SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS FOR A SAFE CLIMATE

Summary of the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change, Elisa Morgera

A/HRC/62/44

Image: Steven Weeks / Unsplash

Introduction

Large-scale food production is increasing dependency on fossil fuels and petrochemicals, causing multiple harms to the climate system and human rights.

This report clarifies human rights obligations and responsibilities to **transform food systems** to mitigate and adapt to climate change and respond to loss and damage.

It recommends:

- **Decarbonizing, defossilizing and detoxifying** industrialized food systems to prevent local and global human rights harms.
- Urgently **holding accountable large-scale food businesses** supporting and expanding the fossil fuel-based economy.
- Prioritizing **Indigenous Peoples' and peasants' acroecology, small-scale fisheries and pastoralism**, as this enhances the sustainability and resilience of food systems, as well as planetary and human health.
- Supporting connections between **urban communities and localized food systems**.



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Climate Action and Food Systems

Food systems currently contribute to 21-37% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

- Without changes, this could rise by 60-90% between 2010-50.
- Food systems generate nearly 80% of global nitrous oxide emissions and 50% of methane emissions.
- Food loss and waste account for 8-10% of GHG emissions.

Food systems are the largest driver of planetary boundary transgressions due to the degradation of soil, water and ecosystem integrity.

- Food production is the leading driver of deforestation: agricultural expansion accounts for roughly 90% of global forest cover changes between 2000-2018.
- Soil is a critical carbon sink, but industrial agriculture, livestock operations and climate change are contributing to soil erosion.
- Aquaculture damages mangroves, which play a key role in carbon sequestration.
- Overfishing disrupts the role of marine organisms in the carbon cycle and damages the carbon-rich seabed.

The EAT-Lancet Commission has found that **less than 1 percent of the world's population has their human rights and food needs met within planetary boundaries**.



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Fossil Fuels in Food Systems

Large-scale food, beverage, seed, petrochemicals and fossil fuels industries are deeply intertwined and partnering with Big Tech.

Fossil fuels provide energy for food systems and the primary feedstock for petrochemicals (pesticides, fertilizers, plastics).

85-90% of global pesticide application occurs in agriculture, exceeding safety thresholds across terrestrial and aquatic systems. This harms human and environmental health, increasing risks of Parkinson's disease and diabetes.

Fertilizers release GHG emissions and cause toxic pollution of drinking water and air. This is associated with health impacts including cancer and pediatric asthma.

Plastics are widely used throughout agrifood value chains, with impacts on the rights to health, food and a healthy environment.

- Single-use plastics have underpinned the expansion of **ultra-processed foods**, which increased risks of obesity, malnutrition and non-communicable diseases.
- Only 6% of **chemicals** used in plastics are subject to global regulation: over 16,000 chemicals are used in plastics, of which at least 4,200 are persistent, bioaccumulative and/or toxic.

The **military-industrial complex** further compounds climate change and human rights impacts through its links to the fossil fuel economy and petrochemicals for warfare.



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Corporate Power Concentration, Disinformation and Obstruction

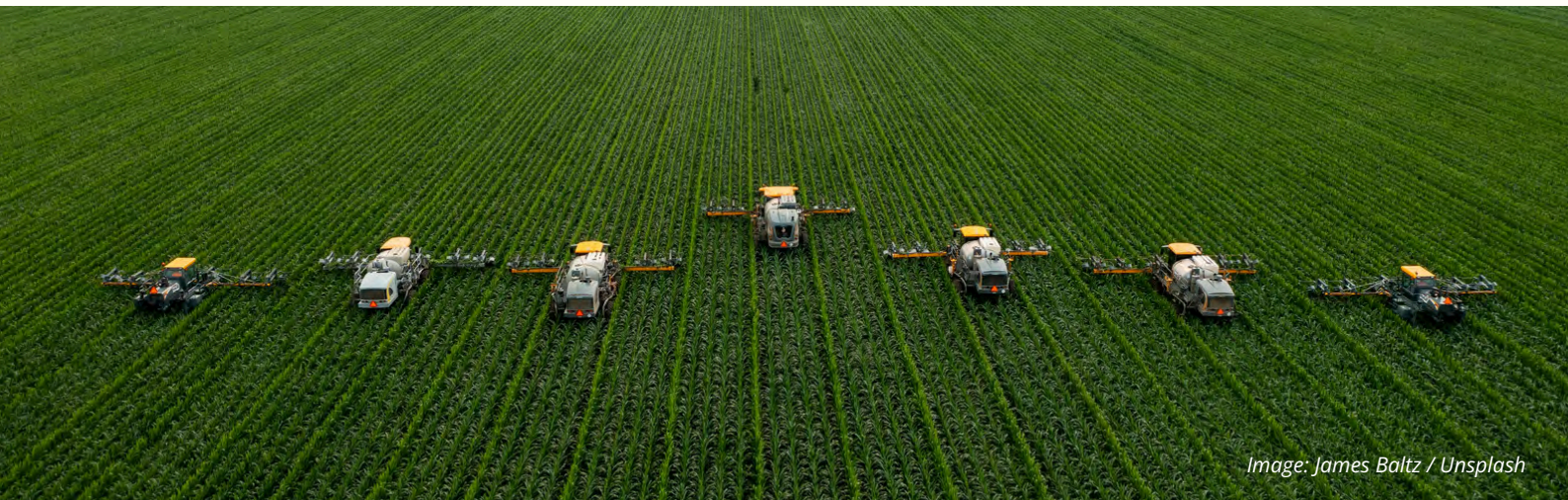
Many agri-food sectors are **dominated by few companies with vested interests** in promoting and perpetuating fossil fuel and chemical-dependent industrial food systems.

Land accumulation and **market concentration** within the agribusiness sector solidifies fossil-based export-oriented production models that harm the climate system, limiting States' policy options for diversified and low-input production models.

At the same time, corporate power concentration in food systems **undermines local food economies and increases reliance on unstable global markets**, affecting the human rights of small-scale producers, while exacerbating inequalities and climate harm for all.

The fossil fuel industry's **playbook of disinformation and climate obstruction** is used by businesses across food systems, including advertising and marketing for unhealthy and ultra-processed products, and greenwashing by the 22 largest meat and dairy companies to downplay their climate impacts.

Over time, these tactics have **cumulatively hindered the protection of human rights**, including the rights to information, science and education, undermining democratic processes.



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Human rights violations

Industrial food production is **linked to interconnected patterns of extensive human rights violations and abuses.**

It requires large volumes of land, feed, water, labour, energy and capital, and externalises "environmental and social costs."

- This directly affects workers, rural communities, Indigenous Peoples, and low-income and marginalized groups.
- It also affects everyone's rights to health, food, water, development, a healthy environment, and self-determination.

Large-scale expansion without sufficient environmental and human rights safeguards leads to **involuntary resettlement, loss of livelihoods. disputes over resources, and increased gender-based violence and inequality.**

Current reliance of i**ndustrial aquaculture** on fishmeal and fish oil reduces access to nutritionally valuable fish.

Shifts away from subsistence farming towards cash crop cultivation may enhance food availability and income in the short term, but lead to long-term decline of nutritious and culturally significant food in rural and urban settings.



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Reprioritizing International Cooperation

International climate cooperation and finance do not prioritize food systems. When they do, they focus on large-scale businesses.

Nearly USD 1 trillion in subsidies support industrial agriculture annually, mainly for high-emitting commodities such as beef, milk and rice.

Current finance flows are insufficient to transition global agrifood systems to a 1.5°C pathway. Public debt, fiscal regressivity and lack of direct funding limit effective responses to climate instability and food insecurity.

Multilateral development banks are increasing investment in agrifood systems but often rely on limited safeguards rather than robust climate, environmental and human rights standards.

International financial institutions should:

- Stop financing large-scale food businesses;
- Prioritize Indigenous Peoples' and peasants' agroecological food systems, small-scale fisheries and pastoralism;
- Support the co-development of context-specific, locally-led research and food systems transitions for urban communities.



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Recommendations

Domestically, States should:

- Require the decarbonization, defossilization and detoxification of food systems, with the inclusive and meaningful participation of affected rights-holders.
- Require corporate human rights due diligence and ensure accountability for harm.
- Curtail accumulation of market power and natural resources.
- Phase out subsidies to large-scale food businesses.
- Prioritize the protection of, and financial and technical support to, Indigenous Peoples' and peasants' food and knowledge systems.

M**ultilaterally**, in both established processes and the negotiation of new instruments, **States should** prioritize the decarbonization, defossilization and detoxification of food systems.

Large-scale food businesses should:

- Develop and implement decarbonization, defossilization and detoxification plans across their value chains.
- Refrain from disinformation and climate obstruction.
- Provide or cooperate in remediation.

Consultancy, media, marketing and advertising firms should refrain from supporting fossil fuel dependency, disinformation and climate obstruction, including in relation to food systems.



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Read the full report at

https://www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2026/call-input-transforming-food-systems-protect-human-rights-and-prevent-climate

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