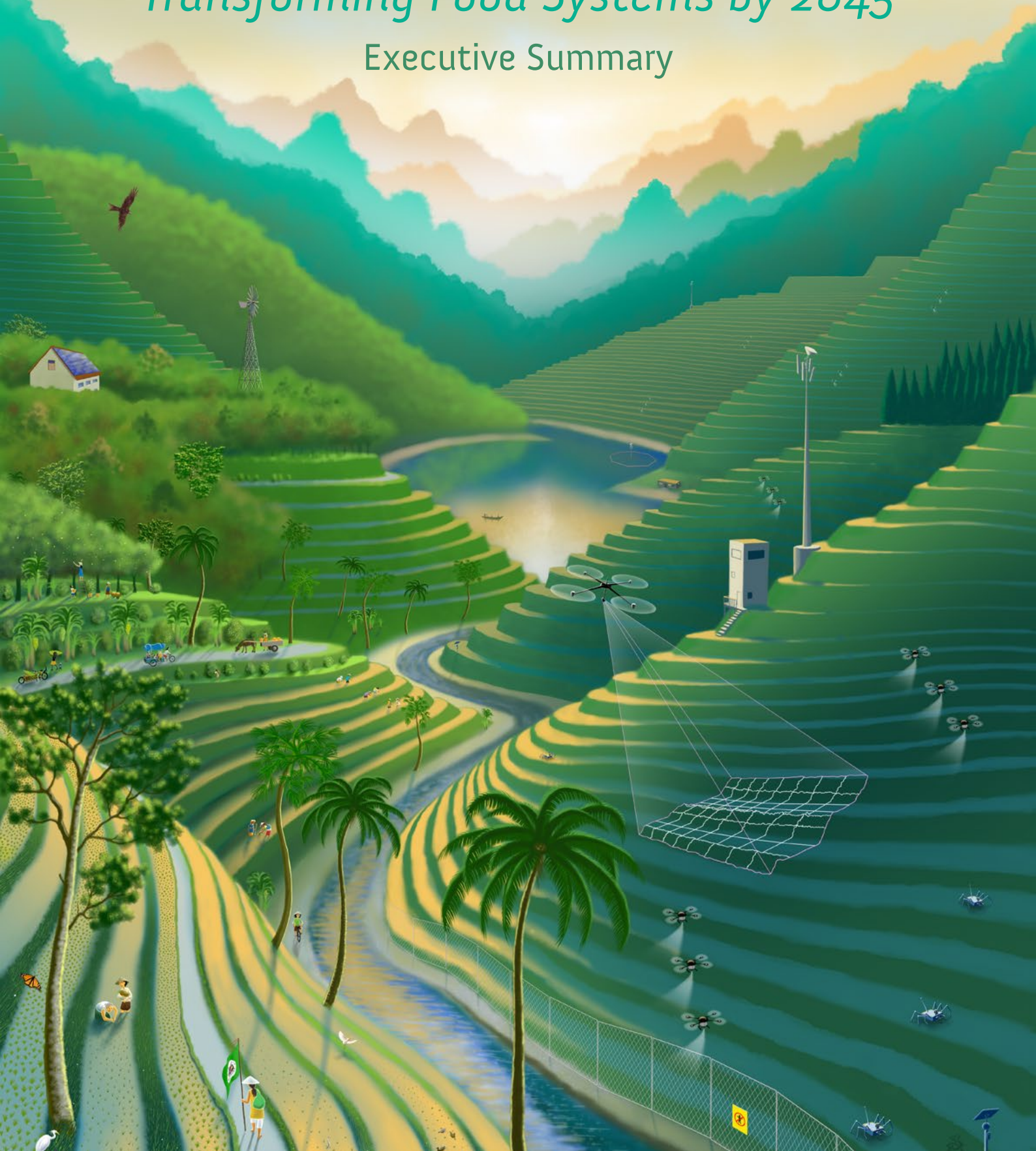


A Long Food Movement: *Transforming Food Systems by 2045*

Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

In 2021, those working to build food systems that are just, equitable, and operate within planetary boundaries have our work cut out for us. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and rapidly declining soil fertility are critically damaging the health of people and the planet, dislocating societies, and threatening food systems around the world. Five years into a global commitment to eliminate hunger by 2030, we have lost significant ground. In 2019, an estimated 690 million people were hungry and upwards of 2 billion lacked regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food. This was before COVID-19 added approximately 130 million people to the world's hungry, pushed uncounted millions more to the brink of hunger, and put one third of food and farming livelihoods at risk.

At the same time, the locus of power in food systems and the broader global economy is shifting at dizzying speed. In 2008, the world's most powerful corporations drilled oil wells and traded stocks. Twelve years later, the world's five corporate titans all deal in intangible data and have a market valuation that exceeds the GDP of entire continents. The new biodigital giants are now primed for the next step: unleashing big data and digital DNA into the world's pharmacies, food markets, and financial systems. 'Multi-stakeholderism' is everywhere as corporations – sensing the social and environmental tipping points ahead – seek to draw governments, scientists and a handful of civil society organizations into an artificial new multilateralism.

Against this backdrop, we consider what food systems could look like by 2045 if (agri)business-as-usual is allowed to run its course. We also imagine what could happen if, instead, the initiative is reclaimed by civil society and social movements – from grassroots organizations to international NGOs, from farmers' and fishers' groups, to cooperatives and unions. We consider what this 'Long Food Movement' could achieve if it succeeds in thinking decades ahead, collaborating across sectors, scales, and strategic differences, working with governments and pressuring them to act, and transforming financial flows, governance structures, and food systems from the ground up.



Looking ahead to 2045: Agribusiness-as-Usual (Scenario 1)

Firstly, we imagine a ‘business-as-usual’ food system and how it might evolve over the next quarter century, as corporations and governments respond to environmental breakdown, social dislocation, geopolitical reconfigurations, and a vast pipeline of technological possibilities. Power relations remain largely unchanged in this scenario, and civil society – also stuck in ‘business-as-usual’ mode – is able to challenge the agenda and prevent the worst excesses, but not fundamentally change the course.

Over the 2020s, advances in digitalization, automation, synthetic biology, and molecular technologies promise to take the risks – and the people – out of food systems. New players argue that producing protein in petri-dishes, letting artificial intelligence manage the farm or invisibly nudge consumer behaviour, inventing novel ultra-processed foods, or backing geoengineering, are the route to resilience (as well as being highly profitable). With climate change, environmental breakdown, and pandemics wreaking havoc on food systems over the coming years, these ‘silver bullet’ solutions prove irresistible to panicking policymakers. The keys of the food system are handed over to the biodigital mega-corporations, data platforms, and private equity firms who – thanks to proliferating merger deals – become tomorrow’s agri-food giants.

Algorithms are used to pinpoint the growing conditions of every fertile square metre on earth; crops and livestock are tailor-made (and modified) for those conditions; and ecosystems are engineered through data for optimal performance. Robotic tractors and drones for spraying and surveillance – an ‘internet of farming things’ – are rolled out as fast as physical and digital infrastructures allow (Trend #1).

Putting food security at the mercy of digital networks and potential data glitches worries governments and food movements alike. So does the plight of farmers (who are forced off the land into ‘smart cities’ and e-commerce villages, or reduced to digital outgrowers). But the ‘climate-smart’ and ‘risk-free’ future on offer convinces many low and middle-income countries to put land, resources, and data in the hands of those supplying the technologies and offering to pre-purchase their harvests. As a result, powerful governments and their flag-bearer corporations are able to use internets of logistics to control resources and food supplies across vast economic corridors.

Unlike previous Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) which opened up new markets, the FTAs of the 2020s and 2030s serve primarily to secure access to resources, protect rights to corporate data exploitation, and put unfavourable regulations into the deep freeze. With food seen as a strategic asset, a new wave of land, ocean, and resource grabs gets underway, and trade chokepoints are increasingly militarized (Trend #2).

Downstream, at the consumer end, data harvested from online activities is being combined with metadata generated from the use of digital wallets, automated food services, and other everyday activities. Connecting these data sources opens up new opportunities to track, micro-target, and invisibly nudge people's eating habits, and to reshape food cultures. The food industry shifts ever-more resources into new veneers of sustainable and ethical consumerism, leaving citizens to make sense of increasingly opaque supply chains and a dizzying array of claims (Trend #3).

Looking ahead to 2045: Civil society as Unusual (Scenario 2)

Environmental breakdown, food security threats, and the push for new data-driven technologies are part of any realistic scenario for the next 25 years. But there is nothing inevitable about the agribusiness-led trajectories described above. In reality, divisions will grow among corporations and between companies, workers and consumers, as ecosystems refuse to be tamed, people refuse to be nudged, technologies malfunction, and environmental and social tipping points loom. Much will depend on the extent to which the most powerful corporations – under the guise of ‘multistakeholderism’ – succeed in taking control of food system governance.

In this second scenario, civil society seizes the initiative, developing deeper, wider, and more effective collaborations than ever before. A Long Food Movement is in fact long in the making. From ongoing Indigenous struggles against colonization to the anti-globalization protests that gave rise to the concept of food sovereignty, it is clear that civil society – in its diversity of forms and scales of action – can be a powerful change-maker. Looking back at those experiences, it is possible to identify four basic ingredients that food movements will need in order to drive forward transformation over the next quarter century: 1) collaborating across multiple scales; 2) broadening alliances and restructuring relationships; 3) connecting long-range commitment to wide range ‘horizon scanning’; and 4) being ready for change and disruption.

These ingredients are abundant in today's food movements, although they will need to be deployed more systematically than ever before. In particular, civil society will need to enhance its readiness for the many crises of the coming quarter century: the ‘Grey Swan’ events that food movements cannot predict in date or detail, but can prepare for. This scenario is imagined in four interrelated pathways of food systems reform and transformation:



PATHWAY 1

Rooting food systems in diversity, agroecology, and human rights

Over the 2020s, food systems based on diversity show their resilience in the face of shocks. Territorial markets continue to spread, and diets edge towards ethical and healthy choices. With a clear consensus in place around food sovereignty and agroecology, the Long Food Movement succeeds in defending the rights of the marginalised and amplifying their voices through inclusive processes, promoting diversified, agroecological systems, and accelerating alternative markets and dietary shifts.

OPPORTUNITY #1

Building resilience through diversity and agroecology. Over the 2020s, a growing premium is placed on healthy soils, diverse crop varieties and livestock breeds, and vibrant aquatic- and agro-ecosystems. The impacts of different production systems become easier to measure, and by 2030, agroecological systems are in place and outperforming industrial agriculture at multiple scales. Indigenous peoples and peasants continue to safeguard landscapes and nurture neglected and underutilized species and crop wild relatives via expanding community gene banks and living collections, fisher and farmer-to-farmer exchanges across neighbouring ecosystems, and agroecological field schools. Traditional foods – including minor crops with high climate/disease tolerance and nutritional value – are revived thanks to the combined efforts of social movements, chefs, public procurement officers, and policymakers.

But peasant strategies for protecting diversity remain under attack, threatening their ability to ensure food security to 2045. Footholds of political support for agroecology are also consolidated. Building on the FAO Plant Treaty, civil society secures a negotiated protocol on genetic diversity, while establishing protections for peasant research and exchange of seeds and breeds, including across borders.

OPPORTUNITY #2

Defending human rights, nature rights, and renegotiating the contract between state and society. The non-stop crises and growing precarity of the next quarter century make human rights more important than ever as the compass guiding food movements. New modes of social protection proliferate over the 2020s, with civil society fighting for entitlements to be both comprehensive and delinked from big data surveillance. With newfound appreciation for ‘essential workers’ in food systems, labour rights are secured via a cascade of national laws and strengthened international regulations. But this is not enough: by the 2030s, food movements are calling on the state to defend universal basic access to rights and resources (land, seeds, water, culture) and people-led production, in the face of expanding agro-industrial complexes and mass automation. With rights at centre stage, governments are forced to link the next set of development goals – ‘Agenda 2045’ – to a new financial settlement between the global North and South. In parallel, food movements explore a range of legal pathways: they ramp up support to civil rights defenders and launch powerful cross-scale campaigns to establish rights for rivers, watersheds, ecosystems, and the planet – while ensuring that these rights are not used to drive communities off their land. By the 2040s, famine, hunger, malnutrition, poor health, and environmental degradation are criminal violations that can be brought before the Human Rights Council (or a restructured International Criminal Court).

OPPORTUNITY #3

Accelerating shifts towards territorial supply chains and ethical consumerism. Territorial markets – already the norm for many small-scale producers and consumers in the global South – continue to grow in the wake of COVID-19. Over the 2020s and 2030s – with a new premium on resilience and increasing support from municipalities and regions – short supply chain initiatives blossom, community and household food production grows, and producer and consumer cooperatives boom. These trends converge with an explosion of ethical, organic, and ‘local’ purchasing and a sustained shift to vegetarian and flexitarian diets – adopted by as many as 80% of people in previously high-meat consuming (wealthier) population groups. By 2045, some 25% of the world’s small livestock and fruit and vegetable consumption is supplied by urban farms and households, another 25% is supplied from within regional foodsheds, and up to half of the food industry’s offering is fairly traded, as judged by peasant producers. Farmers and social movements find common cause in their opposition to novel meat and dairy mimics and succeed in preventing mass rollout of these products onto global markets. By 2045, armed with sophisticated public data tools, as well as fact-checking, true cost accounting, and transparency apps, consumers are able to rapidly distinguish business-as-usual corporations (‘A-corps’) from firms with a sustained commitment to corporate responsibility (‘B-corps’) and sustainable, cooperative enterprises (‘C-corps’).



PATHWAY 2

Transforming governance structures

Over the years, the Long Food Movement fights back against corporate takeover of the multilateral system and forces a fundamental governance reconfiguration of its own. And in the face of semi-permanent crises, civil society successfully makes the case for emergency food security provisions that supersede trade rules and land-grab contracts, and a crackdown on agribusiness concentration and techno-fixes. These steps are underpinned by the ongoing spread of food policy councils, deliberative dialogues, and other mechanisms to strengthen the participation of social movements, Indigenous peoples, and NGOs in food system governance.

OPPORTUNITY #4

Reviewing, reforming and reconfiguring the UN’s agri-food agencies. For all of the shortcomings of the multilateral institutions, food movements are unified in their resolve to avoid corporate capture of the UN and its Rome-based agencies (RBAs) – starting with mobilizations around the contentious 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. Taking advantage of the inevitable post-Summit vacuum, civil society pushes simultaneously to re-unify the fragmented work of the RBAs, while simultaneously strengthening regional processes. By the 2030s, civil society has built the case for reform via independent reviews of the RBAs that reveal inefficiencies and distortions. It has also built support among sympathetic governments and UN secretariats, and used its growing forward planning capacities to influence the election of agency heads. The resulting reforms re-unify the three existing RBAs, under a rejuvenated and highly-inclusive Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as the de facto governing body, and realign the CGIAR with the other agencies (making it effectively the fourth RBA).

More importantly, policy formulation is decentralized and democratized through new CFS regional fora that facilitate ‘grassroutes to Rome’ dialogue; cross-agency, non-hierarchical working groups are revived; and deliberative dialogues are mainstreamed. These reforms help to bring global-level deliberations (e.g., on agroecology, territorial markets, and land) into the national sphere, to build global and national dialogues around local realities and lessons learned, and to bridge the gap between CSOs working locally and globally.

OPPORTUNITY #5

Cracking down on corporate impunity and techno-fixes. Over the coming years and decades, food movements push for national laws and a UN treaty to monitor, regulate, or recall technologies that are dangerous or failing – not least the big data systems at the heart of agribusiness strategies. Corporate impunity comes under assault on additional fronts: pressure is ratcheted up for a treaty countering corporate power; initiatives around antitrust and competition policy gather steam; investor protections are eliminated from trade agreements; and multi-country class-action lawsuits are pursued against agribusinesses. To accelerate progress, food movements partner with select governments and friendly UN secretariats. International discussions soon create space for antitrust and taxation agreements that spill over from the digital giants to all sectors. By the 2030s, negotiations have resulted in a series of treaties/protocols to constrain corporate impunity. While these agreements are only ratified by a few dozen countries, and while lawsuits may be settled out of court, their combined effect (and market clout) is enough to shift the practices of global corporations.

OPPORTUNITY #6

Adopting an international agreement on food emergencies. As food emergencies become more common over the 2020s, governments take disaster prevention seriously, and civil society task forces dust off existing frameworks and develop new blueprints that place food security above trade agreements, egregious land contracts, and other commercial or policy considerations. By the 2030s, the model laws are being applied by many governments, and when a protracted food crisis hits, there is strong momentum to accelerate international negotiations. Memories of the struggle for access to COVID-19 vaccines, and the barriers created by intellectual property rules, help the process to gain support. With the WTO divided, and major trading countries refocused on strategic self-sufficiency, the treaty passes, and several countries and regions opt to attach protocols that supersede any remaining constraints. Agribusiness tries to reverse the agreements, but over the 2030s, CSOs convince governments that the crisis is indefinite and emergency arrangements must stay in place.

OPPORTUNITY #7

Building food policies, food policy councils, and new forms of citizen participation. As food movements invest energy at the international level, they also strengthen and spread the democratic food policies, deliberative dialogues, and multi-sectoral governance models that started in cities and municipalities and, by the early 2020s, were gaining traction at national level. Food movements chalk up a steady stream of victories over the decade, drawing on the experience of municipal authorities and civil society groups, well-established networks of pioneering actors, and the growing visibility of cities and regions in international climate talks. By the 2030s, the new CFS deliberative processes (see Opportunity #4) are linked into other global governance spaces, allowing local experiences to inform international guidelines for developing inclusive food governance processes and bodies.



PATHWAY 3

Shifting financial flows

The combination of climate emergencies, food-related epidemics, and technological risks and failures spark unprecedented calls for existing financial flows to be redirected. The Long Food Movement focuses on three areas: i) soft targets (or 'low-hanging-fruit') like administrative and research budget lines; ii) the hard target of major commodity subsidies; and iii) the untaxed 'externalities' and revenues of corporations.

OPPORTUNITY #8

Redirecting R&D and technical budget lines to sustainable food systems. Over the coming years, civil society targets funding pots that can be potentially reallocated without major political debate. They start with FAO and IFAD, where an estimated one third of expenditures can be shifted within departments or budget lines by willing agency heads and sympathetic civil servants. Emboldened by its Nobel win, the WFP also agrees to ramp up its local sustainable sourcing (targeting 90% by no later than 2030) with relatively little pushback. In parallel, civil society targets the dubious aid flows that subsidize trade missions, facilitate extractive foreign investment, or advance donors' geopolitical goals (i.e. residual forms of 'tied aid'). Even bigger sums are clawed back as food movements step up the pressure on bilateral donors to reorient research projects in the global South towards agroecology, to realign the mission of global research centres (the 'CGIAR'), and to reform their own agricultural research programmes.

OPPORTUNITY #9

Reforming major commodity subsidies. Civil society sets its sights on shifting as much as possible of the annual USD 720 billion of producer subsidies from agribusiness commodity supports to sustainable food production. Like the cross-sectoral collaborations that challenged the WTO some years ago, the next quarter century sees food, trade, and climate movements come together with farmers', fishers' and food workers' groups. They demand subsidy reform, fair pricing, and living wages. With environmental tipping points in sight, obesity surging, and labour abuses on plantations, fishing vessels, and factory farms more visible, these efforts bear fruit by the end of the 2020s. Trawler fuel subsidies are first in line, and payouts to cocoa, sugar, palm oil, and industrial animal feedlots are subsequently slashed. Opportunities for reform also emerge at the global level, as food price spikes and trade volatility become a regular fixture. Pulling on the same strings they used in 2009 to revive the CFS, CSOs are ready to seize the next global food price crisis to recapitalize the UN Common Fund for Commodities and refocus it on supporting diversification. By the 2030s, a handful of bilateral donors and global funds lead on diverting investments away from 'new green revolution' approaches and toward agroecology.

OPPORTUNITY #10

Levying junk food and taxing corporations fairly. The case for taxing the agri-food industry, its unhealthiest offerings, and its most polluting impacts grows stronger over the next quarter century. Buoyed by successful crackdowns on junk food in Mexico and Chile, food movements deploy battle-ready campaign strategies through the 2020s and chalk up victories in all world regions. In doing so, they unearth new tax revenues, put a dent in agribusiness' profits (and thus its ability to set the agenda), and deliver massive healthcare savings. By the 2030s, new connections have been made with environmental taxation movements, while consumers are able to see the 'true costs' of industrial agriculture on their apps. The taxes that follow – on CO₂, toxins, plastic packaging, and food waste

– are sometimes negligible. But just like with subsidies, the first movers enforce similar changes on their trading partners, sparking a cascade of reforms and a new global norm. Emboldened by these successes, the Long Food Movement and its allies in other sectors turn their attention to corporate tax avoidance and evasion, facing up to novel forms of malpractice from the biodigital giants now dominating the agri-food sector, and find many governments reaching a tipping point on this issue and ready to take action.



PATHWAY 4

Rethinking the modalities of civil society collaboration

In order to advance Pathways 1-3, civil society has to operate more collaboratively than ever before. This means navigating long-standing rivalries, diverging priorities, and competition for funding. Yet many successful collaborative processes are already showing the way, and new opportunities are exposed by the compounding social and environmental crises.

OPPORTUNITY #11

Making cross-sectoral collaboration the norm. Food movements work hard to overcome the various barriers to collaboration and to make cross-sectoral strategizing the norm. With the future of global governance at stake (and risks of a corporate takeover), the 2021 Food Systems Summit accelerates civil society convergences. As food systems digitize, food activists learn quickly from the struggles of digital justice activists and vice versa, as well as redoubling collaboration with climate and environmental justice movements. By the 2030s, a sense of shared purpose has encouraged CSOs, foundations, and networks to sync their calendars (from annual board meetings to conference timetables) in order to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogues, strategic planning, and co-fundraising opportunities. Tensions persist between emergency survival measures (in the face of multiplying crises) and longer-term strategizing. By 2045 significant strides have been made, but the quest for closer collaboration remains a work in progress, and the subject of constant negotiation.

OPPORTUNITY #12

Developing new tools to block corporate commodity chains and hack closed-door negotiations.

From the early 2020s onwards, food movements expand and share their corporate monitoring activities, working firstly with close allies and then reaching out to progressive CSOs in virtually every sector. Where livestock expansion leads to deforestation and land appropriation, Indigenous communities, for example, connect with food and agricultural workers who have flagged concerns about the same companies, and work with local consumer and health organizations to ‘block chains’ and safeguard livelihoods. By the 2030s, food movements are also bringing digital tools to bear in the quest for enhanced collaboration. An ‘Agripedia’ platform helps to facilitate information flows on commodities, companies or commitments; document algorithms and media apps allow civil society organizers to decode negotiating texts and identify who is leading and dominating negotiations; and tools are developed to connect concerned communities and organizations to conference rooms and negotiating texts – from town halls to UN assemblies.

OPPORTUNITY #13

Building new partnerships to finance a quarter century of food system transformation. With agribusinesses rapidly rolling out AI and data-powered food systems, and with planetary boundaries being crossed, it becomes clear that the gains food movements are making may be too little too late. Resisting the entrapment of philanthro-capitalists on one side and klepto-philanthropists on the other, food movements challenge bilateral donors and progressive foundations to consider new forms of collaboration and accountability. As a consequence, by the 2030s, allied funders move from short-term project grants to five-year funding cycles, double their funding at least every 10 years, and open up to experimental, speculative, intersectional, and readiness-building initiatives. Most importantly, they are prepared to use their money and influence to catalyze bigger financial shifts and policy changes.

Conclusions

It is clear that an agribusiness-led future will be incapable of bringing the planet and its food systems back within a safe operating space, and will in fact continue to generate rampant inequalities, deepen livelihood stresses and food insecurity, and create harmful environmental impacts of its own. In contrast, four pathways of civil society-led food system transformation could shift USD 4 trillion from the industrial chain to food sovereignty and agroecology, cut 75% of food systems' GHG emissions, and deliver incalculable benefits to the lives and livelihoods of billions of people over the next 25 years.

Nonetheless, a 'Long Food Movement' comes with a number of risks, challenges, and unknowns for civil society groups. Firstly, it entails uncertain opportunities and unquantifiable transaction costs (i.e. the loss of time and resources for everyday campaigns). Secondly, the combination of relentless lobbying and opaque governmental and intergovernmental processes means that victories may always be temporary. Thirdly, every strategy, including those described here, risks co-option. Finally, while improving greatly on the outcomes of agribusiness-as-usual, even these strategies may not be enough to bring humanity back to a safe operating space. In this context, it is understandable that CSOs may shift resources towards frontline struggles for survival and crisis response.

But the case for a Long Food Movement remains compelling. It does not require short-term strategies to defend against land grabs to be traded off against campaigns for a new international treaty. Instead, a Long Food Movement challenges civil society groups to place multiple objectives and actions on a 25-year roadmap, and to keep this bigger picture in mind as they navigate wide-ranging campaigns, potentially rapid environmental and social breakdown, and the tidal wave of the corporate agenda. At this moment of unparalleled threats and tipping points, to not take risks is to ensure failure.

Civil society can and must transform itself. History shows that when confronted by necessity or opportunity, people can adapt almost overnight. Wars, embargoes, coups, and natural calamities can transform production and consumption patterns, and give rise to new networks of communication and cooperation. And the vast changes experienced as society has adapted to COVID-19, changes that would have seemed wildly optimistic only a year ago, show that, tomorrow, anything is possible.

ABOUT IPES-FOOD



The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) seeks to inform debates on food systems reform through policy-oriented research and direct engagement with policy processes around the world. The expert panel brings together environmental scientists, development economists, nutritionists, agronomists, and sociologists, as well as experienced practitioners from civil society and social movements. The panel is co-chaired by Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, and Maryam Rahmanian, independent expert on agriculture and food systems.

ABOUT ETC GROUP



ETC Group works to address the socioeconomic and ecological issues surrounding new technologies that could have an impact on the world's marginalized people. ETC Group investigates ecological erosion (including the erosion of cultures and human rights); the development of new technologies (especially agricultural but also other technologies that work with genomics and matter); and monitors global governance issues including corporate concentration and trade in technologies. It operates at the global political level and works closely with partner civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America. ETC Group is a staff collective headquartered in Canada and Philippines, with colleagues also in Mexico, Kenya, Uruguay, UK and USA.

Full report available at:

www.ipes-food.org/pages/LongFoodMovement