



联 合 国  
粮 食 及  
农 业 组 织

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

Organisation des Nations  
Unies pour l'alimentation  
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и  
сельскохозяйственная организация  
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las  
Naciones Unidas para la  
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة  
الاغذية والزراعة  
للامم المتحدة

# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

**Thirty-sixth Session**

**Dhaka, Bangladesh, 8-11 March 2022**

**Statement by the Spokesperson of the Civil Society Consultation**

*Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:*

APRC Secretariat

APRC@fao.org

1. I am Ahmed Borhan from Bangladesh. Today I represent at least 40 representatives from civil society from 16 countries, belonging to at least 25 organizations and movements at national and regional levels, who joined the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Consultation last week to prepare civil society's input to the 36th Session of the Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific (APRC). We are smallholder family farmers and farm workers, landless, rural women and youth, fisherfolks, forest dwellers, pastoralists and herders, Indigenous Peoples, urban poor, consumers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We thank FAO once again for your ongoing commitment to engage with CSO.

2. The capitalist system has left the world with the multiple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, hunger, obesity, and the rise of global pandemics. We welcome the sharpened focus on the holistic health of ecosystems in the new definition of One Health that seeks to address the structural causes of disease creation embedded in industrial livestock production systems, and we urge FAO and member states to broaden this approach to all aspects of sustainable food and agriculture systems.

3. The industrial food system is in stark contrast to the traditional Indigenous Peoples, women and men family farmers, and peasants-led agrifood system globally, where maintenance of a sustainable resource base is a central organising principle and set of practices of communities connected to place.

4. Consider this reflection from santal women indigenous community in Bangladesh:

*"We led a life where land and nature were integral part of it, and our wisdom and indigenous knowledge that inculcates from one generation to the next generation, was the prime basis of connecting present and future. Still, these living knowledge help us to live a nature based sustainable life".*

5. It raises a concern then that world's governments have been addressing the multiple planetary crises through a series of treaties and conventions for over three decades, all while refusing to name capitalism as the key driver.

6. Fossil fuel and agribusiness companies have embraced Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in their "net zero" pledges that legitimize the hugely harmful practices of extraction, thus fueling more land grabs and human rights violations, especially of Indigenous Peoples and smallholders. Moreover, NBS is a continuation and expansion of initiatives such as REDD+, which has had a devastating record of human rights violations and questionable benefits for ecosystem protection. Finally, NBS threatens to corrupt and co-opt genuine solutions such as agroecology and community forest management (CFM).

7. Indigenous ways of knowing, and the place-based knowledge and wisdom of peasants, with nature within agroecosystems, can provide a basis for preserving biodiversity and the overall health of agro-ecosystems. Food production and consumption characterizes our interrelationship with nature. Instead of putting in place policies and instruments that will lock in more separation between humans and the more-than-human world, FAO and its Members must promote nature-positive interaction between agricultural practices in both managed and wild ecosystems.

8. We disagree with the expeditious push for the so-called 'inclusive scaling-up of digitalisation of agriculture value chain', not until FAO and its Members put in place policy and investment frameworks for digital agriculture that recognize, protect, and promote men and women farmers' endogenous capacities, local needs, rights, and indigenous and traditional knowledge system. The prevailing trend of digitalisation in agriculture is towards an integration between the companies that supply products to farmers (pesticides, tractors, drones, etc.) and those that control the flow of data, which is simply another way for multinational corporations to maintain and gain further control of food and agriculture systems. The smallholders' rights, control, and ownership over their data, land, and genetic resources must be protected against threats or risks of digital technology monopolization.

9. The smallholders we represent from across Asia and the Pacific have very basic digital needs – we need connectivity, access to the internet, which is lacking in so many rural areas. We need mobile phone and smartphones so we can access information, such as weather forecasts, that help us decide when to dry a rice harvest without risk of spoiling in unanticipated rain, for instance. And we

need to be able to connect to local markets to sell our produce – not through Alibaba, but through open-source platforms developed by not-for-profits like Open Food Network, mentioned in the FAO thematic paper on climate resilience. Many need access to education to simply gain the literacy required to navigate the digital world. We do not just need digitalisation, we also need digital justice.

**10. We recommend that FAO:**

- promote climate justice – not only climate resilience – to ensure the ethical, legal, and political aspects of climate change are addressed in addition to the environmental;
- centre Indigenous Peoples and peasants' knowledge and participation in decision-making to address the biodiversity crisis in the Pacific and across Asia;
- promote One Health's heightened focus on ecosystems and the prevention of zoonotic disease and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and ask governments to implement it in their countries;
- determine and invest in appropriate digital technologies driven by small farmers' needs, and respective of varying local contexts, traditional and local knowledge, capacities, and practices, and, most significantly, the rights of peasants and family farmers;
- promote digital justice for small-scale food producers, reducing digital inequality, and supporting national governments to provide internet connectivity in rural areas and access to basic devices such as mobile and smartphones, along with farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing in digital and economic literacies; and
- implement global policy instruments such as the Declaration of Rights of Peasants, the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDFF), the global plan of the UNDFF, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF), and Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (RAI) with full and active participation of civil society at different levels.

**11. We recommend that our governments:**

- connect farmers to universities and other educational institutions to bring the FAO's promotion of agroecology to their attention and into their curricula;
- shift public spending (subsidies, procurement) away from industrial farming towards supporting agro-ecological systems done by peasants and family farmers, including subsidies during transition, support for research, innovation, extension and value addition for agro-ecology, as well as implement procurement policies in public institutions that prioritise produce from local, agro-ecological farms and forests and sustainable fisheries;
- reject free trade agreements, which contribute to the rapid spread of disease and impact negatively on local markets and biodiversity loss; and
- provide direct funding to farmers' organisations to farm agroecologically and connect to local value chains and markets, which may include digital connectivity and technologies.

**12. We recommend that both FAO and our governments:**

- recognize the role of Indigenous Peoples, peasants, smallholders, small scale family farmers, women and rural youth, and local communities as frontline responders to the impacts of climate change, by ensuring their participation in decision making and response; and empower them to lead on shaping climate resilient agriculture that improve their livelihoods; and
- set up mechanisms and stronger partnerships by working with smallholder family farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, forest dwellers, not only for ongoing advice but as real partners from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, project, strategy frameworks.

13. Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, we believe that all of you want the same thing we do – a just world that is free of poverty and hunger, where we are actively slowing climate change and, working for climate justice, rebuilding resilient ecosystems and safe and healthy food systems for future generations. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make that vision a reality.