Food systems for a Safe Climate and Health for All

A child-friendly summary of the report of "Transforming Food Systems for a Safe Climate and Health for All" by the Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change, Elisa Morgera.



Version for Children

2026

You can access the original version of this report through this link

About the UN Special Rapporteur, Elisa Morgera



Elisa Morgera is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change. Elisa is an independent expert who advises the United Nations, governments, and stakeholders on how to protect human rights in the climate crisis.

About the Report



The report looks at:

- how we grow, catch, collect, make and sell food—on land and in the ocean,
- how these practices affect the climate and human rights
- which ones help with climate change mitigation, adaptation and protecting a healthy environment.

What are food systems and how are they affected by climate change?



Image source: Middlesex London Food Policy Council

'Food systems' mean the journey of food from beginning to end, from:

- PRODUCTION (growing crops and raising animals, catching fish or collecting mushrooms in the forest,)
- PROCESSING, (cooking, freezing, packaging),
- TRANSPORTING/DISTRIBUTION and SELLING (retailing, market) food,
- CONSUMPTION (cooking and eating), and
- WASTE (leftovers and waste).

They include all the people, places, and activities that help bring food to our plates.

Climate change has an impact on food systems as it causes storms, floods, and droughts to happen more often and more intensely, ultimately destroying food production.

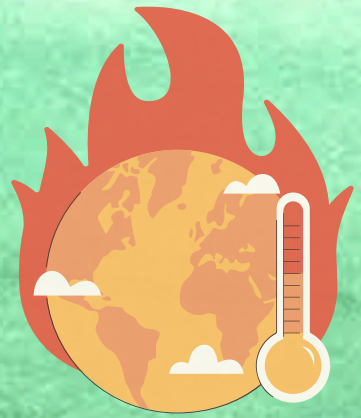


This results in:

- less food being produced,
- food becoming more difficult to access,
- food being less healthy, and
- food becoming more expensive.

At the same time, food systems make climate change worse in:

- the production (when fossil fuels are used to power farm machinery and to make pesticides and chemical fertilizers),
- the processing (especially when we use a lot of plastic for packaging),
- the transportation (when we use trucks and cars to transport food), and when we throw away food.



DID YOU KNOW?

The world's food systems are responsible for roughly one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions warming the Earth.

How are Food Systems and Human Rights connected?



Every child has the right to life, health, water, food, and a healthy environment. They also have the right to be heard, to participate in decision-making, and to live free from discrimination. But today, the way food is produced, processed, transported, consumed and thrown away is threatening these rights

To grow, process, package, and transport food, many companies rely on fossil fuels such as oil, gas, and coal.
Fossil fuels are also used to make pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and plastics. Their use pollutes the air, water, and soil.
It harms plants and animals and makes climate change worse.



This especially harms Indigenous Peoples, small farmers, fisherfolk, and people living in poverty. It also harms pastoralists—people who care for and move with animals, such as sheep, goats, or camels, to find food and water. Communities facing discrimination are also especially affected.

This violates children's rights. It also violates the rights of future generations, who will inherit a damaged planet. This is why we need to change food systems so they are healthy for both people and the planet.

The 4 most important harms caused by food systems

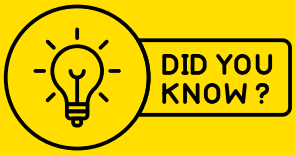


Climate breakdown: because of the use of fossil fuels, oil and gas, food systems emit huge amounts of greenhouse gases. Without change, these emissions could rise by more than double (60 to 90%) by 2050, making extreme weather more frequent and damaging, and making it harder to grow food.

“Sometimes I’m afraid the food is poisoned and will make me sick...”
7-year-old from Mexico

Poisoned ecosystems: Pesticides kill insects and bacteria that are crucial for healthy soil and pollination. Chemical fertilizers also block waterways. Cutting trees to make room for farmland destroys animal habitats, so soil degrades fast, making it unusable for farming.





Just 15 large dairy and meat companies produce greenhouse gas emissions roughly equal to the entire country of Germany.

‘When rain does not come, crops fail. Farmers lose food and income.’
-22 year old, Uganda



Sickness and unhealthy diets: In addition to harming the climate and ecosystems, the use of plastics, pesticides, and fertilizers in our food systems affects our health.

DID YOU KNOW?

The world wastes about 1.3 billion tons of food every year. If food waste were a country, it would be the third-largest emitting country in the world.



Inequality: powerful big companies leave small farmers and producers with little land and at a disadvantage to be able to sell their products, creating inequality and poverty. They keep prices high and continue using harmful ways to produce food, making climate change worse and the production of food more difficult. This affects access to food by the most vulnerable communities, including children.

What are the top 5 things that need to change in food systems?

1

Fossil fuels: Big industrial farms and food companies rely on fossil fuels to run complex machines, transport food far away, and power refrigeration. Fossil fuels are also the main ingredient for synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and plastics used in farming and packaging. This locks food systems into harming the climate.

Big companies: A few very large companies control most of the world's farmland. They often produce cheap but less healthy food and use a lot of fuel, chemicals, and plastic, and create large amounts of food waste. These companies can also influence governments to keep rules weak, making it harder to protect people and the planet. Meanwhile, small farmers have much less land to grow food.

2

"We see the wasteful treatment of nature by humans, who act without regard for future generations."
-22 year old from Senegal

What are the top 5 things that need to change in food systems?

> **‘Companies promote environmental projects to improve their image while still producing large amounts of fossil fuels. This makes it harder for the public to grasp the full environmental impact.’**
> **-15 year old, UK**

3

Pesticides, fertilizers and plastics: Pesticides and fertilizers harm workers, soil, rivers, and the ocean. Plastics leak toxic chemicals into food and nature. Over 16,000 chemicals are used in plastics and many of them are very dangerous to human health.

Government support for harmful food systems: Governments give a lot of money to the big companies that produce a lot of food from agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries in a harmful way. On the other hand, small farms and artisanal fishers with sustainable practices do not receive enough government support.

4

5

Information: Big food, fossil fuel, and chemical companies spend money to spread false or confusing information about the damage they cause (disinformation) and say that they are making an effort, but they are not (greenwashing).

4 best solutions

There are better ways to feed the world that respect human rights and protect the climate and the planet!

1

Agroecology: Growing food in ways that work with nature, such as planting different crops together, using compost, controlling pests naturally, and learning from Indigenous and local knowledge. These methods protect soil, water, wildlife, and biodiversity while producing healthy food.

Small-scale fisheries and pastoralism (a way of life where people raise and care for animals, often moving with them to find food and water): Traditional ways of fishing and raising animals help provide healthy food while causing less pollution. They also help protect nature and keep local traditions and cultures strong.

2

> ‘I believe that food systems, climate change, and biodiversity are all connected. In a country like Laos, our traditional knowledge is a great strength. We should focus on combining this wisdom with modern sustainable practices to ensure no child goes hungry.’
> 21-year-old from Lao PDR

4 best solutions

3

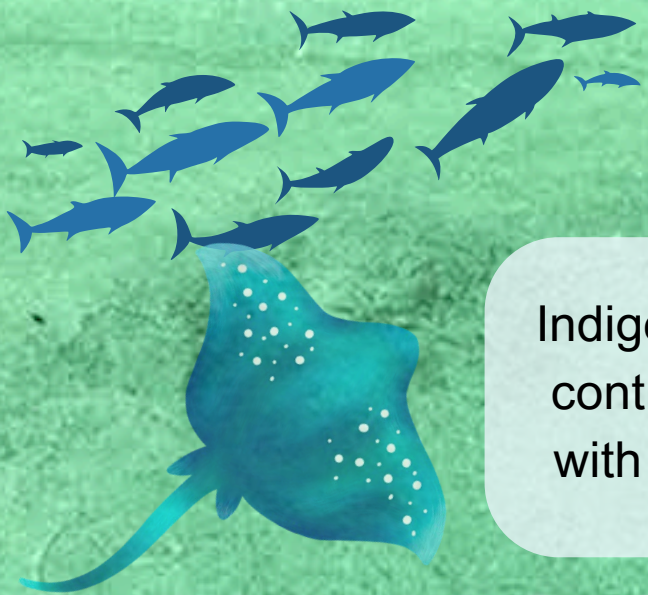
Cutting food waste and shifting diets: Reducing food waste and eating healthy, varied diets with more plant-based foods can greatly reduce pollution from food systems. These changes can also improve people's health and nutrition while using less land and water.

Connecting schools to local food systems: Governments can help by buying food from Indigenous Peoples and small-scale farmers and fishers for public programmes, such as school meals.

4

5

Growing food in cities: Growing food locally can reduce the use of fossil fuels and industrial products. It can also help restore nature and make communities stronger and better able to meet their own needs.



Did you know?

Indigenous Peoples and small-scale fishers contribute nearly half the global fish catch with very little greenhouse gas emissions.

What should governments do?

Children and young people told Elisa that they feel frustrated when leaders listen to big companies that do not respect the right to a healthy environment, instead of listening to them.

Free food systems from fossil fuels: Cut fossil fuels out of food systems, ban harmful chemicals, and drastically reduce plastics.





Redirect money and protection: Stop giving money and helping large polluting companies and give public money to small farms and fisheries that are close to the communities.

Hold companies accountable: Make strong laws forcing big food, fossil fuel, and chemical companies to protect human rights and avoid climate harm, tell the truth, and pay for damage they cause.



What should governments do?



Listen to children: Guarantee children's right to be heard in decisions about food, climate, and the environment. Create safe spaces for children to share ideas and recommendations.

"Children deserve a future where everyone has access to healthy food and where nature is protected. Listening to the voices of young people is important because we will live with the consequences of today's choices."
22-year-old from India





Cooperate fairly across borders: Rich countries that have caused the most climate harm must provide money and technology to poorer countries so they can transform their food systems without leaving anyone behind.

What should children and young people do?

You have the right to participate in decisions that affect you. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and General Comment No. 26 (a guidance from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child about children's rights and the environment/climate) confirm that you have the right to a healthy environment and to be heard on climate issues.



Learn your rights and speak up: Ask your school to teach you about food systems, climate change, and human rights. Join debates, youth councils, or write to local leaders.

> "Schools should provide more education on these topics so that young people understand how food systems work and how they affect the climate."
> 15-year-old from the UK



Interested?

Here you can find extra links to learn more!



Connect with Elisa: The Special Rapporteur wants to hear from you. You can follow and share ideas through the ClimateRights4Kids Instagram channel and take part in future consultations.

When children, young people, communities, and leaders work together, change becomes unstoppable.

Children have the right to food, health, and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment—online, offline, and anywhere around the world.

You can find an explanation of words used in the Special Rapporteur's Report, a glossary of terms, and some helpful resources and guidance here.

Special Rapporteur on human rights and climate change

https://www.ohchr.org/en/specialprocedures/sr-climate-change

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