

A COALITION FOR FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION THROUGH AGROECOLOGY CIDSE'S POSITION – JUNE 2022

The UN Food Systems Summit and its outcomes

On September 23rd, 2021, [the UN Food Systems Summit \(UNFSS\)](#) took place in New York. This event gathered various stakeholders (governments, private companies, civil society organisations...) to address the pressing need to transform our food systems. The summit was the peak of a one-year process that in 2021 drew significant attention to food systems.

Creating an international space to discuss the need for more sustainable and resilient food systems is a highly topical issue. Yet, since its start, this Summit [raised great concerns](#) among civil society organisations (CSOs), indigenous peoples' organisations and farmers' and peasants' unions.

Despite multiple calls for a more inclusive and less corporate-oriented forum, those civil society concerns were not addressed and the Summit paved the way for a transformation of food systems that would support corporate solutions and multi-stakeholderism¹. This could result in a global food system not addressing the causes of its actual failures (food insecurity, inequalities and poverty, climate change), but ending up replicating them.

One of the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit was the [creation of several multi-stakeholder coalitions](#). One of them is set to promote the [development of agroecology](#): *“The purpose of the Coalition is to accelerate the transformation of food systems through agroecology, guided by [the 13 principles of agroecology](#) defined by the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that are aligned with the [10 Elements of Agroecology](#) adopted by the 197 FAO Members in December 2019²”*.

¹ A multi-stakeholder partnership (MSP) is “a form of partnership governance structure that brings together different actors, such as civil society, governments, international bodies, the media, private companies and academic or research institutions, to work towards a common solution by sharing their experience, information, technology, and financial resources. They function at different levels such as the global, regional, and local levels (as initiatives, platforms, or dialogues) and participation may also involve the sharing of risks in their respective responsibilities”.

(N. Momen. (2009). Multi-stakeholder Partnerships in Public Policy. University of Rajshahi).
² https://agroecology-coalition.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Agroecology-coalition_EN.pdf.

CIDSE has been invited to join this coalition. However, [CIDSE's position is firmly critical of the UNFSS and its outcomes](#). It was therefore decided to take the time to analyse the pros and cons of joining the Agroecology Coalition and to organise an internal consultation with CIDSE members on what CIDSE's role and position should be in relation to the Coalition.

What is the CIDSE position towards the Agroecology Coalition and why?

After several meetings with its members and some external consultations, **CIDSE decided it would not join the Agroecology Coalition yet. It also decided that it will periodically reassess its position based on the changes the Coalition will experience over time.** In order to realise this assessment, CIDSE listed principles of engagement under which it might consider joining the Coalition in future (see below).

First of all, CIDSE deems it positive that [the FAO 10 elements](#) and [the HLPE 13 principles](#) provide the foundation for the Coalition's language. Moreover, the current leaders of the Coalition and a few members have partnered with CIDSE in some of its agroecology projects. We also acknowledge that [the first documents released by the Coalition](#) reinforce that commitment and present interesting objectives.

Nevertheless, some concerns persist. The Coalition is based on a multi-stakeholder approach that leaves the door open to any proponents 'willing to take action'. CIDSE's general assessment of multi-stakeholder partnerships is that they do not bring about systemic change and, in some cases, they even maintain unsustainable or unfair practices. Moreover, the growing trend of State disengagement from multilateral spaces towards less accountable bodies is a threat to these democratic spaces; most partnerships between multi-stakeholders operate voluntarily, which is counterproductive to national legislative processes aimed at more regulation. CIDSE's general strategy for change focuses on influencing multilateral or international agreements that are democratic and enforceable.

Therefore, we invite the Coalition to:

- Define a clear membership process,
- Set a clear inclusive governance where power imbalances are considered; and
- Create a clear process to make the coalition accountable vis-à-vis national, regional and international regulation.

Even though some members of the Coalition are key allies of CIDSE, other members have an understanding of agroecology which is not aligned with our own or with the 13 principles the Coalition is supposed to be built on. Therefore, it is important for CIDSE to understand how the Coalition is going to ensure that those principles will always remain the reference framework of its activities and which means will be put in place to this end.

Finally, it is important to understand that CIDSE is not closing the door on joining this coalition, as – with the appropriate framework – it could also be

seen as an opportunity to improve and speed up the implementation of agroecology and the transformation of food systems. As mentioned above, CIDSE thus decided that it will periodically assess its position, based on how the Coalition will change. In order to realise this assessment, CIDSE listed principles of engagement under which it might consider joining the coalition.

We warmly encourage the Agroecology Coalition to take into consideration the following points:

1. A clear declaration from the Coalition stating that it works independently from the UNFSS process. It is important for CIDSE that the Coalition distances itself from the UNFSS, based on the critics of many civil society organisations and farmers' movements, and on the lack of coherence that we observe between the different UNFSS coalitions.
2. The Coalition should clarify its relation and role vis-à-vis the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Its activities should not be a source of confusion and reduce the role and importance of the CFS. In this regard, we invite the Coalition to recognise the importance of the role of multilateralism in food governance.
3. The Coalition should clearly set a series of conditions to join in order to avoid any stakeholder that would not fully commit to the 13 principles and to the transformative approach of food systems based on agroecology.
4. The governance structure that is being put in place by the Coalition should set rules and mechanisms that take into account the risk of power imbalances and address possible conflicts of interest. Moreover, we invite this governance body to build a strong framework to ensure transparency and accountability.
5. The Coalition should set criteria for identifying and choosing activities that contribute to agroecology based on the 13 principles of agroecology.
6. The Coalition should recognise the structural causes of the failures of food systems. It is important for CIDSE, not only to recognise the failures of the current food systems but also to address their root causes.
7. The rights, needs and interests of civil society organisations, farmers' organisations and indigenous communities should be the cornerstone of the activities of the Coalition.
8. The Coalition should work towards implementing and achieving the Right to food.
9. The Coalition should support the implementation of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas \(UNDROP\)](#).

CONTACT

Vincent Dauby, Agroecology and Food Sovereignty Officer – [dauby\(at\)cidse.org](mailto:dauby(at)cidse.org)
Rue Stévin 16, 1000 Brussels, Belgium – www.cidse.org