

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Monday, 9 July – Wednesday, 18 July 2018

Conference Room 4, United Nations

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Speaking Notes

Data is an important tool for underpinning policy measures and interventions- but it is always important to question data- how it is collected, what is measured, who controls and benefits from it, as well as what are its limitations.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI) is the main reference in terms of data collection on hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition globally. With the adoption of the SDGs the SOFI has reformed its methodology to better cover the development targets, however it has not yet sufficiently done this.

- The Food Insecurity Experience Scale or FIES has been an important addition. Based on direct interviews with people to measure their ability to access food, FIES has achieved a better assessment, as it also addresses anxiety over food insecurity and habits at individual and household level. Yet, not all countries have released this data and the report features severe food insecurity only, despite the fact that SDG 2 indicator also seeks to monitor moderate food insecurity. This is a reality faced by communities the world over, from the south to the north.
- Even with a revised methodology, SOFI does not address issues of discrimination linked to class, gender and race/ethnicity, disenfranchisement, patterns of ownership and access to land, labor and capital and more qualitative assessments of wellbeing and human capabilities. Those affected by food insecurity and malnutrition tend to be mere objects to be monitored instead of subjects who should have a say in defining what should be monitored and how. As it stands now, neither SOFI nor the SDGs have developed an indicator measuring, for instance, the degree of concentration of land ownership or the pollution of water resources, which are fundamental elements preventing the realization of the right to food and nutrition.

While much energy is put into the collection of more data, the reality is that the number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition is on the rise- and with some countries at risk for or already experiencing famine.

Focusing uncritically on data collection only may distract us from taking the very urgent and needed action in order to overcome hunger and malnutrition.

The so-called “data revolution” may nurture three concerning developments:

- (1) Undermining people's knowledge and backpedalling from the centrality of people's participation – and people's subjective assessment - to review progress;**
- (2) Focusing on what we do not know – rather than on what we know, therefore generating yet another rationale for inaction;**
- (3) Facilitating the capture of information by huge data-manager corporations under the shelter of developmental needs.**

We need data which

- Uncovers inequality and discrimination linked to class, gender and race/ethnicity, disenfranchisement, patterns of ownership and access to land, labor and capital.**
- Is used as part of a democratic process which aspires to challenge oppressive power structures and strengthens participation in decision making of those most affected by hunger and malnutrition;**