




Report: Reflection Exercise on Global Food Governance Reforms

Executive summary

Introduction

In the global context of geopolitical turmoil and serious questions on the destiny of the multilateral system and the global governance of food systems, the Brazilian National Council for Food and Nutritional Security (CONSEA) and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) convened a **Reflection exercise,** bringing together 86 actors from civil society, United Nations (U.N.) Member States, U.N. bodies and academia. Together, these participants shared insights and discussed critical challenges, gaps, needs, opportunities, and proposals related to global food governance. The exercise included two moments: an International Workshop on Global Food Governance Reforms held at the Rio Branco Institute of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Relations on April 29-30, 2026 in Brasilia, and an Informal Exchange on Needs and Opportunities for Global Food Governance held as an online dialogue on May 15, 2026.

The **reflection exercise started with seven questions** linked to 1) fracturing multilateralism; 2) ongoing U.N. reform processes and opportunities to strengthen social participation, democratization, and representativeness; 3) challenges and opportunities to strengthen the U.N. Committee on World Food Security (CFS) as the main U.N. policy coordination platform on food security and nutrition; 4) the role of U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in global food governance; 5) challenges and opportunities to achieve more effective collaboration between the three Rome-Based Agencies (FAO, World Food Program, and International Fund for Agriculture Development); 6) proposals to address, limit, and counter corporate power in global food systems governance; and 7) interlinkages between efforts addressing food system transformation and the global finance and climate justice agendas.

These questions were shared in advance with the participants and helped frame the planning of, and interventions during the Brasilia workshop and the subsequent online dialogue. The exchange of perspectives among participants established a broad picture of gaps and challenges, and a vision of critical elements for a comprehensive response. These are set out in this report and summary, based on a shared understanding that global food governance reform is, at its core, a democratic project.

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Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy

CONSEA Conselho Nacional de Segurança Alimentar e Nutricional

SECRETARIA-GERAL

Key Messages:

The exercise identified **nine critical gaps and challenges:**

1. An increasing number of **wars and conflicts** directly generate hunger and exacerbate food insecurity and malnutrition. In several of these conflicts, food has been used as a weapon or as a means for political and economic pressure, and starvation has been used as a method of warfare.

2. **Corporate concentration** in food systems and corporate power in political decision-making continue to expand inexorably, weakening the position of small-scale food producers, processors, and retailers, and undermining the sovereignty and self-reliance of many communities, countries, and regions.

3. Governance processes involve **insufficient social participation**, based on the principles of autonomy, self-organization and representativeness; they also lack respect for the principle of prior, free and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples.

4. The **United Nations is fragmented,** struggling to overcome siloed approaches and a lack of cooperation within and among institutions. This is exacerbated by the open disregard shown by some of the most powerful Member States for the U.N.'s core principles, agreements and proceedings.

5. There is a **need for enhanced global policy coordination;** mechanisms such as the CFS, which was reformed for precisely the purpose of strengthening global policy coordination for achieving food security, lacks effective support.

6. The **available financial resources are inadequate** to address the acute and structural causes of food insecurity, as unprecedented wealth is concentrated in a few hands without just and effective taxation.

7. There has been an **erosion of normative power** in governance institutions; U.N. credibility is severely undermined when countries are allowed to blatantly violate the U.N. Charter, international law, human rights and international humanitarian law with impunity.

8. There is a **lack of consistent global responses to major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition.** These drivers include: immense wealth inequalities, wars and violent conflicts, climate collapse, biodiversity loss, land degradation, pollution, marginalizing and racist policies, gender discrimination, exploitation, corporate concentration, and other expressions of economic, social and ecological injustices.

9. The **U.N. is threatened** by authoritarian regimes which aim to impose their nationalistic and shortsighted interests against multilateral efforts for peace, development and human rights.

A comprehensive rethinking of global food governance should intend to address the enormous and interlinked gaps and challenges through an interconnected agenda based on an intersectoral approach, the human right to food, and effective social participation.

The exercise identified **12 elements of a comprehensive response:**

1. Efforts to strengthen and reform global food governance need to develop an **intersectoral and inclusive approach**, combined with **effective and meaningful social participation**, to build an **interconnected agenda** with related processes in the areas of finance, corporate accountability and climate justice. For this purpose, a much closer cooperation of Member States and U.N. agencies playing a role in the promotion and protection of the human right to adequate food is critical.

2. **Food is not a weapon; food is a human right.** The use of food as a weapon of war and conflict, as a measure of political and economic pressure, or even the use of starvation as a method of warfare, are clear violations of international law. One conclusion of the reflection process is a call to collectively develop a global campaign against using food as a weapon of war and other conflicts. This campaign would mobilize the public and raise awareness around the human right to adequate food as well as the global responsibility to protect human life and dignity in situations of conflict and war.

3. **Normative foundations must be restored and defended** as effective guidance for global governance. Acting to reverse the erosion of norms requires building new alliances among civil society, academia, and Member States who are committed to defending the basic values of the United Nations while joining hands in protecting, reforming, democratizing, and strengthening the U.N. as an institution. The consistent protection and promotion of the right to food can be a convening point for collaboration across the U.N.

4. **Public policies must be created with social participation**. Social participation is crucial to designing public policies that are responsive to the real needs, rights, and potentials of the concerned communities and societies. Social participation can inform public policy-making and monitor its implementation on all levels of food governance (local, national, regional, and global) through institutionalized social participation mechanisms that respect the autonomy, self-organization, and representativeness of civil society. Democratizing the process of policy formulation gives new direction to food system transformation. Decision-making spaces from local to global should empower social movements to participate by elevating their voices and protecting those spaces from asymmetries of power in food systems.

5. **Public policies must be protected against corporate power.** It is essential to limit and regulate corporate power in order to ensure that public interest prevails in public institutions. Key initiatives to address corporate power in governance include the introduction of robust safeguards against conflicts of interest, as well as transparency rules in national and international institutions. The ongoing negotiations on the U.N. Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights are of high relevance for the food sector. Experts have proposed to develop a U.N.-wide Corporate Accountability Framework. The UNDP Food and Power Initiative addresses corporate concentration and its relation to local, national, and global governance.

6. **Financial structures must be reformed to eliminate funding gaps.** Countries in the Global South are more vulnerable to economic crises, conflicts, wars, and the impacts of climate emergencies. Three ongoing processes at the United Nations are advancing to increase fiscal space: strengthening the economic justice agenda in the context of Financing for Development (FfD); advancing the negotiations on the U.N. Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation (UNFCITC); and establishing a Framework Convention on Sovereign Debt at the U.N. to enable countries in the Global South to renegotiate their debts under fairer terms.

7. **Specific steps for FAO:** FAO's work should be guided by the human right to adequate food. The mandate given by the FAO Conference 2025 to mainstream the right to food throughout the organization's program of work needs to be implemented. FAO should prioritize a systemic approach to food security through the just transition of food systems, emphasizing agroecological transformation,

support for small-scale food producers, agrarian reform, and the promotion of gender equity, women's rights, racial equity, and labor rights. Specific attention must be paid to the livelihoods, rights, and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and other ethnically minoritized populations, including peasants and artisanal fisherfolks. FAO should establish mechanisms for effective and meaningful social participation of the diversity of these constituencies.

8. **Specific steps for CFS:** Member States should, as a matter of high priority, concert collective efforts to strengthen CFS as the U.N. global policy coordination platform on food security and nutrition, using its unique convening power and legitimacy as the foremost inclusive intergovernmental and international platform to advance the progressive realization of the right to food. The Rome-Based Agencies (RBAs) should provide formalized and reliable support to CFS. They should also integrate the promotion, use, and application of CFS policy guidance instruments into their regular programmatic and country work. The World Food Day, October 16, should again become a regular part of the CFS Plenary week, as a clear sign of support of FAO for CFS.

9. **Specific steps to connect Rome-Geneva agency goals:** The protection and promotion of the right to food is the key connection between the RBAs, CFS and the Geneva-based Human Rights System. The collaboration of the World Health Organization (WHO) with the CFS and the RBAs offers many possibilities to strengthen the human rights perspective, given the intrinsic link between the right to food and the right to health.

10. **Specific steps to connect food system goals with Rio Conventions:** The promotion of agro-ecological transitions rooted in food sovereignty principles is the main common transformational proposal that connects the global food conversation with the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, U.N. CBD, UNCCD). Other common threads dealt with as a priority themes in all four U.N. spaces have been gender equality, regulating the corporate sector, the realization of the right to food, and effective and meaningful social participation.

11. **Specific Steps to enhance the Rome-Geneva-New York U.N. agency collaboration:** In the context of the UN80 Reform initiative, connections and cooperation between Rome, Geneva, and New York on issues related to food security and the right to food need to be improved. This includes particularly the cooperation of the CFS and RBAs with the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the U.N. General Assembly, the U.N. Security Council, and the U.N. Secretary General.

12. **Human Rights and Social Participation in the Post-SDG process:** The right to food is fundamental for human life and dignity, and should therefore be considered as a core element of the post-Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) process, to signal a long-term political commitment on the global level, with effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms included. At the same time, meaningful and effective social participation mechanisms should be applied to the preparations of the post-SDG process, starting with the initial deliberations at the SDG Summit in September 2027.

The identified challenges and gaps point to the need for a **comprehensive and intersectoral approach** that ensures effective social participation and connects the different spaces and levels of food governance, from local to global. The 12 elements listed as part of a comprehensive response are neither complete nor exhaustive, but critical to be considered. The **elements show the potential of an interconnected agenda to restore and improve global food governance.** They illustrate how the **right to food** can serve as a **convening cornerstone for collaboration** across the U.N., and from the territorial to the global level.

Read the full report online at
https://www.iatp.org/report-global-food-governance-reform