

# CSO Statement

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I am Ahmed Borhan from Bangladesh. Today I represent the 40 participants from civil society, from 16 countries, belonging to 25 organizations and movements at national and regional levels, who joined the CSO Consultation last week to prepare civil society's input to the 36<sup>th</sup> APRC. We are smallholder family farmers and farmworkers, landless, rural women and youth, fisherfolks, forest dwellers, pastoralists and herders, Indigenous Peoples, urban poor, consumers, and NGOs. We thank the FAO once again for your ongoing commitment to engage with CSOs.

The capitalist system has left the world with the multiple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, hunger, obesity, and the rise of global pandemics. We welcome the sharpened focus on the holistic health of ecosystems in the new definition of One Health that seeks to address the structural causes of disease creation embedded in industrial livestock production systems, and we urge the FAO and member states to broaden this approach to all aspects of sustainable food and agriculture systems.

The industrial food system is in stark contrast to the traditional Indigenous Peoples, family farmers and peasant-led agri-food systems globally, where maintenance of a sustainable resource base is a central organising principle and set of practices of communities connected to place.

Consider this reflection from Santal (indigenous community) women from Bangladesh: We led a life where land and nature were an integral part of it and our wisdom and indigenous knowledge that inculcates from one generation to the next was the prime basis of connecting present and future. Still, this living knowledge helps us to live a nature-based sustainable life.

To address the multiple planetary crises a series of treaties and conventions have been formulated for over three decades, all while refusing to name capitalism as the key driver.

Fossil fuel and agribusiness companies have embraced Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in their “net zero” pledges that legitimize the hugely harmful practices of extraction, thus fueling more land grabs and human rights violations, especially of Indigenous Peoples and smallholders . Moreover, NBS is a continuation and expansion of initiatives such as REDD+, which has had a devastating record of human rights violations and questionable benefits for ecosystem protection. Finally, NBS threatens to corrupt and co-opt genuine solutions such as agroecology and community forest management (CFM).

Indigenous ways of knowing, and the place-based knowledge and wisdom of peasants, *with* nature within agroecosystems, can provide a basis for preserving biodiversity and the overall health of agro-ecosystems. Food production and consumption characterizes our interrelationship with nature. Instead of putting in place policies and instruments that will lock in more separation between humans and the more-than-human world, the FAO and member states must promote positive interaction between agricultural practices in both managed and wild ecosystems.

We reject the push for so-called ‘inclusive digitalisation of agriculture’, which is simply another way for multinational corporations to maintain and gain further control of food and agriculture systems. The overall trend of digitalisation is towards integration between the companies that supply products to farmers (pesticides, tractors, drones, etc.) and those that control the flow of data.

For smallholders, giving data away to large companies enriches those companies and makes them more powerful and promotes the Industrial Food Chain. Signing up with a digital ag company could lock farmers into a contract that will force them to buy the products companies promote and sell on credit (at high prices), and receive payment via a digital money app (for which there is a fee). Farmers may find themselves locked into selling their farm products to just one company at a price determined by their algorithm.

Food workers may find their jobs replaced by machines such as robots and drones.

They may be expected to work at the same pace as a robot, perhaps by wearing robotic devices, even though this has already been leading to more accidents in highly automated workplaces such as industrial meat processing facilities.

The smallholders we represent from across Asia and the Pacific have very basic digital needs – we need connectivity – access to the internet, which is lacking in so many rural areas. We need smartphones so we can access information such as weather forecasts that help us to decide on production and harvest. In addition, we need to be able to connect to local markets to sell our products through open-source platforms developed by not-for-profits like the one Open Food Network mentioned in the FAO thematic paper on climate resilience. Many need access to education to gain the literacy required to navigate the digital world. We need digital justice.

**We recommend that FAO:**

- promote climate justice – not only climate resilience – to ensure the ethical, legal, and political aspects of climate change are addressed in addition to the environmental;
- centre Indigenous Peoples and peasants’ knowledge and participation in decision making to address the biodiversity crisis in this region;
- promote One Health’s heightened focus on ecosystems and the *prevention* of zoonotic disease and AMR and ask governments to implement it in their countries;
- Promote digital justice for small-scale food producers, reducing digital inequality supporting national governments to provide internet connectivity in rural areas, and access to basic devices such as smartphones, along with farmer to farmer knowledge sharing in digital and economic literacies;
- implement global policy instruments such as the Declaration of Rights of Peasants; the UNDRIP, the global plan of the UNDRIP, the VGGT, the VGSSF, and RAI with the full and active participation of civil society;

**We recommend that our governments:**

- connect farmers to universities and other educational institutions to bring the FAO’s promotion of agroecology to their attention and into their curricula;
- shift public spending (subsidies, procurement) away from industrial farming towards supporting agroecological systems of peasants and family farmers, including subsidies

during the transition, support for research, innovation, extension and value addition for agroecology, and implement procurement policies in public institutions that prioritize produce from local, agroecological farms and forests and sustainable fisheries;

- reject free trade agreements, which contribute to the rapid spread of disease and impact negatively on local markets;
- provide direct funding to farmers' organisations to help smallholders farm agroecologically and connect to local value chains and markets, which may include digital connectivity and technologies.

**We recommend that both the FAO and our governments:**

- recognize the role of Indigenous Peoples, peasants, smallholders, small scale family farmers, and local communities as frontline responders to the impacts of climate change, by ensuring their participation in decision making and response; and empower them to lead on shaping climate-resilient agriculture that improves their livelihoods.
- set up mechanisms and stronger partnerships by working with smallholder family farmers, fisherfolks, pastoralists, forest dwellers, not only for ongoing advice but as real partners from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives, project, strategy frameworks.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, we believe that all of you want the same thing we do – a just world that is free of poverty and hunger, where we are actively slowing climate change and, working for climate justice, and rebuilding resilient ecosystems and safe and healthy food systems for future generations. We look forward to continuing to work with you to make that vision a reality.