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# **Manifesto on the urgency of health and sustainable food systems**

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1. Healthy and sustainable food systems must be based on human rights and must have a positive impact on the multiple burden of all forms of malnutrition with full respect for the health of our planet and its limits. In addition, food systems must contribute to social justice and equity; economic and business interests must be subordinate to the higher goals of health and nutrition, environmental sustainability, and climate change mitigation.
2. Food systems have a significant impact on people's health and the environment. Among world regions, Latin American countries (LAC), in particular, **have one of the highest incidences of malnutrition**. LAC have the highest rates of overweight and obesity in the world. More than half of the women are overweight or obese. In addition, 7% of the child population under 5 years of age is overweight. Despite the decline in child malnutrition, around 43 million people are undernourished. The double burden of malnutrition refers to families in which problems of overweight and undernutrition coexist simultaneously. Furthermore, malnutrition is determined by nutritional and socioeconomic inequalities and the way food is produced, processed, sold and consumed.
3. One third of the region's population was already food insecure before the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic and measures to combat it have highlighted the fragility and imbalance of current food systems, further reinforcing inequalities and injustices in some regions of the world and for specific segments of the population. These are the ones who are always the most vulnerable and run the risk of not being guaranteed access to a plate of food. Even with the world's food production increasing and countries breaking production records, we know that food insecurity and hunger afflict more than **800 million people**. This situation worsened even more due to the socioeconomic and health impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. The **Global Burden of Disease (GBD)** study, which carries out a permanent evaluation of risk factors, health outcomes and the burden of disease in the world, indicates that factors associated with unhealthy diets are currently among the main causes of death and disease in populations. On the one hand, the consumption of fiber and micronutrients (present in foods such as whole grains, milk, fruits and

vegetables) is considered insufficient, and on the other, the intake of foods with a high content of critical nutrients, such as sodium, sugar, saturated fats and trans, is considered excessive.

5. Therefore, dietary patterns are one of the main risk factors and, at the same time, one of the main protective measures for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Healthy diets, based on a variety of fresh and minimally processed foods (rice, beans, fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, etc.), are health protection factors, and they are also central to maintaining and recreating the varied gastronomic cultural heritages of the region. On the other hand, the consumption in excess of sodium, sugar, saturated and trans fats, critical ingredients present in ultra-processed products, are associated with the development of diseases such as obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer, and, in turn, these products affect the erosion of culinary traditions and skills.
6. It is noteworthy that these diseases are largely preventable and could be prevented or reversed through policies that involve all the different stages of food systems, considering the production, distribution and access to diversified and healthy foods, as recommended, for example, by **Food-Based Dietary Guidelines**.
7. Scientific evidence shows that the dietary pattern of the population is influenced by various physical, social, cultural, economic and political factors. Among the main obstacles to healthy diets are supply, time and cost. The food environment directly and indirectly influences the foods that are chosen. Fresh or minimally processed foods are not always sold close to people's homes. This supply problem, in addition to being harmful in itself, can indirectly lead to increased consumption of ultra-processed food products that are easily found and are often sold in a deceptive and deliberately confusing way.
8. The choice of food is, ultimately, a simple individual act that sustains an intensive, toxic, unsustainable industrial production system and one of the main factors in accelerating climatic emergencies; or, on the contrary, that values a sustainable, non-toxic production system with a low environmental impact. In this sense, it is essential to have food education and health promotion policies for the process of building political awareness to generate good individual and collective options.
9. The countries of Latin America contribute approximately 9.5 percent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Agriculture and land use are the main drivers of emissions, accounting for 56% of total GHGs in the

region, compared to the world average of 22%. GHGs from agricultural crops and livestock have doubled in the last fifty years, driven by sustained economic growth in countries such as Brazil and Argentina. Most of these emissions (88%) come from livestock. The expectation of the agricultural sector is to grow faster than the world average over the next decade and is expected to represent 25% of world agricultural and fisheries exports by the year 2028. It is also important to highlight that livestock production is the main driver of deforestation in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

10. The transition towards healthier and more environmentally and climate-friendly food systems should imply that regional patterns of consumption and production must be addressed to promote less and better production and consumption of meat, and increased production and consumption of protective foods of plant origin in the region.
11. In this context, to strengthen strategies that promote adequate and healthy diets and overcome the main obstacles, healthy and sustainable food systems are needed, supported by intersectoral and synergistic policies, including regulatory measures, that favor healthy options. All stages must be taken into account, from the production, processing, storage, distribution and consumption of food, seeking to minimize the negative effects on the health and nutrition of the population. It is also necessary to encourage sustainable forms of production that, at the same time, promote social justice, protect biodiversity, contribute to the health of people and the planet, such as agroecology and short circuits of production, distribution and consumption. With specific policies and actions for peasants and family farmers.
12. The **global syndemic** is the coexistence of three pandemics: obesity, malnutrition and climate change. LAC are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Key impacts in the region, predicted to occur by 2050, include the disappearance of glaciers, coastal erosion due to rising sea levels, the regressive death of the Amazon rainforest, reduced agricultural yields and the intensification of extreme events such as tropical storms, floods and droughts. Direct effects on agricultural

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<sup>1</sup> Edwards G, Roberts JT, Araya M, Retamal C. A new global agreement can catalyze climate action in latin america. Global Economy and Development at Brookings. Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> FAO. 2014. Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use Emissions by Sources and Removals by Sinks.

<sup>3</sup> OECD/FAO (2019), OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2019-2028, OECD Publishing, Paris/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. [https://doi.org/10.1787/agr\\_outlook-2019-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/agr_outlook-2019-en)

<sup>4</sup> ECLAC, FAO, IICA. 2017. The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas: A Perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean 2017-2018. San Jose, C.R.: IICA, 2017. 252 p.



production carry additional risks to food and nutrition security, especially for the most vulnerable who depend on agriculture.

13. It is essential to ensure governance structures that take into account, among other things, the interactions between public and private structures and the inherent conflicts of interest between all actors and stakeholders. The right to health and the right to choose adequate food must come before economic and commercial interests. The governance and transparency mechanisms must guarantee the non-participation and interference of the private sector in the formulation of norms or public policies on food and health.
14. In order to achieve the necessary transformative changes, it is essential to have a space for consultation and negotiation that sheds light on the serious imbalances of power between the different actors. These power imbalances require adjustments between economic interests and the defense and guarantee of fundamental rights.
15. In this sense, at the multilateral level, the **Committee on World Food Security**, especially after its reform in 2009, is undoubtedly the main intergovernmental and international political platform on food security and nutrition with the explicit vision of promoting progressive realization of the right to adequate food for all.
16. Only in this way, putting food systems at the service of the health of people and the planet, and not the other way around, will we achieve the change of perspective necessary for a real transformation.

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GESAN – Grupo de Estudos em Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional Prof. Pedro Kitoko

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