

# SE18: NOURISH TO FLOURISH – STRENGTHENING RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS FROM COMMUNITY ROOTS TO GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Organized by: SUN CSN (Scaling Up Nutrition Movement Civil Society Network); Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Republic of South Africa; University of the Free State; University of KwaZulu-Natal, African Centre for Food Security; CSIPM (Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism)

## Summary of the side event

As a joint side event at CFS 52, *"Nourish to Flourish: Strengthening Resilient Food Systems from Community Roots to Global Governance"* brought together civil society, academics, government officials, and international experts to explore the importance of local partnerships in building resilient, nutrition-focused food systems. Organized collaboratively by the SUN CSN, the Western Cape Government, University of the Free State, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the CSIPM, the event emphasized the critical role of civil society in driving sustainable food systems that can withstand both local and global challenges.

Michael Fakhri, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, delivered the keynote address, underscoring the vital connection between global trade policies and food sovereignty. He highlighted how food sovereignty emerged as a response to corporate-dominated trade, advocating for local production, small farmers, and territorial markets as essential components of resilient food systems. Reflecting on the pandemic's exposure of global supply chain fragilities, Fakhri emphasized the need to prioritize local food systems that empower small farmers and communities, rather than relying solely on international markets.

Academic insights added depth to the discussion, with Professors Jan Swanepoel from the University of the Free State and Joyce Chitja from the University of KwaZulu-Natal sharing their perspectives on the role of research and education in building sustainable food systems. Swanepoel outlined three foundational pillars: conducting research that supports resilient food systems, providing education to foster informed decision-making, and supporting smallholder farmers and community-led initiatives. Chitja stressed the importance of participatory research that involves communities directly, ensuring research agendas align with local needs. This approach not only addresses pressing food security challenges but also empowers students to become agents of change within food systems.

The panel, moderated by Prof Jane Battersby, included voices from civil society, government, and international organizations, who shared effective practices for strengthening food systems. Saima Zia from CSIPM highlighted the power of grassroots movements in advocating for food sovereignty and influencing policy. Carmen Letlhagoje from the Nutrition and Food Security Alliance of Namibia (NAFSAN), a SUN CSN member, discussed Namibia's community-led initiatives, such as "Nutrition for Health: Embracing our Namibian Food Systems," which educates communities on sustainable food practices. Jerry Aries from the Western Cape Department of Agriculture provided insights on local government efforts to mobilize communities and train smallholder farmers, even amid budget constraints. Anastasia Nesvetailova from UNCTAD addressed the need for regulatory reforms to limit financial speculation in food markets, which often drives price volatility and disproportionately affects vulnerable communities.

During the Q&A, participants engaged with panellists on topics such as multi-sectoral collaboration and government support for smallholder farmers. Closing the event, Joanne Raisin, Director of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, emphasized the interconnectedness of local actions and global policies in building resilient food systems. She highlighted SUN's role in amplifying local voices on the global stage, advocating for fairer food systems that prioritize nutrition security and accountability.

This joint side event underscored the value of collaboration among civil society, academia, and government in fostering resilient, community-centered food systems. It concluded with a call for sustained commitment to food sovereignty, urging stakeholders to continue investing in civil society and strengthening the frameworks needed to support sustainable food systems for all.