



Towards COP 28 – EESC contribution #1

Implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security

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In its Resolution adopted in 2022, the EESC stressed that we are living through a climate emergency, highlighted that policy decisions need to respond to science and scientific information; and called on the European Commission and the EU Member States to take a leadership role and to update the nationally determined contribution (NDC) following the Glasgow Climate Pact. The key messages from the 2022 Resolution remain valid. The EESC also expresses concern on sustained assault on human rights and freedoms as reflected on the [Joint Statement: UAE Human Rights Record Ahead of COP28 by Human Rights Watch](#) and calls on the UAE government to comply with its obligations under international human rights laws.

In 2023, the EESC decided to focus on three specific contributions on the implementation of climate action on food and agriculture, just transition and climate finance, which will be submitted to the Commission as an input to the negotiations. This is the first of the three contributions.

1. Context

The **current multiple crises** of conflict, COVID-19, climate and debt have exposed the vulnerabilities in food systems and highlighted the urgency of food system transformation. In particular, agri-food systems are increasingly vulnerable to climate change, while producing up to 37 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions. Climate-resilient agri-food system responses are seen as fundamental to achieving both the global goal on adaptation and collective temperature goal under the Paris Agreement. The latest IPCC report¹ was particularly attentive to the way which food systems are affected by climate change, but are also contributing to it. **The agri-food sector should therefore be actively involved and supported in combating global warming** in order to contribute to the broader transition to sustainable food systems while ensuring its long-term profitability.

UNFCCC COP23 has recognised the unique potential of agriculture in tackling climate change by establishing the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA). COP27 reported back on the work done under the KJWA and concluded with a turning point decision on the four-year **Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security** ([decision 3/CP.27](#), from now "Joint Work").

The EESC welcomes the progress achieved by the KJWA and the COP27's landmark decision on the new Joint Work, as well as the initiative on Food and Agriculture for Sustainable Transformation ([FAST](#)) launched in November 2022 by more than 20 agriculture ministers and the Egyptian COP27 Presidency. To achieve its objectives, the Joint Work must build upon the successes of the KJWA, including its efforts to ensure **inclusiveness and the participation of civil society observers**² in the organisation of its work.

Ahead of the UNFCCC COP28, the EESC has prepared this contribution with the aim to provide civil society's input into the **Joint Work**. The purpose is to identify and address those elements that are still missing in the negotiations and/or where European civil society has concrete proposals for action.

¹ [AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023 — IPCC](#).

² [Special attention should be given to farmers, including peasants and small and medium farmers, fishers, pastoralists, those without land, consumers, urban-based people living in poverty, agricultural and food workers, women, youth and indigenous people.](#)

2. Key recommendations for the new Joint Work on agriculture and food security

Policy - Promote a coherent and comprehensive approach on climate, agriculture and food

To ensure the implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security, the EESC sees the urgency of **creating a new narrative that drives real systems change** - not only technical or technological solutions. This new narrative should aim to increase **policy** coherence, build more democratic and rights-based **governance** and principles, and ensure that **finance** goes in the right – and equitable – direction. We expect the EU to play a leadership role along the following key recommendations for the new Joint Work's objectives and ways forward for implementation. Concretely, the main issues identified in this contribution could also be considered as proposed workshop topics (Doc .CP/27, Para 16).

The convergence of the climate and agri-food agendas requires a more holistic and integrated policy approach, putting food system transformation at the heart of climate action. This is also necessary for the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. There are solutions to the issue of adaptation and mitigation in the agriculture sector (e.g. carbon sequestration) and food businesses, but they have a price, risks and sometimes an impact on long-term profitability³. Therefore, farmers and agricultural workers need support, fair remuneration and long-term access to land so that they will commit to and make a success of the low carbon transition. This means in practice that the new Joint Work should focus on:

- **fostering systems thinking, breaking the sectoral silos and ensuring policy coherence.** The EESC has been calling for years for a comprehensive food policy delivering: i) economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability; ii) integration across sectors, policy areas and levels of governance; iii) inclusive decision-making processes; and iv) a combination of compulsory measures and incentives to accelerate the transition towards sustainable food systems. Climate action is a key pillar of this approach. The Joint Work should also provide impetus to enhance biodiversity in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
- **providing tools, instruments, funding and knowledge for farmers⁴ to make the necessary transition through public policies that deliver:**
 - the right incentives to encourage sustainable practices, tackle food losses and waste, foster measures to decrease GHG emissions and increase carbon sequestration, as well as drive the demand of public and private consumers towards sustainable/organic food and healthy diets.
 - support (through public funding or horizontal partnerships with the public or private sector) to make the necessary adaptations in the production methods and sourcing of inputs, including, for example, through renewable energies and biomethanisation.
 - access to land to reach the critical size for economic performance of farms, and therefore ensure generation renewal as well as the extensification of livestock and feed autonomy, while also considering the potential of finite natural capital (mainly land, but also biodiversity).

³ [Restoring sustainable carbon cycles | European Economic and Social Committee \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁴ Cfr. footnote 2

- access to skills, knowledge and training to address the effects of climate change and to change agricultural practices. Advisory services will need to be well-resourced to accompany farmers in major production shifts.
- **accelerating the agroecological transformation of our food systems building on the positive aspects of the current competitive⁵ European agri-food model.** There is now ample scientific evidence that diversified agroecological systems are the only ones that can contribute both to a rapid decarbonisation and high adaptation, while at the same time reversing biodiversity losses, restoring degraded land and ensuring healthy diets and food security⁶. The EESC has already supported agroecology as the horizon towards which European agriculture should be working⁷, requiring a paradigm shift that builds on the positive aspects of the current competitive European agri-food model and promote diversity at all levels (species, farms, landscapes and livelihoods). Subsidies for agricultural practices must be increased and redirected to support sustainable food systems transformation. This includes recognising and delinking food systems' reliance on agricultural inputs through actions to reduce and eliminate whenever possible the use of synthetic fertilisers, chemical pesticides and fossil fuel energy in agriculture, promoting agriculture that does not contribute to deforestation and reducing non-food uses of cropland and ensuring that food systems deliver food to local communities.
- **ensuring fairness and equity across the food supply chain through:**
 - traceable fair prices reflecting the true cost of production for the environment and society, and allowing suppliers and workers to receive an income or a wage that is adequate for their livelihood, investment, innovation and sustainable production.
 - fostering fairer trading practices to ensure that the food supply chain is more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and a ban of Unfair Trading Practices (UTPs) across the food chain.
 - streamlining human rights, social aspects and social equity within agriculture/food systems. Dominant discourses around sustainability focus on environmental and climate-related issues and are often framed around managing the environment as part of improving performance/efficiency (for example, the focus on increasing yields through chemical fertilisers) and take into little or no account the social dimension. Climate justice and food justice must go hand in hand.
- **agricultural research budgets** benefiting also local communities and smallholder farmers and not targeting unsustainable and highly-input demanding technologies.
- **fostering coherence of internal policies with external action and trade by:**
 - shifting from input-intensive, export-oriented, industrial agriculture to diversified, agroecological food systems.

⁵ "In order for a comprehensive European food policy to be truly relevant for European consumers, it is essential that the food produced sustainably in the EU is competitive. This means that the European agri-food sector is able to deliver food for the consumers at prices that include extra costs for criteria such as sustainability, animal welfare, food safety and nutrition but also a fair return to the farmers, and at the same time maintains its position as the preferred choice for the vast majority of consumers." *Opinion Civil society's contribution to the development of a comprehensive food policy in the EU*, paragraph 5.8, [OJ C129, 11.04.2018, p. 18.](#)

⁶ IPCC report.

⁷ [OJ C 353, 18.10.2019, p. 65.](#)

- Recognising the close link between trade, climate change and food poverty, and ensuring true reciprocity of standards in preferential trade agreements. Cheap imports often imply high social and environmental costs in third countries, particularly on deforestation.
- Linking food system transformation to global responses to the debt crisis in order to address the structural drivers of unsustainable sovereign debt⁸.

Governance - Democratised agri-food systems and ensure a rights-based approach

Fostering a governance framework which increases coherence across the climate and food agendas is essential to ensure the convergence of political approaches on climate and food. In addition, a just transition cannot happen without the democratisation of food systems and without **ensuring a rights-based approach** versus the concentration of power and interests across the food chain. For the implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security, this means in practice that the new Joint Work should focus on:

- **building a stronger and more inclusive governance system in all relevant fora**, starting with the **Committee on World Food Security (CFS)**, which must be propped up and strengthened rather than side-lined and undermined. The new Joint Work must recognise and build upon workstreams and policy products endorsed by the CFS, which is the foremost inclusive intergovernmental forum dedicated to food security issues supported by a dedicated High-Level Panel of Experts (HLPE).
- **creating autonomous processes and spaces for the voices, claims, and proposals of people's organisations and social movements** to be heard. While acknowledging the **role of farmers and small-scale food producers** as key agents of change, special attention needs to be given to processes that build the agency and voice of women, young people, indigenous peoples and constituencies whose voices and needs have been and are being marginalised in policy, justice and governance structures. A **concrete proposal for the Sharm el Sheik online portal** (Doc .CP/27, Para 18) would be to ensure that key existing resources should be referenced, accessible and used including publications also from Indigenous and grassroots knowledge (non-academic research, reflecting experiences from the ground)⁹.
- **fostering a gender-responsive rights-based approach**. In many parts of the world women make up nearly half of the agricultural workforce, and face particular challenges due to climate change and gendered power relations. Yet they are systematically disadvantaged by policies which are gender-blind and/or gender-biased, and tend to assume that men are the default farmers. Furthermore, it is of critical importance that the new Joint Work significantly strengthen its gender analysis, draws on linkages with the enhanced UNFCCC Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (GAP), and integrate this across many areas of implementation. Agricultural system change must be carried out structurally, including a class, gender and ethnic-racial perspective, leaving nobody behind, in order to end the systems that devalue, oppress and exploit women, the people and the environment.

⁸ IPES Food report "[Breaking the Cycle of Unsustainable Food Systems, Hunger and Debt](#)" (March 2023).

⁹ [Climate Action Network Submission to the Sharm-el-Sheik Joint work on implementation of action on Agriculture and food security - Climate Action Network \(climatenetwork.org\)](#).

- **Ensuring the structured participation of civil society and food chain actors** in policy-making processes, for example through food policy councils. Food policy councils already exist at local level, bringing together diverse food system actors across a specific area to resolve challenges, reconnect cities to food production in the surrounding regions and ensure the effective governance of local and regional food policies. The option of a European Food Policy Council, as put forward in several EESC opinions, should be explored.
- **ensuring that states and subnational governments recognise and prioritise action to build sustainable and resilient food systems as the most direct mechanism to take action** on climate, hunger and poverty and thus must renew and redouble their commitments to develop sustainable food policies, for example by putting food and farming at the heart of the global response to the climate emergency (including through Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans).
- recognising that to foster a just transition **there is no one-size-fits-all recipe** for food system transformation, and therefore **developing** carefully sequenced steps (following continuous meaningful expert consultation) over multi-year frameworks, to ensure that farmers are provided with the resources (input, advice, transition support, etc.) that they need to move away from monocultures and diversify their production without compromising food security and their income. This will also entail re-diversifying food consumption and restructuring trade flows, ensuring a diverse mix of local and global supplies.
- **aligning policy actions horizontally (across policy areas) and vertically (between different levels of governance) to accelerate the transition to sustainable food systems**¹⁰. National and supranational governments (e.g. EU and AU) must take a proactive and enabling role to build multi-level and multi-actor governance mechanisms for coordinated decision-making on food systems from the farm and landscape level to the city, region, state, and international levels¹¹.
- **protecting, respecting and fulfilling the right to food as a transformative obligation towards sustainable and just food systems**¹² and **tipping the balance of power in food system governance from corporations to communities**; address corporate overreach in food governance by creating mechanisms to manage conflicts of interest and reducing corporate market power.
- **empowering young people in agroecological careers** in order to transfer and maintain essential intergenerational knowledge as we transition to more sustainable and just practices.

Finance – Ensure that climate finance to agriculture and food systems goes in the right – and equitable – direction

Public and private investments are essential to support the transition to low-carbon and adaptive agri-food systems, but should be geared in the right – and equitable – direction - not feed unsustainable food systems, quick but unfair solutions or financial speculation. According to the Climate Policy Initiative, "The Agriculture, Forestry, Other Land Uses and Fisheries (AFOLU) sectors require a nearly

¹⁰ FAO definition: <https://www.fao.org/3/ca2079en/CA2079EN.pdf>.

¹¹ This is the call to action of the [Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration](#) signed by 100+ local governments and launched at COP26 in 2021.

¹² [Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter. Final report: The transformative potential of the right to food \(2014\)](#).

26-fold increase in annual funding by 2030 compared with the 2019/20 annual average in order to shift to a low-carbon and climate resilient trajectory." However, not all forms of finance are the same, they are not all motivated by the same objectives, and do not have the same repercussions in terms of food system transformation, food security, right to food, climate adaptation and mitigation.

The financialisation of the climate agenda is not new, nor is the financialisation of the agri-food system. But **the role of finance has expanded across the value chain**. Since the beginning of the century, the food/climate convergence has been going hand in hand with the surge in the role of private capital, including from financial actors like banks, asset managers and private equity funds. Especially following the Paris Agreement, the narrative that "there are not enough public funds for climate change adaptation and mitigation" has stimulated public actors to look for ways of attracting private finance – while private actors themselves look for opportunities to fund climate change mitigation (and to a very limited extent, adaptation) all across the agri-food supply chain.

Because the agri-food system transition may be increasingly defined by private financial actors and their visions of the future of food, it is important to **identify how private finance is defining the global and local climate/food agenda**, and the **implications of financialisation of climate change adaptation and mitigation** in terms of human rights, livelihood, access to food and agri-food system transformation.

This means in practice that the new Joint Work should focus on:

- **prioritising climate adaptation and mitigation rather than financial needs**, thus responding to farmers' needs and the agroecological shift first.
- **addressing the financial sector and its responsibilities** in profiting from agri-food systems and activities (such as food speculation) that are incompatible with the Paris Agreement and the SDG objectives. Mitigation strategies must ensure that the right to food is not violated, but progressively realised. Agriculture's contribution to indirect emissions through deforestation and cultivation changes of pasture lands (which may include a range of social, policy and trade factors) need to be better understood. The impact of land distribution (land concentration) on climate change mitigation and adaptation needs broader attention.
- **following IPCC and HLPE indications of close climate/food nexus**, especially when it comes to the need to decarbonise and ensure the transition in more industrialised countries.
- **addressing the food-system-related implications** of large-scale investments so that they do not create further opportunities for speculators, in particular when linked to the market for carbon credits.
- **assessing the nature and purpose of "climate-smart" investments in agriculture**, which tend to require substantial upfront investments mostly reach "low-hanging" fruits, and tend to be associated with the creation of new forms of financial, input and market dependency to support the transformational changes necessary to heighten farmers' productivity and their capacity to adapt to climate change while reducing the emission intensity of what they produce.
- **scrutinising the socio-economic implications of farmers' financial inclusion**, in particular when associated with the distribution derivative and insurance products that are bound to specific agricultural practices and transnational value chains.
- **recognising that the current structure of the commodities market is not delivering** for the "sustainable economy we need" and for the objectives linked to sustainable development, climate

ambition and just transition - but actively works against them. It undermines the efforts to solve hunger, foster fair revenues for farmers and workers and fair prices for consumers, as well as protect small and medium food processors and the retail sector from the risks of rising inflation.

- **addressing concentration in food chains and financial ownership.** Global physical grain trade is highly concentrated. Along with a focus on corporate concentration, it is essential to address the common ownership of competing enterprises by a handful of financial actors. Four companies control an estimated 70-90 percent of global grain trade: Archer-Daniels-Midland, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus. These "ABCD" companies not only exercise an oligopoly over global grain trade, but also over information about market fundamentals, and are also highly financialised.
- **Increasing transparency and taking the necessary steps to curb excessive commodity speculation** to reduce uncertainty, dependency, low prices and fragility, which are the strongest enemies of sustainable and adaptive practices and the implementation of adaptive forms of agriculture, in particular by:
 - Regulating the futures market, while preserving the function of futures for hedging.
 - Regulating indexes (commodities indexes and food indexes).
 - Addressing the financialisation of the food sector as massive money-making off the backs of people, e.g. by introducing global windfall taxation on excess profits before dividends of trade and financing corporations and a food speculation tax to curb high frequency trading.

References

The contribution is based on key recommendations from EESC's adopted opinions as well as on input received from experts and civil society's actors.

Related EESC opinions and documents:

- [EESC Resolution: Jointly tackling an existential threat - social partners and civil society for the implementation of ambitious climate action](#)
- [NAT/711 Comprehensive EU food policy](#)
- [NAT/755 Healthy and sustainable diets](#)
- [NAT/734 improving the food supply chain/UTPs](#)
- [NAT/763 Short food supply chains/agroecology](#)
- [NAT/787 "From farm to fork": a sustainable food strategy](#)
- [NAT/821 Aligning food business practices and operations with the SDGs](#)
- [NAT/823 Towards a fair food supply chain](#)
- [NAT/844 Food security and sustainable food systems](#)
- [NAT/846 Restoring sustainable carbon cycles](#)
- [NAT/856 Towards a sustainable plant protein and plant oil strategy for the EU own-initiative opinion \(2022\)](#)
- [NAT 857 Towards a sustainable food labelling framework to empower consumers to make sustainable food choices](#)
- [NAT/873 own-initiative opinion "Food price crisis: the role of speculation and concrete proposals for action in the aftermath of the Ukraine war"](#)
- [NAT/892- Towards a European Food Policy Council as a new governance model in the future EU Framework on Sustainable Food Systems \(ongoing\)](#)

Other reference documents:

- [IPCC Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023](#)
- [UN Food and Agriculture Organisation \(FAO\) FAST initiative](#)
- Summary of Submissions under UNFCCC decision 3/CP.27 provided by Parties and observers as of 30 April 2023 in relation to the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security, paragraph 17 and paragraph 18, compiled by FAO.
- [Climate Action Network submission](#) to the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security
- IPES Food report "[Another Perfect Storm](#)" (May 2022)
- IPES Food report "[Who's Tipping the Scales?](#)" (April 2023)
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