



POSITION OF CARITAS AFRICA, SECAM & JENA ON THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

“For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there, among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent. If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him. Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is law and the prophets.”

Mathew 7:8-12

This position paper covers Caritas Africa’s, Jesuit Justice and Ecology Network Africa’s (JENA), and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar’s (SECAM) recommendations to the Summit on seed, food, and policy related issues. It provides a summary of what the Africa region hopes to see as points of discussion and outcomes from the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit.

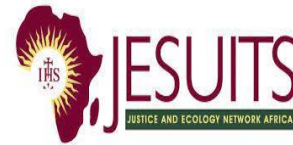
CONTEXTUAL

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted a number of global vulnerabilities, including the uncoordinated nature of the world’s pandemic response, its inability to support the poorest countries and their populations in managing the economic fallout, and has exposed the weakness of existing health-care systems and infrastructure. The pandemic has also uncovered the fragilities and inequalities in food systems and emphasizes the urgent need to ensure that food systems are more sustainable, inclusive and resilient. It has further demonstrated an urgent need for political leaders to not only address shortcoming in health and food systems but also pay attention to global challenges like climate change, rising social inequalities and terrorism. The pandemic has further worsened the already fragile agriculture and food systems in Africa and other low-income regions. The African continent risks falling into deeper crisis if these systemic shortcomings are not addressed.

We recall that in 2020, the United Nations World Food Programme warned that the number of people suffering from acute hunger in low and middle-income countries – including in Africa – could almost double this year, to 265 million, as a result of the pandemic. Thus, strengthening Africa’s agriculture systems is vital to making the continent more self-reliant and resilient to future shocks. Failure to do so will force more people into extreme poverty and misery, and will also limit many Africa countries’ capacities to support their population from economic difficulties especially brought about by Covid-19. It is undeniable that Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions where, inadequate food production is still the major cause of food and nutrition insecurity¹.

The African continent contains a population of 1.3 billion people representing 16.72% of the total world population, and 60% of its population being farmers. Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular, has

¹ [Sustainable food systems: Concept and framework \(fao.org\)](https://www.fao.org/publications/collection/en/collection/13807)



for more than 10 years recorded a steady economic growth since the advent of the new millennium. Yet, despite this stellar economic success, it faces challenges such as rapid population growth, persistent economic inequality, climate change, droughts, youth unemployment, undernourishment, and food insecurity. **Understanding the real state of food security in Africa, and addressing the above-mentioned challenges, should be the highest priority for Africa's political leadership.** Not doing so will forever make Africa fail to achieve a sustainable economic development and create an inclusive, shared prosperity for its people. The African Union (AU), as well as respective national governments and regional organizations, and the international community at large, have in recent decades launched a multitude of policy initiatives aimed at addressing and tackling Africa's food insecurity and nutrition challenges. Despite those efforts and commitments by the disparate stakeholders, much remains to be done.

There are a lot of reasons as to why Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular is suffering from food insecurity and failing to meet its nutrition needs and targets. Though it is true that one cannot point at one specific reason as for why food shortages, insecurity, and prevalence of malnutrition uninterruptedly afflict Sub-Saharan Africa, one can however identify **a number of failed internal economic policy tools and international policy prescriptions as the underlying causes of systemic food insecurity in Africa.**

A few of the many reasons why food insecurity has been chronic in many African countries are the following:

(1) the never-ending political instability and crises; (2) the short or long-protracted civil conflicts and wars; (3) the endemic, persistent, and institutional corruption; (4) the misdirected economic policies and mismanagement; (5) the lack of committed political leadership; (6) the sheer neglect towards the local, small-scale and family farmers; and (7) lack of political will to meet the commitments made in the Maputo and Malabo declarations in order to enhance financial and economic investment in farmer driven initiatives in the agricultural sector, and to boost local economies and rural development.

Consequently, because of these policy prescriptions and systemic failures, African farmers have lost income supports from their respective governments and millions of low-income African families have become victims of food insecurity and nutrition deficits.

In view of the above, we raise the following:

6 KEY QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AT THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

- ✓ **Why** do we have over two billion people lacking access to sufficient, nutritious food in the world?
- ✓ While more food is being produced today than ever before, **why** are food systems failing to deliver for the most vulnerable households, for nature, and for the climate?
- ✓ Despite investments in Agriculture, **why** are food production and key ecosystems still undergoing stress from climate change and current policies?
- ✓ **Why** is providing nutritious food to a growing global population while protecting vital natural systems which sustain life still a challenge of this decade?
- ✓ **Why** are small scale farmers, rural and indigenous communities (mostly women) not given space to share their most desired needs to enhance sustainability in the food system?



- ✓ *What* agriculture subsidies should be key in a just rural transition of the food systems, that enhance resilient livelihoods and eco-social justice?

Based on the experience of Catholic organizations working with and accompanying thousands of local communities in all African countries and to respond to the 5 action tracks², we address the following:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AT THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

1. Policy Change to Unlock the Potential of a Resilient Small-Scale Agriculture Sector

- There is need for policy with emphasis on **payments for ecosystem services** instead of subsidies for synthetic inputs and hybrid seeds.
- **Integrated seed system laws** endorsing local traditions and knowledge, rather than outlawing use and sale of traditional varieties and breeds.
- **Climate change adaptation funds to be used on agroecology principles** rather than “new” green revolution initiatives that don’t respond to the desires and needs of vulnerable farmers.
- **Inclusive land rights** giving priority to local youth and traditional community ownership rather than legislations that enable corporate land grabbing.
- **Public procurement schemes** that create a market and demand for **organically produced diverse diets** rather than highly processed food.
- Drastic increase in **funding for research** with a focus on **agroecological transdisciplinary and systemic approaches** rather than research focusing on single crops or inputs.

2. A Transition to Sustainable Food Systems for Social, Ecological, Economic & Democratic Development

- Food choices are often considered as personal choices. But choice is instead determined by many factors and can be conscious, conditioned, or constrained. Even if one has high nutrition literacy, the lack of local availability or the inaccessibility, due to high price, of healthy foods may prevent an individual from adopting healthy dietary habits. Hence, a transition to sustainable food systems should have at its center the full realization of the human right to adequate food, were by every individual and every community should be enabled to have available, accessible, nutritious, culturally adequate, healthy, and environment-friendly food at all times. This requires putting right-holders at the center, rather than the interests of the market.
- Consequently, the Summit must urgently recognize the need and call for a supportive political will from national leaders and for dedicated, comprehensive and coherent government policies, backed up by secure funding, which include open and transparent participation mechanisms for right-holders in all stages of policy making, implementation and monitoring, as well as strong accountability mechanisms for all actors, from

² <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>



government bodies to the food industry. This paradigm change shall ensure better consideration and involvement of the most marginalized sectors of society with a view to their social inclusion, economic self-sufficiency, the enhancement of their living environments, and overall, to well-functioning food systems ensuring justice and sustainability for all.

3. From Synthetic Monocultures to Organic Food Systems

- **Agroecological practices** are the only alternative to combine food quality, environmental protection of soil fertility, response to climate change, water quality, biodiversity, and human health. Organic food has not only proven to contain lower levels of contaminants and pesticide residues, but also has better nutritional profiles and should not be a privilege for the few, but a right for all.
- It is **imperative that national food systems move away from agro-industrial production methods** which are responsible for dietary monotony and reliance on ultra-processed food and beverages, **towards a system that supports food sovereignty, small-scale producers, and local markets** based on ecological balance and traditional practices.
- The Summit should hence focus on **Food Sovereignty** to enable people to define their own policies and strategies for sustainable production, distribution, and consumption of food.

4. Making the Seed Sector Socially Viable and Sustainable

- The Summit **should recognise farmer's rights and support Farmer Managed Seed Systems (FMSS)**, which are to be reinforced by policy to reduce restrictions during trade, as currently trade can't go beyond achieving economic benefits. Further, there is need for the development of regulations that protect diverse genetic resources and traditional knowledge and ensure that the benefit sharing system is inclusive and implemented.

5. Changes in the International Trade Rules and Systems - responsibility of the United Nations and its relevant bodies

- The Summit should give a high priority to implement a comprehensive, global framework to minimise the adverse impacts of the use of toxic and pollutant chemicals as well as other practices that are dangerous to health and environmental protection with great sensitivity to biological diversity, bringing forward a systemic approach that is grounded in human rights principles.
- Among the goals of this systemic effort should be the following: generation of policies to reduce pesticide use worldwide and develop a framework for the banning and phasing out of highly hazardous and toxic pesticides as a matter of urgency; promotion of agroecology principles and related approaches as an alternative production method to the current reliance on monoculture-based industrial agriculture with its major use of chemical inputs; and the imposition of strict liability on pesticide producers that refuse to follow voluntary guidelines.
- Recognising the particular vulnerability of women, and especially girls, to malnutrition, the Summit should aim at protecting a woman's human right to adequate food and nutrition. **The empowerment of women should firmly be embedded within all strategies.**



CONCLUSION

Caritas Africa, SECAM, and JENA hope that the Summit will focus its discussions on **enhancing agroecological principles**.

For the three Pan African Catholic organizations, agroecology represents the greatest example of integral ecology in agriculture. In today's world, about a billion people go hungry and another billion lack vital micronutrients – while 30-40 percent of all food is wasted. To feed the almost 8 billion people today – which will rise to almost 10 billion by mid-century—we need to make sure that agriculture is productive and sustainable. If we fail to make investments in agroecology, we are not performing our sacred duty to the poor and to future generations.

As Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'*, “*Let us not only keep the poor of the future in mind, but also today's poor, whose life on this earth is brief and who cannot keep on waiting*” (§162). The solution requires ***solidarity between the richer and poorer countries, more sober lifestyles***, and far ***less food waste*** among the affluent—and more attentiveness to the impact of their actions on the planet and the poor. As Pope Francis noted, also in *Laudato Si'*, “*whenever food is thrown out it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor*” (§50).

A transition to a sustainable food system needs a shift from chemical intensive industrial agriculture to ecologically intensive – and caring - farming. It needs a shift from extractive economies to circular and solidarity economies.

We invite all of you, participants in the UN Food Systems Summit, to engage and take the future of food systems into your own hands and help contribute to a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive development.