



01

# THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'FOOD SYSTEMS' DISCOURSE AND CORPORATE SOLUTIONS TO HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION

*Elisabetta Recine, Ana María Suárez Franco  
and Colin Gonsalves*

**Elisabetta Recine** holds a PhD in Public Health. She is member of the Food Security and Nutrition Policies Observatory at the University of Brasilia. She works as a public policy researcher and activist for the human right to adequate food and nutrition and the promotion of healthy food. She is part of the coordination of the Brazilian Alliance for Adequate and Healthy Food, and Thematic Group of the Brazilian Association of Public Health. She is a member of the Organizing Committee of the People's Conference on Sovereignty and Food and Nutrition Security.

**Ana María Suárez Franco** is the coordinator of FIAN International's accountability work and the organization's permanent representative to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva. She is a lawyer and holds a postgraduate degree in public policies from universities in Colombia, as well as an LLM and a doctorate from universities in Germany. She has participated as expert in negotiation processes at the Human Rights Council, and has worked closely with communities affected by violations of their right to food in various regions, supporting them to use accountability mechanisms in the UN human rights system and the Inter-American human rights system since over 20 years.

**Colin Gonsalves** is Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India and a founder of Human Rights Law Network, an organization that brings together over 200 lawyers and paralegals operating out of 28 offices spread throughout India. He is often associated with the 2001 'Right to Food' case, which resulted in India's Supreme Court orders enforcing a free midday meal for all schoolchildren, and subsidized grain for over 400 million Indians living below the poverty line. He received the Right Livelihood Award in 2017.

*“Although the concept [food systems] does not entail specific proposals nor solutions to current food systems crises, the way how different actors describe and interpret the term ‘food system’ has a bearing on which direction the debate takes.”*

---

## THE RISE OF THE FOOD SYSTEMS NARRATIVES

In recent years, the concept of ‘food systems’ has gained prominence in several global processes.<sup>1</sup> While there is no unified definition,<sup>2</sup> many definitions tend to cover the different steps and actors involved in the production chain, spanning from producers to consumers. Some include health and nutrition outcomes, as well as economic, environmental, and social externalities. Although the concept itself does not entail specific proposals nor solutions to current food systems crises, the way how different actors describe and interpret the term ‘food system’ has a bearing on which direction the debate takes.

At first, this emerging ‘food systems’ concept appears to point to a paradigm shift. It seemingly moves away from the limited approach of ‘food security’ toward a more holistic understanding that recognizes the interactions of various actors as well as the way humans, nature, and food are interconnected. A closer look at how the food systems concept is defined by the UN in its various processes, however, reveals a different picture. For instance, the definition of ‘food systems’ provided by the CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE)<sup>3</sup> initially omitted values, which are pertinent to a human rights perspective. Later, the HLPE added principles such as sustainability, equity, inclusiveness and agency to its definition.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, this reductionist approach can be gleaned from the CFS negotiations on the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN), followed by those on the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches. It is also discernible in the preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS). In short, the mainstream narrative of the UN on food systems fails to address the structural drivers

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS |

Special thanks to Charlotte Dreger (FIAN International) for her valuable input, and Priscilla Claeys (Coventry University) and Claudio Schuftan (People’s Health Movement) for their support in reviewing this article.

PHOTO | © Lyza D. Gardner

1 Some of these processes are: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the debates around the United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit; the recent negotiations at the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) of firstly the Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN), and secondly the Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and other Innovative Approaches.

2 HLPE. (2017). *Nutrition and Food Systems - A report of the High Level panel of Experts of Food Security and Nutrition*. FAO. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/i7846e/i7846e.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/i7846e/i7846e.pdf); HLPE. (2020). *Food Security and Nutrition, Building a Global Narrative Towards 2030*. FAO. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/ca9731en/ca9731en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca9731en/ca9731en.pdf); FAO. (2018). *Sustainable Food Systems. Concept and Framework*. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf); and IPES Food. (2015). *The new science of sustainable food systems. Overcoming barriers to food systems barriers*. Avail-

that shape agro-industrial food systems such as trade, financialization,<sup>5</sup> patriarchy and neo-colonialism. And it equally fails to sufficiently define the new food paradigm required for more just, sustainable and healthy societies.

Over the past 60–70 years, a dominant global food system has emerged despite the existence of multiple forms of food systems. Serving the interests of a few powerful actors, this dominant food system is characterized by the agro-industrial model and marginalizes other existing food systems. It has increasingly globalized ‘food’ and ‘value’ chains, has global trade and investment at its core, and goes hand in hand with corporate concentration, which works in the interest of powerful countries and large companies.<sup>6</sup>

The dominant approach to food systems is problematic for the following reasons<sup>7</sup>:

- **It makes use of human rights only marginally or superficially**, including through the lack of recognition of food sovereignty and the absence of focus on marginalized groups.
- **It does not recognize food systems as a matter of public interest and policy convergence**. Instead, it conceptualizes food as a commodity, rather than as a commons and a human right. It presents a fragmented understanding of food systems, which ignores the complex interconnections between a wide range of areas.
- **It is based on a partial analysis of the unsustainability of the current agro-industrial model**, focusing only on greenhouse gas emissions, forest devastation, and loss of biodiversity as challenges that need addressing with technological solutions, which actually perpetuate the exclusion of indigenous peoples, peasants’ communities and marginalized groups.
- **It does not recognize power relations and the structural determinants of food injustice**, such as trade and investment. It underestimates the governance reforms needed to ensure democratic accountability (including corporate liability) and safeguard public spaces from conflicts of interest. Moreover, it ignores states’ obligations that are enshrined in human rights instruments. Instead, this approach prefers non-binding regulations such as codes of conduct and ethical norms, and focuses, for instance on adequate consumer choices, and multi-stakeholder schemes.<sup>8</sup>
- **It legitimizes the dominant economic and development model**. This approach does not question or clarify why the current hegemonic global food system and agro-industrial production model failed to respond to hunger and malnutrition, and why this system is precisely at the core of the problem. It sees food systems as something linear and focuses on food supply chains. This promotes the idea that small-scale food producers should be integrated into global value chains, instead of ensuring that their food sovereignty is respected and protected.
- **It focuses on market-based approaches as solutions**. As such, people are seen as consumers and not as rights holders. This is the logical result of neoliberal reasoning, and alludes to its functional facet. This includes the creation of hierarchies within food systems, whereby production becomes more important than cultural, spiritual and/or religious aspects of food. Moreover, a market-centric

able at: [www.ipes-food.org/\\_img/upload/files/NewScienceofSusFood.pdf](http://www.ipes-food.org/_img/upload/files/NewScienceofSusFood.pdf)

3 HLPE. (2017). *Supra* note 1.

4 HLPE. (2020). *Supra* note 1.

5 Financialization is defined as “increasing importance of financial markets, financial motives, financial institutions, and financial elites in the operation of the economy and its governing institutions, both at national and international level.” See: Epstein, G. A. (2005). Introduction. In Epstein, G. A. (Ed.) *Financialization and the world economy*. Edward Elgar Publishing. p.3. Available at: [www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/financialization-and-the-world-economy-9781843768746.html](http://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/financialization-and-the-world-economy-9781843768746.html)

6 ETC Group. (2021). *Who will Feed Us? The Peasant Food Web vs the Industrial Food Chain*. Available at: [www.etc-group.org/whowillfeedus](http://www.etc-group.org/whowillfeedus). Bello, W. (2007). Free Trade vs. Small Farmers. TNI. Available at: [www.tni.org/es/node/11368](http://www.tni.org/es/node/11368)

7 Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSM). (2021). *CSM problem analysis document of the UN Food Systems Summit*. Available at: <https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Com-mon-analysis-EN.pdf>; CSM. (2021). *CSM assessment of the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition*. Available at: [www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CSM-FSN-WG-Background-document-on-VGFSYN.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/CSM-FSN-WG-Background-document-on-VGFSYN.pdf)

8 FIAN International. (2020). *Briefing Note on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives*. Available at: [www.fian.org/files/files/Briefing\\_Note\\_on\\_Multi-Stakeholder\\_Initiatives\\_Final\\_e\\_revised.pdf](http://www.fian.org/files/files/Briefing_Note_on_Multi-Stakeholder_Initiatives_Final_e_revised.pdf)

approach imposes a narrative that favors industrial models over traditional ways of food production and acquisition. It is underpinned by an interpretation of development that does not necessarily respect peoples' right to a dignified life, nor does it protect the planet. It renders the magnitude of the world's food problems and their determining factors invisible, including ecological collapse. Moreover, this approach analyzes biodiversity and environmental issues from a business, profit-oriented, point of view.

- **It uses an individualistic and fragmented approach.** Because people are considered consumers first and foremost, they are perceived as 'windows for business opportunities' and not as part of society and nature. In this individualistic approach, wellbeing and nutrition are products to be sold, not human rights. Furthermore, it makes communal institutions invisible and turns companies into problem solvers.
- **It adopts a narrow view of 'nutritious' diets, instead of healthy and sustainable diets.** This approach disregards the fact that food is one of the broadest expressions of human history. Food is all about social and political issues. This means that diets are conditioned by power relations, gender balance and equity, culture, spiritual values, planetary health, working conditions, and migration, among other issues.
- **It pretends to be the result of scientific neutrality.** This approach is based on 'scientific evidence' that is frequently produced by institutions and persons who have conflicts of interests, and who ignore traditional knowledge. This partly leads to a focus on new technologies to solve problems, which ultimately masks issues of power.

This critical view to the dominant approach to food systems derives from the political context within which it has gained its momentum: multi-stakeholderism<sup>9</sup> and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs),<sup>10</sup> as promoted by the SDGs. Here, the food systems concept is applied to support corporate-led solutions to hunger and malnutrition, and ignores the fundamental values of the UN Charter. Therefore, a considerable number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and social movements, mainly gathered in the CFS Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM), contest the dominant approach to food systems that is currently mainstreamed in international debates. They actively advocate plural, human rights-based, and food sovereignty-based approaches.<sup>11</sup>

Others remain skeptical and hesitate to refer to the concept of food systems for different reasons. For instance, 'food systems' as a term is still unknown to many, especially in the Global South. In India, the concept is still foreign to many CSOs and they may likely not accept the term because it originates in and is associated with the Global North. In Colombia, FIAN Colombia, for example, prefers to continue advocating food sovereignty and the human right to food and nutrition, which are not linked to the term 'food systems', in their opinion, but rather to '*procesos alimentarios*'.<sup>12</sup> This term literally means 'food processes' but is more comprehensive in its scope. Some also fear that because the term 'food systems' originates in the Global North, it may become a new colonial imposition, thereby mainstreaming narratives that are developed by a small group of rich elites, and leave out the rights and voices of the excluded and marginalized groups of society.

<sup>9</sup> Multi-stakeholder initiatives, often also referred to as 'partnerships' or platforms, are initiatives that bring together a variety of actors ('stakeholders') that are identified as having a stake (i.e. an interest) in a certain issue, and should therefore play a role in addressing it. Our critique specifically refers to the inclusion of corporate actors on a par with state authorities and civil society organizations, although they are different in nature and in their relation to public interests.

<sup>10</sup> The World Bank refers to the following definition of PPP by [PPP Knowledge Lab](#): PPP is "a long-term contract between a private party and a government entity, for providing a public asset or service, in which the private party bears significant risk and management responsibility, and remuneration is linked to performance". For more information please visit: [ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview/what-are-public-private-partnerships](http://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview/what-are-public-private-partnerships)

<sup>11</sup> CSM. (2021). *Positioning on the 2021 Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition endorsed by Member States on the 47th Plenary Session of the CFS*. Available at: [www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/EN\\_CSMPositioningVGFSyN\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/EN_CSMPositioningVGFSyN_FINAL.pdf); CSM. (2021). *CSM Vision*

In our opinion, the tension of forces between the corporate solutions that are behind the incomplete and faulty food systems approach, and those of other approaches as defended by CSM constituencies and their organizations,<sup>13</sup> is still enormous. Under the current imbalance of power, it is difficult to ensure that the concept of food systems is used to encompass all the obligations, legal elements and principles to which states have committed to in the UN Charter, the Human Rights Bill, and in general in the existing and rich legal framework of the right to food.<sup>14</sup>

## FOOD SYSTEMS DISCOURSE AND CORPORATE SOLUTIONS

What solutions do the corporate-led agendas under the dominant food systems approach propose to end hunger and malnutrition? The solutions are predominantly founded on a globalized model of development that creates ever-increasing divergence between those rendered rich and powerful and those rendered poor. Advanced technologies,<sup>15</sup> big data and financialization throughout the entire food systems are proposed as effective solutions to meet the food needs of the world's population.

Considering that millions of people in the world today are digitally excluded, the decision to base policy decisions on data that is mainly collected and managed through digital technologies (which are in the hands of a few powerful actors), also has an impact on the realization of the right to food. Technology and digitalization are a form of exclusion as part of the exercise of power.<sup>16</sup> These solutions are also sold as ways to control the climate crisis now and in the near future. However, they are clearly 'false solutions', because they are based on a partial analysis of reality, and disregard the structural determinants of the challenges we currently face. What's more, they fail to question the rules of the game, which continue to favor those who have always won. Such solutions are 'windows of opportunity' for business, as mentioned above. A case in point is the use of fortified food, which has been powered by the SUN Movement.<sup>17</sup> Fortified products have historically been declared as solutions to food and nutritional problems, but in fact they are a great business opportunity for formula producers who receive access to a market of consumers who in turn risk becoming dependent on their products. They disconnect people from the key cultural, spiritual, economic, social and environmental aspects of food.<sup>18</sup>

## BIG STONES IN THE WAY OF RIGHT TO FOOD AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY STRUGGLES

To confront this threat, small-scale food producers and their supporters are proposing grassroots-emerging solutions. These solutions aim to advance towards a humanity that can better feed itself, whilst respecting dignity and food sovereignty. However, in practice small-scale food producers and right to food defenders face several challenges.

The first challenge is the **weakening of public institutions and public policies**, which has created conditions for corporations to increase their power. In the recent wave of populist authoritarian governments, corporate interests are aided through the privatization of public services. In this context, states are brazenly neglecting their constitutional and international obligations while conceding more power to corporations. The problems of hunger and malnutrition are seen as individual and moral issues, thus policy measures tend to neglect the social determinants of hunger and malnutrition. Consequently, people – especially those in situations of vulnerability – are made to believe that hunger and malnutrition are the result of their

on Food Systems and Nutrition: An alternative to the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSYN). Available at: <https://www.csm4cfs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/EN-vision-VGFSyN.pdf>; Fakhri M., Elver, H.; De Schutter, O. (2021) *The UN Food Systems Summit: How Not to Respond to the Urgency of Reform*. IPES. Available at: [www.ipsnews.net/2021/03/un-food-systems-summit-not-respond-urgency-reform/](http://www.ipsnews.net/2021/03/un-food-systems-summit-not-respond-urgency-reform/)

12 *Procesos alimentarios* refers to the complex chain of events or moments that result in human nutrition or the 'food fact'. It is a multi-dimensional process, circular in its appearance and spiral in its evolution. Its linkage is not rigid, since, in certain circumstances, a certain element may precede or succeed another, or may even not be present. These moments or links are: the procurement of food (which includes production but is not reduced to it); food processing (which includes industrial processing but is by far not the most important); food exchange (which is not only the market); food consumption; biological utilization; and the regeneration of vital, spiritual, material and biota capacities, which are a precondition for restarting the food process. See: Morales González, J.C. (2021). *Derecho a la alimentación y nutrición adecuadas y Soberanía Alimentaria desde los estándares internacionales de derechos humanos*. In: FIAN Colombia. (forthcoming). *Cuarto informe sobre la situación del derecho a la alimentación en Colombia*.

13 The CSM consists of 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolks, Indigenous Peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless, women, youth, consumers, urban food insecure and NGOs. For more information please visit: [www.csm4cfs.org/](http://www.csm4cfs.org/)

14 Suarez Franco, A.M. (forthcoming). *The right to food*. In Cantú, H. (Ed.) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights: A Commentary* (XXV). Brill-Nijhoff. Available at: [www.fian.org/files/files/Suarez\\_Franco\\_RTFN\\_article\\_IIDH.pdf](http://www.fian.org/files/files/Suarez_Franco_RTFN_article_IIDH.pdf)

15 For example, precise farming and mechanization (thus reduced human labor) in production, and digitalization.

16 GRAIN. (2021). *Digital control: how Big Tech moves into food and farming (and what it means)*. Available at: <https://grain.org/en/article/6595-digital-control-how-big-tech-moves-into-food-and-farming-and-what-it-means>

17 FIAN, SID, IBFAN. (2019). *When the SUN casts the Shadow*. Available at: [www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow\\_En.pdf](http://www.fian.org/files/files/WhenTheSunCastsAShadow_En.pdf)

18 For a more in-depth analysis of some of these corporate-led false solutions, and how small-scale food

own failures, rather than the consequence of structural issues. This means that they rarely point their fingers to abuses of power, and indeed to the dominant economic and agro-industrial model.

In India, for example, the government is curtailing state subsidies for food earmarked for people suffering from hunger, thereby reducing the distribution of grains to those who do not have access to food.<sup>19</sup> These regressive measures, together with the impact of COVID-19, are pushing people toward starvation.<sup>20</sup> Such measures are closely linked to the influence of corporations in governance bodies, which took off 7–8 years ago, and is now coming full circle. These corporations plan to push 70% of farmers off the land in a legal but unjust way. The influence by corporations to change policies is forcing millions of farmers to give up or lease their land to corporations for large-scale farming, and will thus be ultimately rendered landless.

The second challenge refers to **the narratives and tactics** that are used by the corporate sector and its lackeys in government in the food systems' debates. They frequently use words that are closely associated to social movements, such as 'human rights', 'gender equality', and 'agroecology'. However, this is merely an attempt to capture people's minds, and to block their natural instinct to question things. The superficial uses of 'kidnapped language' (e.g. on Twitter), along with new complicated and intimidating terms, are all part of this false narrative. This is called co-optation. The every-day use of imposed narratives negatively affects people's ability to name and define their connection to food according to their cultures. One example of such co-opted language is 'agroecology'. For social movements 'agroecology' brings together knowledge, science, and practice, and is clearly connected to social and gender justice and human dignity. And yet the term has now been reduced to a mere technical concept by the business sector.<sup>21</sup> Through these tactics, concepts are separated from their historical and political context and are manipulated to serve the purposes of those who deceptively use them.

Brazil is one poignant example of the two challenges mentioned above. The country was a pioneer in promoting the right to food and nutrition of its people under the leadership of former president Lula. The term 'food and nutrition security' was conceived as a broad, holistic concept that is intrinsically connected to the right to food and to food sovereignty. Nonetheless, the term is used in a fragmented way by the current authoritarian regime, which has practically destroyed all the public policies that turned the concept into a reality for many. Furthermore, this government deploys tactics to fragment people's strategies, preventing sustainable results and structural changes. It also transforms rights-holders into beneficiaries of public budget, thereby denying their agency.<sup>22</sup>

The third challenge is industry's attempt to convert **data into a key criterion for policy decisions, and to keep 'hard' 'scientific' evidence as the only valid knowledge, while disregarding conflicts of interests.** Information and science are without a doubt essential for decision-making. However, the importance and value of traditional knowledge and local communities' day-to-day experiences must not be neglected. It is often traditional knowledge that feeds scientific research with new ideas. And yet the millenary knowledge that Indigenous Peoples have acquired over centuries of observations is sadly romanticized and disregarded, even when it is relevant to key policy decisions.

producers and their supporters are resisting: see articles "Food Banks and Charity as a False Response to Hunger in the Wealthy but Unequal Countries"; "Aquaculture, Financialization, and Impacts on Small-scale Fishing Communities"; and "An Imperceptible Growth: Healthy Food and Transformative Solidarity" in this issue of the Watch.

19 Gotoskar, S. (2021, March 12). NITI Aayog's Proposal to Cut Food Subsidies Will Worsen India's Rising Hunger Problem. *The Wire*. Available at: [thewire.in/government/niti-aayogs-proposal-to-cut-food-subsidies-will-worsen-indias-rising-hunger-problem](https://thewire.in/government/niti-aayogs-proposal-to-cut-food-subsidies-will-worsen-indias-rising-hunger-problem)

20 The Wire Staff. (2020, December 13). Hunger Index Among Poor in 11 States Continues to Be Dire Post-Lockdown: Survey. *The Wire*. Available at: [thewire.in/rights/hunger-watch-survey-lockdown](https://thewire.in/rights/hunger-watch-survey-lockdown)

21 HLP. (2019). *Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*. FAO. Available at: [www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca5602en/ca5602en.pdf); Friends of the Earth International, Transnational Institute, and Crocevia. (2020). *Junk Agroecology*. Available at: <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Junk-Agroecology-FOEI-TNI-Crocevia-report-ENG.pdf>

22 Santarelli, M., Burity, V., et al. (2019). *Informe Dhana 2019: autoritarismo, negação de direitos e fome*. FIAN Brasil. Available in Portuguese at: [fian-brasil.org.br/informe-dhana-2019-faca-download-aqui/](http://fian-brasil.org.br/informe-dhana-2019-faca-download-aqui/)

For example, the UN Food Systems Summit created an independent group of leading researchers and scientists (the Science Group) who are responsible for ensuring the ‘robustness, breadth and independence’ of the science that underpins the summit and its potential outcomes. Nevertheless, the public is not informed about how these members were selected, or how their research topics are decided upon. Most of these researchers are men, the majority of whom are white and have nationalities from and/or work in the Global North. There is also an imbalance of expertise, which is more focused on agricultural economics than on health, regenerative production practices (such as agroecology and traditional practices), and human or social sciences. Considering the UN Secretary General’s call for a “collective action of all citizens to radically change the way we produce, process, and consume food”,<sup>23</sup> the Scientific Group’s profile raises serious doubts about the breadth of the vision being applied to food systems. It also casts doubt on what their priorities are for change, given the urgent task to restructure food systems towards sustainability and health.

23 UN Web TV. (2020, September 4). Deputy Secretary-General Briefing to Member States on the UN Food Systems Summit 2021. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/news/summit-provides-information-updates-un-member-states-briefing>

### **SOLID FOUNDATIONS FOR A NEW FOOD SYSTEMS PARADIGM BASED ON REAL SOLUTIONS**

We would like to emphasize the following points in our critical analysis of the dominant approach to food systems:

First, it is critical that social movements and CSOs **defend the common character of public institutions, and participate in the design, adoption and implementation of policies, in line with existing human rights obligations of states and democracy.** Public institutions shall be at the service of the common good, and not at the service of corporate interests. The efforts to preserve democratic public institutions, to retake captured institutions and to advocate human rights-based public policies also requires denouncing situations of corporate interference, conflicts of interests, and/or the replacement of public institutions by multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms. It also means demanding rules to hold corporations to account, and to regulate conflicts of interests.

Second, at this critical juncture, it is essential that social movements and CSOs **proactively differentiate between solutions that aim to achieve the public good, human dignity, the protection of nature and the reduction of inequalities, and those that serve to maintain a socioeconomic order focused merely on profit.** We need to pay attention to attempts of co-optation and green- or blue-washing that can make us fall in the trap of false solutions.

Third, since one shoe does not fit all, it is also vital to **seek a broad, pluri-cultural set of solutions based on a diversity of knowledge.** These should go beyond those receiving more visibility and propaganda from the hegemonic system, which is based on trade and investments and is aimed at maintaining consumption and growth at the cost of despoiling nature, including humans as part of it. Therefore, we need to value and incorporate the people’s practical knowledge that comes from careful observation of natural cycles, as well as the specific needs of each group. Peasants, traditional rural communities and Indigenous Peoples have proven that they have answers to hunger, malnutrition, and the realization of the right to food. Based on centuries of experience and observation, their solutions are more caring for nature, helpful in increasing resilience and regenerative practices, and key in facing the current environmental collapse. They have always understood land, water, and

seeds as commons, as opposed to their commoditization. Their practices to protect and promote the diversity of seeds and plant varieties is fundamental to ensure environmental balance and nutritional diversity. As guardians of nature and its diversity, they do not just benefit their communities, but also contribute to the preservation of the planet.

Fourth, it is critical to **recognize and protect peasants and Indigenous Peoples' contribution to the realization of the right to food**. The pandemic has dramatically exposed the failures of today's dominant agro-industrial food system, showing that it contributes to the destruction of ecosystems and the creation of conditions for the propagation of zoonosis. Moreover, it imposes ultra-processed foods on people, putting their health at a higher risk of non-communicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes. That, in turn, makes us more vulnerable to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. At the same time, small food producers such as peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and agricultural workers, feed the majority of the world's population,<sup>24</sup> and produce food in a more sustainable and healthy manner. The pandemic is confronting our societies to actively debate and negotiate the much-needed systemic changes in our food systems worldwide. The contribution of peasants and Indigenous Peoples to the enjoyment of the right to food shall be put at the center of those debates and negotiations and their rights shall be respected, protected and fulfilled.

Fifth, and lastly, a **holistic approach to food systems, based on human rights and on food sovereignty and enriched by environmental law principles**, is a strong tool to identify real solutions in the fight for social justice, including food justice. A holistic approach includes the full recognition of women, Indigenous Peoples, peasants, pastoralists, fishers, food systems workers and other historically marginalized sectors, as rights holders, as recognized in international human rights standards, including those specifically addressing the rural world, such as: the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and People working in Rural Areas (UNDROP); various Conventions of the International Labor Organization; and General recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

A human rights-based approach that centers on food sovereignty is relevant and useful, because it considers the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and its grounding values as a core of food systems,<sup>25</sup> and focuses on the international obligations of states as duty bearers. Human rights put people and the planet at the center of governance, recognize people's agency and demand that the powerful minority does not exploit our communities and ecosystems for their profit.

<sup>24</sup> FAO. (2014). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2014: Innovation in Family Farming Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2014/en>

<sup>25</sup> CSM. (2021). *Supra* note 7.