

# **Nutrition Agenda on the International Strategies: Ongoing Initiatives, Challenges and Proposals**

## **Contributions to the debate at the National Council on Food and Nutrition Security – CONSEA<sup>1</sup>**

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Elisabetta Recine<sup>2</sup>, CONSEA/CP7<sup>3</sup> Counselor.  
Nathalie Beghin<sup>4</sup>, CONSEA/CP2<sup>5</sup> Counselor.

### **Introduction**

At the end of November 2014 specifically from the 19<sup>th</sup>, to the 21<sup>st</sup>, the **Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2)**<sup>6</sup> will be held in Rome. Such event is jointly organized by the FAO and the WHO and it is occurring 22 years after the first conference, performed in 1992. Moreover, 2014 is considered by the United Nations as the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF), which will emphasize this way of production in the international context.

This is the right moment for deeply addressing, in the context of the CONSEA, the nutrition theme at the SAN, particularly regarding a set of ongoing international initiatives. The present Note seeks to identify these initiatives and list their concerns. It also seeks to present a series of recommendations that may contribute to the Council positioning regarding these ones when necessary.

### **The entanglement of international initiatives for fighting child malnutrition**

The objective of reducing malnutrition and eradicating world hunger has been present in several initiatives since the creation of the United Nations. Such initiatives have changed their conception, but it might be said that they were always characterized by a vertical approaching based on technicism and little (or no) social participation. Besides, they tend to limit the approaching to child malnutrition, leaving behind inadequate

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<sup>1</sup> This Note translates the opinion of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the CONSEA's opinion. The objective of the same is contributing to the debate on the challenges that a series of ongoing initiatives in the international scenario in the nutritional area brings to the food (in) security both in Brazil and in the rest of the world.

<sup>2</sup> PhD in Public Health by the University of São Paulo (USP). Professor at the University of Brasília (UnB).

<sup>3</sup> Permanent Commission on Consumption, Nutrition and Education.

<sup>4</sup> Economist, PhD in Social Policies by the University of Brasília (UnB) and Head of Policy at Institut for Socioeconomic Studies (INESC).

<sup>5</sup> Permanent Commission on National and International Macro-challenges.

<sup>6</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to: [http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/WHO\\_FAO\\_announce\\_ICN2/en/index3.html](http://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/WHO_FAO_announce_ICN2/en/index3.html).

nutrition along the whole course of life. More recently, since the early 2010, some international proposals have been intensified in fighting malnutrition and, in several moments, Brazil has been involved or invited to be involved. To a large extent, such involvement is due to the success obtained by the country in the expressive decrease of malnutrition; to the international recognition of the good results of the social and food and nutritional security policies; and to the preference that many Southern countries manifests when seeking the cooperation of Brazil instead of the traditional Northern donors.

Without the intention to be exhaustive, some of the initiatives are mentioned, counting on the leadership of countries or the United Nations. The first of them began in 2010 from the strong leadership of the World Bank, of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and of some donor countries, called **Scaling Up Nutrition – SUN**. This group of leaders supported David Nabarro, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for food security and nutrition, as the leader of the initiative. The SUN is intended to be a movement involving United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations, traditional donors<sup>7</sup>, developing countries and the business sector for facing child malnutrition in the world. Note that the Scaling Up Nutrition is not an initiative approved by the set of countries members of the UN. It is about a voluntary mechanism in which the integrant members, including the countries, manifest their interest in adhering, and for such, they commit themselves to follow its principles and *modus operandi*. Up to the moment, 46 developing countries have joined the SUN, especially from Africa and Asia. The SUN has goals to be reached and a narrative involving cost-benefit ideas, public-private partnerships, rectitude and rendering of accounts. In the SUN's architecture the Committee responsible by its implementation, called Group of Leaders, counts on representatives from the business sector. Besides, it is structured around five networks of equal weight: from the countries, organizations of the civil society, the UN agencies, the business sector, and the donors. Note that the companies' network has as its main articulator the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition – GAIN<sup>8</sup>, which defends food fortification. It shall also be highlighted that David Nabarro is part of the GAIN Partnership Council. David Nabarro has shown in several occasions his wish of involving Brazil with the SUN and, in this sense, he is requesting the Brazilian government to receive him still in the first semester of 2014.

The **New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition**, United States' initiative launched at the G8 in 2012 for fighting malnutrition in African countries in partnership with the private enterprise. Such project is based on document from the World Economic Forum, titled "Achieving New Vision for Agriculture: New Models for Action"<sup>9</sup> in which some subjects, such as expressive investments for the agribusiness expansion are defended, inter alia.

Still in 2012, at Rio+20, in Rio de Janeiro, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, announced the **Zero Hunger Challenge – ZHC**<sup>10</sup> with the purpose of eliminating child malnutrition, assuring food to all, increasing small farmers'

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<sup>7</sup> Countries that traditionally make donations for social development initiatives, such as North Europe, United States, Canada, and Japan, inter alia.

<sup>8</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to: <http://www.gainhealth.org>.

<sup>9</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to:

[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/IP/2013/NVA/WEF\\_IP\\_NVA\\_New\\_Models\\_for\\_Action\\_report.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/IP/2013/NVA/WEF_IP_NVA_New_Models_for_Action_report.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> For further information, access: <http://www.un.org/en/zerohunger/challenge.shtml>

productivity, and preventing the waste of food. Recently, several countries and companies have joined the ZHC. At such occasion, in January 2014, in Davos, Switzerland, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) granted the Zero Hunger Award for representatives of three organizations very close to the business sector: Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition – GAIN, and the International Food Policy Research Institute – IFPRI. Note that the SUN is also signatory of the Zero Hunger Challenge.

In the following year, 2013, the United Kingdom, G-8's pro-tempore president, proposed a new strategy, which is similar to the one that had been initially established by the New Alliance and, along with Brazil and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF)<sup>11</sup>, it promoted an event where developing countries, traditional donors, United Nations agencies, universities, research centers and networks, international NGOs, private companies, and business foundations signed a global pact called **Nutrition For Growth – N4G**<sup>12</sup>. This pact involves a series of goals and activities and, among them, Brazil must host a new international meeting on the theme during the great sportive events of 2014 and 2016. It shall be mentioned that SUN is part of this pact.

The documents of such different, but interwoven and often overlapped initiatives<sup>13</sup>, refer to important achievements by the global civil society such as the human right to food, the food and nutritional security, the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding up to the sixth month of life, the social participation and the small farmer's strengthening, inter alia. However, the proposed strategies do not allow the effective accomplishment of these objectives; furthermore, in some cases they involve processes that go against the human rights principles.

Besides these initiatives of a global nature, there are other regional initiatives, such as the 2025 Hunger-Free Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pan American Alliance for Nutrition and Development, from PAHO, which will not be seen in detail herein.

### **The concerns of the international civil society**

Before this verification and having joined the inquietudes manifested by international networks of organizations such as the IBFAN (International Baby Food Action Network)<sup>14</sup>, CONCORD (Confédération Européenne des ONGs d'Urgence et de Développement)<sup>15</sup> and the Working Group on Nutrition from the UNO Food Safety Committee's Civil Society Mechanism<sup>16</sup>, we present next a set of concerns that such initiatives raise and which shall be debated:

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<sup>11</sup> CIFF is a foundation based in the United Kingdom, materially financed by the business sector, supporting projects turned to children under extreme poverty from a business management. For further information, access: <http://ciff.org>.

<sup>12</sup> For further information, access: <http://nutrition4growth.org>.

<sup>13</sup> Many institutions or countries participate in all of them. The SUN, as it was already seen; the United Kingdom; Gates Foundation; several UNO agencies, the GAIN, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to:

<http://info.babymilkaction.org/sites/info.babymilkaction.org/files/SUN%20IBFAN%2028.11.122.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to: <http://www.concordeurope.org/248-statement-on-g8-andnew-alliances-for-food-and-nutritionsecurity?highlight=WyJnOCJd>

<sup>16</sup> For further information, access: [http://www.csm4cfs.org/policy\\_issues-6/nutrition-10](http://www.csm4cfs.org/policy_issues-6/nutrition-10)

### **1) The lack of legitimate representation of groups and populations effectively affected by food insecurity and malnutrition**

In none of these initiatives, the populations effectively affected by child malnutrition have participated. Great international NGOs that joined one or another project, such as Oxfam, Save the Children, Doctors without Borders and the CAFOD, inter alia, have, unarguably, a relevant role in their action, but do not represent the ones living in poverty and food insecurity. Organizations of workers, small farmers and fisherfalks or movements of women, indigenous or traditional peoples or communities are not participating in such endeavors, making at least questionable the idea of “partnership” or “involvement of all” in a great common cause that would be fighting the determinants of hunger and malnutrition.

### **2) The depoliticization of the debate on hunger and malnutrition**

Malnutrition and hunger are presented as technological problems in essence, or resulting from bad public administration, which, therefore, require simple solutions and more efficient management mechanisms. Thus, these initiatives establish, for the integrant countries, commitments, goals, indicators, progress reports, and a wide communication and dissemination system. Furthermore, most of the solutions presented refer to the application and expansion of technologies for genetically modified organisms (GMO), biofortification<sup>17</sup>, food fortification<sup>18</sup> and formulated food<sup>19</sup>. With this narrative, the debate on the real causes of hunger and malnutrition (i.e., poverty, inequality, land concentration, agribusiness expansion, excluding the rules of international trade, lack of public policies, raise in the price of food) are eliminated, contributing to maintain the *status quo*.

### **3) Weakening of the role of the State**

According to the UN, eating is understood as a human right and it shall be provided, promoted and protected by the State. However, in those several international arrangements in force, the governments of poor countries are only supporting actors who, in the existing forces correlation, do not have any power for opposing to or regulating the business sector’s agenda. The companies now start to take or finance actions that are public authorities’ duties and expand their markets in the fields of agribusiness and genetically modified, biofortified, fortified, and formulated food products. Further: this privatizing strategy counts on the support of traditional donors from the North and from United Nations themselves, since it is evaluated that the business logic is more efficient than the public one, especially in countries where the malnutrition and food insecurity indexes are high. Such strategy contributes to take the responsibility of the State away on its tasks of assuring the access to the universal social rights of fighting hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity. The State starts conveying an implicit idea of denying action, letting its instrumentalization open to the game of private interests. Although, in many cases, such initiatives contribute to concretely improve the nutrition for some parts of the population, they do not turn the excluded ones into citizens: they only provide assistance to them, making them dependent on the private aid that, in turn, depends on the fluctuations and managers’ interests. We

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<sup>17</sup> Biofortified agricultural products are improved versions presenting higher content of minerals and vitamins (iron, zinc, vitamin A, inter alia).

<sup>18</sup> Fortified and enriched food is the one receiving an added-nutrient.

<sup>19</sup> Formulated foods include “imitation” foods, such as substitutive of eggs, meat, milk, complete formulas from the nutritional point of view such as elementary, synthetic, semi-synthetic diets, space food, formulas for weight reduction, diets for parenteral nutrition, liquid or solid diets.

understand that the consequences of this “public privatization” operation, without the corresponding “private publicization” – which is the State’s job – dramatize the social fracture, increasing hunger, poverty, inequalities, since the essential is missing to this “moralization” movement practiced by the elites. What is missing is what social rights legally assured by the social contract guarantee, even when emptied: a real public space, common to all, where the criticism and the organized disagreement of the excluded parties can be installed on the demand for their rights<sup>20</sup>.

#### **4) The concepts trivialization**

These initiatives, in general, are said to be anchored in concepts such as the human right to food, food security, strengthening of family farming, sustainability, nutrition-sensitive interventions, inter alia. They try to convey that they meet the demands of the society and the pacts internationally agreed. However, what is observed is an inadequate appropriation of these concepts. As it was previously seen, it is actually contributing to weaken the idea of the right while it does not strengthen the roles of the State and the regulation of the markets, both in the national and international context. Although in their narrative such initiatives reinforce the importance of implanting “nutrition-sensitive” multi-sectors strategies, most of them, as well as the funding available, are, in fact, turned to the “nutrition-specific” ones. It is about interventions with an essentially curative nature and with a medical and technical character approach, in contrast to a more holistic, food centered, preventive view, turned to fight the causes of malnutrition and not only the consequences. Substantially, the implemented strategies are far off from nutrition-sensitive conceptions since they are not turned to the strengthening of the rights, mainly women and children’s ones, to the markets regulation, decent jobs policies, the promotion of a fair international trade, the strengthening of family agriculture, inclusive food supplying policies, production and consumption models guided by agroecology and by the biodiversity preservation, and to the respect of local food practices and habits. In this sense, they are less sustainable and, ultimately, they will contribute to increase the food and nutritional insecurity, since they will result in the eviction of small farmers and traditional peoples and communities out of their lands and in the consequent swelling of deprivation and poverty in the cities.

#### **5) The insufficient debate on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD)**

These global initiatives for fighting malnutrition and food and nutritional insecurity pay less or no attention to NCDs. However, these aggravations, which in many countries became real epidemics (i.e., obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and some types of cancer), arise most from an inadequate eating and they are associated to malnutrition and present growing social and budgetary costs in the whole world. Further: many of these diseases are essentially originated by the practice of monotonous eating (limited to leguminous plants, vegetables, and fruits) and from the excessive consumption of the so-called ultra-processed foods (UPF), in other words, industrial ready-to-eat foods<sup>21</sup>. These products are gaining a growing ground in the market to the detriment of the consumption of fresh food coming from local food cultures and habits. Besides, the connection between the low height in the childhood and the increased risk of developing NCDs in adolescence and adult age, and their common social determinants (i.e., inequality, poverty, lack of access to land, expansion of agribusiness) are rarely mentioned and approached by the strategies. In this sense, initiatives in fighting malnutrition such as the ones mentioned in this Note, since they do not include

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<sup>20</sup> Refer to Yasbek (1995), Oliveira (1999), Paoli (2002) and Nogueira (2004), inter alia.

<sup>21</sup> Refer to Monteiro and Castro (2010).

strategies related to the determination of nutritional issues and do not value traditional eating practices, facilitate the opening of markets for ultra-processed products in countries without regulation systems, setting the stage for promoting totally inadequate consumption standards that in medium-term will result in manifestations of other forms of severe food insecurity.

#### **6) The implementation of market-oriented strategies**

As it can be seen in the previous items, the prevalent logic of these initiatives is ruled by the market, since its conception, passing through its management, until its implementation strategies both in the consumption and in the production of food products. The conception is the one of “partnership” without recognizing the existing unequal power relations in the field of food and nutritional security. The management is project-orientated, with measurable objectives, indexes, table filling, etc. far from the role of assuring the full enjoyment of the rights. The execution is mostly handed to the business sector, especially the transnational companies and, among them, the several companies from the agrifood sector. It is alleged that such sector is part of the solution, since it has scale for selling goods and services; for investing in technology and innovation; for developing more efficient strategies; for expanding the food education activities; for increasing the productivity of small farmers inserting them in the agribusiness value chain, among others<sup>22</sup>, without taking into account the impacts over the society, the environment and the human health, and the recognition of the autonomy and the historical role of the family farming. Besides, the expressive subsidy of this sector regarding the public one is concerning, both from countries and from the United Nations or International Financial Institutions.

#### **7) The structure and the decision processes that strengthen the existing unequal power relations**

The operation structure and process, of the SUN, for example, attributes the same weight to each one of the five networks previously mentioned. Thus, the debate and decision mechanisms of the group of countries in the context of the United Nations are not used and the representative role of the UNO's organisms is equalized with the private and financier's interests. Likewise, when a country joins the SUN, it is submitted to the management parameters and results of its financiers, without measurement that can contribute to strengthen its sovereignty and its social development.

#### **Brazil**

Brazil has been successful with its policies for fighting child malnutrition. In the last twenty years, the average malnutrition indexes have been reduced by 50%, taking this scourge out of the long list of public health problems, although we can still find concentrated child malnutrition in rural areas and among indigenous peoples and traditional peoples and communities<sup>23</sup>. Such result was due to a set of inter-sector public policies – in health, education, nutrition<sup>24</sup> and sanitation areas – associated to the

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<sup>22</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to “Tools Kit” proposed by the business sector to SUN: <http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Business-Network-Private-Sector-Engagement-Toolkit.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to Monteiro *et al.* (2009).

<sup>24</sup> The nutrition actions that involved the incentive of the exclusive breastfeeding until the sixth month of life; the distribution of basic food associated to the health actions; the distribution of dietary supplements, such as iron for fighting iron-deficiency anemia, vitamin A for hypovitaminosis A and iodized salt for fighting endemic goitre; the universalization of school food in public schools, inter alia.



income increase through the real elevation of the minimum wage and cash transfer programmes and to the elimination of formulated products out of official eating programs<sup>25</sup>. Note that the business sector was not a “partner” in this approaching, neither in the implementation of policies nor in the funds transfer. It is about a public intervention that counted on the participation of the society both in the elaboration of the interventions and in their social control. It shall be highlighted that the role of the social movements and the organizations of the civil society was vital for turning food into a social right and for inserting the nutritional dimension in the public policy of food security<sup>26</sup>. The latter has been one of the aspects that have arisen the interest in the international scenario: the CONSEA has been invited to present their experience and contribute through different initiatives. However, it shall be warned that many interlocutors, mainly the representatives of Foundations and big international NGOs, make mistakes when trying to put the CONSEA’s action, role, and impact out of the political context, from which it came and in which it intervenes, longing for a formula or protocol to be followed that can assure the same results.

Despite these advances, the country is facing now the strong consequences of an inadequate eating, essentially resulting from the decrease in the consumption of fresh products, increased eating of ultra-processed products, contamination by pesticides and transgenic food and an each time more sedentary life. Thus, the Brazilian population is not only experiencing an overweight and obesity epidemics, but also increasing aggravations arising from the food unbalance, such as cancers, diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases.

In addition to this situation, there are the risks arising from the food biofortification. Brazil is the leader of an important programme in this field, the BioFort, implemented by the Embrapa<sup>27</sup>. Such programme is inserted in the HarvestPlus<sup>28</sup>, international initiative coordinated by the research centers International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and financed by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the World Bank, besides cooperation agencies, such as the ones from Canada (CIDA), United States (USAID) and United Kingdom (DFID). The defenders of food biofortification present this technology as the solution for eliminating malnutrition through increasing iron, zinc, vitamin A content and other micronutrients in the diet of the needing population. The biofortification consists in a crossing process of plants of the same species, generating more nutritive cultivated plant varieties in theory. The process is also known as conventional genetic improvement. Such procedure impacts in a way that violates the human right to proper eating: using transgenic technology; threatening the existence of farm-saved seeds; increasing the dependency of family farmers on companies that patent biofortified

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<sup>25</sup> Up to the early 1990’s, the food from the National School Feeding Programme was acquired in a centralized way by the federal government, through the Student Assistance Foundation – FAE, from the Ministry of Education and Science – MEC. An expressive part of the budgetary resources was assigned to the acquisition of formulated, industrialized and lyophilized food that had much or nothing to do with the children’s eating habits. From 1993 on, in the landmark of CONSEA, the Programme starts to be decentralized for the sub-national entities and it encourages the purchase of natural food. According to the FAE, the formulated and lyophilized products represented 60% of the acquisitions made prior to the decentralization and, in 1995, they were only 5%.

<sup>26</sup> Regarding that matter, refer to Leão and Maluf (2012).

<sup>27</sup> For further information, access: <http://biofort.com.br>

<sup>28</sup> For further information, access: <http://www.harvestplus.org>

seeds, strengthening once again the agribusiness transnational companies; and, contributing to "medicalize" food.

In this sense, it is vital taking into account the *nutritional dimension* of the human right to adequate eating. Guaranteeing nutrition as a right means guaranteeing the physical and financial access to food that meets all the dimensions foreseen by the concept adopted by CONSEA.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the food must be produced in a sustainable, healthy way, through processes offering nutritionally rich, diversified and culturally accepted diets, as the example of the agroecological food production and consumption. The changes affecting the way of producing food and the eating practices of our societies and communities impact over the nutritional status of the populations. Therefore, the nutritional dimension must be preserved and considered in all the phases of the food system: from land handling, access to seeds, cultivation, harvest, food transformation, sale, advertising, purchase for consumption, and biological and cultural utilization in an individual level. This is the only way of reaching the human right to proper food. Due to the importance of the nutritional dimension, a movement was started so that the terminology "Human Right to Proper Food and Nutrition" can be adopted.

### **Proposals**

In this context, we understand that the following proposals should be adopted in order to accomplish the ongoing international initiatives:

- 1) ***Assuring that the coordination and implementation of the policies are public authorities' responsibility:*** by the United Nations, in the multilateral context, from a political, technical and budgetary back up from agencies supporting the theme, and by the countries, in a national context. The objectives, the goals, and the strategies to be implemented shall suit each local reality without standardizing and sterilizing them in limits and models common to all.
- 2) ***Guaranteeing the effective social participation through mechanisms that assure the presence of the ones affected by hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity.*** Such mechanisms shall exist both in the global governance context of the initiatives and in the level of each country. In this sense, in the landmark of multilateralism, it is assessed that the preferential *locus* of this debate is the United Nations Committee on Food Security (CFS/ONU) which shall strengthen its Nutrition Group. This is because the CFS is the only intergovernmental space that counts on, in an institutionalized way, the participation of several segments of the civil society, from the business sector, through the academic environment, including workers, family farmers and landmen, women, fisherfalks, indigenous peoples, young people and consumers, inter alia. It shall be highlighted that any coordination and governance mechanism in the nutritional area (i.e. the recommendations of the Second International Conference on Nutrition – ICN2 to be held at the end of 2014) shall

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<sup>29</sup> Adequate and healthy food is a basic human right, with the guarantee of permanent and regular access, in a socially fair way, to an eating practice suiting the biological and social aspects of the individuals according to the cycle of life and special food needs, ruled by the local traditional referential. It must meet the principles of variety, balance, moderation, pleasure (flavor), the gender and ethnicity dimensions and the environmentally sustainable production ways, free from physical, chemical, biological contaminants and genetically modified organisms.

<http://www2.planalto.gov.br/consea/plenarias/documentos/relatorio-final-marco-2007-03.2007>



have formal interfaces with the CFS and with the World Health Assembly. Note that at the end of 2013, the CONSEA sent a letter to the Ministry of Health requesting that the same take measures leading to an increased social participation in the organization and performance of the ICN2. In this same direction, an audience of the CONSEA's representatives with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was performed.

- 3) ***Strengthening the capacities of the States and social movements and social organizations from countries that manifest interest in fighting hunger and malnutrition.*** Such measures shall be taken through nutrition-sensitive policies, in other words, towards the widening of public services coverage (health, education, inhabitation, social assistance, social security), generation of decent jobs and income, defense of the rights of women and traditional peoples and communities, investment in family farming and agroecology, rescue and respect to traditional food cultivations and practices, regulation of markets and the access to land in defense of small farmers.

- 4) ***Creating and implementing international measures that fight the food prices volatility, speculation around commodities, food market regulation, including advertising, and that promote a fair trade.***

The trade rules agreed at the WTO shall make possible creating international and national reserves for fighting the food crises. They shall also make possible for countries living in circumstances of food insecurity to adopt measures that protect them from prices volatility (i.e. regulation of imports, tariffs). It is necessary allowing the developing countries to implement policies and programmes that do not fall in the forbidden category of subsidies for strengthening the family farming. Summing up, the trade rules cannot cause the increase in hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity of millions of people around the globe: they shall be ruled by the human right to food<sup>30</sup>.

- 5) ***Forbidding the participation of the business sector in the decision-making process and the management and implementation of both international and national strategies and policies.*** Such participation creates conflicts of interests and favors market-guided measures that ultimately result in the increase of food insecurity, and they also go against the concept of food sovereignty.

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<sup>30</sup> Regarding this matter, refer to De Schutter (2011).

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