



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
15 February 2022

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Forty-ninth session

28 February–1 April 2022

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Human Rights Advocates Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 February 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



## **The Right to Food in the Face of Globalization and Corporate Consolidation**

All human beings have the inborn right to adequate food and to be free from hunger. This right to food is recognized in Art. 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as part of the right to an adequate standard of living and is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman, and child has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals highlight different dimensions to actualizing the human right to food. One such goal is to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers such as family farmers and pastoralists, including through secure and equal access to land, financial services, and markets.

Another goal is to ensure sustainable food production systems and to implement agricultural practices which maintain ecosystems for adaptation to climate change. Two important themes the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has decided to focus on are food systems and global governance, and farmer's rights. A significant issue in realizing small-scale farmer's rights to equal access to markets is globalization and large corporate involvement in the food industry around the globe. Corporate mergers and acquisitions as a result of unchecked monopolization and corporate greed are having a disastrous impact on the right to food and farmer's rights.

The primary guarantors for both individual and collective rights are states' governments. The private sector is an important actor that provides capital for the development of local populations, however, while the business sector's actions should comply with the law, companies do not have the obligation to guarantee peoples' human rights. This obligation belongs to governments, and these goals can only be achieved by holding both private and public actors accountable.

### **Effects in the United States of America**

Farm subsidies and lax economic oversight have disrupting affects in local markets. One example of this impact can be seen in the United States of America, where the federal government has provided approximately \$424.4 billion in current-dollar subsidies to the United States of America farms since 1995.

The data also shows that the United States of America's farm subsidies have been historically concentrated among a few states (Texas and the "Farm Belt"), a few recipients (big farms and banks), and a few commodities (corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice). Government subsidies flood global markets at the expense of diverse food systems and the ability for small farmers to compete with the low prices these subsidies create.

A small and powerful group of food and agribusiness companies has a stranglehold on the food system from seed to supermarket. In 2018 it was reported the four largest firms in many food and agriculture subsectors have more than 60% market share. This is a worrying trend that is not slowing down, at the expense of small farmers in the United States of America. These oligopolistic firms have also been consolidating at alarming rates, endangering the resiliency of the food system, and contributing to the current precarious economic viability of independent farmers. ,

The United States of America's farm subsidies also hurt local farmers around the globe. Because the United States of America is a major exporter of farm products, federal subsidies have a disproportionate effect on global agriculture markets and, in turn, farmers in developing countries. For example, United States of America's subsidization of cotton, indirectly harms more than 10 million cotton farmers across the Western African region."

## Effects in Western Africa

In Western Africa, European Union (E.U.) milk is also severely hurting local pastoral farmers. Producing and selling milk is an extremely important source of income for this region. Millions of nomadic herders and agro-pastoralists participate this sector, but this industry has been under strain since countries in the region opened their markets to Europe under a series of trade agreements. In recent years, European producers have been using West African markets to offload a low-quality mixed product derived from cow's milk that they are unable to sell in the EU.

This cheap and unhealthy milk lookalike's low cost and ubiquity make it impossible to compete leading to a spiral of economic decline for local farmers. In 2018, the sale of this product from the European Union increased 234% since 2008. The milk derivative sells for 30% cheaper than whole milk powder in African markets, generating unfair competition for African dairy farmers, who suffer Local livestock farmers suffer huge financial losses as imports increase.

## Positive Example

In 2013, Oxfam led a campaign which shined a light on the fact that ten major companies controlled almost all of the food we eat. It then led a campaign which called upon these companies to improve their corporate accountability, and over 700,000 campaign actions were made in this regard. The pressure worked, and major strides were made in the areas such as sustainable access to land, treatment of farm workers in their supply chains. Accountability leads to action. Naming and shaming big corporations which hurt small farmers is a trend that must continue, but not just with consumers advocacy and grassroots or non-profit campaigns, but also through direct state-level action.

One such example of a state-led change for good is the Indian State of Sikkim. In 2003, Sikkim banned the import and use of chemical fertilizers and announced the adoption of an organic farming plan to ensure long term sustenance of soil fertility, protection of the environment, and to protect the local farming community. The plan was a dramatic success which reaches beyond organic production and has proven truly transformational for the state and its citizens. This large-scale state-led policy choice has benefitted more than 66,000 farming families. More localities should follow in the footsteps of Sikkim in implementing domestic policy changes which protect farming communities and promote local farming techniques.

## Conclusion

Globalization of food systems through trade agreements and economic policies which prioritize maximizing profits has perpetuated global inequalities and is undermining the livelihoods of small farmers and the food system as a whole; but the shrinking and destruction of local markets for the sake of profits for multi-national corporations does not have to be the norm.

The right to food requires more than just producing enough for the world, but also involves ensuring that farmers and communities around the world have access to the food market. Business models must be adopted which throughout their supply chain do not exploit and disadvantage small farmers.

HRA requests that the U.N. focus on solutions to monitor and hold accountable large transnational conglomerates and their impact on the global food system as a whole, and particularly on small farmers' access to these markets. Governments should reconcile trade agreements and negotiations between small farmers and corporations with the goal of harmonious development. There must be multi-sectoral coherence of agricultural and trade policies to promote sustainable development of local markets.

The right to food encompasses one's ability to cultivate and to survive off of the very soil beneath our collective feet. The right to food and the right to farm should never be diminished

or dictated by self-interested corporations at the expense of the common populace, and there must be multi-sectoral cooperation and accountability to achieve this human right.

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