

CFS High-Level Special Event on Global Governance of Food Security and Nutrition

“CFS and Food Systems Summit”

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I am speaking to you today as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. I document people's struggles as they tackle hunger, famine, malnutrition, and injustice. I'm also a researcher who has studied how food systems have transformed over the last 150 years.

I am also speaking to you as a citizen of Lebanon who is watching his family and friends get pushed into hunger.

I am also speaking to you as an Arab who sees the vicious effects of blockades in places like Gaza and Yemen.

I am witnessing and experiencing the result of what happens when individuals, countries, and companies with power are not held accountable.

We are all witnessing and experiencing the anguish of irreversible ecological loss and inter-generational damage.

We've heard about solutions today, but we haven't worked out who broke our food systems and who needs to be held accountable.

At this moment of upheaval, what gets decided in the next few years will determine the path for global food governance for decades to come.

The Food Systems Summit's ultimate goal is to focus the world's attention on food systems and generate an immense amount of energy into transforming those systems.

But, that energy will sparkle then fizzle into nothing unless it is directed somewhere that already has the capacity to change food systems.

The CFS not only has the ability to transform food systems, but it also has the legitimacy to do so because its **multilateralism** and commitment to **human rights**.

Whereas many have questioned the Food System's Summit's legitimacy.

Governments from some smaller or poorer countries are worried that corporations have more leverage at the Summit than they do.

Many policymakers are wondering why the Summit is trying to reinvent the wheel by not building on the CFS's infrastructure.

Civil society is worried that the Summit is not making enough room for human rights.

So let me turn to how I think the Summit can be a success –

I think everyone must think about how their contribution to the Summit will draw from and connect with the CFS and the right to food.

To get into some specifics –

There are different theories of change in play these days.

I hear a lot of talk about needing to create the right **incentives**. To get farmers to grow in the right way, and consumers to eat in the right way.

I think this talk of incentives is a dead end. It assumes that experts and policy makers can solve the problem, and then it's a matter of implementing the correct solution.

Instead, what is emerging from the CFS, especially from the work of the High Level Panel of Experts, is a theory of change built upon **agency**.

Allow me to explain and connect with others at the event...

On Day 1, we heard from Carin Smaller about Ceres2030 groundbreaking research. This was a 3-year effort reviewing more than 100,000 academic articles.

They found that smallholders are more likely to adopt new approaches when supported by extension services - **Localized education matters**.

They also found that farmers' incomes increase when they belong to cooperatives, self-help groups, and other autonomous organizations that share networks and resources – this is called **solidarity economics**.

And finally, they found that **informal markets** work: Farmers prosper when they can sell their produce informally to small- and medium-sized firms. These are markets **territorially embedded** in long-standing social relationships. These are markets based on trust.

What surprised and troubled the Ceres2030 team was that more than 95% of agricultural science research was not relevant to the needs of smallholders and their families.

I want to add that the results would be different if Ceres2030 surveyed all available agroecological research - this is research that is by definition derived from and relevant to smallholders and their families.

And agroecological research is not just found in scientific agricultural journals because it is a wholistic approach that includes ecological, social, and cultural questions.

Extrapolating from Ceres2030, and connecting to the successes of the CFS, CSM, and also the FAO's work on the right to food and agroecology, I will conclude with what I think can make the Food Systems Summit a success:

We must start with the premise that small-holders, peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and food workers know what they need – this is the notion of **agency** Jennifer Clapp discussed on behalf of the HLPE on Day 1.

Within those groups, it's the women, youth, and Indigenous peoples who usually have the clearest sense of what is at stake.

Now in many ways, the people have already indicated what they need – and they've articulated their needs through the CSM and CFS.

Governments and the private sector have listened and responded.

Researchers have listened and responded.

Not everyone is always happy. For those who've attended recent CFS meetings, you'll know that I'm not shy about critically pushing the CFS to do better.

But for the past ten years, all these groups have developed tools in this spirit of debate and dialogue.

With all this in mind, I will consider the Food System Summit a success if it results in:

1. Clear commitments and timelines from governments to implement CFS's tools and FAO's Right to Food Guidelines;
2. Clear commitments and timelines from governments to transition or enhance agroecological practices that respond to small-holders' demands.
3. An affirmation from all stakeholders that no food system can be transformed without also attending to peoples' right to adequate food, peoples' sovereignty, and every individual's inherent human dignity.

Dr. Kalibata and her Taskforce have been working hard this past year. And they were kind enough to invite me to be on the Integrative Team.

She often tells me that one can't just criticize without providing solutions. I will also add that one can't just offer solutions without also helping out. **Spain, France, Mexico, and Dominican Republic's** interventions today supporting principles of social inclusion, fair markets, and supporting the CFS were inspiring.

So in that spirit, I want to extend my good offices to the international food community –

Systemic transformation requires global understanding, vision, and coordination. As one of the few international lawyers in this milieu, I can provide that space.

My first thematic report has already provided a blueprint for how we can develop a new trade regime. It is pragmatic and ambitious. It was released several weeks ago and will be presented to the UN General Assembly next week.

I have also been closely following the legitimacy crisis in investment law for years.

Currently, I'm working on detailing farmer's rights in relation to different intellectual property regimes.

Here in Oregon, ten minutes from my house is the headquarters for the largest international network of environmental lawyers in the world: e-Law.

And of course, as UN Special Rapporteur, I am able to ground everything in a human rights approach, coordinate with all the different UN organizations, and overcome silos and fragmentation.

I have the authority and ability to provide the integrative vision we need. I have a deep network of other international lawyers I can call upon. All I need is some more capacity and resources.

To conclude-

Food systems are already transforming, whether we do something or not.

The challenge is not just about eliminating hunger and malnutrition. Our duty to ourselves and future generations is to change food systems in a way that ensures that everyone on the planet lives with dignity.

There will be no real solutions if we focus on science and technology, money and markets, without also addressing fundamental questions of inequality, accountability, and governance.

Learning from the Dakota people and other Indigenous peoples; learning from feminists and women in our communities; learning from our children and youth – we must build systems of care not profit, and live in good relation with the land, water, and each other.