
JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND DIVERSITY IN OUR FOOD SYSTEM

¹ The preparation of the paper was led by CONCORD's European Group on Food Security (EFSG). Several CONCORD members and other working structures were consulted and provided comments.

Summary

CONCORD advocates for a food system that enables everyone to eat a healthy, nutritious diet that is based in the right to food, shaped by planetary boundaries, resilient and defined by people.

The basis for this just and sustainable food system already exists, in the local food systems – family- based, small scale, diversified- that already feed the majority of the world's people.

However its potential is thwarted by the dominance of a corporate and industrial food model which receives disproportionate political attention and support.

Solutions to the problems of our current food system require us:

- **to ensure democracy and coherence in policy making**, with a bottom-up approach. Governments must in particular respect and strengthen the role of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) that offers a promise to improve coordination and governance of the global food system.

- **to opt for agroecological methods of production** that maintain and increase biodiversity, regenerate ecosystems and opt out from production methods that ignore planetary boundaries.

- **to prioritise local economies and trade** that can support local producers to meet the growing and changing demand of city dwellers. International trade rules must allow policy space to support livelihoods and jobs where people live and ensure food is at all-time available locally.

- **to focus investment policies on the provision of public goods** (infrastructure, research and extension services, bank loans) which complement farmers' own investments rather than facilitating foreign private sector investment that legitimise land and water grabs and promote corporations' interests and products.

- **to ensure stable and fair prices** by using policy tools which help to stabilize food markets and food producers to cope with unpredictable harvests. Governments should be able to take measures against import surges, prices spikes and for the management of buffer stock.

- **to guarantee the access to productive resources** through secure and equitable rights for family farmers, especially women, to land, water, seeds and livestock breeds, fisheries and forests.

- **to enable and promote better responsible food consumption** and healthy diets by improving policies on public procurement, regulating the marketing of foods, ensuring consumers have access to information and discouraging high meat and dairy consumption.

- **to redirect agricultural research towards meeting the needs of family farmers**, improving nutrition, developing innovative agroecological methods and restoring the environment in direct collaboration with food producers.

- **to develop better aid and development policies** that are built on the human rights and support their realization, including the right to food and nutrition, with heightened attention to under-fives and mothers.

Hunger in our world today is a result of injustice not of scarcity. In a world of plenty, where more than enough food is produced to feed everyone, it is outrageous that 842 million² people still live in constant hunger and that malnutrition is responsible for nearly half of all deaths in children under five.

In our globalised world we have **a dual food system.** On the one hand there is internationally traded, industrialised commodity production, processing and retailing dominated by a few major corporations. On the other hand there is a food system that still feeds the majority of the world's people,³ through myriad webs of local, small-scale food production and marketing.

The **industrial food system generates huge profits but fails at actually feeding people** with healthy food. Outright hunger, where people do not have enough to eat, exists alongside the growing problem of overconsumption and obesity, as well as undernutrition, where people may have food but it is of poor quality and lacking in nutrients essential for life and health. The industrial system's environmental impacts on the planet are so profound that they put our future capacity to feed ourselves at risk. Long supply chains have become unaccountable and waste has been built into the way food is marketed.

Local, small-scale food systems have often been marginalised as backward. This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy when, as a result, they are neglected by policies, research and investment. In fact, not only **are they still the basis of the world's food supply**, but they offer the potential to end hunger, restore the environment and improve social justice.

Gender inequality, poverty, marginalisation and power inequalities distort the current food system. To have any chance of changing it for the better we need to confront these injustices.

CONCORD seeks to tackle injustice and work for a world with a just and sustainable global food system. It does this by advocating for changes in European Union policies, programmes and positions – knowing that this is only one piece of a huge range of actions that need to be taken across the world and seeking to play our part. As a group of NGOs **we recognise it is essential that we ourselves are in solidarity with the self-organised movements of people most affected by hunger**, including networks of the marginalised local small-scale food systems that are necessary to feed the majority of the world's people. This requires us **to reinforce their claims to the right to be part of decision making at all levels**, and to acting in solidarity with them in advocacy, taking a lead from their positions and ensuring that NGOs do not speak for them or inadvertently undermine their demands.

² FAO, *State of food insecurity in the world 2013*. Rome: FAO, 2013, www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3434e/i3434e00.htm

³ ETC Group (2009), *Who will feed us? Questions for the food and climate crises*. Ottawa: ETC Group, p4-5 www.etcgroup.org/upload/publication/pdf_file/ETC_Who_Will_Feed_Us.pdf



Vision

A just and sustainable food system would:

- fulfil human rights
- provide healthy and nutritious food
- be participative and democratically controlled
- recognise planetary boundaries for sustainability and stay inside them
- provide resilience to shocks

VISION

A just and sustainable food system

Our vision of a just and sustainable global food system is **grounded in human rights, most particularly the Right to Adequate Food** and its obligation to progressively take steps to reach a world where everyone is food secure and malnutrition is eliminated. This requires food to be available, affordable and of good quality and for food supplies to be dependably resilient. Global networks and social movements of family farmers themselves have defined a policy approach for achieving the Right to Food, food sovereignty:

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.”⁴

The human rights approach compels us to **pay special attention to those most vulnerable to hunger** and assess policies by the impact they have on them, rather than dealing only in broad brush terms. It leads us to ask questions along the entire food chain from producer to consumer, including how food is produced, by whom, for whom, at what price and of what nutritional quality.

We recognise that the systems that currently feed and nourish the majority of people in the world – **family-based, small scale, diversified and local – must be the starting point and the focus for building and strengthening people’s right to food and nutrition.** With the right support, local food production promotes access to fresh, healthy and diverse food whereas currently more and more of our food is making us sick – from micronutrient deficiency to diabetes and heart disease.

Food is produced in these local systems by settled crop and livestock farmers, mobile pastoralists, fisherfolk, urban food growers, rural workers, Indigenous Peoples, forest gatherers and other small-scale food providers. Here we use the term ‘family farmers’ to refer to all of these.

Women are food providers. They make up 43% of the overall agricultural workforce,⁵ and in many societies they have the main responsibility for food production as opposed to growing cash crops. Much processing of food is done by women, whether for sale or use within the household, and across the world women still do most of the cooking. **Women however often have weaker access to productive resources** and are more likely than men to be malnourished. Strengthening women’s ability to claim their rights on the ground is a core part of

building a fairer food system.

Fundamental to our vision is **the need for our food systems to be participative and democratic**, defined by the people and responding to their needs and aspirations, at all levels from local to global. Family farmers, especially women, need to have control of productive resources that determine their livelihood, including land, water, seeds and livestock breeds. Agricultural workers need safe, decent working conditions and labour standards.

Our vision is also shaped by the need for us **to live within the boundaries of what our planet can provide.** The environmental impact of how food is produced and distributed matters. Agriculture, transport and consumption have profound effects upon climate change, land use change, freshwater consumption, phosphorus and nitrogen cycles, biodiversity loss and chemical pollution. All of these are among nine planetary systems that have been identified as having boundaries which if crossed could lead to irreversible and abrupt environmental change that would threaten human survival.⁶ In loss of biodiversity, the nitrogen cycle and climate change we appear to have already crossed those boundaries. Yet **agriculture can also be part of the solution**, and our vision also includes the deliberate choice to support agroecological and other sustainable approaches to producing food for all the world’s people, which have the potential to help restore the environment.

We also know that we need **a food system that is resilient and that can deal with the shocks and changes** that will inevitably face us. Natural and manmade disasters have been increasing in frequency and severity and we need a food system that can cope with these and ensure long term sustainability. This is closely linked with the other aspects of our vision, because we can best build resilience by addressing the underlying environmental, social and economic causes of shocks, conflict and disasters.

This is our vision – a food system that enables everyone to eat a healthy, nutritious (and hopefully delicious) diet, that is based in the right to food, shaped by planetary boundaries, resilient and defined by people. **The basis for this vision already exists, in the local food systems that feed the majority of the world’s people.** However its potential is thwarted by the dominance of a corporate and industrial food model, which undermines support for a just and sustainable food system.

⁴ Declaration of Nyéléni, Sélingué, Mali, February 2007.

www.nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf

⁵ FAO, The state of food and agriculture 2010-11. Rome: FAO, 2011, p7

www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf

⁶ Rockström et al, “Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity” *Ecology and society* 14(2): 32, 2009, www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/ and Stockholm Resilience Centre, *Planetary boundaries research*, www.stockholmresilience.org/21/research/research-programmes/planetary-boundaries.html



Problems

Our current food system judges success by profit rather than by effectiveness in achieving the Right to Food. Food reaches those whose purchasing power is highest, rather than going where the need exists.

Power in the global food system is held by corporations and elites who have transformed food and productive resources into objects for financialisation and speculation while states have failed in their duty to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food. In the vast complexity of our current global food system there is no formal control. Rather, **the whole system funnels through small numbers of multinational corporations who dominate production, processing, retail and financing, giving them an unsafe level of power.** In search of new profit, corporations are seizing more control over land, seeds, water and genetic resources. There is a need for democratic and accountable governance and coordination in the food system, with a bottom-up approach, to improve its effectiveness and rein in corporate excesses.

The distorted power in our food system underlies a range of problems:

- **political support invested in unfair and environmentally damaging food systems** and a lack of political will to implement policies that evidence shows would contribute to achieving the right to food and restoring the environment
- exclusion of the vast majority of those involved in producing food and feeding people from contributing to **decision making** on policies and laws that affect their livelihoods and everyone's food, with many decisions instead being made in non-transparent and secretive ways
- **malnutrition** which takes the lives of 3.1 million children under five every year when proven and cost-effective solutions exist. It also blights the lives of millions more as the effects of malnutrition during the first 1,000 days of a child's life are irreversible. Stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height) and underweight (low weight for age) all indicate reduced chances of having a healthy, productive and rewarding life
- **unjust trade rules** that force markets open to unfair competition between international agribusiness and local producers and reduce the space for democratic control. Such unjust rules continue to multiply in new trade negotiations
- **financialisation of natural resources and agricultural commodities**, which has led to increasingly volatile agricultural markets with high levels of speculation, and to land grabbing. Food has been made interchan-

geable with fuel, fibre, forestry and other products as a source of profit

- **unsustainable production methods which ignore planetary boundaries**, with widespread use of pesticides, loss of crop varieties, livestock breeds and wider agricultural biodiversity as a result of focus on a monocultures of a few varieties, significant production of climate change gases, introduction of GM crops, algal blooms caused by fertiliser runoff, soil degradation and dependence on fossil fuels

- **race to the bottom in food production**, creating long food chains lacking in accountability and undermining labour standards

- **unsustainable consumption patterns**, enabled by food prices that do not reflect the true cost of production, the diversion of resources to the richest and a disconnection of urban consumers from the sources of their food. These patterns are characterised by waste, unhealthy levels of meat and dairy consumption, uniformity in the dominance of a small number of crops and breeds, a loss of seasonality and too much highly processed food with high sugar, salt and fat levels

- **research agendas and funding disproportionately geared to high-tech, profit driven approaches** rather than meeting the needs of food producers, supporting farmers' own innovation and working with natural ecosystems.



Solutions

- participative and democratic governance
- agroecological methods of production
- local economies and trade
- responsible investment
- stable agricultural markets
- access to productive resources
- responsible consumption and healthy diets
- innovation and agricultural research for development
- better aid and development policies

Solutions

Promote participative and democratic governance of our food system

Solutions to the problems of our current food system require democracy and coherence in policy making. Achieving the right to food and realising food sovereignty is not just a matter for development and agriculture policies but is also deeply affected by policies on trade, environment, investment, climate, research and health.

Because we see hunger as an issue of injustice, we see the basis of all solutions to hunger as lying in **a just redistribution of power, in which there is genuine participatory democratic governance of our food systems.** It is vital that the organised social movements of family farmers, agricultural workers and consumers, especially women and youth, have a meaningful voice in determining decisions, at local, national and global levels, that affect us all on such a fundamental level as the right to food.

The UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), reformed in 2009 following the food price shock, offers **a promise of a central intergovernmental platform to improve coordination and governance of the global food system.** It is also very inclusive, with formal participation by civil society, particularly of the organisations of people most affected by hunger. Governments must strengthen and respect the role of the CFS in order to enable it to live up to its promise.

The EU is the only region of the world to have undertaken a binding obligation to be accountable for how all its policies affect the world's poorest, and for this it is to be applauded. Putting 'policy coherence for development' into practice however requires determined political will.

National food, nutrition and agriculture policies also need to be developed through **multi-actor processes** that bring together different government departments with civil society, private sector and research institutions.

Opt for agroecological methods of production

In order to live within our planetary boundaries, we need to meet the food and nutritional needs of our growing population through **the design and management of sustainable agro-ecosystems.** Agroecology is a scientific approach drawing together ecological, socio-logical and economic disciplines to balance the needs of communities and the integrity of ecosystems.

Agroecological systems aim to maintain the ecological functions that natural systems provide while developing a robust, productive, resilient and fair food system. This means integrating rather than segregating, increasing

diversity instead of restricting it, and regenerating not degrading. It also means **thinking of inputs and wastes in terms of cycles** rather than as a linear process in which fossil fuel derived inputs are treated as endless, nutrients are lost, chemical residues are ignored and animal feed is transported half way round the world.

Agroecology draws strongly on traditional knowledge, including that held in many cultures by women, for instance on seeds. It recognises both farmers' specialist expertise and the importance of local knowledge in designing systems in a local environment. It is thus easily and effectively adopted by family farmers, and it has proven to be sustainable over many lifetimes. Ongoing adaptation to the continuously changing local contexts, makes agroecology **a knowledge intensive approach.** Investment in and facilitation of local innovation remain important.

Prioritising local economies and trade

To reduce hunger and poverty, livelihoods and jobs must be created and supported where people live, and adequate, **nutritious food must be available locally.** The priority therefore must be on developing local economies and local food systems which have vibrant potential.

A focus on local does not imply that larger scale trade and markets have no role to play in achieving an effective, just and sustainable food system. Many local rural economies and food systems are based around urban centres and **local food producers customarily sell to urban markets.** As the eating habits of city dwellers change, demanding food that is easier and quicker to cook, with the right policy support this can foster local food processing enterprises at a small and medium scale to meet that changing demand. Food producers and processors also seek the physical and market infrastructure to trade with other parts of their country, as well as cross-border with neighbouring countries. These opportunities should be developed with an intention to redress gender inequality.

There is always **also space for foods to be traded globally.** However local communities should be able to decide democratically where the policy and investment priorities should lie between local, national, regional and global economies.

The most vital element is that a significant proportion of the benefits of local production remain within the local economy and food system – in terms of access to food, economic gains, environmental resilience, women's rights and also in terms of social and cultural vitality. International trade rules, investment agreements and the policies and loan conditionalities of the international financial institutions and regional development banks must allow policy space to enable this.

Responsible investment

The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) is the most legitimate global forum for deliberating on what kinds of investment will best promote food security and the right to food of the world's population. The CFS has recognised that **family farmers themselves are by far the largest investors in agriculture**, contributing more than three quarters of all agricultural investment in developing countries and 85% in Africa. Given the central role of family farmers in feeding most people in the world and the contribution of small-scale food production to a range of other benefits, from employment creation to caring for the environment, family farmers and small-scale food production must be central to all policies and programmes on investment in agriculture.

Public investment is essential in providing public goods, such as infrastructure, research and extension services and financial support mechanisms, which complement family farmers' own investment.

Governments equally have a fundamental role to play in **ensuring responsible investments**. Foreign direct investment makes up only a tiny proportion of investment in agriculture in developing countries, but despite this the power and influence of agribusiness means they often become the focus of investment policy, with damaging results. Investment policies and programmes can end up supporting environmentally destructive practices; legitimising land and water grabs; threatening farmers' rights to save, use, exchange and sell seeds; and opening up markets to unfair competition from food imports. Public policies must set in place the regulatory and legal frameworks necessary to prevent this, meeting their obligations under the right to food to protect against violations. This includes a responsibility to regulate the operations of companies based in their country outside of their own territorial boundaries.⁷

Favouring stable agricultural markets

Agriculture is inherently unpredictable, due to fluctuating harvests. **Stable and fair prices are essential for family farmers, providing them with reliable income and enabling them to invest in improvements**. Policy tools to promote stability and help foods producers cope with unpredictability are hugely valuable. Policy makers should be able to make use of such tools as well as to regulate techniques that become misused.

Governments should be able to **take measures against import surges and price spikes** and to ensure that corporations are accountable to the rule of law. Trade rules and investment agreements should not prevent this.

Tools such as 'futures contracts' were originally developed precisely to deal with unpredictability and worked well for hundreds of years, but deregulation has led to them being taken over by speculators who have no connection with food production.

Low stocks are associated with price spikes and volatility. **Management of buffer stocks**, at both national and international levels, is a technique that can help both manage prices and protect against emergencies. It is important to learn lessons from the past in the development of guiding principles on stock management.

Access to productive resources

Secure and equitable rights for family farmers, especially women, to productive resources – land, water, seeds and livestock breeds, fisheries and forests – is vital for a food system that can produce healthy food for all.

Rights to land need to be secured through a human rights based approach that recognises all **legitimate rights to ownership, tenure and use of land**, whether formally recorded or not, including indigenous people's rights and rights over commons and publically owned land. Simplistic exercises in 'titling' without taking account of the complexity of legitimate rights can lead to privatisation of national heritage and an increase in conflict. Solutions need to be developed in each country's own context, with reference to the CFS Tenure Guidelines. In some contexts, redistributive land reform is an important tool for justice.

Water is essential both for production and for good nutrition. Water scarcity is an increasingly urgent issue and as access to water becomes more and more politicised it is essential to secure the rights of family farmers. It is also important to reinvigorate and strengthen community-led systems and agreements for **management of shared water resources**.

The diversity of traditional crop and livestock species, varieties and breeds, which are conserved, used and developed by family farmers is an immense productive resource. The **rights of family farmers to re-sow, preserve, protect, exchange and sell their seeds** must be recognised and respected.⁸

⁷ This responsibility is specifically recognised in the *Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure to Land, Fisheries and Forests* adopted by the CFS in 2012

⁸ 'Farmers Rights' are recognised in the *International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture*.

Responsible consumption and healthy diets

Eating better and wasting less would not only make a real difference for the health of Europeans but would considerably alleviate the enormous pressure Europeans' diets have on the planet resources on which all lives depend. 89 million tons of food is wasted annually in the EU⁹. Ways to reduce waste include **use of labelling to fully encompass the lifecycle of products and avoiding marketing that encourages waste**. European (and American) levels of consumption of meat, dairy products, sugar and high-fat foods are extremely resource intensive and related to the destruction of precious ecosystems, all disproportionately impacting poor people.

Half of the EU population is overweight or obese, and in consequence subject to health problems such as cardiovascular risks, hypertension or diabetes. At the same time in developing countries malnutrition, both underweight and micronutrients deficiencies take the lives of 3,1 million of young children each year. In food insecure countries underweight people live next to overweight people, sometimes even in the same households. The right to food builds on diversified diets, based on locally available foods, combined with access to quality healthcare, safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

We encourage policy development, broader consumer education and industry action to make sustainable and healthy diets possible. **Developing policies on public procurement of food** that take into consideration the environmental, health and ethical impacts is one such measure. **Regulation of marketing of foods to children** is another, to prevent the promotion of high-fat, high-sugar and highly processed food products. Governments should take action to promote **better eating habits, in particular with less meat, dairy products, sugar and high-fat foods and more vegetables and fruits**. Industry support in such promotion can be useful as long as it is only in support of scientific, evidence-based, public health messages.

Innovation and agricultural research for development

Innovation and research in agriculture are important elements in helping agriculture support livelihoods but we need to consider who will benefit from research. **Research should prioritise supporting the right to food of the most vulnerable, meeting the needs of family farmers**, improving nutrition, developing biodiverse agroecological methods and restoring the environment. It is acknowledged that at present many of the outcomes of formal agricultural research have "primarily benefited the better resourced groups in society and transnational

corporations, rather than the most vulnerable ones."¹⁰ Family farmers are innovative, adaptive and keen to adopt innovations that will benefit them. Formally trained researchers should collaborate with family farmers during the entire research process, from identification of the research question, to doing the research and analysing the results.

Over centuries, agricultural research has been led by farmers themselves, but our current agricultural research system is top-down and increasingly corporate-controlled. We need one that **recognises the skills, innovations and practices of family farmers, particularly women**, and where research institutions co-develop knowledge with food producers and consumers. This involves both opening up the decision-making bodies and governance structures of the current research establishment, and strengthening the spaces and institutions of food producers' organisations and wider communities to debate and agree on priorities for research and to develop their own knowledge. This approach should be incorporated into **national research strategies with increased public funding**. The outcomes of research should be shared through farmer to farmer extension and similar knowledge and skill sharing programmes between women and men family farmers.

Better aid and development policies

Development policies and criteria for aid have become more and more fragmented. The division between donor and recipient countries is blurring as some emerging economies give increasing amounts of aid while some 'traditional' donors are struggling to meet their commitments. Amidst this flux, what remains constant is **the need to consider human rights, including the right to food and nutrition**, when targeting aid.

Food security policies need to make specific acknowledgement of the importance of nutrition dimension in under-fives and mothers. **Pregnant women, women who are breastfeeding, babies and young children have heightened nutritional requirements**, particularly between the point of conception, to complementary feeding phase and before the age of two.

⁹ European Commission, Preparatory Study on Food Waste across EU 27, October 2010

¹⁰ International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, *Global summary for decision makers*. Washington: Island Press, 2009, pp23-24.

CONCORD MEMBERS

NP National Platform Member
NW Network Member
AS Associate Member

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NW IPPF European Network
NW Islamic Relief Worldwide
NP Ireland: Dochas
NP Italy: CONCORD Italia
NP Latvia: Lapas
NP 'LU' Lithuanian development
NGO umbrella
NP Luxembourg: Cercle
NP Malta: SKOP

NP Netherlands: Partos
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NP Poland: Grupa Zagranica
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NW Solidar
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NW SOS Children's Villages
NP CONCORD Sweden
NW Terres des hommes IF
NP United Kingdom: Bond
AW World Vision International
AS World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

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