

A SUMMIT UNDER SIEGE!

POSITION PAPER ON UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT 2021

THE STATE

MULTINATIONALS



Corporate lobbies defending Agribusiness interests are influencing the 2021 UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT preparations, making the process opaque and exclusionary. La Via Campesina explains why this endangers people's food sovereignty and threatens the planet's future.



POSITION PAPER BY **LA VIA CAMPESINA**
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INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that the world needs to come together to deal with the severe and ongoing impact of COVID-19 on our food systems. When the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS21) was announced in December 2019, the world was a different place. Even then, concerns existed about the non-transparent and illegitimate process behind developing, announcing and organizing that Summit. Consequently, in March 2020 La Via Campesina (LVC) joined [around 550](#) other social movements and civil society organizations in opposing the corporate takeover of the Summit.

As the UNFSS21 process has been moving forward, as La Via Campesina, we are getting more and more alarmed. At the same time, we affirm that a global conversation on our food systems is of utmost importance, as the COVID 19 pandemic has only reinforced and exposed the failure of the corporate food system to address hunger, inequality and the ecological crisis.

This paper presents LVC's concerns and reflections related to the Summit, both in terms of process and contents. It also aims to express La Via Campesina's engagement and demands towards a necessary food system transformation guided by the principles of food sovereignty and agroecology.

We, at LVC, have not only advocated but also actively participated in democratizing the United Nations. LVC has had a critical role in the reform of UN food policy processes after the 2008 food crisis. The crisis made UN bodies and member states recognize the importance of including the voices of rural social movements and civil society in shaping food policies. In particular, the FAO Strategy for Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations¹, and the reform of the Committee for World Food Security (CFS) with its Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM) brought forth new paradigms, logics and processes that started paving the way to the democratization global food systems policy.

1 <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3443e.pdf>

This brought about a progressive shift that levelled the “field of play” not only for civil society but also for national governments. LVC, through the unified and committed work and processes of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), has played a vital role in empowering the CSM and CFS processes.

Many of the advances were indeed born out of the principles of food sovereignty - a comprehensive model for transforming food systems, restoring the health of our peoples and nature - supported and advocated by LVC since the World Food Summit of 1996. These institutional processes have allowed several significant advances, including the Guidelines on Land Tenure, the Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, the ongoing process regarding the Guidelines on Agroecology and Other Innovations, and more broadly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. Many of these new instruments have posed direct obstacles to the global corporate agenda, as well as the imperial interests of global economies and elites.

Towards a Non-Inclusive Summit Led By Global Power And Financial Elites

Announced in December 2019, UNFSS21 has the stated 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.

However, the UNFSS21 process has been characterized from the beginning by opacity and non-inclusiveness. In the past, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) convened the World Food Summits (WFS) - in 1996 and 2002 - following explicit decisions of its member governments. These previous summits also saw an active and fully supported participation of the Civil Society through parallel autonomous and self-organized fora. However, the UNFSS21 has not received



any mandate from an intergovernmental decision or process. Instead, the decision was taken by the UN General Secretary, in response to a request made by the World Economic Forum, which is a private sector organization representing global corporate interests. It also had crucial support from a few powerful member states and a few major 'philanthro-capitalist' organizations as sponsors.

Even as the UNFSS Secretariat claims that this 'will be the most open summit ever', the governance of the Summit remains then firmly in the hands of a handful of large international corporations. "Experts" known to be strenuous defenders of industrial agriculture and some States, the same that host many of these large international corporations, are driving the agenda!

Social movements are restricted to a process of backchannel dialogues, and they are unable to participate autonomously. The UNFSS secretariat has consciously refused to approach existing organized Social Movements or platforms, such as LVC or IPC. Instead, it has decided to cherry-pick participants from different organizations. A few organizations and individuals were summoned to join advisory bodies, while a growing number of individuals are being called to participate by signing up as 'champions' of the UNFSS. No compunction has been shown in including small-scale food producers, civil society and indigenous peoples' organizations in a way respecting their autonomy, self-organization, and self-determination.

In October 2020, the Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) launched [an open call for engagement in response to the UNFSS](#), denouncing its non-inclusiveness and inviting movements and organizations concerned with food to join efforts in building a collective process to challenge the Summit. A month later, and almost a year after announcing the Summit, the Chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) was invited to join the advisory committee. At the same time, an invitation also sought the participation of Civil Society Mechanism (CSM) in "Action Tracks" - consultations among stakeholders around the objectives of the Summit.

Despite these late invitations, the role of the CFS as the leading international and intergovernmental policy platform (and FAO as key implementing

agency) on food issues continues to be undermined. The idea that a restricted panel of so-called 'experts' should be at the helm of global food system policy is utterly undemocratic. Such an idea has already been rejected by consensus and replaced by the reformed CFS. The current trajectory of the Summit's build-up process allows the global power elites, and especially the private sector, to once again legitimize themselves as architects of the future of our food system, using its transnational corporate arms to continue to accumulate capital and destroy the planet.

Its giving agribusinesses a free rein to shape the future of our food systems, covered by anti-democratic public policies. Hence, we cannot consider the UNFSS21 as a legitimate multilateral governmental space allowing the autonomous participation of Civil Society. The process towards the UNFSS also clearly shows the increasing corporate capture of some important UN Bodies.



by Polyp (Permission for use issued to La Via Campesina in 2018).
More at www.polyp.org.uk

WE WANT FOOD POLICIES THAT ARE FREE FROM CORPORATE CAPTURE!

For more than two decades, La Via Campesina, together with other social movements and civil society organizations have been exposing the risks of corporate capture of food systems at all levels². We express now our concerns about the processes linked to the UNFSS21. There are clear indications that corporate interests will control the Summit, evident from the fact that it originates from a partnership between the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the UN Secretary-General.

These concerns have been given more credence in our dialogues with the appointed Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for overseeing the Summit, Dr Agnes Kalibata. She is the current President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), which has been controversial amongst social movements and civil society in Africa and elsewhere, since its inception.

In Africa, a [recent expose](#) revealed the catastrophic failure of AGRA's continent-wide plan to stop hunger through an aggressive shift of African agricultural systems towards industrial and agro-toxic-reliant agriculture models. In our eyes, the appointment of Dr Agnes Kalibata as Special Envoy for the Summit shows how the relevant multinational corporate interests seek to control the "Summit" and further entrench their power over the public policy and governance of the global food system.

We believe it is essential to oppose the corporate capture of food systems because global agribusiness supports the imposition of financial and market paradigms to food production and distribution. This logic created the 2008 food crisis and has continued to negatively affect small-scale food producers and people, in general, all over the world. Nowadays, a small number of corporations aim to control data, agricultural land, water,

² See for instance <https://viacampesina.org/en/ending-corporate-capture-of-the-united-nations/> and <https://www.eurovia.org/la-via-campesina-issues-call-to-mobilise-against-wto-and-free-trade-agreements/>

seeds and other resources, and through this to control our food systems for private profit and global domination. Their destructive practices include large-scale grabbing, the concentration and privatization of land, water and other resources, industrialized farming, fishing and livestock production, overexploitation of nature (including the exploitation of



human beings), the autocratic and greedy use of new technologies, and the implementation of large scale infrastructure projects based on foreign direct investment and unsustainable public debt.

This corporate grip has been expanding in international, regional, and national policy places, and has continued to try to increase their influence within the UN system. The WEF-UN partnership agreement signed in 2019 has de facto provided transnational corporations preferential and deferential access to the UN System. This partnership, denounced by LVC and other organizations, raises serious concerns about the integrity of the United Nations as a multilateral system and its independence and impartiality, particularly concerning the protection and promotion of human rights. Moreover, many UN agencies, including UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and UNESCO, have engaged in partnerships with major transnational companies (TNCs); at the same time, they are not doing enough to curb the impunity of TNCs. The result is that we see more and more UN policies that put private interests and speculation above public interests.

WE DEFEND A HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF FOOD SYSTEMS!

The UN Food Summit has been renamed to the UN Food Systems Summit in its upcoming iteration in the belief that the change would equip us better to 'resolve not only hunger but to reduce diet-related disease and heal the planet'. While the shift to 'food systems' is a step up from the previously dominant 'food security' paradigm within the UN institutions, all signs show that food systems will continue to be defined in such a way as to facilitate corporate capture.

In concurrent and ongoing processes in the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of UN, particularly on the negotiations on Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, the push is towards a narrower understanding of food systems, where the private sector continues to be allowed to undertake the task of transformation. The UN institutions continue to draw definitions from policy-makers that are situated far away from real food systems, which leads to food systems being understood only in terms of their eventual outcome: putting food on a plate.

LVC has continued to push those in the UN institutions to move beyond narrow visions of food systems. It is important to remember that while the UN agencies are still debating whether they need a food systems approach, what exactly a food system is, and whether they need transformation, LVC has advocated for the idea of food sovereignty as a located, grounded vision of food systems transformation since 1994. While there is a growing recognition that the industrialization and intensification of food production in the last century have led to ecological damage, displacement, food waste and the consumption of unhealthy and unsustainable food, there is continued reluctance to point the finger at those responsible: agribusiness and productivist agricultural policies.

WHAT FOOD SYSTEMS DO WE NEED?

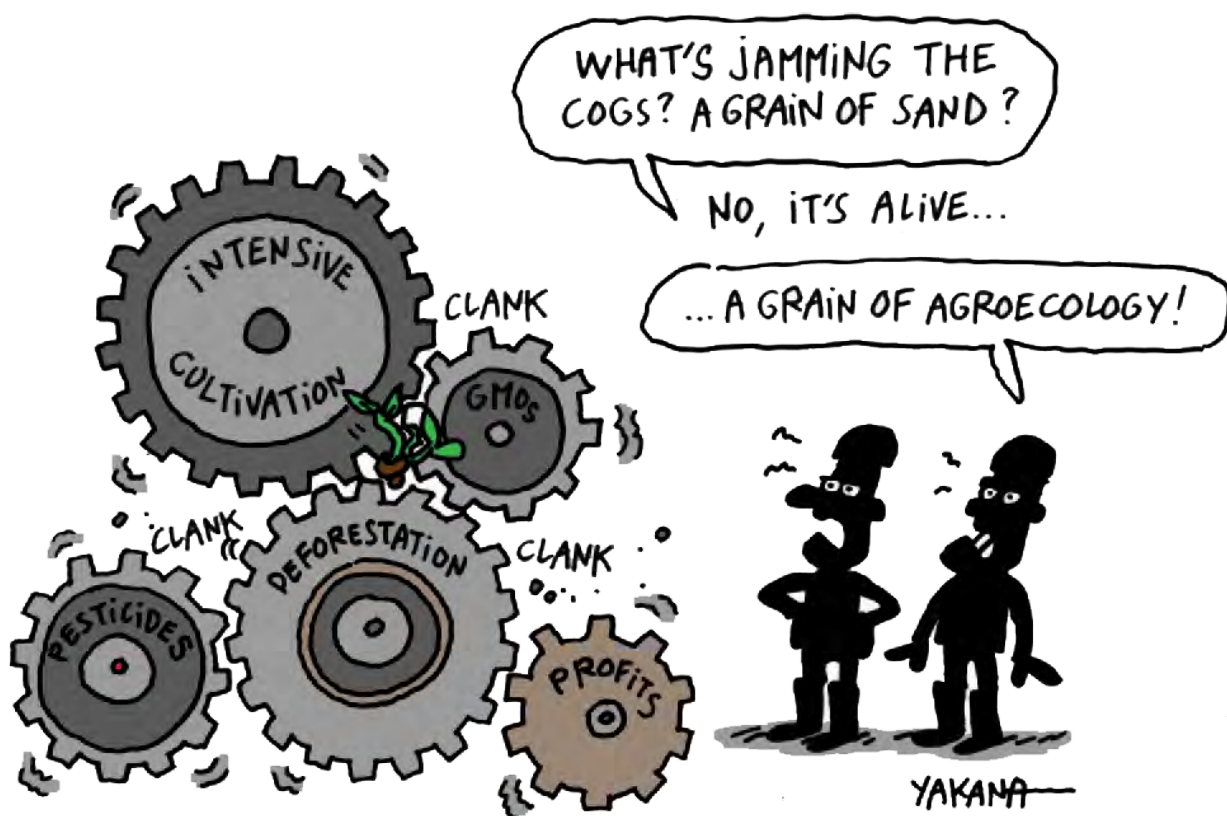
We believe that no systemic transformation is possible through narrowing inclusion and intensifying corporate capture and destruction of nature. These approaches have already failed too many times. Peasants, fisherfolks, indigenous people, pastoralists, forest dwellers, agriculture workers, as well as consumers in the cities and rural areas, are the heart of the food systems.

Those are the voices that must be heard within the UN if a change is to take place, and if the UN is to become a space to lead to real transformations of food systems. Food systems will neither be sustainable nor equitable if the UN continues to rely on the voices of corporations, sponsored researchers and dominant elites' policymakers.

To achieve a food system transformation in this sense, we advocate the following:

- Build local food systems that are diverse and agroecological and built by people, instead of remaking and expanding of the corporate global food system. Bring in genuine agrarian reform in many countries, and support and promote local seeds.
- Bring in systemic changes to face the current climate crisis and to achieve a significant reduction of CO2 emissions, knowing that Industrialized agriculture and the corporate food system are causing this crisis.
- Transform existing trade policies to allow the support and protection of local food production.
- Promote effective public policies at the international, national and local level that will strengthen agroecological peasant production and protect local markets.
- Guarantee the implementation of the United Nation Declaration on the Right of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) at all level as a critical instrument for the defence and promotion of human and labour rights.

At a time when the world reels under a pandemic and continues to suffer the consequence of climate crisis, La Via Campesina is urging the governments of the UN, to bring forth an agenda for social transformation. One that puts at its centre a strong emphasis on local food production and local food systems, a transition to renewable energy and the strengthening of the public sector. Representatives of major global movements and organization should play a key role in the formulation of these initiatives.



La Via Campesina, the voice of over 200 million peasant producers, is convinced that only food systems that are in harmony with nature and respect human rights can protect the life, peace and the wellbeing of people and our generations to come.

Food Sovereignty is our compass, and the Agroecological transition is our map towards the needed systemic transformations.

All illustrations, except the one on page 4, by Yacine Canamas (YAKANA), a committed ally of the Peasant Movement, who is no more with us in this world, but his ideas live on.



For more information:

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