



AFSTC Declaration for COP28

Urgent and decisive action is required to promote African food systems

transformation. With this declaration, the African Food Systems Transformation Collective, an African network of expert researchers and civil society representatives, frames key issues and sets out commitments required for COP28 to succeed in promoting African food system transformation.

African food systems are vulnerable to climate change

Globally, food systems are unsustainable: 80% of the food system is powered by fossil fuels and the food system is responsible for over one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions¹. The vast majority of African agrifood GHG emissions are caused by deforestation and on-farm emissions. As African food systems intensify, developing pathways that rely on renewable energies and short supply chains will help mitigate GHG emissions and build resilience to fuel price shocks and supply disruptions.

Climate change will impact Africa disproportionately, with significant increases in mean annual temperature, numbers of high-temperature days, reduced overall rainfall, shifting rainfall patterns, and increased incidence of heavy rainfall events, and more extended droughts². All food systems activities rely on water. Yet African countries experience water stresses and four out of five African countries are unlikely to have sustainably managed water resources by 2030³. Beyond climate change, Africa is disproportionately affected by social and environmental externalities of agrifood systems.⁴ Intersecting climate change, social, economic and environmental externalities compound each other, exacerbating food systems vulnerability and food insecurity.

This will severely impact African ways to produce, process, store, transport, sell, access, prepare and dispose of food. Africa already experiences high levels of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition⁵. African systems of food provision were disrupted and compromised by colonialism. Current rapid transformation towards industrialised food

¹ Tubiello, F. N., Karl, K., Flammini, A., Gütschow, J., Obli-Laryea, G., Conchedda, G., Pan, X., Qi, S. Y., Halldórudóttir Heiðarsdóttir, H., Wanner, N., Quadrelli, R., Rocha Souza, L., Benoit, P., Hayek, M., Sandalow, D., Mencos Contreras, E., Rosenzweig, C., Rosero Moncayo, J., Conforti, P., and Torero, M.: Pre- and post-production processes increasingly dominate greenhouse gas emissions from agri-food systems, *Earth Syst. Sci. Data*, 14, 1795–1809, <https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-14-1795-2022>, 2022.; Crippa, M., Solazzo, E., Guizzardi, D., Monforti-Ferrario, F., Tubiello, F.N. & Leip, A. 2021. Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nature Food*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>

² Trisos, C.H., I.O. Adelekan, E. Totin, A. Ayanlade, J. Efitre, A. Gameda, K. Kalaba, C. Lennard, C. Masao, Y. Mgaya, G. Ngaruiya, D. Olago, N.P. Simpson, and S. Zakieldeen, 2022: Africa. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Lösckke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 1285–1455, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.011.

³ [State of the Climate in Africa Report 2021](https://www.wmo.int/publications/state-of-the-climate-in-africa-report-2021). World Meteorological Organization.

⁴ FAO. 2023. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2023 – Revealing the true cost of food to transform agrifood systems*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7724en>

⁵ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023. Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3017en>



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systems modelled on the global North emphasise technologies and efficiencies. This exacerbates inequality, poverty, the triple burden of malnutrition, environmental degradation and greenhouse gas emissions, while eroding African food culture and knowledge systems. Lengthening supply chains and reliance on fossil fuels increase African food systems vulnerability.

Africa is rapidly urbanising alongside unprecedented population growth: 50 percent of global population growth by 2050 will take place in Africa alone and urban populations in Africa will triple in the next 50 years⁶. Yet this is the continent most reliant on food imports and most impacted by, and unable to manage, climate change. Massive urban and peri-urban populations are becoming vulnerable to food supply disruption. Simultaneously, they generate demand for food increasingly produced and provided in environmentally destructive ways.

African food systems urgently require bold and decisive action to enable transformation towards justice, sustainability and resilience.

Sharm-El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda is inadequate

The Sharm-El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda (SESAA) addresses food issues, especially for Africa, and highlights the importance of financing. However, it falls short of transformational aspirations in many respects.

Its definition of food security omits the key dimension of agency. Its focus remains strongly on technological enhancements for increased crop production, with a nod towards more diversified and climate resilient crops. ***Its recommendations are inadequate*** given the risk, scale and pace of climate change and ecosystem degradation. They are likely to result at best in minor incremental changes to current food systems, without engaging with the root issue of the global political and economic order. Recommendations for dietary change to reduce animal protein consumption are likely appropriate in the global North. However, nutritional deficiencies and ecological conditions in Africa mean that, aside from necessary disincentives for ultraprocessed food consumption⁷, different recommendations are required here. ***It is essential for COP28 to adopt a regionally specific food systems perspective***, engaging holistically with input supply, production, processing, distribution, retail, consumption and waste.

As African food systems remain largely informal and traditional, ***there exists an opportunity to adopt transformative pathways.*** Moreover, traditional ***African food***

⁶ UN Habitat - [Africa Urban Agenda Programme](#)

⁷ Reardon, T., Tshirley, D., Liverpool-Tasie, L.S.O., et al. 2021. The processed food revolution in African food systems and the double burden of malnutrition. *Global Food Security*, 28: 1-19



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systems represent a global resource to rethink and rebuild food systems in countries that are the main contributors of climate change.

Yet declarations have remained performative, commitment to implementation has been weak, and action has been lethargically slow. **Inaction represents a massive risk** to ecosystem health as well as to people's wellbeing in Africa: millions of poor and vulnerable people are threatened by hunger and malnutrition. This will inflict harm both acute in the form of starvation and long-term in the form of non-communicable diseases.

Although African food insecurity is frequently interpreted in terms of inadequate production, **the primary causes of food insecurity are structural**, related to access constraints and distribution inequalities caused by poverty, lacking land access, economic concentration and resource degradation. Proposed transitions must therefore promote structural transformations across food systems that address inequalities and secure equitable resource governance and access.

Commitments required of COP28

The **African Food Systems Transformation Collective (AFSTC)** is a network of over two hundred leading African academics and civil society representatives. AFSTC advocates for deep, just food systems transitions aligned with the 13 principles of agroecology set out by the FAO Committee for Food Security's High Level Panel of Experts⁸. Given the current state and trends, we feel that COP28 will fail the people and landscapes of Africa if the following outcomes are not reflected in COP28 declarations on food systems.

To succeed in promoting transition to sustainable, resilient and just food systems in Africa, COP28 must entail clear commitments to:

Shift mindsets

- **Recognise and adopt the 13 principles of agroecology** to orient food systems transformation.
- **Recognise and respect African values** of relatedness and reciprocity, expressed through food, and through custodianship of nature as a sacred heritage
- **Acknowledge, validate and develop the extraordinary value of traditional and agroecological African food systems** for food system transformations globally
- **Go beyond techno-fix approaches** to food system transformations while leveraging disruptive, territorially and socially rooted technologies to level the playing field and enhance resource efficiency

⁸ Wezel, A., Herren, B.G., Kerr, R.B. et al. Agroecological principles and elements and their implications for transitioning to sustainable food systems. A review. *Agron. Sustain. Dev.* 40, 40 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13593-020-00646-z>



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- **Endorse, prioritise and protect traditional food and seed**
- **Root science in co-creation** informed by nature and indigenous knowledge and reorient school and university curricula towards agroecology

Secure rights and access

- **Emphasise people's agency and rights** to food, livelihoods and healthy landscapes as central to food systems transformation
- **Set aside investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms** limiting agrifood industry regulation towards sustainability, equity, and resilience.
- **Include small food enterprises in decision-making structures and processes** in planning, implementing, & monitoring & evaluating food systems transformation
- **Protect and uphold intergenerational equity** by promoting advantageous participation of women, youth, children and elders in food systems.
- **Prevent land-grabbing and promote land reform** to right injustice and current disenfranchisement through colonial land regime legacies

Promote redress and justice

- **Conduct thorough baseline analysis** of African food systems and set clear targets for transformation to support monitoring, assessment and evaluation
- **Support locally-led adaptation, training and technology development** that galvanize community action based on local knowledge and proven methodologies
- **Elucidate how the loss and damage fund will compensate food systems stakeholders** and build transformational resilience in developing countries highly affected by climate change
- **Institute retrospective compensation for climate change losses and damages** by high-emitting developed Nations who have benefited enormously from fossil-fuelled development to African countries that are disproportionately impacted by climate change
- **Develop legislation** that sets out clear targets for transition to nourishing, biodiverse, carbon-negative, resilient and equitable food systems with clear mandates for democratic food governance at all levels, especially local governments
- **Establish fiscal incentives and financial products** to fund and insure food systems adaptation and transformation

Prioritise people and nature

- **Promote localised, short value chains**
- **Recognise, protect and promote small and informal** food enterprises with climate-resilient urban infrastructure, food-sensitive planning and developmental regulatory frameworks



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- **De-couple food systems from fossil fuels and artificial fertilizers** by developing regulations, processes and technologies that facilitate resource regeneration, recycling and efficiency, while promoting uptake of renewable energies.
- **Discourage input-intensive food industrialisation**, especially entailing the use of pesticides, antibiotics, artificial food additives, preservatives and the production of ultra-processed food
- **Promote multi-scale water resource management** protecting and regenerating catchment systems, coastlines and oceans while ensuring equitable access to safe water to all involved in food provision.
- **Divest from destructive agrifood industries** and redirect investments into ventures aligned with agroecological principles

Famines are already a reality in Africa, causing needless loss of innocent lives. The most tragic aspect of this is that solutions are available and implementing them is possible. This requires that we prioritise human rights and dignity, particularly for the poorest on the continent. It also means decision-makers must recognize the importance of maintaining and restoring the sanctity of the continent's natural ecosystems. They provide our last line of defence against the worst extremes of climate breakdown and maintain the biodiversity upon which all food production depends. This needs a mindset shift that puts people and nature at the centre of our food systems. It then demands real action to secure rights and access for those disenfranchised by current food systems. Finally, action on African food systems must promote redress and justice.

If the COP28 presidency fails to get parties to agree and advance these calls to action, they will have failed in their mandate and left behind those worst affected by the climate crisis.