

**Statement prepared by the International Planning Committee and the AdHoc Committee of CSOs engaging in the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific Asia-Pacific (37<sup>th</sup> APRC); delivered by Ms. Anuka de Silva of the Movement for Land and Agrarian Reform (MONLAR) on behalf of the CSO Consultation for the 37<sup>th</sup> APRC**

Good day to all of you. I'm Anuka de Silva from Sri Lanka. Today, I speak in behalf of around 100 representatives from civil society organizations and movements at the national and regional levels, who participated in the online CSO Consultation on CSO inputs to the 37th FAO APRC last January 23 to 24, 2024 . We represent smallholder family farmers and farmworkers, the landless, rural women and youth, fisherfolks, forest dwellers, pastoralists and herders, Indigenous Peoples, the urban poor, consumers, and NGOs.

The 2030 agenda of “leaving no one behind” will remain mere rhetoric as long as the structural roots of poverty and inequality are not addressed. Small-scale food producers, family farmers and their communities feed 70 to 80 percent of the world’s population. Yet, they remain the most vulnerable to social and economic marginalization and even starvation. Our small-scale fishing communities continue to face existential challenges, yet it is fishing and related industries that provide the main or supplementary source of employment, livelihood, and income for many of the region's poor.

Neoliberal policies and the industrial agriculture have led to the depletion of natural resources as they have concentrated power in a few transnational corporations, which reap all the profits. The resulting health, food, climate and ecological crises are clear illustrations of the failure of a food system that prioritizes immediate profit.

As a first step towards genuinely fixing the broken food system, we need to completely change our development paradigm. The current narrow focus on increasing production to achieve food security is inadequate and could be dangerous. We need a radical shift towards a genuine and holistic sustainable food system. We believe that agroecology, which promotes small-scale farming, could counter the corporate-led agri-food system. Agroecology encompasses a set of sustainable, equitable principles together with scientific disciplines that contribute to achieving a sustainable, equitable, and secure agri-food system.

The magnitude and urgency of the climate and ecological crises , compounded by the pandemic and health crisis, requires decisive action, more investments, progressive climate laws, locally adapted and appropriate technologies, a halt to dependence on fossil fuels, and an equitable society. This evolution is an invitation to work towards the promotion of a society more respectful of people and the earth.

The CSO Consultation, puts forward the following recommendations to FAO and its Member States:

1. Broaden and deepen analysis, foresight and outlook on the current food security situation by:
  - a. Accounting for the socio-economic conditions of food producers, farmers, fishers, and herders as well as the land and agrobiodiversity situation;
  - b. Questioning the consequences of industrialization, neo-liberal policies and corporate consolidation on the food security situation of the region, and the root causes of rural poverty, food insecurity, and undernutrition;
  - c. Depicting the real-world implications of environmental changes, new and emerging technologies, and trade competition, particularly on us, small-scale producers, who face these significant challenges.
2. Prioritize the empowerment of family farmers, small-scale farmers, fishers, forest dwellers, herders, pastoralists, and indigenous peoples by responding to their needs, recognizing their potentials, capacities, and innovations and increasing the Agency of our own organizations, building our potentials and capacities to engage decision-makers as well as respond to the social and economic needs of our members.
3. Promote a rights-based approach to transforming agri-food systems and making them more climate-resilient through policies that: (a) secure our rights and access to natural resources- lands, waters, forests, and seeds, (b) promote agroecology and food sovereignty as a holistic systems approach that shortens value chains , increases resource efficiency, reduces food waste, promotes nutrient recycling, and builds on local knowledge; and (c) strengthen our organizations and cooperatives with a view towards increasing our market power.
4. Promote the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication to address the challenges of climate change and to strengthen the sustainability and livelihood of small-scale and indigenous fishers, with equity and equality.

5. Adopt and implement Structural One Health, through programs that: (1) foster community autonomy; (2) reform extension services to make them more horizontal especially for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing; (3) promote collective activities; (4) reform public policies to enable an agro-ecological transition and to provide public financing for vital community-owned infrastructure that local food systems require.
6. Facilitate direct access to financing by farmers through our farmers' organizations and cooperatives to scale up and scale out appropriate and much needed innovations related to securing tenurial rights to natural resources, agroecology, local and traditional crops, shorter value chains, participatory action researches, community-based and farmer-led innovation and extension services, and maintaining peace in the communities.
7. Ensure the application of a gender and youth lens when enacting policies and implementing programs for agri-food system transformation, building climate resilience, and ensuring equal rights and equitable opportunities for women and youth.

We, organizations of family farmers, fishers, forest dwellers, pastoralists, indigenous peoples and civil society, remain committed and steadfast to engage with FAO and its Member States in building a just, healthy, nutritious, and resilient food system that provides dignity and self-worth to our constituencies, and our members.

Thank you for your attention . #