GOOD COP, BAD COP?

THEMATIC SUMMARY OF HOW KEY FOOD SYSTEMS ISSUES WERE DISCUSSED

A WWF FOOD REVIEW
DECEMBER 2023
THE KEY THEMES THAT WERE DISCUSSED AND ARE DRIVING ACTION

ACCELERATING IMPLEMENTATION

Amidst the initiatives and pledges, there was clear recognition that what is needed most urgently is action on the ground and in the water. In addition to stakeholders from all parts of the system calling for accelerated implementation, several resources and tools were published to aid the translation of global commitments into national-level action.

These included means to advance NDCs and NAPs. The **COP28 Food, Agriculture and Climate Action Toolkit** launched as part of the Presidency's Food and Agriculture Agenda produced a set of resources, case studies and priority actions for integrating food in NDCs and NAPs. It was prepared by a taskforce (which included WWF, GAFF, Climate Focus, NDC Partnership, FAO, CGIAR and the Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT) convened by the Presidency. WWF and partners also announced **Food Forward NDCs**, a new interactive guidance tool that will support NDC implementation by providing policymakers with practices and measures that enable systemic shifts in food systems which can be included as ambitious targets before 2025. The interactive web-based tool will launch in Feb 2024.

Separately, FAO published it's highly anticipated **Global Roadmap: Achieving SDG2 without breaching the 1.5°C threshold**. The first instalment in a three-part publication, the Roadmap identifies 20 time-bound milestones that must be achieved, although several organisation have called for the actions to deliver these milestones to be strengthened as the Roadmap continues to be developed.

**PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURE**

Between COP27 and COP28 the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted. At this year’s climate meeting we saw much stronger alignment of climate and nature, and an appreciation of food systems transformation as the solution most likely to deliver co-benefits.

The **COP28 Action Agenda on Regenerative Landscapes** initiative led by the COP28 Presidency, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the Boston Consulting Group, and supported by the UN High Level Climate Champions aims to accelerate the transition of large agricultural landscapes to regenerative landscapes, while Regen10, launched at COP26, continues its work to develop a **farmer-centric, outcomes-based framework** that supports the transition to regenerative global food systems. **The COP28 Presidency launched the Partnership on Water-Resilient Food Systems** which addresses the critical interdependencies between soil health, water cycles, and food production, processing, and transportation. Against the backdrop of increasing threats of drought and famine due to climate change, **six new countries joined the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA)** as over 60 countries and organisations came together on the one year anniversary of the Alliance, to design new projects, accelerate knowledge sharing and develop new financial mechanisms. There are ultimately no healthy food systems without healthy freshwater ecosystems so it was good news that 33 countries signed up to **The Freshwater Challenge**, which aims to ensure 300,000 kilometres of degraded rivers and 350 million hectares of degraded wetlands are committed to restoration by 2030.

**SUPPORTING SMALLHOLDERS WITH ADAPTATION**

Numerous financial pledges were made to support smallholders in low- and middle- income countries to boost food security while tackling climate challenges. Building on COP27, hosted in Egypt, there were many which focused on Africa.

The Africa and Middle East SAFE Initiative, **a US$10 billion public-private partnership between countries and Institutions from Africa and the Middle East**, will focus on scaling-up agriculture and food systems for economic development. CGIAR announced **US$890 million of funding** to support smallholder farmers in low- and middle-income countries, reduce emissions from farming, and boost access to nutritious, healthy diets. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced a partnership to support smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Together, they **pledged US$200 million for innovation**, much of it to be delivered to CGIAR. **IFAD’s Africa Rural Climate Adaptation Finance Mechanism (ARCAFIM)** is a new **US$200 million blended financing mechanism** to...
Boost support to small-scale food producers in rural communities in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. CGIAR and the World Food Programme launched the Stability Peace Accelerator, a new partnership that will support food systems innovators in fragile contexts (in Nigeria, Mozambique, Yemen, Jordan) through science-driven entrepreneurship support, and with the support of the African Development Bank (AfDB).

**FOOD LOSS AND WASTE**

As much as 40 percent of the food we produce goes uneaten, accounting for up to 10 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. Aligned with global efforts to tackle the growing food and nutrition insecurity crisis, there was increased effort to reduce food loss and waste.

Reducing Food Loss and Waste – A Roadmap for Philanthropy outlined a path to significant reductions in food loss and waste and GHG emissions, highlighting proven solutions and showcasing seven countries – Brazil, China, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States – that are poised to make remarkable progress on reducing food loss and waste. WWF and ReFED announced the formation of the US Food Waste Pact, a national voluntary agreement enabling pre-competitive collaboration and data-driven action to reach national and international food waste reduction targets, including SDG12.3. Several major retailers have already signed the pact. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) announced the release of US$100 million to support 10 African countries in adopting food loss reduction solutions. The funds, which will be disbursed through AGRA, will be used to enhance African smallholders’ access to technologies, make food loss reduction solutions more accessible and affordable, and support the creation of enabling environments for food system transformation on the continent.

**WHAT WE NEEDED TO HEAR MORE ABOUT AND WHERE ACTION WAS LACKING**

**SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND DIETS**

There is no way to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius without a shift in the foods we eat and the amount of calories consumed. Transitioning to healthier, more sustainable diets is potentially the single biggest action we can take to reduce food-based emissions. But there is still limited appetite to address this opportunity, perhaps because it’s one of the more sensitive topics and relies on highly localised and context-specific solutions.

There were some exceptions, for instance: the integration of health and nutrition with the climate agenda, primarily through the Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN); the School Meals Coalition examining the potential of both policy and procurement changes to school meals programmes to deliver positive benefits to public health and the environment; The Plant-Based Treaty introducing the idea of ‘vegan donut economics’; and UNEP publishing a report into how novel plant-based foods, cultivated meat and fermentation-derived products can help contribute to food security and nature and climate goals. However, the loudest voices are often those promoting dramatic shifts in consumption or production, with discussion on how to achieve step-changes and collective shifts in consumption often lacking. In any case, sustainable consumption and diets needs to become a mainstream topic at future COPs.

**BLUE AND AQUATIC FOODS**

Yet again, blue and aquatic foods were barely on the agenda at COP28. The world’s seas and oceans produce around half of all the oxygen we breathe (thanks to phytoplankton, tiny single-celled ocean plants) and absorb half of all man-made climate-warming carbon dioxide, but overfishing is destabilising these vital ecosystems. At the same time, aquaculture can be part of the solution to providing everyone with healthy and nutritious diets within planetary boundaries. There must be urgent transformation in wild fisheries and overall food production related to seafood to sustain healthy people - we cannot have healthy oceans supporting life on earth, us included, if overfishing is not urgently reined in. While there were commitments to protect and restore oceans, there were precious few food-focused initiatives to more sustainably manage fisheries and scale up sustainable aquaculture production.
CITIES / MULTI-LEVEL ACTION

National-level action is critical to translating global commitments into local action, but it also needs the partnership of sub-national governance and local communities. There are many examples of cities leading the way on building healthy, sustainable and resilient food systems, but the vast majority of announcements focused on country-wide programmes or national collaborations. The Transforming Urban and Rural Food Systems Consortium (TURFS) did launch its strategy on transforming urban and peri-urban food systems but in the broad scheme of things, cities and municipalities aren't as big a part of the picture as needed.

METHANE EMISSIONS FROM FOOD SYSTEMS

Much was made of announcements to cut methane emissions from fossil fuel production, by addressing leakage from drilling and pipelines. But food systems were nearly entirely absent in the methane conversations. Agriculture (mainly ruminants and some from rice production), burning of fields after harvests and rotting food (and other waste) in landfills account for a significant amount of methane emissions. Livestock alone accounts for about 30% of global anthropogenic methane emissions. Six leading global dairy companies did form the Dairy Methane Action Alliance, committing to disclose their methane emissions by mid-2024 and develop action plans by the end of the same year. This is welcome, but if we are to reduce these much more potent emissions (in terms of global warming versus carbon dioxide), food-based methane must be addressed more holistically.
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