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## Climate Resilience Through the Right to Food: Perspectives on the UN Food Systems Summit: 16 September 2021

This event was the first in a two-part series on “Land-Food-Climate: An African-European Dialogue on Climate Resilience” aimed at gathering stakeholder perspectives on ways to strengthen rights-based approaches in the ongoing food systems and climate change discussions. The event focused on the right to food as an important entry point for transforming current unequal and unsustainable development trends. It also showcased possible pathways for realizing the potential of African farmers to not only contribute to the continent’s food security, but also expand climate-resilient livelihood opportunities. Speakers emphasized that a rights-based approach is critical in implementing nature-based solutions that enhance sustainable livelihoods while protecting the environment.

Key recommendations aimed at informing the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), scheduled for 23 September 2021, relate to, among others:

- integrating the progressive realization of the right to food in the follow up process to the UNFSS, particularly through national dialogues and pathways, and organizing a follow-up process that reports on this;
- ensuring meaningful participation in the upcoming national dialogues and pathways by empowering those directly affected by hunger and malnutrition and their representative organizations;
- putting the principle of “leaving no one behind” into practice, notably by ensuring access to healthy diets;
- addressing climate change in the discussions and negotiations on food systems transformations, particularly with regard to adaptation needs in the agricultural sector;
- highlighting Europe’s responsibility to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions, including from agriculture, to reduce adaptation needs in Africa, and to ensure trade policies and agricultural subsidies do not negatively affect African domestic markets; and
- adopting holistic, multi-sectoral approaches that ensure policy coherence and enhance progress toward achieving multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the integration of urban agriculture and urban planning into national food security and land use policies.

The event took place on 16 September 2021 and was conducted virtually, with 240 participants joining from more than



Photo courtesy of Beks

30 countries. It was jointly organized by TMG Research gGmbH, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Future Africa, and the African Research Universities Alliance Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems. The second event in the series will take place on 19 October, and will focus on perspectives on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

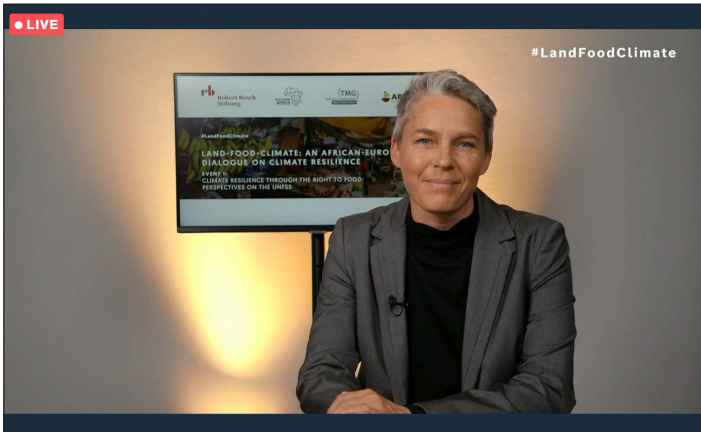
### Report of the Meeting

#### Opening remarks

Gerrit Hansen, Program Director, Climate Change, Robert Bosch Stiftung, emphasized more than 50% of the African population is food insecure. She said climate change is increasingly threatening agricultural production in Sub-Saharan

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**Gerrit Hansen**, Program Director, Climate Change, Robert Bosch Stiftung

Africa. Underscoring the increasing pressure on land associated with the rising demand for offsetting greenhouse gas emissions in the Global North, she noted the objective of the two-event series is to focus on a just transformation of land use that secures peoples' livelihoods, provides nutritious food, mitigates climate change, and protects biodiversity. In line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights that established the right to food, she proposed thinking of the right to food as a safeguard and reference point for nature-based solutions and for the creation of climate-resilient landscapes that work for people.

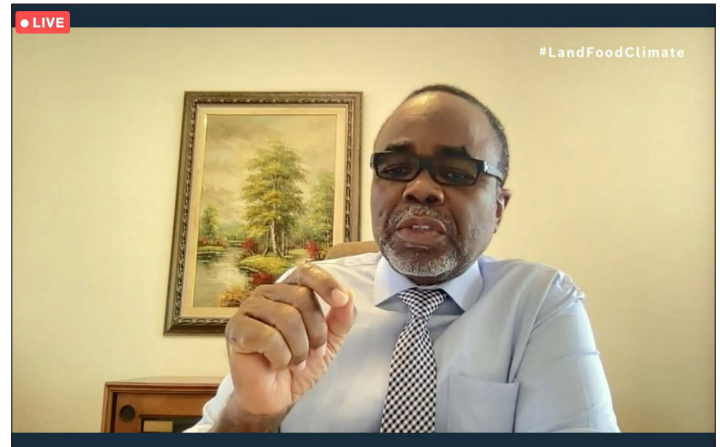
Barend Erasmus, University of Pretoria, highlighted that food challenges cannot be addressed without addressing climate resilience and said Africa is the "last frontier" in this regard. He stressed this event's role in elevating Africa's voice on the land-food-climate nexus and in underscoring the importance of the right to food for everyone ahead of the UNFSS.

Jes Weigelt, TMG Research, who co-moderated the event with Wangu Mwangi, TMG Research, noted the structural reasons for hunger, poverty, and inequality also make people vulnerable to the climate crisis, and called for common solutions to these interlinked challenges. He highlighted "climate-resilient landscapes" are not devoid of people but, rather, are places where people can respond to the challenges of food security, climate change, and biodiversity loss.

### **Panel 1 - Towards Resilient Landscapes for People and Planet**

This panel focused on identifying principles for resilient landscapes for food security, sustainable livelihoods, climate change mitigation, and biodiversity protection.

Luc Gnacadja, World Future Council and former Executive Director, UN Convention to Combat Desertification, said SDG 15.3 on land degradation neutrality (LDN) represents a paradigm shift in land development. He advocated policies, practices, and investments to avoid degradation and fostering: restoration of land for use; conservation of natural ecosystems; and sustainable management of all land under use. He called for LDN country profile maps showing areas of degradation and potential restoration, noting that poverty and food insecurity in rural areas



**Luc Gnacadja**, World Future Council and former Executive Director, UN Convention to Combat Desertification

correlate with maps of degraded land. He reported estimates that degradation costs 12.3% of combined GDP in 42 Sub-Saharan countries, versus a cost of action estimated at 1.15% GDP.

Fatima Denton, Director, UN University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa, pointed to the importance of speed, scale, and management issues in building forward better and underscored the need to develop an African perspective on the design of this transformation. Noting much attention is devoted to the energy sector, she called for recentring attention towards the agriculture sector, which is key for mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development. She emphasized the crucial role of technology transfer and financial support for African farmers. Pointing to distortions related to subsidies and border taxes, she urged ensuring opportunities to build back better in a more symmetrical manner between Europe and Africa.

Sebastian Lesch, German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), noted the number of chronically undernourished people in Africa is increasing, in tandem with a trend towards high protein diets associated with higher carbon footprints. Pointing to Germany's [One World No Hunger](#) initiative, he shared his belief that reaching the zero hunger objective while staying within planetary boundaries is possible, but emphasized this requires transforming agri-food systems towards increased sustainability and resilience to shocks. He underscored the need for holistic, multi-sectoral approaches connecting rural development with food systems transformation, and noted Germany intends to use its upcoming presidency of the Group of 7 (G7) to stimulate progress in this regard.

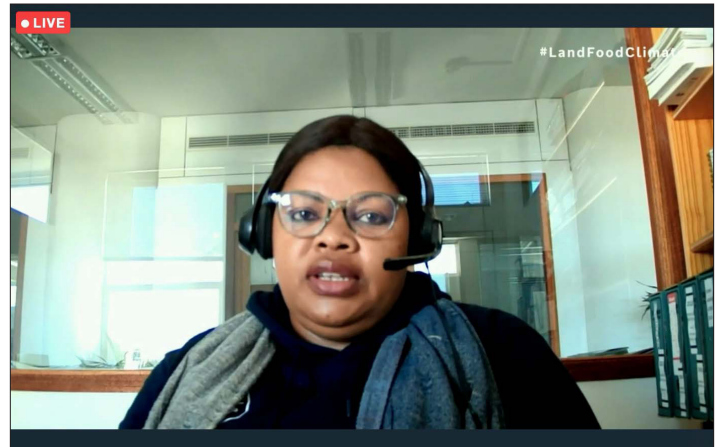
Muthoni Wanyeki, Director, Africa Regional Office, Open Society Foundation, noted priorities for action include increasing food production, especially by women, and ensuring the availability of safe and nutritious food. Pointing to the exclusion of women working in the informal sector from institutional social protections, she called for the UNFSS and others to adopt a "new lens" and end discrimination and legal inequalities, such as on land rights and social insurance, as well as learn from women's informal mechanisms for risk mitigation and shock management. She emphasized higher productivity and returns in pastoralist systems compared to those of smallholders, calling for

investment in communal land rights and facilitative approaches towards them instead of sedentarization efforts. Noting no “single African voice” exists and cautioning against the dominance of agribusiness and conservation actors in multi-stakeholder consultation processes, she stressed the need to invest in self-organization and self-representation of pastoralists and smallholder cooperatives.

Nomonde Buthelezi, Food Agency Cape Town and Heinrich Böll Foundation, South Africa, reported on a dire food security situation in her urban neighborhood in Cape Town. She noted COVID-19 exposed the severity of already-existing problems and lamented ongoing conversations have not included local communities. She said her organization’s recommendations envision addressing poverty, hunger, and other issues, such as gender-based violence, through self-organization around community food kitchens that were created during the pandemic and aim to give a voice to local communities. She said the kitchens are becoming hubs for communities to collaborate to identify challenges, address problems, and develop solutions together.

Marc Nolting, German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), said food systems are in a state of system failure, with the agriculture sector both contributing to acceleration of climate change and being negatively affected by it. He noted agricultural policies are not only insufficiently addressing key challenges facing the sector but are, at times, counterproductive, and underscored the need for more holistic approaches and better coordination among donors. Going forward, he emphasized four priorities: engaging scientific institutions; fostering multi-stakeholder processes; ensuring tenure security and equal use of national resources; and promoting public and private investment in landscapes.

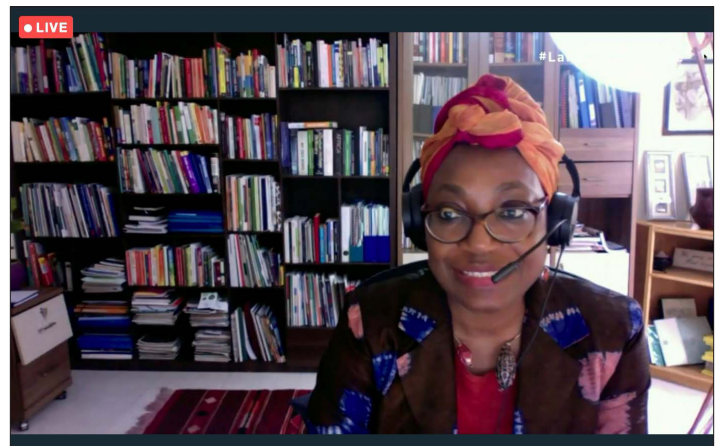
During the discussion, Denton noted the objective of “building back better” suffers from insufficient funding. She said buffer systems are not available to African farmers affected by COVID-19 and the informal sector, one of Africa’s largest employers, is sidelined. Lesch urged the UNFSS to raise awareness on the need to engage local politics at the landscape level, involving everyone interested in using the land, and subsequently build on these outcomes at the national and then international levels. Pointing to the issue of subsidies on the European market,



**Nomonde Buthelezi**, Food Agency Cape Town, and Heinrich Böll Foundation, South Africa

he emphasized linkages to international trade discussions. Buthelezi called for inclusive and accessible dialogue formats for marginalized stakeholders to make their voices heard. “We are tired of being statistics,” she underscored, criticizing projects that leverage the participation of vulnerable communities without properly crediting their contribution or reporting back to them about research results. Lesch pointed to a twinning programme between European and African farmers’ associations as an example of a project that fosters meaningful exchanges. Gnacadja underscored the need to phase out policies and subsidies that foster ecosystem degradation and to conduct stakeholder consultations to jointly assess land status and discuss restoration and conservation pathways.

In a second round of questions, moderator Weigelt asked about tensions between national and municipal policies and between the need for speed versus space for discussion. Denton noted that multiple transitions are happening at different scales, contingent on capacities, infrastructure, and tools to participate in the transition, and suggested that space be widened to allow marginalized voices to emerge. She called for focusing on the land-based economy, agriculture, and adaptation, not just on mitigating emissions from fossil fuels. She said farmers’ innovativeness is killed when they are taxed or not allowed to produce competitively.



**Fatima Denton**, Director, UN University Institute for Natural Resources in Africa



**Marc Nolting**, GIZ



**Muthoni Wanyeki**, Africa Regional Director, Open Society Foundation

Echoing Nolting's comment that the current business model represents a "systems failure," she called for "resetting the dials" on what works for Africa. Nolting called for agreement on a reboot regarding priorities for food systems transformations, emphasizing the UNFSS could impact how development cooperation is undertaken going forward. Wanyeki said although local governments are at the forefront of tackling food deficit and climate change issues, they are excluded from multilateral processes. She called for governance processes to better balance interests and power differentials between stakeholder groups.

### **Panel 2 - Transforming Food Systems for Climate-Resilient Landscapes**

This panel focused on the need to bring all voices to the table to ensure the UNFSS process achieves its fundamental goal of transforming the world's broken food systems.

Martin Frick, Deputy to the Special Envoy for the UNFSS, shared his perspective on the UNFSS process. Noting member states' reluctance regarding top-down norm setting, he pointed to the difficulty of reaching multilateral consensus on a binding outcome, as shown with the climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. Against this background, he highlighted the UNFSS process opted instead for a bottom-up approach, inviting countries to engage in national-level, multi-stakeholder, and all-of-society conversations ahead of the Summit. He indicated



**Martin Frick**, Deputy to the Special Envoy for the UNFSS

68 countries have already published food systems transformation pathways resulting from these discussions. He said coalitions are emerging to work on the UNFSS' action tracks, noting this bears the potential for accelerating the necessary changes in food systems. He shared the Green Climate Fund's intention to revise its investment guidelines for increasing openness towards food systems projects.

Lindiwe Sibanda, Director, African Research Universities Alliance Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems, shared her perspective on the African Green Revolution Forum which took place from 7-10 September in advance of the UNFSS. She emphasized the importance of such fora for African countries to share their experiences and develop a common voice for engaging in multilateral processes. As key issues discussed at the Forum, she highlighted the need to ensure healthy dietary resources are affordable and attractive to different age groups, and to foster renewable energy access to limit food loss due to unreliable cooling chains.

Million Belay, Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa, said his organization views the solutions put forward as the "green revolution" as bad for the environment and the future, and as a disaster for Africa. He also cautioned the African Union's "negotiated proposal" to the UNFSS on the future of the African food system was not as consultative as claimed and placed too much emphasis on productivity, technology, and productiveness, and not enough on agro-ecology, human rights, and the right to food. While the UNFSS raised food security on the agenda, he said the lack of civil society participation at its outset represents a lost opportunity. He also expressed concern regarding, *inter alia*, the treatment of science in the UNFSS process and the lack of discussion of corporate power in the food system, noting five companies control 60% of the world's food production.

Ravi Prabhu, World Agroforestry Centre, suggested adopting a landscape framing for the food system problem to bring together people, land, and nature, and highlighting diversity as a key source of resilience. He underscored the need to address issues of power and innovation capacity. He cautioned that "today's solutions are often tomorrow's problems," citing the green revolution in India as the source of most problems in that country today. Noting the assumption that "big science can solve all problems" is untrue, he called for partnerships based on equality and for improved support for farmers for developing and applying innovations.

During discussions, Frick noted the UN is only as good as its member states, saying that, even after states finalize agreements, the UN cannot tell governments what to do. He confirmed, however, that a decentralized process has been built to enable transition within countries at the landscape level. Citing the UNFSS as a "center of gravity" for transforming food systems, he called for all of society to participate in such a transformation, with civil society pushing governments to implement their commitments amid UN system support. Sibanda called for continuing and sharpening UNFSS dialogues and customizing their format to African culture, bringing voices through via



Violet Shivutse, Director, Shibuye Community Health Workers

traditional African means of communication, and for holding heads of state to account for making progress in the follow-up to the Summit. Belay pointed to his organization's work on fostering country-level discussions on food policy, notably on policy coherence and keeping up with community- and market-level innovations. Prabhu emphasized the need to address the issue of power differentials when discussing food systems transformations and to engage with people on the ground to find solutions that work for them.

### Closing Remarks

Alexander Müller, Managing Director, TMG Research, underscored the responsibilities of European countries, and the Global North more generally, in mitigating climate change and reducing their environmental footprint to ensure African countries have space to adapt. Pointing to the multiple crises of climate change, hunger, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity, he emphasized the need to act at the landscape level and ensure every dollar invested generates multiple benefits. Welcoming the national food systems transformation pathways developed in the context of the UNFSS, he cautioned that the issue is too complex to be successfully tackled only at the national level and requires global governance responses, including in terms of subsidy reforms. He called for a process to take stock of progress made in the follow-up to the Summit and said food



Alexander Müller, Managing Director, TMG Research

systems transformations must take climate change into account to succeed.

Violet Shivutse, Director, Shibuye Community Health Workers, lauded the principle of “leaving no one behind” in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but emphasized this is not being implemented in practice. She called for dialogue formats that allow farmers to shape the agenda and for partnerships that enable the scaling-up of community-level solutions to turn this principle into reality.

Wangu Mwangi, TMG Research, emphasized the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, African perspectives on food systems transformation discussed during the event, suggesting this diversity should inform the design of transformation pathways and be recognized and supported in European debates.

### Upcoming Meetings

**2021 UN Food Systems Summit:** The Summit aims to provide a platform for ambitious new actions, innovative solutions, and plans to transform food systems and leverage these shifts to deliver progress across all of the SDGs by 2030. **date:** 23 September 2021 **location:** New York City, US **www:** [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/food-systems-summit-2021/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/food-systems-summit-2021/)

**Fifteenth Session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development:** The session will be held under the theme “From inequality and vulnerability to prosperity for all.” It will seek to provide a platform for countries to devise new ways to use trade as an enabler of sustainable development. **dates:** 3-7 October 2021 **location:** Bridgetown, Barbados **www:** [unctad15.org/](http://unctad15.org/)

**Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Biodiversity Convention (part 1):** The CBD COP 15 was originally scheduled to take place in October 2020, in Kunming, China, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is now scheduled in two parts, with a virtual meeting in 2021 with limited onsite presence of accredited delegates from embassies and organizations already located and based in China, and more in-depth, face-to-face discussions in 2022. A primary objective of COP 15 is to agree on a new post-2020 global biodiversity framework. **dates:** 11-15 October 2021 **location:** virtual and Kunming, China **www:** [www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15](http://www.cbd.int/meetings/COP-15)

**Land-Food-Climate: Perspectives on the UNFCCC:** This event will take place in advance of UNFCCC COP-26 and is being organized by TMG Research gGmbH, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Future Africa, and the African Research Universities Alliance Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Food Systems.

**Twenty-Sixth Session of the COP to the UNFCCC:** UNFCCC COP 26 was originally scheduled to take place in 2020, in Glasgow, UK, but was postponed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of the conference is to advance work towards implementation of the Paris Agreement. **dates:** 1-12 November 2021 **location:** Glasgow, Scotland, UK **www:** [unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference](http://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/glasgow-climate-change-conference)