

December 10th, 2022.

## **Multi-stakeholders' initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean must fight against malnutrition without conflicts of interest**

*Governments and civil society organizations must ensure initiatives to reduce malnutrition are not diminished by conflicts of interest!*

Successive economic crises that affect much of the world, as well as the consequences of territorial conflicts, climate emergencies and, more recently, the continuously unfolding COVID-19 pandemic have, unfortunately, placed food and nutrition security once again at the center of the global agenda. As with other complex challenges, the need for cross-sectoral and comprehensive approaches that require resources, scientific evidence and knowledge from different stakeholders must be recognized. And although new actors are welcome to contribute and join in this important challenge, it is crucial that all efforts converge in the public interest and the right to adequate food and nutrition. Despite different contexts and capacities, it is governments that remain primarily responsible for adopting effective strategies to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition.

Challenges are many and varied. Globally, more than 800 million people are affected by hunger and about 3 billion people cannot access healthy diets due to high food costs, loss of purchasing power and increased inequalities. Latin America and the Caribbean is the region that has experienced the most setbacks. From 2019 to 2020, the region has seen a staggering 30% increase in the number of people at risk. Four out of ten people are suffering moderate or severe food insecurity.

Hunger and undernutrition are not the only faces of malnutrition. Obesity and overweight, as well as other non-communicable chronic diseases (NCDs) resulting from inadequate and unhealthy diets, affect more and more people. They put children and young people's development at risk and shorten the lives of thousands of people every year. According to the latest data, NCDs in the Americas are responsible for about 80.7% of total deaths each year.

Food sovereignty is a major challenge for the small developing states of the Caribbean who import the vast majority of what they eat - most of which is ultra processed foods. At the same time, the Latin America region is one of the main food producers and exporters in the world, with enormous natural wealth and resources. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), agricultural and fisheries productions are expected to grow by 14% over the next ten years.

It is important to question what foods are being produced and if they promote health and adequate nourishment, and to which interests and to what demands are current food systems responding.

When the 2021 Food Systems Summit was convened by the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, there was an expectation that discussions in multilateral forums would contribute to the construction of paths to tackle various facets of malnutrition in an holistic and comprehensive manner. However, as several civil society organizations, academics and activists have pointed out, the proposals made were captured by false solutions that privilege technology, intensive agriculture, and business interests.

It is in this vein that initiatives called “multi stakeholder platforms” or “country driven movements” were legitimized and are presented as the only way to respond to national governments’ disengagement and lack of resources. Such initiatives claim to bring together a variety of actors that are identified as having a stake (i.e., an interest) in a certain issue and should therefore play a role in addressing it. Examples are the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement (SUN) and Nutrition for Growth (N4G). Even though these initiatives have good intentions and aim to keep countries away from the scourge of hunger, it is necessary to look at their strategies and results so far.

First, food sovereignty and the human right to adequate and healthy food are non-negotiable, foundational concepts, enshrined in numerous international treaties and national constitutions. Top-down, ready-made solutions that pretend to serve different local contexts are more likely to be serving others’ interests. Power dynamics shape local food systems and it is not surprising that they are becoming increasingly global. This is reinforced by transnational and large corporations activities which distort human rights turning hunger and the elimination of malnutrition into a business with false solutions that actually strengthen malnutrition and its root causes. Solutions that focus on artificial and harmful measures designed to leverage their products and businesses, e.g. ultra-processed food products, agricultural poisons, genetically modified organisms, abusive exploitation of natural resources, monoculture and other unsustainable agricultural practices.

Initiatives to fight malnutrition should ensure the absence of participation of corporations and related actors whose products, practices and policies oppose the progress of the elimination of malnutrition in all its forms. The economic interests of transnational corporations cannot supersede those of public health. In addition, these initiatives must contribute to the autonomy and local strengthening of public policies, institutions and civil society. They must address structural issues such as access to natural resources, sustainability within national territories, the rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities, and the guarantee of peasant rights, among others.

It is essential that initiatives preserve and respect governance structures that safeguard democracy and public interest obligations. The right to health and to choose an adequate diet must take precedence over economic and commercial interests. Governance mechanisms must guarantee the non-participation and interference of the unhealthy commodities industry and related actors in the formulation of norms or public policies on food and health. In this regard, community participation and accountability are essential.

Latin American and Caribbean countries play a prominent role in food and nutrition policies that serve as a reference for the world. In addition, the region concentrates one of the greatest diversities of food traditions and cultures on the planet, it is part of the identity

and formation process of its peoples. These experiences and knowledge are assets, part of our heritage and must be preserved.

If multi stakeholder initiatives and/or movements are willing to collaborate, respecting local actors' agency and decision-making processes, they are welcome to join forces and reflect together, contributing with their experiences and accumulated knowledge on how to transform current food systems into fairer, healthier and more sustainable ones, provided that they are not related with unhealthy commodity industries and related actors or at least commit and establish a clear plan to discontinue their relationship with such actors.

## **Signed**

Colansa (Latin American and Caribbean Nutrition and Health Community of Practice)

Clas (Healthy Latin America Coalition)

Idec (Brazilian Institute of Consumer Protection)

ACT (Health Promotion)

Healthy Caribbean Coalition

Aliança pela Alimentação Adequada e Saudável (Brazilian Alliance for Healthy and Adequate Food)

Corporate Accountability International

CIET Uruguay

Alianza ENT Uruguay

FASE (Brazilian Federation of Organizations for Social and Educational Assistance)

Brazilian Forum on Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security

SUT (Sociedad Uruguaya de Tabacología)

CUA Uruguay (Consumidores y Usuarios Asociados)

Observatório de Obesidade (PEO-ERJ)

Grupo de Estudos, Pesquisas e Práticas em Ambiente Alimentar e Saúde (GEPPAAS), da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Observatorio Universitario de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional del Estado de Guanajuato (OUSANEG)

Movimento Urbano de Agroecologia - MUDA

Miriam Balestro, Promotora de Justiça Aposentada e pesquisadora do Direito à Alimentação (FIC) InterAmerican Heart Foundation Argentina

Secretaría Técnica MAELA Colombia

CORDES Colombia

Grupo de Pesquisas Sistemas Alimentares Sustentáveis (GPSAS) da Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP)

Observatorio Nacional para la Protección del Consumidor, República Dominicana

Conselho Federal de Nutricionistas (Brasil)

Costa Rica Saludable

Myriam Paredes, Profesora de FLACSO, Ecuador

Instituto Desiderata

Observatório de Políticas de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional - UnB

Slow Food Brasil

Associação Brasileira de Agroecologia

Núcleo de Pesquisa de Nutrição em Produção de Refeições da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina - NUPPRE/UFSC

Gloria Durán Landazábal  
Rede Brasileira de Pesquisa em Soberania e Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional  
Consejo de Nutrición Pública de la Asociación Argentina de Salud Pública  
Movimiento de Alimentación Saludable de Panamá  
AMBIO Sociedad Civil, Costa Rica  
Federación Argentina de Graduados en Nutrición (FAGRAN)

*For more information on SUN, Multi stakeholder platforms and other private-public Partnerships:*

[Corporations that make up the SUN business network](#)

[When the SUN casts a shadow. The human rights risks of multi-stakeholder partnerships: the case of Scaling up Nutrition \(SUN\)](#)

[Briefing Note on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives \(MSI\). Fian International.](#)

[Multi-stakeholder Partnerships to Finance and Improve Food Security and Nutrition in the Framework of the 2030 Agenda, HLPE Report.](#)

[La preocupación de IBFAN sobre el papel de la industria en la Scaling Up Nutrition \(Spanish only\)](#)

[Conflict of Interest in Nutrition: Where's the Power?](#)

*Other sources:*

[OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2022-2031.](#)

[In Brief to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022](#)

[Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2021, hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

[Hundreds of grassroots organisations to oppose the UN Food Systems Summit.](#)

[UN Food System Summit Fails to Address Real Healthy and Sustainable Diets Challenges](#)

[Prioritizing noncommunicable diseases in the Americas region in the era of COVID-19.](#)