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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In recent years, the much-needed transformation of food systems to make them healthier, sustainable and just has made it onto the international agenda, and is much debated in spaces of global governance. The spread of COVID-19 and the massive food crisis that swept across continents has clearly demonstrated the urgency of reform. The destruction of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity associated with the industrial food system and its mode of production have functioned as **perfect breeding grounds for zoonotic diseases**, such as COVID-19. Simultaneously, the pandemic has shed light on the immense inequalities that are inherent to the industrial food system, as well as the dependence and multiple vulnerabilities it generates. This includes increased **vulnerability to severe infection from the virus due to obesity and non-communicable diseases** (NCDs), associated with the consumption of ultra-processed foods, as well as due to respiratory diseases caused by exposure to agro-chemicals.

The most important international space for policy debate on how to transform food systems has been the **United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**. After four years of policy deliberation, on the 10th of February 2021 CFS adopted the **Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (VGFSyN)**. Civil society and social movements participating in the CFS **Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSM)** have actively engaged in the process since its very beginning, trying to ensure that the Guidelines reflect the experiences and solutions put forward by those most affected by hunger and malnutrition, who at the same time feed the majority of the world's population: small-scale food producers, including Indigenous Peoples, workers, and women. It therefore comes with immense disappointment that the Guidelines fall far short of providing any substantial basis for the transformation of the dominant industrial food system. They fail to present an analysis of where the industrial food system is lacking, and a clear vision on how to overcome these problems. The negotiation process was marked by a strong power game led by the main agro-exporting countries defending the interests of 'their' transnational corporations. It was further complicated by the online format and methodology that the Working Group's Chair applied to the negotiations. The CSM has **decided to not support the dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines**, and only engage in critically monitoring their implementation and effects on the ground. Instead, the CSM will focus on promoting its **own collective vision for food systems transformation** that it developed in the course of the Guidelines process.

Closely related to the VGFSyN process and of central relevance to social movements and CSOs participating in the CSM have been the CFS negotiations on Agroecology. On June 4, 2021 they concluded with the adoption of the **CFS Policy Recommendations on Agroecological and Other Innovative Approaches**. While the process has been much more inclusive than the VGFSyN negotiations, time pressure has been a major challenge. The outcome is far from satisfactory and contains **several problematic recommendations** (e.g., use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers). The CSM is yet to decide on whether or not to endorse the Policy Recommendations.

The CSM also prepared a report on **Monitoring the use and application of the CFS Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises**

(CFS-FFA), and presented it at the Global Thematic Event during the CFS 47th Plenary Session, exceptionally held in February 2021. By providing reflections from affected communities and related organizations on the implementation and alignment of the CFS-FFA with policy decisions (or lack thereof), along with key barriers to its use and implementation, amongst other things, the report aims to complement the CFS assessment of the implementation of the CFS-FFA.

In September 2021, the **UN Food Systems Summit** will be held in New York, while a Pre-Summit is scheduled for July 26 to 28 in Rome. According to the organizers, the Summit aims to “**launch bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems**”. The Summit faced harsh criticism from **civil society, social movements, academia** and **UN human rights experts** since the beginning of preparations, starting with the appointment by the UN Secretary General of Agnes Kalibata, the president of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), as Special Envoy to lead the Summit’s preparations. Other issues raised were the lack of transparency surrounding the Summit, the dominance of corporate interests, the absence of human rights framing, and the emphasis on technological approaches over people’s approaches, such as agroecology.

The CFS, despite its role as the principle and most inclusive intergovernmental body to discuss food, agriculture and nutrition, continues to be marginalized in the preparations for the Summit. Meanwhile, civil society organizations (CSOs) are being cherry-picked rather than engaged through established platforms, such as the CSM, which already channel the voices of small-scale food producers and others affected by hunger and malnutrition. Consequently, CSOs and peoples’ organizations involved in CSM have decided to organize their **own process to challenge the Summit**. A first global meeting was held in December 2020 with over 100 participants, and a three-day counter-event to the Pre-Summit will be held from July 25 to 27. The convergence process aims to advance human rights and food sovereignty, dismantle corporate power, and democratize public institutions and multilateralism in the framework of building and strengthening truly sustainable, healthy and just food systems. Key CSM demands on the conditions for its participation in the Summit, presented in a **letter signed by over 200 organizations** to the CFS Chair in March 2021 were not met, despite **meetings between the CSM and the Summit Leadership**. In fact, the course of the Summit is not changing direction.

Another public outcry in relation to the corporate capture of UN institutions followed the announced **partnership between FAO and Crop Life International**, a trade association that represents the interests of pesticides companies. The partnership introduces major institutional conflicts of interest within FAO, the mission of which is to serve the rural population and protect the environment and, more broadly, as UN agency, to promote human rights. A broad alliance of CSOs has **urged FAO to stop the partnership**.

Corporate influence over the UN equally tightened its grip, albeit in a more subtle move, through the recent establishment of a new UN body, **UN Nutrition**. With the stated aim of enhancing inter-agency coordination and collaboration for

nutrition at global and country levels, UN Nutrition, which virtually opened its doors in January 2021, was born out of a merger between the former UN Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) and the UN Network for **Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)**. Through this merger, the UN institutionalizes SUN, a ‘multi-stakeholder’ body that **promotes market-based solutions and private sector partnerships** in the struggle against malnutrition. Food and agribusiness members of SUN are thereby indirectly upgraded as preferred UN partners in the struggle against malnutrition, while neglecting the inherent conflicts of interest this inflicts upon involved UN agencies and member states.

From October 26 to 30, 2020, the **sixth session** of the open-ended intergovernmental working group on **transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights** (OEIGWG) took place to negotiate the **2nd draft of the TNC Treaty**. The negotiations, which are the outcome of decades of civil society campaign, will be critical for filling a major gap in international human rights protection vis-à-vis the actions of corporations. While only few civil society participants could join in person due to COVID-19 restrictions, there was a vivid pre-session and daily face-to-face online exchanges among the various global treaty movements involved in the process (Treaty Alliance, Global Campaign, Feminists for a Binding Treaty, etc.).

The **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA)** continued its work to provide guidance to states regarding the implementation of peasants’ and indigenous peoples’ rights to seeds (“farmers’ rights”). The dedicated ad-hoc technical expert group (AHTEG) developed an **inventory** with existing measures in support of these rights and will present a set of recommendations to the ITPGRFA’s governing body meeting in late 2021. Representatives of peasant and Indigenous Peoples’ organizations in the AHTEG have emphasized the need for legal measures supporting peasant seed systems and protecting their rights against intellectual property rights and emerging technologies.



Under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) states are currently negotiating a new **Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)** to halt the rapid biodiversity loss. The GBF is intended to guide the implementation of the Convention, including in the context of food and agriculture, and small-scale food producers’ organizations and other CSOs are pushing for the inclusion of agroecology as a key strategy in this regard. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, negotiations have taken place in a virtual format, **raising serious concerns of inequity** regarding the participation of rights holders as well as of governments of the Global South.

In July 2020, the **African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights** publically launched the **Guidelines on the Right to Water**, which it had adopted a

year earlier during its 26th Extra-Ordinary Session in Banjul, The Gambia. The Guidelines aim to assist State Parties in complying with their obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in relation to the right to water. They call on States to develop integrated strategies to pursue the full realization of the right to water and related human rights, such as the rights to food, health, and livelihoods. The Guidelines highlight the obligation to regulate companies to prevent negative impacts on people's right to water and ensure effective remedies in case of violations. Moreover, they emphasize the importance of community involvement in management of water sources and place a special focus on measures to address discrimination and ensure water rights of marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

On May 1, 2020 the **new Special Rapporteur on the right to food**, Michael Fakhri, assumed his functions. His **first thematic report** to the General Assembly in July 2020, focuses on the right to food in the context of international trade law and policy. In the **second report**, presented to the Human Rights Council at its 46th session (February to March 2021), he outlines the direction, vision and priorities for his mandate: the COVID-19 pandemic and hunger crisis, food systems and global governance, seeds and farmers rights, and the right to food in armed conflict and protracted crises.

The work of the **UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** on a General Comment on Land has been delayed due to limited capacities amid COVID-19. The draft is expected to be published later this year (2021).