

## **Draft Briefing on Civil Society & Indigenous People's concerns on the Food Systems Summit (FSS)**

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In December 2019, the UN Secretary General officially announced that he will be hosting a Food Systems Summit in 2021 with the aims of maximizing the benefits of a food systems approach across the entire 2030 Agenda, meeting the challenges of climate change, making food systems inclusive, and supporting sustainable peace. Indigenous Peoples, social movements and grassroots organizations of small-scale food producers, peasants and family farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, food and agricultural workers, landless, women, youth, consumers and urban food insecure and other civil society organizations (CSOs) who have been working for decades for food sovereignty have expressed serious concerns about this Summit.

### **What is the role of UN Member States in FSS?**

The [architecture of FSS](#) is complex: The Special Envoy, the Advisory Committee, the Scientific Group, the UN Task Force, the Champions Network, five Action Tracks, four cross-cutting Levers of Change and the Food Systems Dialogues.

Despite the name "Summit" is usually devoted to intergovernmental meetings, only a handful of country governments not selected by regional groups are represented in the Advisory Committee. The other FSS bodies are mainly populated by other actors, identified through totally non transparent selection processes. In such a complex architecture, with so many different actors participating, it is unclear how they will be making decisions with regards, for instance, to the "high-level set of principles established through the process that will guide Member States and other stakeholders to leverage their food systems capacity to support the SDGs", which is supposed to be one of the expected results of FSS.

Furthermore, UN Member States have established a set of intergovernmental agencies and bodies to ensure coherence and continuity in policies and programmes. These agencies and bodies have also nurtured inclusive mechanisms of participation of civil society, social movements and Indigenous Peoples. The Summit infrastructure largely by-passes these bodies and their consultative mechanisms, and does not make adequate reference to the normative frameworks that they have established over time. While much effort and resources are being spent in FSS, it remains unclear what would the outcome of this process be and who will be mandated to follow it up.

We kindly request Member States to underline the importance of a democratic multilateral system, including the CFS and the Rome Based Agencies for the governance of food. The FSS must strengthen, and in no way undermine, weaken or substitute the CFS or its components, particularly the independence of the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) and the autonomy of civil society and Indigenous Peoples' participation in this foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international global platform for food security and nutrition.

### **Should the UN become a multi-stakeholder platform?**

The FSS follows a strong multi-stakeholder approach, which puts on equal footing governments, corporations, other private sector actors, philanthropies, scientists, and international NGOs. While FSS organizers aim to create an illusion of inclusiveness, it remains unclear who is in control of taking decisions and by what procedures decisions are made. This creates serious problems of accountability, legitimacy and democratic control of the UN.

In June 2019, the UN Secretary General signed a strategic partnership agreement with the World Economic Forum. This agreement is fundamentally at odds with the UN Charter and with

intergovernmental decisions on sustainable development, the climate emergency, and the eradication of poverty and hunger. It will provide transnational corporations (TNCs) preferential access to the UN system and permanently associate the UN with TNCs, some of whose core activities have caused and/or worsened the social, economic and environmental crises the world faces.

The FSS emerges as one of the first tangible materialization of this approach, casting serious shadows on the primacy of human rights and public interest in the United Nations.

We kindly request Member States to commit to establishing robust safeguards against conflict of interest (COI) in all bodies and processes of the FSS (and the UN), to ensure the centrality of public interests over private ones. This would include mandatory COI declarations from all members of these bodies (Scientific Group, Advisory Committee, Champions Group, Action Tracks) to transparently expose the full map of existing conflicts of interests and enable adequate corrective actions.

### **What are the real impediments to the transformation of food systems?**

Today's food systems are highly dysfunctional in several key dimensions, notably in terms of their impact on cultural traditions, human health, ecosystems and the livelihoods of small-scale producers, rural communities and workers. These dysfunctions are maintained by profound power asymmetries across countries and food system actors. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed how industrial and increasingly globalized food systems are intensifying ecological destruction and the emergence of zoonotic diseases while increasing peoples' vulnerability to infections and disease due to unhealthy food and living environments. Structural imbalances related to agricultural and food markets, trade and investment regimes that perpetuates commodity and debt traps for countries in the Global South, lack of policy framework that uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and technological divides are among some of the critical policy challenges that would need to be tackled to enable the real transformative potential of a systemic and holistic approach to food systems. None of these issues appear on the agenda of the Summit as the FSS itself appears trapped by these same power dynamics.

We kindly invite Member States to recognize that food system transformation requires systemic policy reforms that redress the current global division of labour between the Global North and the Global South. Such an agenda for systemic reforms can only be tackled in the context of inclusive and democratic intergovernmental negotiations based on human rights and other key UN developmental principles, with robust safeguards against conflicts of interest.

### **Why is the "food systems" approach important for UN Member States?**

The notion of food systems offers the opportunity for a paradigm shift to a holistic, systemic approach that moves beyond agricultural productivism and reclaims food systems as public goods that cannot be left to market-based solutions only. A holistic food systems approach recognizes the complex interrelatedness of food systems with other sectors (health, agriculture, environment, politics, culture) and systems (such as ecosystems, economic systems, socio-cultural systems, energy systems and health systems). Food systems hence need to be understood in their multidimensionality and circularity, because they combine and can serve multiple public objectives such as the protection and regeneration of nature, health and well-being, protection of labour and livelihoods, culture and knowledge, and social relations. In this respect, food systems offer a critical entry point for public

policies and investment that can advance the development agenda. However, this requires a process firmly centred on UN Member States and protected by robust safeguards against conflicts of interest.

In the context of the urgent need for a systemic and holistic understanding, we kindly request Member States to uphold the centrality of public interest and public institutions in rethinking and reassessing food systems to ensure they are better shaped to meet the multiplicity of public objectives they inherently support.