The United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021: Understanding the Controversy About the Leadership and Governance that Led to Protests and the Boycott, and Examining the Outcomes

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Discussion Points

1. Rationale for UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) Sept 2021
   • Previous UN Summits had focused on hunger & food insecurity (1974, 1996, 2002 and 2009)
   • Shift from multi-lateral to multi-stakeholder governance to enable UN System & agencies to support “Food Systems Transformation”

2. Planning: UN agencies and key actors

3. Timeline: Actors involved in protesting and UNFSS boycott

4. Response: UN Secretary General and other organizers

5. Outcomes: Global coalitions for 4 action areas

6. Reflections on future actions for actors to strengthen governance and accountability for safe, healthy, green, fair & affordable (equitable), resilient and sustainable food systems
UN Secretary General and WEF Chairman Announced Strategic Partnership Framework June 2019

Five Focus Areas to Collaborate to Achieve SDG Agenda

1. Climate change  
2. Health  
3. Digital cooperation  
4. Gender equality & empowerment of women  
5. Education

The UN-Forum Partnership was signed in a meeting held at United Nations headquarters between UN Secretary-General António Guterres and World Economic Founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Food Systems Summit will serve as a turning point in the world’s journey to achieve the SDGs.

With 10 years to go, we are not on track to achieve many of the SDGs.

There is scientific consensus that transforming food systems also offers one of the single strongest opportunities we have to change course and realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda, and to support the Secretary-General’s call to “build back better” from COVID-19.

The Summit will unleash bold new actions, innovative solutions, and strategies to transform our food systems and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all of the SDGs.

“Transforming food systems is crucial for delivering all the Sustainable Development Goals.”
- António Guterres, UN Secretary-General, 2019

2019-2021: UN agencies and partners organized activities that culminated in UNFSS held in NYC on Sept 23, 2021.
SDG Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXTBYMfZyrM
Governments, private sector and civil society actors must work with UN System agencies to raise US $172.5 trillion to achieve the 17 goals and 169 targets in the SDG Agenda (2015-2030).
UN Food Systems Summit Timeline
June 2019 to Dec 2020

Jun 2019
UN & WEF Partnership

Oct 2019
UNFSS 2021
Announced on World Food Day

Dec 2019
Dr. Agnes Kalibata, President of AGRA, appointed as Special Envoy for UNFSS 2021

Jan 2020
Global Food Sovereignty actors (IPCFS) sent letter to UNSG re: WEF, AGRA & CFS for UNFSS

Feb – Dec 2020
Leadership & planning for UNFSS 2021 selected by UN Deputy SG, Amina Mohammed & Dr. Agnes Kabata
The Global Syndemic: undernutrition, obesity and climate change

Global Food System is Unhealthy & Unsustainable

- Global Syndemic = three interacting pandemics that include obesity, undernutrition, climate change
- Common system drivers = food, transport, energy, urban design and land use
- Policy inertia = weak/ineffective policies by decision-makers, opposition by commercial vested interests, and lack of public and civil society demand for change
- Coordinated triple-duty actions by many actors needed to achieve healthy people and planet

Six Food Security Dimensions

REGARDING THE HEALTH ASPECT

1. Start early in life with early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding until six months of age, and continued breastfeeding until two years and beyond, combined with appropriate complementary feeding.

2. Are based on a great variety of unprocessed or minimally processed foods, balanced across food groups, while restricting highly processed food and drink products.  

3. Include wholegrains, legumes, nuts and an abundance and variety of fruits and vegetables.  

4. Can include moderate amounts of eggs, dairy, poultry and fish, and small amounts of red meat.

5. Include safe and clean drinking water as the fluid of choice.

6. Are adequate (i.e. reaching but not exceeding needs) in energy and nutrients for growth and development, and to meet the needs for an active and healthy life across the lifecycle.

7. Are consistent with WHO guidelines to reduce the risk of diet-related NCDs, and ensure health and wellbeing for the general population.

8. Contain minimal levels, or none if possible, of pathogens, toxins and other agents that can cause foodborne disease.

REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9. Maintain greenhouse gas emissions, water and land use, nitrogen and phosphorus application and chemical pollution within set targets.

10. Preserve biodiversity, including that of crops, livestock, forest-derived foods and aquatic genetic resources, and avoid overfishing and overhunting.

11. Minimize the use of antibiotics and hormones in food production.

12. Minimize the use of plastics and derivatives in food packaging.

REGARDING SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS

13. Reduce food loss and waste.

14. Are built on and respect local culture, culinary practices, knowledge and consumption patterns, and values on the way food is sourced, produced and consumed.

15. Are accessible and desirable.

16. Avoid adverse gender-related impacts, especially with regard to time allocation (e.g. for buying and preparing food, water and fuel acquisition).

Governance

- **Governance** is the “total political, organizational, and administrative processes through which actors or stakeholders (i.e., governments, private-sector businesses, foundations, non-governmental organization interest groups and civil society) articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, make decisions, mediate their differences, and meet their obligations.

- **Implicit in governance are...**
  - political ideology
  - politics
  - power
Multi-lateral vs. Multi-stakeholder Governance

Seven Engagement Principles

1. Act with urgency
2. Commit to the Summit
3. Be respectful
4. Recognize complexity
5. Embrace multi-stakeholder inclusivity
6. Complement the work of others
7. Build trust

An international organization based in Geneva that promotes public-private cooperation by engaging political, business and other leaders to shape global, regional and industry agendas.

UNFSS Aimed to Re-Shape Global Governance Structure from Multilateral to Multi-Stakeholder Market-Led Governance Approach

UN Collaborations & Partnerships

UN System Agencies & Global Partners
A SUN Movement Call to Action for Nutrition ahead of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit:

**A multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to nutrition must be front and centre in food systems transformation**

The UNFSS represents a key milestone in the Year of Action for Nutrition, which kicked off in December 2020 and will culminate at the Nutrition for Growth Summit this December. An inclusive and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will not be achieved unless people’s nutrition is improved globally, as good nutrition is an indispensable foundation to lift individuals, families, and nations out of poverty and safeguard good health. **We must make use of this historic opportunity for governments, donors, the private sector, UN agencies, and civil society to step up and announce bold commitments at the UNFSS to drive progress against the global nutrition targets.**
In this regard, the SUN Movement asks the UNFSS Secretariat and all stakeholders involved in the upcoming Summit to join forces and ensure that:

- **Nutrition is elevated as a key driver for food systems transformation throughout the UNFSS agenda and panel discussions, and that all National Pathways for food systems transformation are geared towards ending malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.**

- **The Summit is inclusive and ensures a balanced representation of stakeholders, providing meaningful space to nutrition grassroots movements, particularly those involving young people, women, and indigenous peoples.** These organisations and networks are uniquely positioned to create awareness, involvement, and commitment to improve food systems in a way that is owned by communities and rooted in human rights. They are instrumental in achieving a country-led, bottom-up transformation by using locally generated evidence and solutions.

- **Private sector representatives - from multinational companies to small enterprises – commit to every person’s right to healthy, affordable, and sustainable diets to end all forms of malnutrition.** This includes, but is not limited to, supporting every mother’s right to breastfeed without undue influence from manufacturers of breastmilk substitutes. The infant and young child feeding industry must publicly commit to full compliance, globally, with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly resolutions. Companies must also support and comply with regulatory measures around the labelling, promotion and marketing of unhealthy foods.

- **The Summit weaves all sectors together to enable a true systemic transformation to improve nutrition.** It is particularly key that the One Health approach is strongly referenced in the Summit’s narrative, along with concrete recommendations for how food systems can address global nutrition targets (such as reaching wasting or anaemia targets). Biodiversity’s pivotal role in food systems also needs to be elevated: it contributes to mitigating climate change, but it also ensures diet diversity, crop resilience and eventually, improved nutrition.

- **The Summit upholds the systemic approach with an accountability mechanism that transparently engages all sectors and stakeholders and ensures links with other global summits and processes such as the World Health Assembly, the COP of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the COP of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ocean Conferences, and, last but not least, Nutrition for Growth Summit.**

The SUN Movement remains determined to support the success of the UNFSS and to drive progress in food systems transformation through a truly multistakeholder and multisectoral approach to nutrition, in the lead up to and beyond the Nutrition for Growth Summit.

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**Gerda Verburg**  
UN Assistant Secretary-General and SUN Movement Coordinator

Emily Heneghan  
on behalf of the SUN Business Network co-convener

Melanie Bruns  
on behalf of the SUN Donor Network

R.Moylan  
on behalf of the SUN Civil Society Network

Sticksa Genema  
on behalf of the UN Nutrition
Many actors are engaging through global alliances, networks, coalitions to address hunger, food insecurity, poor diet, obesity and NCDs.

Five Dimensions of Sustainability for Diets and Food Systems

1. Markets and Value Chains
   - Improve livelihoods, availability and affordability of healthy sustainable diets

2. Food Security and Agriculture
   - Improve agricultural productivity, food safety, food and nutrition security, and dietary diversity

3. Environment and Ecosystems
   - Improve environmental stewardship, soil and water health, preserve biodiversity and regenerative agriculture

4. Sociocultural and Political
   - Improve equity, human labor conditions and animal welfare

5. Health and Nutrition
   - Improve consumer demand, food safety and nutrition security (diet quality) to reduce wasting, stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, obesity and non-communicable disease risks

Global and Regional Alliances, Networks and Partnerships

National Alliances, Networks and Partnerships

Global, Regional and National Forums, Multi-Stakeholder Platforms and Coalitions

Source: Kraak VI. Advice for Food Systems Governance Actors to Decide Whether and How to Engage with the Agri-Food and Beverage Industry to Address Malnutrition Within the Context of Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems. Comment on "Challenges to Establish Effective Public-Private Partnerships to Address Malnutrition in All Its Forms." Int J Health Policy Manag. 2021.
Food Systems

Food Supply Chains & Food Environments

Source: Adapted wheel concept from Ranganathan et al. (2016).

FAO Food Systems Approach

Agri-Food System Actors or Stakeholders

Five Dimensions of Sustainability for Diets and Health

UN Food Systems Summit 2021

Overview of Areas of Work to Deliver on the Food Systems Summit Vision

We are moving forward an ambitious process to make this both a “People’s Summit” and a “Solutions Summit”, and the following image depicts how all components come together.
Action Track 1:  
Ensure access to safe and nutritious food for all  

Action Track 1 will work to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition and reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases, enabling all people to be nourished and healthy. This goal requires that all people at all times have access to sufficient quantities of affordable and safe food products. Achieving the goal means increasing the availability of nutritious foods, making food more affordable and reducing inequities in access to food.

Updates:  
December 2020 - Public Forum - Report - Watch - Discussion Starter Paper


Action Track 2:  
Shift to sustainable consumption patterns  

Action Track 2 will work to build consumer demand for sustainably produced food, strengthen local value chains, improve nutrition, and promote the reuse and recycling of food resources, especially among the most vulnerable. This Action Track recognizes that we need to eliminate wasteful patterns of food consumption; it also recognizes that we need to facilitate a transition in diets towards more nutritious foods that require fewer resources to produce and transport.

Updates:  
December 2020 - Discussion Starter Paper - Public Forum - Watch

Action Track 3:  
Boost nature-positive production  

Action Track 3 will work to optimize environmental resource use in food production, processing and distribution, thereby reducing biodiversity loss, pollution, water use, soil degradation and greenhouse gas emissions. In its pursuit of this goal, the Action Track will aim to deepen understanding of the constraints and opportunities facing smallholder farmers and small-scale enterprises along the food value chain. It will also strive to support food systems governance that realizes incentives to reduce food losses and other negative environmental impacts.

Updates:  
December 2020 - Discussion Starter Paper - Public Forum - Watch

Action Track 4:  
Advance equitable livelihoods  

Action Track 4 will work to contribute to the elimination of poverty by promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all actors along the food value chain, reducing risks for the world’s poorest, enabling entrepreneurship and addressing the inequitable access to resources and distribution of value. Action Track 4 will improve resilience through social protection and seek to ensure that food systems “leave no one behind.”

Updates:  
December 2020 - Discussion Starter Paper - Public Forum - Watch

Action Track 5:  
Build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stress  

Action Track 5 will work to ensure the continued functionality of sustainable food systems in areas that are prone to conflict or natural disasters. The Action Track will also promote global action to protect food supplies from the impacts of pandemics. The ambition behind Action Track 5 is to ensure that all people within a food system are empowered to prepare for, withstand, and recover from instability. Action Track 5 also aims to help people everywhere participate in food systems that, despite shocks and stressors, deliver food security, nutrition and equitable livelihoods for all.

Updates:  
December 2020 - Discussion Starter Paper - Public Forum - Watch

UN Food Systems Summit Timeline
February to October 2021

Feb 2021
UN CFS released Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition (CGFSyN) endorsed by 138 FAO member states

Apr 2021
Scientists launched online petition to boycott UNFSS

July 2021
IPES withdrew from UNFSS

Aug 2021
Ad hoc UNFSS Governance Committee & > 100 people from 17 countries sent letter to UNSG & > 500 African faith leaders and agriculturalists sent letter to Gates & Rockefeller Fdns rejecting AGRA approach

Sept 23, 2021
UNFSS in NYC

Oct 2021
UN released list of global coalitions for 4 action areas
Critiques of UNFSS Planners
Food sovereignty civil society actors & scholar activists

1. Summit lacked clarity, transparency and sufficient accountability mechanism.
2. Summit used “human rights rhetoric” but did not use human rights equity or justice lens to analyze problems and viable solutions.
3. Summit overly focused on scientific and technical solutions to transform unhealthy and unsustainable food systems even though organizers described it as “People’s Summit.”
4. Summit failed to address corporate power over global food system; was dominated and “co-opted” by corporate interests; private-sector actors portrayed as “investors and innovators”; limited focus on their role in predatory marketing practices of unhealthy UPFs especially targeted to children globally; vague engagement principles shared.
5. Undermined existing governance structures (UN Committee World Food Security) and shifted from multi-literalism to multi-stakeholderism to reshape global food systems governance.

Forms of Protest for UNFSS 2021

UN Food Systems Summit 2021: Dismantling Democracy and Resetting Corporate Control of Food Systems

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This article analyses the development and organization of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), which is being convened by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in late 2021. Although few people will dispute that global food systems need transformation, it has become clear that the Summit is instead an effort by a powerful alliance of multinational corporations, philanthropists, and export-oriented countries to trample on multilateral institutions of food governance and capture the global narrative of “food systems transformation.” This article places the upcoming Summit in the context of previous world food summits and analyses concerns that have been voiced by many within civil society. It elaborates on the current structures and forms of participants recruitment and public engagement, lack of transparency and accountability, and its ability to address significant conflicts of interest, and ignore human rights. As the COVID-19 pandemic is influencing the structural vulnerabilities of the neoliberal model of food systems and the consequences of climate change for food production, a high-level commitment to equitable and sustainable food systems is needed more than ever. However, the authors suggest that the UNFSS is instead aiming to follow a trajectory in which efforts to govern global food systems in the public interest has been subverted to maintain corporate forms of control.

The need to reshape global food processing: a call to the United Nations Food Systems Summit

Carlos Augusto Monteiro, Mark Lawrence, Christopher Millet, Marion Nestle, Barry M Popkin, Qayum Soni, Boyd Swinburn

UN Food systems summit leaders must not remain silent on its inadequate rules of engagement with commercial actors

September 1, 2021

The pre-summit to September’s United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), held in Rome at the end of July 2021, confirmed the fears of a broad range of international actors that the UNFSS model allows for corporate capture of international policy on healthy and sustainable food systems. Coverage in the BBC Food Programme demonstrates that concerns have moved into the mainstream, despite the hopes of many that the UNFSS could still help fix a broken food system.
Insights From Past Effective Boycotts
1960s – 1980s

The 1965-1970 Delano Grape Strike and Boycott

The 1968 Mexico Olympic Boycott

The 1971 Nestlé Boycott

The 1980 United Farm Workers Boycott
Digital Activism Could Have Been Used More Strategically by Civil Society & Scholar Activists

Thousands mobilize to call for food systems that empower people, not companies
2020-2021: 50 “game changing” solution clusters
Sept 2021: ~22,000 people from 180 countries participated in the UNFSS to “Transform Food Systems”
1. UNFSS Outcomes: Evaluate Commitments

> **230 voluntary pledges and commitments** were made by governments, businesses, foundations, civil society organizations and UN agencies to implement actions across **5 Action Tracks (streamlined into 4 Action Areas)**

UNFSS Outcomes: 4 Action Areas

- **Action Area 1:** Nourish All People: the **Food is Never Waste Coalition** (Brazil, US, Italy, FAO, UNEP, and others), the **School Meals Coalition: Nutrition, Health and Education for Every Child** (Argentina, Finland, Burkina Faso, FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and others), and the **Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems for Children and all Coalition** (Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, FAO, UNEP, UNICEF, WHO, and others).

- **Action Area 2:** Boost Nature-based Solutions of Production: the **Agroecology Coalition** (Costa Rica, Philippines, Switzerland, CGIAR, FAO, UNEP, WFP, and others), and The Coalition for Aquatic/Blue Foods (Bangladesh, Fiji, FAO, WorldFish, and others).

- **Action Area 3:** Advance Equitable Livelihoods, Decent Work, and Empowered Communities: the **Decent Work and Living Incomes and Wages Coalition** (Dominican Republic, IFAD, ILO, CARE and others).

- **Action Area 4:** Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks, and Stresses: Social Protection for Food Systems Transformation Coalition (Chile, Ethiopia, FAO, ILO, UNICEF, WFP and others).
Reflections

1. Convening UNFSS important post-COVID but was one of several UN Summits in 2021
   - Oct 2021: COP 26 in Glasgow to address climate change commitments
   - Dec 2021: Nutrition for Growth Summit in Tokyo for undernutrition

2. UN Secretary General & UNSSS planners
   - Politically pragmatic or complicit by not addressing corporate power and control of food systems at UNFSS?
   - Underutilized existing UN (WFS, FAO & WHO) technical reports
   - Inadequate private-sector engagement guidelines
   - UNFSS had tight control over social media/digital narrative

3. Global governance: multi-lateral to multi-stakeholder shift
   - What strategies and tools can civil society and scholar activists use hold govts and private-sector actors accountable for policies and practices?

4. Reconcile conflicting future food system visions
   - Sustainability, vision for food systems transition and transformation
Evaluate Accountability Actions for Actors in UNFSS Global Coalitions

The Accountability Pact Webinar Programme

01 September 2021
13:00 CEST, 07:00 EDT, 21:00 AEST

This 2-hour webinar will launch An International Pact on Monitoring for Accountability for Action on Food Systems: 'The Accountability Pact', linking people from around the world involved in food systems monitoring and bringing them up to date with international activities and actions on monitoring for accountability ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) in late September 2021.

There will be presenters from the current major food monitoring systems giving an update of the future directions for their work and how you can become engaged. See the programme below.

Food Systems Dashboard

Identifies 5 food system types x 146 countries
“describe, diagnose, decide how to improve diets”

We need clearer descriptions of future food system typologies....

1. Develop roadmap to achieve healthy, equitable, resilient and sustainable (i.e., economic, social, environment) food system typologies 6 and 7 and 8.
2. Decide how govt policies to incentivize and regulate technologies & conveniences of modern food systems (i.e., digital technology and commerce, biometric info & privacy) to avoid consequences for people and the planet.

Future Food Systems Transition & Transformation
Reconcile competing paradigms, visions, narratives

From ‘algorithmic nudging’ to virtual cross-selling: Is ecommerce changing the rules in grocery?

By Elaine Watson
17 Jul 2018 - Last updated on 17 Jul 2018 at 04:19 GMT

This self-driving car could deliver groceries to your doorstep
Kroger is launching a pilot program later this year to test the autonomous vehicles.
These steps are necessary in “bending the curve” on the negative impacts of the food system:
4. Future Food Systems Transition & Transformation

Reconcile competing paradigms, visions, narratives
Further Reading

6. Kraak. Advice for food systems governance actors to decide whether and how to engage with the agri-food and beverage industry to address malnutrition within the context of healthy and sustainable food systems. Comment on “challenges to establish effective public-private partnerships to address malnutrition in all its forms. *Int. J. Health Policy Manag.*" 2021; 1–6. [https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2021.70](https://doi.org/10.34172/ijhpm.2021.70).
7. Kraak VI, Niewolny KN, Barquera S, Swinburn BA. How digital activism may advance the United Nations priorities to strengthen governance and accountability for healthy, resilient and sustainable diets and food systems. *Forthcoming.*