

UN Food Systems Summit - Statement of Action

Small-scale and family farmers

Many of the world's extremely poor people reside in rural areas and most rely, at least in part, on natural resource-based livelihoods for their welfare and food and nutrition security. They are involved in food systems as small-scale and family farmers, fishers, pastoralists or as people dependent on forests or other ecosystems and many practice mixed agricultural livelihoods. Small-scale fisheries employ more than 90 percent of the people engaged in the sector and 600 million small-scale producers directly depend on raising livestock in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. For many of these people, hunger, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and climate change are daily and accumulating threats to their livelihoods. They often struggle to grow, catch, or buy enough nutritious food because of poor quality soil, small plots of land, depleted fish stocks, water scarcity, lack of diverse foods in the market, low incomes or other challenges. They often lack access to resources needed for productive, sustainable, resilient livelihoods: secure land tenure or access to natural resources like water and common grazing land, financial services, inputs, extension services and training, information about weather, post-harvest storage, and markets. Yet, the world depends on small-scale and family farmers to produce the bulk of food consumed in developing countries.

Inequities are acutely felt by many small-scale and family farmers – particularly women. They lack equitable access to and ownership of agricultural assets and access to services and knowledge. Other social and economic inequalities are faced by small-scale and family farmers. There is overwhelming evidence, for example, that gender-based discrimination, or the denial of women's rights and other rights (such as tenure rights), is one of the major causes of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity. Discriminatory social norms, practices and roles shape the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid farm work; limit women's access to productive resources and markets; underpin unequal bargaining positions and marginalize women in farming from decision-making spheres at all levels. Indigenous peoples who are farmers, fishers and herders face compound discrimination and are frequently denied their individual and collective rights.

The denial of rights and entitlements, through formal and informal institutions and laws, is central to the problems that small-scale and family farmers face. The widespread and systematic institutional discrimination and bias they face can be attributed to the related challenges of harmful socio-cultural norms and practices, inadequate policy, and poor governance and rights denial. Unfair terms of trade, capacity deficits and inadequate financing for are wider challenges. The amplifying threat of COVID-19 and its differential impact on women and marginal groups involved in agriculture is exacerbating an already alarming situation.

Solutions

Advancing equitable livelihoods for small-scale and family farmers requires strengthening the agency of those people in diverse food systems that lack the space or the enabling environment in which to exercise their power and rights. It implies protecting and strengthening the capacities and the knowledge, resilience, and innovation that they possess.

Changing power relations in food systems is also critical, and these will require changes both in formal spheres (market negotiations, group membership, etc.) and in non-formal spheres.

Finally, the shift involves transforming structures, including confronting social norms and practices that systematically privilege some producers over others. We must confront the structural barriers within institutions and policies, with the aim of achieving lasting change so that food systems can lead to equitable, sustainable livelihoods. Within food systems, this transformation means adjustments to regimes that regulate access to, use of and control over resources for small-scale and family farmers, especially those defining land distribution, labor division and decision-making power.

Call to Action

Central to advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems are the nearly 500 million small-scale food producers and family farmers who often work in fragile and vulnerable terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems¹. Their production choices, technologies, natural resource management, and market links to value chains determine not only the sustainability and resilience of their livelihoods and their capacity to overcome poverty and food insecurity, but also the diversity of food that will be available to their communities and to consumers and the prices they will pay.

Our statement builds on extensive work within the food systems summit process and calls for action that

1. **Anchors food systems transformation in small-scale producers and family farmers of all identities:** The centrality of small-scale and family farmers is key due to their sustainable and diversified forms of production, generation of employment, provision of dietary diversity, adaptive capacity, contribution to resilience, and role in sustaining rural communities, indigenous knowledge, and local and regional economies.
2. **Strengthens small-scale and family farmer organizations' abilities** to aggregate value, hold duty bearers to account and promote and advocate for the protection of indigenous knowledge and access to finance, services, technology, and markets.
3. **Protects and upholds rights to genetic resources** such as indigenous seeds and also **promotes equity in access to new and sustainable technologies** including rural internet, mobile telecommunications and finance platforms, data collection tools, remote sensing technology, food safety, food processing and post-harvest management technology etc.

¹ While livelihoods in food systems include wage labor and business of all sizes along food value chains – encompassing hundreds of millions of other people, this statement brings attention specifically to the challenges faced by primary producers.

4. **Addresses specific barriers to inclusive, equitable livelihoods for small-scale and family farmers** through partnerships, platforms and networks that integrate smaller, vulnerable actors into more efficient, sustainable, and equitable food value chains.
5. **Adopts coordinated multisectoral approaches at national and territorial levels** to advance equitable livelihoods for small-scale farmers. This includes health and nutrition, social protection, water and sanitation, environment and climate, rural development, and other relevant sectors.
6. **Explicitly recognizes and respond to the specific constraints faced by rural women and girls** and their roles in food systems and in nutrition - ensuring their participation and leadership in decision making and that their rights are secured and protected regarding, for example, land tenure and access to knowledge, dignified work and living incomes, natural resources and ecosystems services, and markets.
7. **Makes targeted investment in and takes explicit action** on the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence within food systems programmes.
8. **Explicitly recognizes and supports the role that indigenous peoples play** within localized and territorial food systems and in natural resource management, biodiversity protection and social and spiritual value systems.
9. **Meets the needs and strengthens the agency of other marginalized groups** such as youth, the elderly or disabled and seasonal, migrant, or low wage farm workers.
10. **Includes nature-based solutions and climate change, environment, and biodiversity policies and investments to strengthen the capacities of small-scale and family farmers to manage risks.** Climate change and biodiversity loss have immediate and long-term impact on the livelihoods of farmers, fishers and pastoralists and have acute consequences for indigenous peoples and food producers in marginal terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Regenerative agriculture and agroecology represent proven models for sustainable and resilient food systems.
11. **Focuses on improving small-scale producer resilience through social protection.** Expanded social protection is key to protecting incomes, improving nutrition, facilitating risk management, fostering economic inclusion, and realizing the rights of small-scale and family farmers.
12. **Addresses the legal, institutional and market constraints to the realization of equity for small-scale farmers,** such as ensuring that the laws, norms, and regulatory mechanisms coupled with the capacity of institutions and communities to implement them are adequate. Ensuring that international convention and treaty obligations related to equity and rights are enshrined in national legal frameworks and that mechanisms for application of the law or dispute settlement are functioning, accountable and accessible to marginalized small-scale and family farmers and their representative groups.