

Ending hunger and achieving food security for all

Responses from Sofía Monsalve Suárez, FIAN International

Key messages

Small-scale food producer organisations, trade unions and civil society organizations have consistently defended food sovereignty on the understanding that the universal right to food is inseparable from rights for food producers. Existing human rights instruments – among them the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Conventions of the ILO, the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas – provide a foundation for concrete action to ensure the right to food and achieve SDG 2. The task is to secure their implementation.

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, small-scale food producers demand immediate measures to respect and strengthen traditional indigenous food systems, transition towards agroecological food systems, and move away from industrial animal farming towards circular mobile pastoralist systems and extensive livestock production as part of mixed farming systems.

V Guiding questions

1. **Which areas and socio-economic groups** are especially vulnerable to poor nutrition and food insecurity and what are ways to ensure that food systems transformations leave no one behind?

This contribution is based on 1 consultation with the [International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty](#) (IPC). The IPC is an autonomous and self-organised global platform of small-scale food producers (women, peasants, family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, pastoralists and herders, nomads, indigenous peoples, forest dwellers) and rural workers organisations and grassroots/community-based social movements whose goal is to advance the food sovereignty agenda at the global and regional levels. More than 6000 organizations and 300 million small-scale food producers organise themselves through the IPC, sharing the principles and the 6 pillars of food sovereignty as outlined in the [Nyeleni 2007 Declaration and synthesis report](#). Indeed, small-scale food producers supply some 70% of global food production and yet they are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and malnutrition.

The structural drivers of the discrimination and marginalization of these socio-economic groups are national policies and international framework conditions which favor a corporate/industrial agri-food model of production, distribution and consumption. This policy mix, which privileges long food-supply chains, global trade and investment agreements, and market-based responses

to the climate crisis, is destroying the social fabric of rural communities and the ecological and material conditions of their survival.

For small-scale food producers, realizing the vision of food sovereignty is paramount to transforming the dominant corporate/industrial food systems and achieving a culturally diverse and truly sustainable, equitable, and secure food future. Food sovereignty entails the rights of all peoples, nations and states to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems. It invests them with the authority to develop policies that determine how food is produced, distributed and consumed in order to provide affordable, nutritious, healthy and culturally appropriate food for all. For Indigenous Peoples, food sovereignty is a way to exercise their right to self-determination. It entails democratic control and management of natural resources and local development, ecologically sound and sustainable production methods, and social justice. It is a “process in action” that invites peoples to organize and work together to improve their conditions and societies, while regaining self-reliance and asserting food autonomy. It represents the widest framework for exercising the right to food, along with the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. Indeed, article 15.4 of the latter declaration states: “Peasants and other people working in rural areas have the right to determine their own food and agriculture systems, recognized by many States and regions as the right to food sovereignty.”

Food sovereignty offers concrete tools and measures to work towards systemic change across the food system. Since it sees food, agriculture, ecosystems, politics and cultures as intrinsically linked and covers a spectrum of socioeconomic dimensions touching upon lifestyles, development paradigms and geopolitics, its relevance extends to the very future of societies and the survival of the planet. Food sovereignty encompasses the key elements to address the root causes of the problems of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized rural communities and implement alternatives to respond to the detrimental impacts of current mainstream global agriculture and food policies.

2. **What fundamental changes are needed** to make our food systems an engine for inclusive growth and contribute to accelerating progress towards ending hunger and achieving food security for all in the Decade of Action?
 - a) How could they be designed and implemented to generate synergies and strengthen existing ones with other Goals and Targets?
 - b) What are some of the possible trade-offs from these changes and how can they be mitigated

For small-scale food producers, food systems are not primarily an engine for growth. Food is not a commodity but first and foremost a universal human right. Food systems serve a public purpose and encompass multiple dimensions: ecological, cultural, health and well-being, economic and political. For Indigenous Peoples, in particular, indigenous food systems express their distinct relationship with their environment and natural goods to obtain food and sustain

their lives and cultures, applying their knowledge, technologies, cosmovisions and forms of organizing their social and economic life.

In order to achieve SDG 2 and closely related SDGs 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, small-scale food producers attach paramount importance to prioritizing the full respect and realization of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas and the ILO Conventions protecting the rights of rural workers. Today's widespread land grabbing and outrageous concentration of land ownership and control demand protection of the right of Indigenous Peoples to the land, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or used, as well as the right of peasants and other rural people to land, water bodies, coastal seas, fisheries, pastures and forests. This implies in many countries the obligation of government to carry out agrarian and aquatic reforms.

A second fundamental change consists in transiting the mode of food production towards agroecology. [Agroecology](#) is a way of life and the language of Nature. It is based on shared principles that people practice in many different ways, contributing the colors of their local reality and culture while always respecting Mother Earth and common values.¹ The production practices of agroecology are based on ecological principles like building life in the soil, recycling nutrients, the dynamic management of biodiversity and energy conservation at all scales. It thus contributes to achieving the Paris Agreement on Climate Change

The autonomy of agroecology displaces the control of global markets and generates self-governance by communities. It minimizes the use of purchased inputs from outside. It requires the re-shaping of markets to build on the principles of solidarity economy and the ethics of responsible production and consumption. It promotes direct and fair short distribution chains. It implies a transparent relationship between producers and consumers and shared risks and benefits. School feeding programs sourced from agro-ecological peasant production is one of the most successful schemes to ensure the right to adequate food for children from marginalized socio-economic groups.

Agroecology is political; it means challenging and transforming structures of power in society, including patriarchy. To achieve the full potential of agroecology, there must be equal distribution of power, decision-making, remuneration and resources between women and men. Agroecology can provide a radical space for young people to contribute to the social and ecological transformation that is underway in many societies.

3. **How might COVID-19 facilitate or complicate** the implementation of needed food systems changes?

¹ FAO's Council adopted in 2019 a "The Ten Elements of Agroecology" as a guide to promote sustainable agriculture in food systems. See www.fao.org/3/ca7173en/ca7173en.pdf

- a) Will it aggravate and/or reduce vulnerabilities?
- b) What are the changes in design and implementation of policies affecting food systems which are necessary to prevent and better deal with food security and nutrition impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and pandemics in the future?
- c) What of the current immediate actions we are seeing will contribute to the long-term resilience of food systems?

The COVID19 crisis is rapidly exacerbating existing inequalities. In many countries it will generate a deep social and economic crisis from which the most vulnerable will suffer the most. In many regions, a major food crisis is looming since people will be no longer be able to pay for food although there might be no shortage.

Local markets are being closed. Peasants, livestock keepers, animal breeders, shepherds and fisherfolk are impeded from getting their products to consumers. Severe and sometimes brutally imposed lockdowns block them from performing the crucially important work they do to secure products for consumption. In many countries, migrant workers are not able to travel and food will be left to rot in the fields despite of the hugely increased demand for healthy local food.

In some countries, peasants, migrant agricultural workers, indigenous peoples are facing increased repression and criminalization in the context of the extraordinary measures that government are taking. In times of crisis, human rights are more important than ever. There will be no effective response to the pandemic if governments misuse extraordinary measures to increase repression and protect the interests of the few.

Small-scale producer organizations are disseminating recommendations on how to avoid transmission of the virus.e. They are finding appropriate ways to make healthy foods available through open-air markets, direct sales and other distribution channels. Together with consumers they are organizing innovative platforms, often with the support of local government, to establish new rural and peri-urban territorial food chains. They are participating in local solidarity committees to ensure access to food for the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

The High-Level Panel of Experts of Food Security and Nutrition of the UN Committee on World Food Security has recently urged governments to “support local communities and citizens to increase local food production (including home and community gardens) through appropriate stimulus packages (in cash and kind) to enhance food resilience”. Governments should also support the functioning of local markets and direct sales with new norms for protection. They should strengthen decentralized and mobile public procurement programs. Existing school feeding programs for children, and for all those going hungry must be dramatically improved and expanded. New social protection programs must be implemented for millions who face hunger or loss of their livelihoods. Governments should ensure stable and decent incomes for small-scale food producers, living salaries and proper conditions for rural workers, and specific protection for seasonal and displaced migrant workers. It is unacceptable for this crisis to

reinforce the industrial food system that destroys the environment and generates poverty, hunger and diseases such as obesity and diabetes which have made people vulnerable to COVID19. Moreover, scientific evidence is demonstrating the relation between the recurrent recent epidemics, new epizootics outbreaks and current agribusiness and extractivism. [Small-scale food producers demand immediate measures to respect and strengthen traditional indigenous food systems, transition towards agroecological food systems](#), and move away from industrial animal farming towards circular mobile pastoralist systems and extensive livestock production as part of mixed farming systems.

4. **What knowledge and data gaps need to be filled** for better analyzing current successes and failures in food systems and the trade-offs and synergies, across SDGs, in implementing food systems changes to fix these failures?

It is essential to fill the gaps in data which are necessary to be able to conduct human rights assessments of food systems.

On the one hand, important efforts still need to be made to legally recognize the right to food and connected rights such as the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, agri-food workers, peasants and other small-scale food producers. It is equally necessary to increase the capacity of national and international sectorial institutions (food, land, water, agriculture, fisheries, forests, animal rearing, environment and climate, health, social policy, labor protection) to observe these rights. On the other hand, there is a large gap related to obtaining more detailed information on inequalities and discrimination, for instance, regarding forced evictions, deforestation, water pollution, or the concentration of land ownership. Data about Indigenous Peoples, peasants and family farmers, small-scale fishers, transhumant pastoralists and other small-scale food producers are not available because statistical national and international offices do not recognize these categories of economic actors and consequently do not gather related information. Likewise, there is patchy information about the degree of repression, persecution and criminalization of the defenders of Indigenous Peoples', peasants', workers', women's and environmental rights.

Another important measure to take is to promote innovation and knowledge-creation around ecological recovery led by small-scale food producers in collaboration with other forms of knowledge

- There are some particular areas in which knowledge gaps need to be filled. These include 1) the relationship between agroecology, healthy soil and human microbiome. Many heritage varieties of cereals also have specific health benefits that require greater study; 2) plant biodiversity, agroecology, prevention of animal and insect biodiversity collapse, especially among pollinators; 3) reduction in food loss and waste in direct farm to fork chains such as

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). One such study² shows that the overall loss and waste in the long industrial food chain is 56% compared with 6% in CSA.

Small-scale food producer organizations have established their own data collection and analysis mechanisms as a basis for providing services to their members and advocating necessary policies and support from government in important areas such as strengthening family farming and the functioning of territorial markets. These data collection systems should be supported and synergies developed with official systems.

5. **What partnerships and initiatives are needed** to harness synergies and/or reduce trade-offs in food systems?
- a) What are the most critical interventions and partnerships needed over next 2 years, 5 years, 10 years?
 - b) Can these be scaled up or adjusted to fit other contexts?
 - c) How can private sector support investments for sustainable agriculture production and supply reduce food insecurity?

It is essential to implement the commitments of the UN Decade on Family Farming and strengthen initiatives with local governments aimed at democratizing decision making around food and supporting the agro-ecological transformation of food systems.

The role of local governments is crucial in implementing policies aimed at strengthening local and territorial markets in which small-scale food producers are engaged. Firstly, local government is most often responsible for decisions concerning land use, and is therefore well-placed to regulate construction of expanding cities on peri-urban agricultural land that is needed to feed cities. This land should be protected, prioritizing food production over urban sprawl. Local Government is also the decision-making level closest to populations and the one where food sovereignty, social inclusion and the right to food of vulnerable communities can often be best ensured.

Mandatory regulation of business must be adopted and strong safeguards set in place against conflicts of interests and corporate capture of public policy spaces

Agri-food transnational corporations (TNCs) and other corporations are responsible for a large share of the human rights abuses and crimes that Indigenous Peoples, workers, peasants and other small-scale food producers suffer. As long as impunity of these crimes remains rampant, transformation of food systems will not be possible. Therefore, there is a need to strengthen initiatives by government, civil society, academia and other actors to hold TNCs accountable.

² Nigel Baker, Coventry University

Likewise, TNCs are increasingly exercising undue influence over national and international public institutions in order to obtain favorable public policies and regulations. This runs counter to efforts to transform food systems towards more sustainable, healthy and just systems. Through the World Economic Forum (WEF) and various multi-stakeholder platforms and arrangements, corporations have been transforming the multilateral principles and practices in the UN system. There is a need to adopt effective mechanisms that can prevent cases of conflict of interest consistently throughout the entire UN system. Any policy in this regard should bear in mind the different roles of private interests and of human rights-holders that protect common goods and benefits. Those private interests whose activities are in conflict with UN goals and objectives should not be involved in intergovernmental bodies or their Secretariats, whose focus should be always be on protecting common goods and providing global public benefits.