

THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT: CIDSE’S POSITION AND ROLE – APRIL 2021

This document defines the position of the CIDSE network vis-à-vis the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) that is taking place in the autumn of 2021. This event could be a game-changer for the evolution and transformation of food systems. Therefore, CIDSE – promoting food sovereignty for years in close collaboration with partners from all over the world – is expressing its perspective and approach towards this Summit.

What is happening? 2021 a tipping moment for food systems?

Less than a decade remains for the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹. The growing number of people living in hunger, as well as the climate and biodiversity emergencies demand effective policy responses now. Even in times of a global pandemic and the continuous deterioration of international institutions by authoritarian leaders and corporate interests, there are perspectives, hopes and plans for another future. The Paris Agreement, the post-pandemic recovery, and the Agenda 2030 remain paths for the transition towards a just and sustainable world for all. However, in order to achieve those objectives, in particular ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture², we must question and transform our food systems.

The dominant industrial food system is at the heart of the current ecological, social and economic crises. For decades, the strategy to fight hunger was to increase productivity with technologies such as chemical pesticides and fertilizers, high-tech seeds and the integration of farmers into international markets. It is no longer appropriate to consider this development approach effective, if only for its major contribution to climate change, biodiversity loss, and deforestation. All this ecological damage threatens life systems while failing to feed the poorest and most vulnerable populations, often food producers themselves. The way we are producing, modifying, distributing and consuming food has to change if we want a livable planet for now and for future generations³.

In December 2019, the United Nations (UN) announced the organisation of a Food Systems Summit that aims to bring various stakeholders together to work on the necessary changes to food systems. As the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, put it: *“It is unacceptable that hunger is on the rise at a time when the world wastes more than 1 billion tonnes of food every year. It is time to change how we*

¹ Sustainable Development Goals - THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development (un.org)

² SDG 2

³ Frison, E., & Jacobs, N. (2016). *From uniformity to diversity – A paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems*. Bruxelles: IPES-Food - [UniformityToDiversity FULL.pdf \(ipes-food.org\)](https://www.ipes-food.org/uniformity-to-diversity-full.pdf)

produce and consume, including to reduce greenhouse emissions. Transforming food systems is crucial for delivering all the Sustainable Development Goals. As a human family, a world free of hunger is our imperative⁴.”

Despite the urgency to create a global space to discuss the need for more sustainable and resilient food systems, this Summit unfortunately raises a lot of concerns among civil society organisations (CSOs), indigenous peoples’ organisations and farmers and peasants’ unions. In 2020, 550 CSOs joined forces to express their concern in a letter addressed to Antonio Guterres⁵. The lack of transparency and of inclusiveness, the disproportionate importance given to corporate solutions and rhetoric, and the appointment of Agnes Kalibata as the Special envoy for the UN Food Systems Summit are key elements that concern civil society organisations worldwide⁶.

Moreover, the place given to corporate interests in the process⁷ demonstrates the on-going dynamic of corporate capture⁸ of multilateral institutions. CIDSE considers that the transformation of the global food systems must be discussed inside the existing and globally recognised international democratic institutions, particularly inside the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). We collaborate with, support and defend this UN body in its work of providing people and governments democratic recommendations for the necessary evolution of food systems.

CIDSE and its allies share those concerns⁹. The UN Food Systems Summit risks to become a key moment for corporate interests to push for their solutions even though it has been demonstrated that these solutions are inadequate to achieve the ultimate goal of ensuring the right to food for all and protect the planet at the same time¹⁰. The UN Food Systems Summit will likely ignore small scale farmers’ voices, experience and knowledge. The Summit risks to delay a just and sustainable transformation of food consumption and production patterns, and to perpetuate the current economic, social, and environmental crises. The solutions that emerge from such a process will certainly fail to eradicate hunger and ensure food sovereignty for all. The Summit lacks the necessary democratic legitimacy that is essential for deep changes to be accepted, endorsed and implemented multilaterally.

⁴ [Food Systems Summit | United Nations](#)

⁵ Various CSOs. (2020). *CSOs letter on UN Food Systems Summit*. Rome: IPC - [EN Edited draft-letter-UN-food-systems-summit_070220.pdf \(foodsovereignty.org\)](#)

⁶ Agnes Kalibata is the former Minister of Agriculture of Rwanda and director of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). This alliance aims to fight hunger and poverty by promoting market-led agriculture based on the use of chemical intrants and improved seeds. Based on an 2020 study, AGRA failed to meet its objectives : [False Promises AGRA en.pdf \(rosalux.de\)](#)

⁷ CETIM speech during the 46th session of the Human Rights Council (22 February – 19 March 2021) [The UN Food Systems Summit: How Not to Respond to the Urgency of Reform | Inter Press Service \(ipsnews.net\)](#)

⁸ [The corporate capture of global governance and what we are doing about it | Transnational Institute \(tni.org\)](#)

⁹ [CSM letter to the CFS Chair on Food Systems Summit/](#) Letter sent by Michael Fakri, UN Rapporteur on the Right to Food [to Dr. Agnes Kalibata](#)

¹⁰ CIDSE. (2014). *Climate-Smart Agriculture: the Emperor’s new clothes?* / Wise, T. (2020). *Failing Africa’s Farmers: New report shows Africa’s Green Revolution is “failing on its own terms”*

What is CIDSE's general approach towards the Summit?

CIDSE has a long history of work on the transformation of agriculture. From our research and testimonies¹¹, CIDSE concludes that a holistic approach based on human rights is needed to tackle all the interconnected issues linked to agriculture. CIDSE advocates for agroecology¹² and supports knowledge sharing on this food system between Southern movements and researchers. As Olivier De Schutter¹³ defines it: “*Agroecology is a coherent concept for designing future farming systems as it is strongly rooted both in science and in practice, and because it shows strong connections with the principles of the right to adequate food*”¹⁴. CIDSE considers that the corporate interests influencing the UN Food Systems Summit represent a threat for the development and implementation of agroecology. The plethora of technical and market solutions (high-tech seeds and new breeding techniques, digital agriculture, climate smart agriculture, among others) pushed by agrobusiness that indebt and exclude small-scale farmers will not sustainably feed the world or fight poverty. It will only keep the order of inequality intact.

The CIDSE network has decided to approach the Summit critically. **CIDSE and its partners are working with other like-minded civil society actors to set out rights-based strategies for the sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems. These strategies are based on inclusive governance systems and denounce false solutions**¹⁵. CIDSE, while not directly engaged within the official process of the Summit, will continue to target institutions and collaborate with grassroots actors to create an enabling environment for agroecological transitions.

These are the solutions that CIDSE has been supporting for years and for which we will continue to fight. The coming decade of intergovernmental decisions will determine the future of humanity. CIDSE will continue to promote the interests of the most exploited small-scale farmers who feed the world, and ensure the right to food for all. On a planet of collapsing ecosystems, without a solution for all, there will be a solution for none. But life and hope always find their way. CIDSE commits to continue working for a resilient food system in its entire chain to restore harmony between humanity and nature.

¹¹ To present a few – CIDSE. (2018). *The Climate Urgency*; CIDSE. (2018). *The principles of Agroecology*; CIDSE (2020). *Analysis of funding flows to agroecology*; (2020). CIDSE and al. *Feminism and agroecology: Transforming economy and society*.

¹² CIDSE. (2018). *The Principles of Agroecology*

¹³ Olivier De Schutter was the United Nations Rapporteur on the right to food from 2008 to 2014. He now co-chairs the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) and is the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

¹⁴ [The Principles of Agroecology - CIDSE](#)

¹⁵ [CSM letter to the CFS Chair on Food Systems Summit](#)



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