the mechanism include:

i. broad and regular exchange of information, analysis and experience;

ii. developing common positions as appropriate;

iii. communicating to the CFS and its Bureau;

iv. convening a civil society forum as a preparatory event before CFS sessions, “if so decided by the civil society mechanism”. CSOs need time to consult and deliberate prior to official decision-making.

**Ensuring regional and constituency balance in CSM, important for representation of different interests**.

The following constituencies are included:

a) smallholder family farmers; b) artisanal fisherfolk; c) herders/pastoralists; d) landless; e) urban poor; f) agricultural and food workers; g) women; h) youth; i) consumers; j) Indigenous Peoples, and k) NGOs.

**Lessons from the process**

* Noted that CFS for now is not focused on ARD but there is increasing demand for an ARD agenda and a group on this will soon be established.
* CSM was not a gift (just given) but was a result of long-time struggles pushing for it, ample time needs to be factored, it took about 15 years for it to fully materialise; the process was also confrontational, involving nonstop dialogue with governments and UN agencies.
* Having a trust fund allocated for CSO participation took a lot of effort and advocacy to realise.
* Just one CSO in such global systems is not enough (as seen in the diversity of interests); at the same time, too many may not be realistic; arguments for a right balance should be advanced. Therefore one CSO/FO in ARD structures may probably not be enough; INSARD may need to create an argument for another, providing for, say, an agro-ecology interest group.