

Let Them Eat Bugs: Challenging the WEF's Corporate-Driven Food Reset

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The prevailing globalised agrifood model is built on unjust trade policies, the leveraging of sovereign debt, population displacement and land dispossession. It fuels commodity monocropping and food insecurity as well as soil and environmental degradation.

It is responsible for increasing rates of illness, nutrient-deficient diets, a narrowing of the range of food crops, water shortages, chemical runoffs, increasing levels of farmer indebtedness, the undermining and destruction of local communities and the eradication of biodiversity.

The model relies on a policy paradigm that privileges urbanisation, global markets, long supply chains, external proprietary inputs, highly processed food and market (corporate) dependency at the expense of rural communities, small independent enterprises and smallholder farms, local markets, short supply chains, on-farm resources, diverse agroecological cropping, nutrient dense diets and food sovereignty.

It is clear that there are huge environmental, social and health issues that stem from how much of our food is currently produced and consumed and that a paradigm shift is required.

So, some optimists - or wishful thinkers - might have hoped for genuine solutions to the problems and challenges outlined above during the second edition of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) that took place last week in Rome.

The UNFSS has claimed that it aims to deliver the latest evidence-based, scientific approaches from around the world, launch a set of fresh commitments through coalitions of action and mobilise new financing and partnerships. These 'coalitions of action' revolve around implementing a 'food transition' that is more sustainable, efficient and environmentally friendly.

Founded on a partnership between the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF), the UNFSS is, however, disproportionately influenced by corporate actors, [lacks transparency and accountability](#) and diverts energy and financial resources away from the real solutions needed to tackle the multiple hunger, environmental and health crises.

According to a recent article on [The Canary website](#), key multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) appearing at the 2023 summit included the WEF, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, EAT (EAT Forum, EAT Foundation and EAT-Lancet Commission on Sustainable Healthy Food Systems), the World Business Council on Sustainable Development and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa.

The global corporate agrifood sector, including Coca-Cola, Danone, Kelloggs, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Tyson Foods, Unilever, Bayer and Syngenta, were also out in force along with Dutch Rabobank, the Mastercard Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Through its “strategic partnership” with the UN, the WEF regards MSIs as key to achieving its vision of a ‘great reset’ – in this case, a food transition. The summit comprises a powerful alliance of global corporations, influential foundations and rich countries that are attempting to capture the narrative of ‘food systems transformation’. These interests aim to secure greater corporate concentration and agribusiness leverage over public institutions.

Hannah Sharland, the author of the piece in The Canary, writes:

“... the UN is knowingly giving the very corporations sponsoring the destruction of the planet prime seats at the table. It is precisely these corporations who already shape the state of global food systems.”

She concludes that the solutions to a burgeoning world crisis cannot be found in the corporate capitalist system that manufactured it.

During a press conference on 17 July 2023, representatives from the [People’s Autonomous Response](#) to the UNFSS highlighted the urgent, coordinated actions required to address global hunger. The response came in the form of a statement from those representing food justice movements, small-scale food producer organisations and indigenous peoples.

The [statement](#) denounced the United Nations’ approach. Saúl Vicente from the International Indian Treaty Council said that the summit’s organisers aimed to sell their corporate and industrial project as ‘transformation’.

The movements and organisations opposing the summit call for a rapid shift away from corporate-driven industrial models towards biodiverse, agroecological, community-led food systems that prioritise the public interest over profit making. This entails guaranteeing the rights of peoples to access and control land and productive resources while promoting agroecological production and peasant seeds.

The response to the summit adds that, despite the increasing recognition that industrial food systems are failing on so many fronts, agribusiness and food corporations continue to try to maintain their control. They are deploying digitalization, artificial intelligence and other information and communication technologies to promote a new wave of farmer dependency or displacement, resource grabbing, wealth extraction and labour exploitation and to re-structure food systems towards a greater concentration of power and ever more

globalised value chains.

Shalmali Guttal, from Focus on the Global South, says:

“... people from all over the world have presented concrete, effective strategies... food sovereignty, agroecology, revitalisation of biodiversity, territorial markets and a solidarity-based economy. The evidence is overwhelming – the solutions devised by small-scale food producers and Indigenous Peoples not only feed the world but also advance gender, social, economic justice, youth empowerment, workers’ rights and real resilience to crises.”

Guttal asks “why are policy makers not listening to this and providing adequate support?”

That’s easily answered. The UN has climbed into bed with the WEF and unaccountable corporate agrifood and big data giants, which have no time for democratic governance.

A new report by FIAN International was released in parallel to the statement from the People’s Autonomous Response. The report – [Food Systems Transformation – In which direction?](#) – calls for an urgent overhaul of the global food governance architecture to guarantee decision making that prioritises the public good and the right to food for all.

Sofia Monsalve, secretary general of FIAN International, says:

“The main stumbling block for taking effective action towards more resilient, diversified, localized and agroecological food systems are the economic interests of those who advance and benefit from corporate-driven industrial food systems.”

These interests are promoting multistakeholderism: a process that involves corporations and their front groups and armies of lobbyists co-opting public bodies to act on their behalf in the name of ‘feeding the world’ and ‘sustainability’.

A process that places powerful private interests in the driving seat, steering policy makers to facilitate corporate needs while sidelining the strong concerns and solutions being forwarded by many civil society, small-scale food producers’ and workers’ organisations and indigenous peoples as well as prominent academics.

The very corporations that are responsible for the problems of the prevailing food system. They offer more of the same, this time packaged in a biosynthetic, genetically-engineered, bug-eating, ecomodernist, fake-green wrapping (see the online article [From net zero to glyphosate: agritech’s greenwashed corporate power grab](#)’).

While more than 800 million people go to bed hungry under the current food regime, these corporations and their wealthy investors continue to hunger for ever more profit and control. The economic system ensures they are not driven by food justice or any kind of justice. They are compelled to maximise profit, not least, for instance, by assigning an economic market value to all aspects of nature and social practices, whether knowledge, land, data, water, seeds or systems of resource exchange.

By cleverly (and cynically) ensuring that the needs of global markets (that is, the needs of corporate supply chains and their profit-seeking strategies) have become synonymous with the needs of modern agriculture, these corporations have secured a self-serving hegemonic policy paradigm among decision makers that is deeply embedded.

It is for good reason that the People's Autonomous Response to the UNFSS calls for a mass mobilisation to challenge the power that major corporate interests wield:

“*[This power]* must be dismantled so that the common good is privileged before corporate interests. It is time to connect our struggles and fight together for a better world based on mutual respect, social justice, equity, solidarity and harmony with our Mother Earth.”

This may seem like a tall order, especially given the financialization of the food and agriculture sector, which [has developed](#) in tandem with the neoliberal agenda and the overall financialization of the global economy. It means that extremely powerful firms like BlackRock – which holds shares in a number of the world's largest food and agribusiness companies – have a lot riding on further entrenching the existing system.

But hope prevails. In 2021, the ETC Group and the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems released the report [A Long Food Movement: Transforming Food Systems by 2045](#). It calls for grassroots organisations, international NGOs, farmers' and fishers' groups, cooperatives and unions to collaborate more closely to transform financial flows and food systems from the ground up.

The report's lead author, [Pat Mooney](#), says that civil society can fight back and develop healthy and equitable agroecological production systems, build short (community-based) supply chains and restructure and democratise governance structures.

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Colin Todhunter

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We are currently seeing an acceleration of the corporate consolidation of the entire global agri-food chain. The high-tech/big data conglomerates, including Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook and Google, [have joined traditional agribusiness giants](#), such as Corteva, Bayer, Cargill and Syngenta, in a quest to impose their model of food and agriculture on the world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also involved (documented in '[Gates to a Global Empire](#)' by Navdanya International), whether through [buying up huge tracts of farmland](#), promoting a much-heralded ([but failed](#)) '[green revolution](#)' for Africa, pushing [biosynthetic food](#) and [genetic engineering technologies](#) or more generally [facilitating the aims of the mega agri-food corporations](#).

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