



Policy brief

July 2023

# African Civil Society Assessment of the UNFSS National Pathways

## African CSIPM Popular Consultation Space

African agriculture and food systems are evolving in a very volatile context, impacted by climate change, conflicts, fragile and iniquitous globalized food systems, successive food crises (three major ones in 15 years)<sup>1</sup>, and unattended structural causes. Africa is one of the first victims of existing global inequalities with a generally subordinate economic position, a limited voice in political decisions affecting the continent, and an extremely unequal distribution of the costs and benefits arising from the exploitation of natural resources. In this context, the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) of 2021, which was widely denounced by peoples' movements around the world as undemocratic and illegitimate, sought to kickstart a global process towards "food system transformation," and urged countries to develop "national pathways" towards this goal. In Africa, the Dakar 2 'Feed Africa' Summit of January 2023, sponsored by the African Development Bank, also enjoined countries to present "national compacts" highlighting private sector investment.

African governments are calling for an end to dependence on food imports. But instead of supporting peasant agroecology and territorial markets, they seem to prefer a modernization approach to African agriculture that concentrates investment in specialized crops, privileges privatized seed and so-called modern technologies, and promotes the development of export-oriented value chains. The national pathways that African governments have drawn up in the context of the UNFSS, like the national compacts presented at the Dakar 2 Summit, could reinforce this tendency. This is why African Peasants Organizations (POs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have decided to undertake their own autonomous assessment of these developments.

A broad range of African POs and CSOs have denounced the corporate capture of their food systems and are advocating for their real solutions to food crises. This policy brief is rooted in a process that began before the 2021 UNFSS summit and has produced two widely shared statements: (1) The African PO/CSO response to the UNFSS, and (2) The African popular consultation declaration. These POs and CSOs – acting in what is known as the African CSIPM Popular Consultation Space - have mandated the research, whose initial findings are reported here.

1. Food crisis (2008), Covid-19 pandemic (2019) and war between Ukraine and Russia (2022).



## A PARTICIPATORY AND INCLUSIVE CSO PROCESS

Case studies have been conducted in five countries (Congo, Kenya, Mali, Morocco and Zambia), representing different African sub-regions. Information from Mauritania, Egypt, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Uganda and Zimbabwe has been added to broaden the scope of the study. In all the five case study countries the work has been undertaken under the guidance of POs and CSOs who have been involved in the UNFSS counter-mobilization and the CSIPM popular consultation. In each of the five countries, a national researcher was identified to conduct the study under the leadership of a continental lead researcher. It was agreed that the research would look at both the process whereby the pathways were developed and their content, comparing the direction of the pathways and the compacts with that advocated by national movements.

A task team was mandated to develop the evaluation proposal for validation by the space and to follow up on its implementation. The task team consulted regularly with the participants of the African space to ensure their participation in the activities and validation of the outcomes.

### INITIAL KEY FINDINGS

This brief presents emerging results, which will be further explored in a participatory process over the coming weeks. The key findings are drawn from different sources, including through interviews with official informants, analyses of official governmental declarations, online sources, media, community consultations, personal communications and more. In many cases, information from different sources has been fact-checked to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data provided.

#### Process


Three scenarios of PO/CSO participation in formulating the national pathways have been identified:

1. POs/CSOs were recognized as key players, were invited to participate and contributed to the drafting of the pathway, but were excluded afterward;
2. POs/CSOs with a legitimate mandate to represent the views of people's organizations working in food systems were excluded while other CSOs without such a mandate were invited instead;
3. POs/CSOs were invited and participated in the process, but their concerns were ignored in the final document and in the follow-up.

In all cases studied, except for Mali and Congo Brazzaville, POs/CSOs advocating a rights-based approach were completely omitted from the section of the national pathway action plan regarding monitoring and evaluation systems, with governments foreseeing no role for them in the implementation of the pathway. Furthermore, in all countries studied, except for Morocco, the pathway process foresees increased financing for agriculture, but dependent on external support. Autonomous decision-making is reduced, and most processes are blocked at the present time because of the lack of donor funding.

#### Content

The content of the national pathways and the compacts shows that the most governments, while mentioning agroecology and occasionally food sovereignty, have drafted documents which are rooted in a technology-oriented green revolution model of production. These documents lack reference to a rights-based approach (observed in Morocco, Kenya and Mauritania) and emphasize the corporate private sector as a key actor in food system trans-



formation. In addition, gender equity and youth's access to opportunities is still problematic in all the countries.

## KEY MESSAGES

- **Human rights-based governance, not multistakeholderism**

States must reconsider their policy processes by building on existing inclusive spaces and strengthening the involvement of and accountability to peoples' movements for more inclusive food systems, promoting food and nutritional sovereignty.

- **Public financing for more sustainable food systems**

The national pathways approach promotes dependence on external financing rather than on public policies and judicious use of public finances. This should be addressed urgently. The key message from the case studies is for States to honor the Maputo and Malabo commitments to allocate at least 10% of the national budget (sourced from national resources) to the agricultural sector and food systems. They are requested to prioritize investments in family farming, including all agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries activities.

- **Support to family farming, agroecology and territorial markets**

States must ensure a critical participatory assessment of agricultural public policies to achieve overall coherence, taking into account the legitimate needs and goals of peasants, Indigenous Peoples and other people working in rural areas. The issue of the sustainability and equity of food systems must be at the heart of this process, promoting alternatives to the green revolution approach, with its industrial agriculture/private sector-led, export-oriented supply chains.

- **People's access to and control over land, water and seeds**

States must commit to resolutely supporting inclusive and participatory land tenure, and access to seeds and other resources that provide security for communities and are based on customs and traditions. These must be drawn up, finalised, implemented and monitored taking into account the well-being of communities, without discriminating against groups under pressure, in particular pastoralists, fisherfolk, women, youth and persons with disabilities.

In addition, States must not only acknowledge farmer-managed seed systems but also actively promote them through participatory research, with peasant-researchers at the center in all fields, in order to assert seed sovereignty. Seed policies and laws must systematically exclude any provisions that criminalize or undermine farmer-managed seed systems and their practices.

- **Gender equity and youth access to opportunities**

All actions and investments related to the pathways and the compacts should be analyzed from a gender and youth perspective to ensure that they strengthen, rather than undermine, women and youth's empowerment and livelihoods. This would also promote generational sustainability of family farming, allowing young people to access productive assets such as land, which are largely captured by industrial agriculture corporations. Additionally, gender equality and youth agency are relevant issues to be addressed, aligning with the contrasting high-tech and entrepreneurial approach of the modernization narrative with the socially embedded approach of POs and CSOs.

*For African peasant and civil society organisations, food sovereignty means supporting peasant agroecology and territorial food systems, not global value chains and industrial, high-tech agriculture.*