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Two years after the Food Systems Summit: plenty of rhetoric and meetings, very few tangible results

In September 2021, the UN General Secretariat organized the Food Systems Summit jointly with the World Economic Forum (WEF), a consortium of large multinational corporations known for holding early every year, in Davos, an international forum gathering major global economic and political leaders [\[read\]](#).

It is remembered that this strange Food System's Summit, that did not have any specific objective other than the very vague "build a just and resilient world where no one is left behind", was characterized by a lack of concrete results, plan of action or programme "to save the world" [\[read\]](#). It was, however, an opportunity for promoting a new form of multilateralism relying on coalitions based on voluntary participation – that resemble oddly interest groups – in which large private corporations are expected to play a key role as they "are presumed to have the necessary know-how, managerial capacity and resources to make things happen" [\[read p. 4\]](#) in line with the new vision for agriculture of the WEF [\[read\]](#).

Before it was even held, the Summit organizers, particularly the UN Secretary General, had been criticized on this subject by producer and civil society organizations (POs/CSOs) [\[read\]](#).

Two years later, a stocktaking moment was organized to evaluate the consequences of the Summit. We present here two of the resulting reports: the report by the UN Secretary-General [\[read\]](#), and the autonomous report produced by the African Regional Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) Popular Consultation Space [\[read\]](#).



The UN Secretary-General's report: pompous rhetoric, complex and time-consuming processes and, so far, little impact on the ground

In its first chapter, the report stresses that the Summit "marked a significant milestone for the global community, in accelerating actions towards more

sustainable, inclusive, equitable, and nutritious food systems” and that it urged in its Statement of Action “countries to go beyond rhetoric and take concrete steps for implementing their newly adopted food systems national pathways”.

However, for many observers, the Statement of Action was just another rhetorical piece without any clear and concrete measures. In other words, this mountain of a Summit has given birth to a mouse of action in all domains but one, (spontaneous) governance [read [here pp. 4–5](#) and [here p. 4](#)].

In its second chapter, that largely confirms this assessment, the report presents progress made in the activities initiated by the Summit and it lists the country reports prepared to provide answers to a series of pre-defined questions. The analysis of these country reports deals mainly with the processes implemented for influencing national policies, but it says very little on the policy content promoted in those countries, with the exception of a handful of them.

Regarding these processes, the report explains that they are quite dominated, in terms of participation, by academics, the private sector and producer organizations, and that they are mostly (63%) managed by ministries of Agriculture.

Finally, the report emphasizes the difficulty met in measuring the value-added by the global coalitions in their functions of transfer of best practices, of capacity strengthening, of fostering alignment and coherence, and of resources mobilization.

The general impression conveyed by the report is that the effect of Summit is mainly felt in processes – even though they seem rather fragmented and lacking orientation –, but there was very little outcome in terms of substance and actions.

The report of the African Regional Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM) Popular Consultation Space: priority to reducing dependence on food imports and promoting food sovereignty

This report relies on five rather detailed case studies (Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Republic of Congo and Zambia) and identifies “steps that can help to terminate dependence on food imports and implement a vision of food sovereignty that benefits African peoples and territories”. They include:

- Reforming policy processes in order to establishing democratic policy decision-making rooted in a human rights framework and leaving no place to corporate economic interests.
- Giving priority to national public policies in the setting of the framework for selecting investments, rather than depending on external financing.
- Implementing the transition away from “green revolution/industrial agriculture/ private sector-led, export-oriented supply chains” to “family farming/ agroecology/territorial markets”.

- Obtaining states' commitments to secure "people's access to and control over land, water and seeds".
- Urgent steps to be taken by governments to direct actions and investments in support of "Gender equity and youth access to opportunities".

The measures listed here are in strong opposition with the orientations that had been put forward during the 2021 Food Systems Summit.



Contrarily to the Secretary General's report, this autonomous report is much more concerned by public policies and actions to be implemented, and it reiterates earlier critiques by OPs and CSOs who saw the Summit as an instrument "to legitimize and institutionalize the corporate capture of global food governance".

It concludes by stating that there remains much to be done before the food systems transformation process takes place in an inclusive way. While the rhetoric used by Summit organizer makes reference to "food sovereignty", "agroecology" and "transformational change", the reality of processes occurring at country level is, according to the authors, quite different and rather exclusive, and they put forward solutions inspired by outdated Green Revolution models [\[read\]](#)

Conclusion

What can be provisionally drawn from these two reports, is that the Food Systems Summit that was to transform them to contribute to "build a just and resilient world where no one is left behind", did not have a real impact on the ground.

It has simply been instrumental in creating confusion by multiplying processes often dominated by large agro-industrial corporations assisted by academics and other experts, from which POs and CSOs have frequently been excluded or marginalized.

However, the absence of concrete results should not reassure those who fear a greater corporate takeover of food systems. Far from it! The machinery has indeed been established and governments seem to agree to leave the private sector free to act, and they do not show any intention to ally with civil society.

While all stakeholders are kept busy with complex and time-consuming processes, the ongoing transition already moves forward quietly, pushing us straight into a world where priority is given to profits of a minority of owners and their companies, at the expense of the mass of producers and consumers, and of the sustainability of the world's food [\[read\]](#).

In short, this leads to a world all but desirable, where inequalities will be growing inexorably [\[read\]](#).

To know more:

- African Regional CSIPM Popular Consultation Space, [They will feed us! A people's route to African food sovereignty](#) – Autonomous assessment of UNFSS National Pathways and Dakar 2 Summit Compacts, in collaboration with Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM), 2023.
- United Nations, [Making food systems work for people and planet – UN Food Systems Summit +2 – Report of the Secretary-General](#), UN Food Systems Summit +2 Stocktaking Moment, 2023.

Selection of past articles on hungerexplained.org related to the topic:

- [The “food and agricultural transition” is ongoing – Nine changes tell us to what kind of world it is leading us](#), 2023.
- [Governance: united to decide or divided to be ruled?](#) 2022.
- Opinions: [A strange Summit](#) by George-André Simon, 2021.
- Opinions: [Another False Start in Africa Sold with Green Revolution Myths](#) by Timothy A. Wise and Jomo Kwame Sundaram, 2021.
- [The World Economic Forum's “New Vision for Agriculture” is moving ahead on the ground...](#), 2017.