

# **Human rights-based food governance: Coordinating policy responses and rebalancing power**

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## **Organizers**

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food)  
The Global Alliance for the Future of Food (GAFF)  
The CSIPM (Working Group on Global Food Governance)  
Mexico, Department of Agriculture

## **Abstract**

Deep power asymmetries in food system governance block the transformation we need. International initiatives are proliferating, but they are often fragmented, neglect the voices of the countries and constituencies most affected by multiple crises, and promote solutions that are incompatible with the long-term transformation needed. Moreover, for decades, the institutions, policies, and norms that affect decision-making about food have been impacted by corporate overreach, undermining the public good and the rights of people and communities (especially those most affected by hunger and malnutrition) to engage in food governance on their own terms.

It is urgent and essential to critically examine the governance architecture of food to guarantee food system decision-making prioritizes the public good and the right to food for all.

This side-event examined how the upcoming multi-year program of work can strengthen the Committee's mandate as a global policy coordination body and its role in promoting accountability. Drawing inspiration from successful initiatives such as the World Health Organization's tobacco control frameworks, the side event explored actionable accountability mechanisms to ensure public-interest-based decision-making within the UN.

## **Panelist Interventions**

**Shalmali Guttal**, Executive Director of Focus on the Global South and IPES-Food expert set the scene by presenting key findings from IPES-Food's latest report [Who's Tipping the Scales: the growing influence of corporations on the governance of food systems, and how to counter it](#). She outlined how corporate overreach in food system decision-making is the new normal. Corporations are influencing food governance through visible mechanisms (multi-stakeholder initiatives, public-private partnerships, and funding governance spaces) and less visible mechanisms (corporate concentration, lobbying, revolving doors, sponsoring scientific research, political donations, and influencing trade and investment agreements). This poses problems for process, outcomes, and accountability. She proposed three

recommendations: 1) Address the outsized influence of transnational agri-food corporations at all levels of food systems through a multipronged approach. 2) Democratize food governance to serve the public interest, including holding corporations accountable for human rights violations and environmental destruction. 3) Build up autonomous processes and spaces that centre the voices, claims, and proposals of people's organizations and social movements.

**Musa Sowe**, Network of Farmers' and Producers' Organizations in West Africa - ROPPA and Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism - CSIPM then presented findings from the report [They will feed us! A people's route to African food sovereignty](#). It provides a critical analysis of the process and content of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and the Dakar 2 – 'Feed Africa Summit' in 2023. These summits sought to initiate a global process of food system transformation but their approaches have been strongly criticized as undemocratic, opaque, and illegitimate. African governments were urged to develop "national pathways" and "national compacts," often favoring modernisation and green revolution approaches coupled with foreign private investment, over supporting local peasant agroecology and territorial markets. Musa concluded that farmers' seed systems, promoting farmer-led agroecology, ensuring access to land, and protecting the rights of women, Indigenous Peoples, and youth in food systems, among other actions, are vital building blocks of a better food system.

**Victor Suárez**, Deputy Agriculture Minister of Mexico gave compelling statements on how Mexico has been working to confront corporate capture. He shared updates about ongoing trade discussions between Mexico and the United States regarding GM maize and introduced the idea that we are living at a critical moment to forge a new path for human rights and move towards a multi-polar world - from resistance to transformation. He urged that to achieve this we must dare to undertake a process of decolonization and put food sovereignty at the center of food governance. This includes focusing on agricultural self-sufficiency, cooperation agreements for national development instead of "free" trade agreements, and leaving behind ultra-processed foods.

**Daniel Dorado**, Director of Policy Organizing and Tobacco Campaign: International & Latin America, Corporate Accountability, explained that we can take inspiration from the World Health Organization's tobacco control frameworks, particularly Art. 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control that establishes the irreconcilable conflict of interest with public health and requires governments to protect their policies from industry interference. For particular recommendations on food system corporate accountability measures, he

recommended reading the article [Towards Building Comprehensive Legal Frameworks for Corporate Accountability in Food Governance](#), which he published with Sofía Monsalve, Ashka Naik, and Ana María Suárez.

**Hala Barakat**, Habitat International Coalition and Civil Society and Indigenous People's Mechanism - CSIPM spoke to how the upcoming multi-year program of work can strengthen the Committee's mandate as a global policy coordination body in response to food crises and strengthen its role in promoting accountability. She said that anchoring processes in human rights and the right to food frameworks is key, as well as monitoring corporate actions. Her final warning was that corporate-driven policies lurk nearby, but public awareness and campaigns can tip the scales.