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## REFLECTIONS ON THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT+2 AND THE ROAD TO COP28 FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

*The first UN Food Systems Summit took place in 2021 and centred on transforming fragile global food systems that are failing to deliver food to all, leading to food insecurity and malnutrition.*

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Every two years, a global stocktaking meeting is being held to review progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and the UN Food Systems Summit+2 Stocktaking gathering in Rome on 24-26 July was intended to focus on the progress the world has made since the 2021 Summit. Climate change intersects with other factors, such as economic challenges, conflict and pandemics, to exacerbate the impacts of nonfunctional food systems. As partners working on local climate solutions in food systems as part of the Amplifying Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) alliance, we reflect below on some of the discussions from the event and what it means for the upcoming UNFCCC COP28.



**“Global food systems are broken, and billions of people are paying the price.”**



Our current global food systems are responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions, 80% of deforestation, and 70% of freshwater use, and are the single greatest cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss and land degradation. A third of the earth's surface is already degraded. Despite having sufficient food to feed 10 billion people, three billion people still cannot afford healthy diets. And only 30 crops provide 95% of human food energy needs while local, indigenous varieties that are often both nutritious and more resilient to climate change are being lost. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in the event's opening plenary, **“Global food systems are broken, and billions of people are paying the price.”**

Despite recognition of the challenges facing our food systems, we saw two different narratives during the summit proceedings, offering contradictory solutions. On the one hand, a growing vocal group of researchers, farmers and governments strongly advocate for more support for agroecology, direct support for family or small-scale farmers and moving away from industrial agriculture with its narrow focus on yields and food export commodities. On the other hand, actors such as the International Fertilizer Association and agrichemical multinationals continue to advocate for increased chemical input use, public subsidisation, and “precision agriculture” and automation to more precisely and efficiently apply them.

Fertilizer use in industrial agriculture continues to drive emissions, degrade soils and cause water pollution, impacting ecosystems and biodiversity. Alternative approaches include agroecology, which uses nonchemical inputs, whose principles are based on regeneration, food sovereignty and inclusion. The majority of farmers worldwide are family or small-scale farmers, and agroecology combines elements of many generations of indigenous and local knowledge and farmer research. It has been shown to not only have the potential to outperform industrial agriculture in terms of food production by rebuilding degraded soils but provide many other social and ecological benefits while avoiding the pollution and emissions of agrochemicals.

## Finance is still the biggest hurdle

Many speakers throughout the summit emphasized that finance remains the highest hurdle to food systems transformation. About US\$76 billion annually is estimated to be needed until 2030 to transform African food systems. Susan Gardner, Director of the Ecosystems Division at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), speaking in [an interview](#) ahead of the Summit, emphasised the controversial role that agricultural subsidies continue to play. Agricultural producers receive US\$ 540 billion a year in financial support from states. The vast majority, as much as 87%, either distort prices or harm nature and human health. And yet agroecology approaches receive virtually no public financial support through subsidies or any other form of government support in most countries.



**“In 2021, UNEP published a report, along with other UN partners, that called on governments to rethink the way agriculture is subsidized. By redirecting agricultural subsidies towards sustainable practices, small-scale farmers, research and innovation, rural infrastructure and nutrition, states can foster a more equitable and resilient food system.” - Susan Gardner, Director of the Ecosystems Division at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**



There is an urgent and critical need for finance to transform and repair the broken food system. This includes reforms in the financial architecture to address timely access to resources, good quality and adequate quantity of resources to ensure the transformation of food systems in the Global South.

To achieve food security, it is essential to redirect public funds to prioritize services that support agriculture and food collectively, particularly in low-income and some lower-middle-income countries where agriculture plays a crucial role in the economy, employment, and livelihoods. Such realignment of support alone will not be sufficient; complementary policies for agri-food systems are needed to foster healthy food environments and enable consumers to adopt nutritious diets.

The success of these reorientation initiatives will depend on various factors, including the political and social context, governance, power dynamics, interests, ideas, and stakeholder influence. Strong local, national, and global institutions will be crucial, along with the effective engagement and participation of public and private sector stakeholders and international organizations.

## The path to COP28

Climate change was also central to the discussion, with Mariam bint Mohammed Saeed Hareb Almheiri, Minister of Climate Change and Environment, United Arab Emirates, speaking in several high-level sessions. During the summit, she launched the COP28 Food Systems and Agriculture agenda, which she said builds on the momentum created by the UNFSS process to transform food and agriculture systems. The UAE COP28 presidency plans to finalise a Leaders' Declaration on food systems, agriculture and climate action at COP28.

***“If we don’t transform our food systems now, there will be no realistic pathway to achieve the Paris Agreement,”*** Almheiri said. ***“This is the strongest push ever given to food systems and agriculture in the COP process. And we must work together to make the most of it.”***

We argue that leadership at COP28 will require global leaders to recognize the central importance of local farmers, fishers, harvesters and food workers in shaping food system transformation in line with local solutions and local knowledge. And that any declaration should be centred on food sovereignty and include agroecology. We also support the [Soil Health resolution](#) developed by the [Coalition of Action 4 Soil](#) Health and urge parties to include this in the final COP28 negotiated text.

It is disappointing that the previous Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture framework (KJWA) of the UNFCCC remained so limited, characterized by corporate capture and slow progress. The discussions, focus and scope of KJWA were overly narrow, excluding many critical food system components, possibilities for change and support for agroecology. Food production is one of the major objectives of the UNFCCC framework, and future discussions will need to be broadened.

Food system transformation also cannot happen in isolation. We recall and support the objectives of the UNFCCC set at the Rio Earth Summit: stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system and ensure that food production is not threatened.

## Locally-led action for food and climate

As Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA), we support and advocate for locally-led climate action, and in transforming food systems, this means taking a food sovereignty approach and supporting locally-led and farmer-led approaches. Many of these approaches will provide significant co-benefits for the climate. But we urgently need governments and financiers to scale up and redirect finance towards locally-led food systems transformations.

We applaud the growing recognition demonstrated during the event of the value of indigenous and resilient varieties such as millet and sorghum. These are just a few indigenous varieties that need to be valued and protected, along with local knowledge about them.

Innovation and technology will undoubtedly have a role to play in food systems transformation, but any innovation should be based on the principles of food sovereignty, which requires governments and companies to devolve decision-making and power in the food system to the local level and place farmers and other food workers at the centre. Technology that is implemented top-down in the food system and owned and controlled by multinationals will never be a sustainable solution.

## Paradigm Shift is Needed in Agricultural Policies of the Global South

The global south’s paradigm shift in agricultural policies is a crucial undertaking to ensure food sovereignty. It is essential to acknowledge that their food dependence is not merely a crisis caused by limited national or international events; rather, it stems from a deliberate policy that keeps the agricultural sector reliant on the global agricultural market and the world food system dominated by industrial and economic powers. This colonial-inspired model, adopted by many Southern countries, emerged from a “modernist” vision upheld by political leaders who inherited postcolonial states. This approach continues to influence agricultural policies, leading to their persistent food dependence.

Breaking away from this neocolonial model is paramount to fostering a more autonomous and sovereign approach to agriculture. Food sovereignty can only be achieved through a complete delinking from the global food system, where industrial and economic powers hold dominant sway. Southern countries must embrace agricultural policies that truly leverage local resources, value traditional knowledge, and support local farmers, promoting agroecological and sustainable practices. By severing the chains of dependence and investing in autonomy-focused and sustainable agricultural policies, these countries can liberate themselves from food dependence and foster lasting food security for their populations.

To find out more about what partners in VCA are working on, visit their websites:

<https://osae-marsad.org/>

<https://www.ctdtzambia.com/>

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