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HUNGRY FOR CHANGE!

What the German government should achieve at the UN Food Systems Summit

French fries from European production are exported at high environmental costs to the home country of the potato, Peru, where there are still almost 4,000 potato varieties. These native potato varieties are grown by smallholder farmers who largely lack access to profitable markets. Meanwhile, large-scale farms in Peru export products like asparagus, grapes, and peppers which has led to significant growth in Peruvian agriculture.¹ However, only a few benefit from this growth with 50% of the Peruvian population living below the poverty line and many smallholder farmers suffering from chronic malnutrition, especially among the indigenous populations. This example illustrates that the way we produce and consume food negatively affects people and our planet.

Food Systems encompass the various elements, activities, and actors that relate to the production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food, as well as the output of these activities including socioeconomic and environmental outcomes.²

The world is producing more food than ever, but the current global food system is failing to provide healthy, sustainable, and affordable choices for everyone, violating the right to food and nutrition. This contradiction has prompted the UN Secretary General to convene the UN Food Systems Summit in September '21 to raise awareness and trigger action for the urgently needed transformation of our global food system. The German government should engage in this process in the interest of those most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition.

Smallholder farmers suffer from income and livelihood disparities

Over 2 billion people depend on small-scale farming by either generating income through selling agricultural products or producing food for themselves.³ In many regions of the world, smallholder farmers produce most of the food commodities and provide up to 80% of the nutrients making them essential for global food and nutrition security.⁴ Although they are an integral pillar of food systems, many of them are poor and food insecure with women and children at highest risk. Women are actively involved in food systems in a range of roles but are constrained from engaging on equitable and fair terms which negatively affects their livelihoods and food and nutrition security (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gender inequality faced by rural women and its impact on hunger



Despite being proven as successful measures for poverty reduction, investments in agriculture and rural development have largely been neglected in the past decades.⁵ As a consequence, smallholders are often trapped in a vicious cycle of subsistence farming, low yields, and insufficient income that prevents them from providing adequately for their families. The increasing effects of climate change also hit them the hardest causing losses in crops and livestock. They lack resources such as financing, quality seed and input suppliers, extension services, and access to natural resources. Often living in remote regions, they are poorly connected to roads, information, and markets. Even smallholders who manage to produce surpluses are unable to compete with the low prices of import products from industrial production. Precarious employment and hazardous working conditions including the lack of social security and other labor rights are still a reality for many of the workers in the agricultural and food sector.

The current global food system exacerbates disparities

Intensive agriculture is one of the main drivers of the degradation of natural resources, i.e. soils and water, and industrial livestock farming is responsible for about 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions.⁶ In addition, the conversion of natural ecosystems into arable and grazing land is the biggest factor in biodiversity loss. Land use changes can also have profound social impacts because secure access to land is essential for the food and nutrition security and livelihoods of rural populations. International trade and investment policies, and a lack of legal protection from national governments contribute to driving indigenous groups and smallholders off their land by expanding farmland for the mass production of crops for global markets such as soy for animal feed and palm oil.

The social and ecological costs of the consumption patterns in the Global North on human health, livelihoods, and the environment are not factored into food prices. Instead, these costs are paid by taxpayers and often the most vulnerable households. Intensive agricultural production systems reward cheap production of large quantities of energy-rich staples. This results in the low availability and affordability of nutrient-rich foods; today, three billion people cannot afford healthy diets.⁷

The same vulnerable countries and groups who suffer the adverse effects of these distorted policies often do not have a seat at the negotiating table or face an unequal playing field. These power imbalances are seen at the local and national levels, where policy decisions often serve the interests of an urban elite rather than the rural population and are more likely to be shaped by men, neglecting the needs and rights of smallholder farmers, rural workers, indigenous peoples, and women. This was the case, for instance, in Sierra Leone, where mainly influential people such as government representatives and traditional authorities were consulted on the reform of land governance laws, while the affected local communities were not invited to present their views.⁸ Such inequalities are further exacerbated at the international level, where poor countries are forced to accept unfavorable trade agreements with little to no say from vulnerable groups on policies affecting their food and nutrition security and livelihoods.⁶

Access to nutritious food is a human right

Current and future generations can only eat healthy diets in the long-term if they are provided by food systems that protect and regenerate the natural resource base rather than undermine it. Governments must transform food systems in the public interest, so they connect the well-being of the people to the well-being of our planet.

The development of rural areas and smallholders who are the backbone of food production in the Global South must be given much higher priority in government policies and investments. With secure access to land and other productive resources, smallholder farmers would be in a better position to generate a regular income. The creation of better conditions in agriculture as well as decent jobs in the local and regional food economy could provide livelihood opportunities for the rural youth and create value for local communities. Increasing public investments in social security and pov-

erty reduction, and legally protecting households with basic social protection programs would allow vulnerable groups to absorb external shocks and avoid falling into a food crisis due to an additional source of income or access to nutritious foods.

To make sure that food policies and programs benefit the food and nutrition insecure groups, these groups need to have a voice in decision making at the local, national, and global levels. With access to relevant information and mechanisms, they can hold authorities accountable to designing food policies that respect and protect their right to food. If all consumers have adequate information on how to have a healthy diet and how the food is produced, they are more likely to value and buy healthy food from sustainable production.

The following example illustrates how some of these aims are pursued in a holistic food systems approach.

BhoomiKa - "green, clean, fair" food for all

The marketing platform "BhoomiKa" ("earth-connected") was founded by Welthungerhilfe and partners in India in 2017 to give a growing urban population the opportunity to obtain organic food from smallholder farmers in the region. Food safety is a major issue in India with many foods heavily contaminated with pesticides. Normally, it is mainly middlemen who take the highest cut of the profit in food markets, but the products grown in BhoomiKa are sold via start-ups directly to consumers in large cities. This helps the agricultural producers earn a significantly higher income. Therefore, "green, clean, fair" food is the trademark of BhoomiKa.

To make these newly emerging regional and local food systems more resilient, participating actors are supported through various measures:

- Smallholder farmers receive training in agroecological farming methods. In addition, they are trained to certify each other within the framework of a "Participatory Guarantee

System (PGS)". The main benefit is that smallholder families have access to higher quality food and can feed themselves better.

- For marketing purposes, food entrepreneurs are trained and educated in the areas of food safety, environmentally friendly packaging, and product marketing. They typically operate as independent start-ups and are linked to farmers and larger networks, and consumer markets.
- At the consumer level, urban families gain access to safe organic food.

After a successful pilot phase, BhoomiKa now works with 7000 farmers. Women are encouraged to become board members of farmer-owned producer groups. A network of 50 entrepreneurs has been created, half of whom are women. New value chains have been developed for 15 organic agricultural products. This benefits 800,000 consumers. BhoomiKa has already convinced several Indian states to choose healthier options for school meals.

What Welthungerhilfe expects from the German government

The UN Food Systems Summit in September must set the course for a food systems transformation:

1. Governments should lead the way to fundamentally change our food systems.

Governments must not hide behind the multi-actor format of the summit but commit to concrete actions. These actions must build on and not fall behind existing commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, Human rights treaties, and ILO Conventions. They must not be limited to technical solutions that make processes more efficient but must address structural challenges to bring about systemic change. The private sector must also be held accountable to actively contribute to fighting poverty and malnutrition, and protecting the environment.

2. Governments must enforce human rights and environmental due diligence in agricultural production and supply chains.

The social and environmental costs of our consumption patterns, such as land degradation, water waste, or human rights violations, must be reflected in food prices. The UN Food System Summit must address the actions needed to achieve this. Governments in the Global North and South should redirect tax incentives, such as agricultural subsidies, to contribute to environmental and climate goals and to provide affordable, healthy food. The reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy is a crucial lever to change the course in this direction, and the German government should push it decisively. In addition, Germany should commit to and advocate for an ambitious European Supply Chain act that addresses the right to adequate food. It should use the

UN Food Systems Summit to send a strong signal to other UN member states on the need for a legal framework on corporate due diligence on human rights and environmental standards in supply chains. To establish this framework at the international level, the German government should actively engage in the development of a binding UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights and encourage other UN member states to join.

3. Governments, private sector, and civil society must promote and establish locally and regionally anchored food systems.

The UN Food Systems Summit should clearly acknowledge the importance of locally and regionally anchored food systems for strengthening resilience and achieving the Zero Hunger goal. The German government must ensure that policies and public investments to strengthen rural economies and create conditions for smallholder farmers to become sustainable and diversified producers are prioritized at the summit. Technological, social, and policy innovations must be developed with the local communities respecting their traditional knowledge systems. The German government as well as governments in the Global South need to align food policies across sectors and make sure that policy decisions in areas such as trade, agriculture or energy do not have a negative impact on the food security of vulnerable people, e.g. by driving them off their land for agricultural export production or by making healthy food choices less accessible.

4. Governments must put vulnerable people at the center of food policies.

Food and nutrition insecure people, and the young generation who will bear the effects of today's food policies must participate in the development and monitoring of them. This requires creating enabling policy spaces to address their concerns and ensuring their voice and inclusion at the local, national, and international levels. The German government must address the need for transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation of the most vulnerable in the UN Food System Summit process

as well as in its policy dialogues with partner governments and significantly increase development aid for the empowerment of marginalized groups and civil society actors. The German government must promote the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as a multilateral food governance system that is anchored on human rights with established mechanisms for meaningful participation and ensure that it is given a significant role in future food policy decision-making and the monitoring of the UN Food Systems Summit outcomes.

5. Gender equality must be at the core of the transformation.

Policies and action advancing equitable livelihoods in food systems need to explicitly recognize and respond to the specific constraints faced by women and girls and their roles in food systems particularly in rural settings. Governments must ensure their participation in policy decision-making processes and that their rights are secured and protected in terms of land tenure and access to knowledge, inputs, financing, dignified work, natural resources, and markets. Specifically, national governments, donors and private sector actors need to consult and involve local CSOs working on women's and girls' rights, within the planning and implementation of programs. Donor countries need to systematically include gender equality and women's and girls' rights in political dialogues with partner countries.

6. The outcomes of the summit must be monitored regularly and with inclusive participation.

The results of the UN Food Systems Summit must be measured by whether they deliver tangible change for the groups affected by malnutrition and those suffering from the environmental and social costs of the global food system. These groups must be actively involved through legitimate representatives in monitoring the implementation of the summit outcomes at the national and international levels.

With less than 10 years left, the world is not on track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to restrain it have only shifted us further away from them. Governments must use the summit as an opportunity to change the rules of the game and ensure that 10 billion people have access to healthy diets now and in the future while respecting the planetary boundaries. All the actors involved in the summit need to build momentum and commit to actions that lead to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient food systems.

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