

FERTILE GROUND

Tools for imagining a shared food future



LONG
FOOD
PROJECT

PARTICIPANTS

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INTRODUCTION

The world is at a critical moment. The climate crisis is accelerating, with ecosystems reaching irreversible tipping points, and corporations are tightening their grip over every aspect of the industrial food system, including food production, processing, manufacturing, distribution, retail, delivery, and consumption, while food insecurity continues to rise.

Meanwhile, major global shocks continue to devastate food systems. Seven years into the global promise to end hunger by 2030, the situation is instead only getting worse. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimates that in 2020 alone, 924 million people were severely food insecure – a rise in one (pandemic) year that was larger than the previous five years combined.¹ In the same year, approximately 1 in 3 people – 2.37 billion – did not have regular access to adequate food.² The mismanagement and consolidation of resources among a few corporations, and the fragility of globalised supply chains – as evidenced during the pandemic – continue to push millions more to the brink of hunger and have put an estimated one-third of food and farming livelihoods at risk.³ Compounding this are record-breaking global food prices and a debt crisis. All of this is taking place in the context of non-stop environmental emergencies and extreme levels of inequality.

As our global supply chain crumbles underneath the weight of its inability to deliver food and justice, we currently find ourselves at a crossroads.

1 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. (2022). “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”.

2 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation. (2022). “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World”.

3 IPES Food and ETC Group. (2021). “A long food movement, transforming food systems by 2045”.

Two pathways diverge before us.

The first is the “Agribusiness as Usual” pathway – where the roadmap is determined by profit, not people. Where agribusiness decides not only what's on the table, but who occupies it, and who doesn't. In this pathway, corporations invest all their resources and exert all their influence to realise a future characterised by a fully-automated food chain, where all nature is subject to privatisation, commodification, and genetic modification. Under the guise of “climate-smart” and “nature-based” solutions, agribusiness aims to consolidate even more resources, and further reinforce its grip over food systems. They have clear and calculated blueprints drawn out, targets set, and pockets deep enough to enforce their vision of a future of farming without farmers. To them, we the people are simply passive recipients/beneficiaries of their grand plan.

However, there is another way.

One where we reclaim our collective power to re-root our food systems in diversity, agroecology, and human rights. This pathway draws inspiration from what civil society organisations have already been doing remarkably well for decades. It helps us imagine a future where we tap into our collective power to shape food systems that nourish our communities and the living environment. Where we combine our knowledge and our might by forging deeper, wider, and more effective collaborations than ever before, to collectively lead food systems transformation in the next 25 years.

This pathway serves both as an invitation and a call to join hands, gently reminding us that no system, no matter how seemingly big or powerful, can withstand the force of our collective power.

HOW TO USE THESE TOOLS

PURPOSE

We are hoping that these tools serve as a conversation starter – because only through the radical act of dialogue can we begin to strengthen our roots and build a shared vision for the future we want.

We have designed these tools to help facilitate critical reflection. Whether it's guided by a Community Weaver, or organised in a collective manner is up to you.

PREPARING FOR WORKSHOP

We recommend:

- These workshops are done collectively and in order
- Two or more Community Weavers are selected to guide each workshop
- The Community Weavers selected familiarise themselves with the contents of these tools beforehand and facilitate the sessions in a manner that holds space for all participants to reflect and share their insights
- We embrace the unknown, the in-between, and the uncomfortable
- We have fun and not stress ourselves out

WORKSHOP DESIGN

We have divided the perspectives offered in these tools into three interdependent workshops of around 2 hours each, that can be conducted both online, as well as in-person. We recommend that you honour the space between these conversations as much as the conversations themselves. Give yourselves time to breathe and think, and plan these workshops over a span of days rather than hours.

The first workshop will focus on “Looking Back”, where we learn from the past, which will become our fertile ground for navigating the present.

The second will focus on “Looking Ahead”, where we apply our hindsight from the past to enhance our understanding of the present, to anticipate and collaboratively respond to challenges in the future.

And the third and final workshop is centred around “Preparation as Praxis”, where we root ourselves in a constant process of critical reflection, long-term strategic thinking, and collaboration, to actualise the world we want.

A “PREDICTABLE SURPRISES” PERSPECTIVE



Most of the gravest disruptions in our food systems, such as the accelerating loss of global soil fertility, political upheavals, massive storms or floods, pandemics, economic bubbles, supply system failures, technological disasters, crop failures, or mass extinctions of species, were predicted by civil society actors far in advance. We refer to these events as “Predictable Surprises”, as they arise from foreseeable patterns and come with relatively predictable risks.

However, amidst increasing climate and food security shocks, the diversion of funding in favour of agribusiness, and the growing hostility from governments turning more and more authoritarian, many movements today are forced to adopt a more reactive approach, as they contend with constraints regarding time, resources, and capacity. Using a long-term strategic lens and collaborating deeply between movements is crucial for civil society to effectively anticipate and respond to future disruptions and lead food systems transformation.

The Predictable Surprises perspective offers a possible framework for movements to collaborate in developing response systems that can improve their ability to recognise and collectively prepare for predictable and potentially disruptive events.

This set of tools will collectively serve as a practical resource to help movements use the Predictable Surprises framework to collectively engage in the process of reflection and action and embed these practices in their day-to-day operations, as well as their long-term planning. This process critically involves learning from disruptive events in the past, applying hindsight of the past to see what disruptive events may be on the horizon, and distilling these lessons to develop response systems to prepare for Predictable Surprises in the future.

WORKSHOP 01

LOOKING BACK: OUR PAST IS OUR FERTILE GROUND



EXERCISE 01

ICE BREAKER

15 MINUTES
GROUP ACTIVITY

The Community Weavers will start the session with an ice-breaking activity.

EXERCISE 02

WHAT THE PAST CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE FUTURE

25 MINUTES
CONTEXT SETTING



The Community Weavers will set the context of the exercise and introduce the Predictable Surprises Perspective. They will also introduce essential terminology including Predictable Surprises, Disruptions, Early Warning Signals, and Vulnerabilities, as indicated in the Glossary List.

Weavers will note participants' responses on a physical or digital board.

QUESTION 01

**WHAT EVENTS IN THE PAST HAVE DISRUPTED
THE FOOD SYSTEMS IN YOUR REGION?**

QUESTION 02

**COLLECTIVELY DECIDE TO FOCUS ON A SINGLE
DISRUPTIVE EVENT FOR THE PURPOSE OF
THIS EXERCISE**

QUESTION 03

HOW HAS THIS EVENT IMPACTED:

A) YOUR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM?

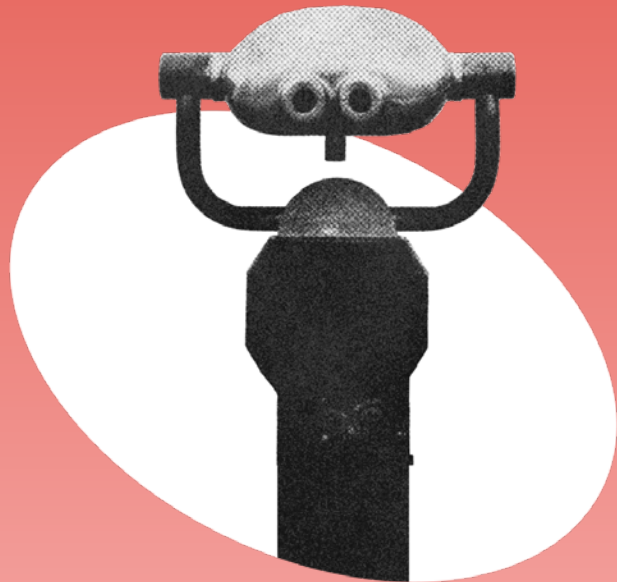
**B) YOUR ORGANISATION'S ACTIVITIES
IN YOUR LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM?**

EXERCISE 03

READING SIGNALS AND IDENTIFYING ALLIES

45 MINUTES

GROUP DISCUSSION



Community Weavers will break the participants into random groups. Each group self-assigns a note taker, a timekeeper, and a synthesiser. The timekeepers should ensure that the group distributes the time evenly so they can discuss all the questions.

QUESTION 01

WHAT WERE THE EARLY WARNING SIGNALS OR PATTERNS THAT INDICATED THAT THE FOOD SYSTEM WAS VULNERABLE TO THIS SORT OF DISRUPTION?

QUESTION 02

HOW AWARE WAS YOUR ORGANISATION OF THE EARLY WARNING SIGNALS OR PATTERNS IN FOOD SYSTEMS THAT LED TO THE DISRUPTION?

Were these signals formally discussed within the organisation and incorporated into your programmatic strategy?

Can you list a few reasons/constraints that helped/prevented your organisation from being prepared?

QUESTION 03

WHAT TYPES OF COLLABORATIONS, AT THE LOCAL, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS, COULD HAVE ENABLED YOUR ORGANISATION TO BETTER PREPARE FOR, AND RESPOND TO, THE DISRUPTION?

What are some other sectors that were closely tied to the issue that would be good to collaborate with?

EXERCISE 04

LESSONS FROM THE PAST: PREPARING THROUGH COLLABORATION

35 MINUTES
REFLECTION



All groups reconvene. The synthesiser selected by each group will share their discussions and learnings with other groups.

After each group presents, there will be a five-minute reflection window where anyone is free to ask questions or add to the discussion.

After all the groups have finished presenting, the Community Weavers will open up a discussion on the common patterns that emerged between all the groups, and pose these two questions:

QUESTION 01

HOW IS LEARNING FROM OUR PAST HELPFUL?

QUESTION 02

HOW CAN COLLABORATIONS HELP IN PREPARING FOR DISRUPTIONS?

WORKSHOP 02

LOOKING AHEAD: APPLYING HINDSIGHT



EXERCISE 01

ICE BREAKER

15 MINUTES
GROUP ACTIVITY

The Community Weavers will start the session with an ice-breaking activity.

EXERCISE 02

HORIZON SCANNING

25 MINUTES

CONTEXT SETTING



The Community Weavers will set the context of the exercise and introduce the Predictable Surprises Perspective and *Applied Hindsight*.

QUESTION 01

WHAT ARE SOME EARLY WARNING SIGNALS THAT ARE VISIBLE IN OUR FOOD SYSTEMS THAT COULD LEAD TO DISRUPTIVE EVENTS IN THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS?

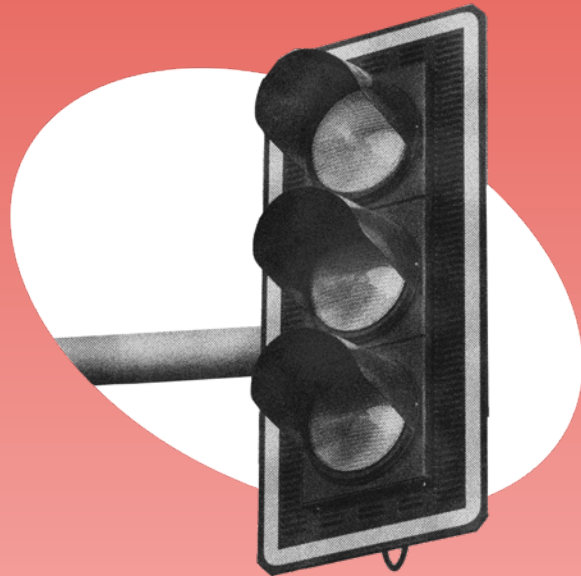
What could the disruptions themselves look like?

EXERCISE 03

APPLIED HINDSIGHT

45 MINUTES

GROUP DISCUSSION



The Community Weavers will break up the participants into random groups. Each group self-assigns a note taker, a timekeeper, and a synthesiser. The timekeepers should ensure that the group distributes the time evenly so they can discuss all the questions.

Each group will critically reflect on how to prepare and respond to the Early Warning Signals identified in Exercise 01.

QUESTION 01

WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND RIGHTS-HOLDERS WHO HAVE THE POWER TO INFLUENCE YOUR FOOD SYSTEM?

Place a special emphasis on naming the key civil society actors in your organisation's ecosystem.

The note-takers will map out all the stakeholders either using or adapting the template provided by the Community Weavers.

Think about:

a. Stakeholders at local and national levels

For example, municipal and state governments, international authorities, umbrella organisations etc.

b. Stakeholders in other sectors that are susceptible to the disruption

For example, transportation, healthcare, food processing and manufacturing, and financial markets – sectors where you're likely to find allies who are also likely to be impacted by the disruption.

c. Allied rights-holders and popular movements that are operating in the same landscape of struggle

For instance, social justice, labour justice, gender equity, climate justice, etc. These aren't necessarily movements directly fighting for your cause, but you share similar values and visions for the future.

QUESTION 02

WHAT ARE SOME MEASURES THAT WE AS CIVIL SOCIETY CAN COLLECTIVELY TAKE TO PREVENT/RESPOND TO THESE EARLY WARNING SIGNALS MORE EFFECTIVELY?

QUESTION 03

WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES OF YOUR ORGANISATION THAT COULD BE LEVERAGED TO DEVELOP RESPONSE SYSTEMS?

QUESTION 04

WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND RIGHTS-HOLDERS YOU WOULD NEED TO COLLABORATE WITH TO DEVELOP THESE RESPONSE SYSTEMS?



EXERCISE 04

FROM HINDSIGHT TO FORESIGHT: PREPARING COLLECTIVELY

30 MINUTES

GROUP REFLECTION



All groups reconvene. The synthesiser selected by each group will share their discussions and learnings with each other.

After each group presents, there will be a five-minute reflection window where anyone is free to ask questions or add to the discussion.

QUESTION 01

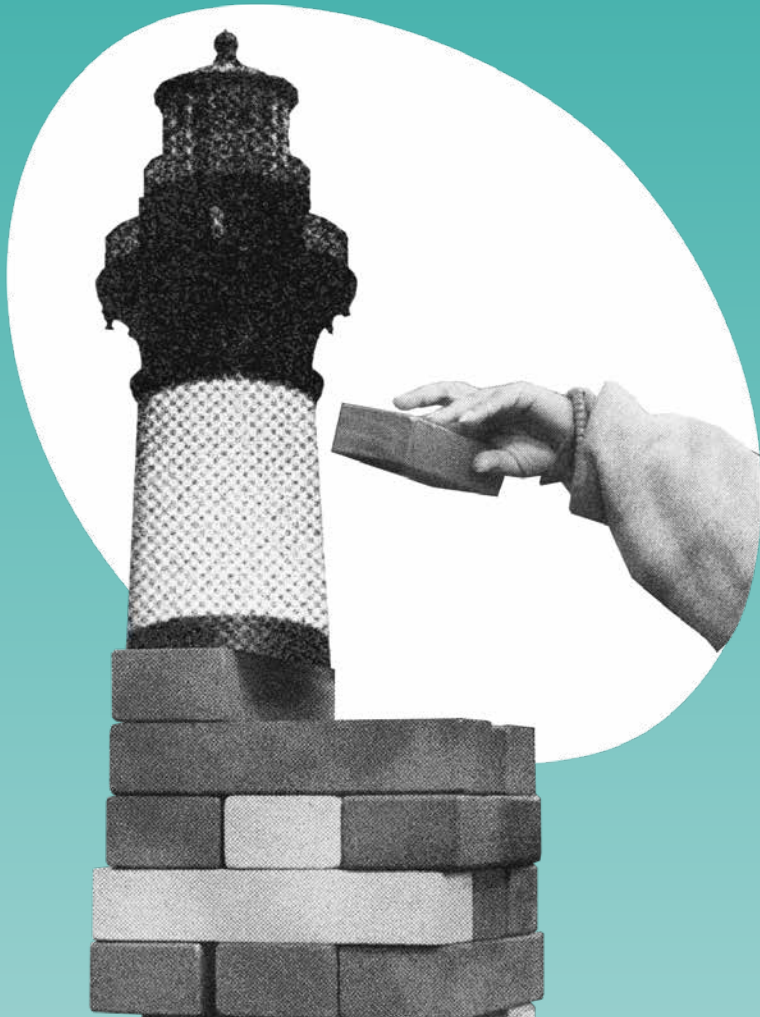
**HOW CAN THINKING LONG-TERM HELP US
BETTER PREPARE FOR DISRUPTIONS?**

QUESTION 02

**HOW CAN COLLABORATIONS HELP SECURE
A MORE WELL-PLANNED FUTURE FOR CIVIL
SOCIETY?**

WORKSHOP 03

PREPARATION AS PRAXIS: PREPARING WHILE IN ACTION



EXERCISE 01

ICE BREAKER

15 MINUTES
GROUP ACTIVITY

The Community Weavers will start the session with an ice-breaking activity.

EXERCISE 02

MAP OF POSSIBILITIES

30 MINUTES

CONTEXT SETTING



The Community Weavers will set the context of the exercise and introduce the Predictable Surprises Perspective. They will give a brief recap on the first workshop on “Looking Back”, and the second workshop on “Looking Ahead”, and re-introduce essential terminology including Predictable Surprises, Disruptions, Early Warning Signals, and Vulnerabilities, as indicated in the Glossary List.

The Weavers will bring back the concept of Applied Hindsight and how it is important to continuously engage in the process of reflecting on the past and applying a long-term strategic lens in the present, to prepare for the future.

The Weavers will note the participants' responses on a digital or physical board.

QUESTION 01

WHAT ARE EARLY WARNING SIGNALS VISIBLE IN THE FOOD SYSTEM?

QUESTION 02

WHAT ARE MEASURES THAT CIVIL SOCIETY CAN TAKE TO PREVENT/RESPOND TO THESE EARLY WARNING SIGNALS MORE EFFECTIVELY?

QUESTION 03

WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND RIGHTS HOLDERS WE WOULD NEED TO COLLABORATE WITH TO DEVELOP EARLY RESPONSE SYSTEMS?

EXERCISE 03

COLLABORATION AS ACTION

45 MINUTES

GROUP DISCUSSION



The Community Weavers will break the participants into small random groups. Each group self-assigns a note-taker, a timekeeper, and a synthesiser. The timekeepers should ensure that the group distributes the time evenly so they can discuss all the questions.

QUESTION 01

WHICH STAKEHOLDERS CAN WE WORK WITH, TO CO-STRATEGISE AND CO-DEVELOP RESPONSE SYSTEMS?

What are each stakeholder's respective roles in the larger movement?

Don't limit your responses to the collaborations and partnerships the organisation already has in place, but examine the larger stakeholder map and see what sorts of new relationships would help develop response systems.

QUESTION 02

WHAT STEPS DO WE NEED TO TAKE TO DEEPEN THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OUR ORGANISATION AND THE STAKEHOLDERS WE'VE IDENTIFIED IN QUESTION 1?

QUESTION 03

WHAT RESOURCES DO WE NEED INTERNALLY AS AN ORGANISATION, IN ORDER TO COLLABORATE WITH THOSE STAKEHOLDERS AND RIGHTS HOLDERS TO DEVELOP RESPONSE SYSTEMS?

Don't limit your inputs to the current resource constraints of the organisation, but be imaginative about what sorts of resources could help the organisation best address the Early Warning Signals in food systems.

EXERCISE 04

BREAKING SILOS, EMBRACING COLLABORATION

30 MINUTES

GROUP REFLECTION



All groups reconvene. The synthesiser selected by each group will share their discussions and learnings with other groups.

After each group presents, there will be a five-minute reflection window where anyone is free to ask questions or add to the discussion.

QUESTION 01

HOW DO WE EMBED THE TIME AND SPACE FOR STRATEGIC LONG-TERM THINKING INTO OUR WORK ON A DEEPER LEVEL?

And how do we avoid losing sight of long-term goals while tackling daily difficulties?

QUESTION 02

WHY IS IT THAT CORPORATIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ARE INCREASINGLY PUSHING CIVIL SOCIETY INTO SILOS AND MAKING US UNABLE TO COLLABORATE AND STRATEGISE FOR OUR FUTURES?

How do we resist the forces that wish to divide us?

GLOSSARY LIST

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil Society encompasses both formally and informally organised networks of non-state actors, such as social movements, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), small-scale producers, trade unions, and community-based organisations. These diverse entities, along with their allies, collaborate towards the common goal of creating food systems that prioritise the public good and are firmly rooted in human rights while respecting the limitations of our planet's boundaries. The term "food movements" is often used interchangeably with "civil society" to emphasise their collective advocacy for positive change in food systems.

PREDICTABLE SURPRISES

Predictable Surprises are sudden and extraordinarily disruptive events that seem to come out of nowhere with the potential to change the fundamental dynamics of societies, whether locally, regionally, or globally. Such world-changing events seem to catch everyone by surprise, even though later analysis shows that we already understood and foresaw their roots and patterns. Our perspective for examining these "predictable surprises" offers the opportunity to better anticipate and strategise for future disruptions.

DISRUPTION

Disruption is the potential that events, coming seemingly out of nowhere, have to change the fundamental dynamics of societies, locally, regionally, or globally. Examples include political upheaval, massive storms or floods, pandemics, economic bubbles, supply system failures, technological disasters, and crop failures.

EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

Early Warning Signals in food systems are indications of potential issues or vulnerabilities that could cause a disruption in the future. Identifying these signals can help civil society, policymakers, governments, and organisations develop responses to prevent future food crises. History provides many examples of early warnings: the rise of the far-right in politics, glyphosate poisoning of living systems, the ecocide caused by herbicide-resistant GMOs, zoonotic disease risk from intensive farming and the scaling up of corporate land grabs. In each case, civil society raised the issue but couldn't find an audience soon enough (often including civil society itself).

RESPONSE SYSTEMS

Response Systems, in the context of Predictable Surprises, refer to interconnected actions and plans developed by movements, civil society, institutions, and governments to address various challenges and crises in food systems. They are designed to respond to urgent issues and protect people while ensuring the long-term sustainability of food systems. Examples include: food emergency agreements that suspend trade rules in times of crisis, the establishment of platforms for the social assessment of agricultural technologies, as well as public policies that mandate agroecology, food sovereignty, and territorial markets. These actions are supported by food policy councils, deliberative dialogues, and active participation from social movements, Indigenous peoples, and a wide range of actors apart from food movements.

Effective response systems “think” long-term, encompassing multiple objectives and actions. They build on previous momentum (acknowledging past achievements of civil society), and incorporate cultural factors, from mutual aid networks to relocalised food provisioning. These systems also address historical legacies like slavery, colonisation, and structural racism in food systems.

INDUSTRIAL FOOD CHAIN

The Industrial Food Chain is a linear sequence from production to consumption. It begins with crop and livestock genomics, followed by inputs like pesticides and fertilisers, and ends with wholesaling, retailing, and delivery. It operates within the market economy, involving financial, political, and regulatory elements. Despite using 75 percent of agricultural land, using 90 percent of the available fossil fuel energy, and 80 percent of water, it feeds less than 30 percent of the world's population.

APPLIED HINDSIGHT

Applied Hindsight refers to the process of examining past events and using that knowledge to make informed decisions or judgments in the present, in order to prepare for the future. It goes beyond simply looking back at what happened; it is a proactive and intentional process of asking critical questions, reflecting on past events, decisions, and outcomes to understand what worked well and what could be improved, and taking actionable steps to respond better in the future. Drawing from past experiences and knowledge not only helps us avoid repeating the same mistakes, but also enhances our understanding of the present and allows us to anticipate and address potential future disruptions in food systems.

PEASANT

According to La Vía Campesina, “A peasant is a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products. Peasants work the land themselves, relying above all on family labour and other small-scale forms of organising labour. Peasants are traditionally embedded in their local communities and they take care of local landscapes and agro-ecological systems. The term peasant can apply to any person engaged in agriculture, cattle-raising, pastoralism, handicrafts related to agriculture, or a related occupation in rural areas. This includes Indigenous Peoples working on the land”.

FOOD SYSTEM

Food Systems encompass the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal, and natural environments in which they are embedded. Food systems are composed of sub-systems (e.g. farming system, waste management system, input supply system, etc.) and interacts with other key systems (e.g. energy system, trade system, health system). A sustainable food system is one that delivers healthy and culturally appropriate food for all in such a way that the economic, social, and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised.

PEASANT FOOD WEB

The Peasant Food Web comprises intricate webs of over 2.5 billion small-scale farmers, peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and Indigenous peoples. Today, these communities operate on small patches of just 25 percent of the world's agricultural land, to feed 70 percent of its population. The myriad food systems that make up the food web, although diverse and unique to their respective local cultures and environments, coexist with each other in an imperfect synchrony, to sustain themselves, feed the majority of us, and preserve the world's biodiversity.

Peasants play a crucial role in providing food to over 70% of the global population, doing so with significantly fewer resources, such as land, water, and fossil fuels, compared to the industrialised food system. With their wealth of knowledge, innovative spirit, and strong networks, peasants are well-equipped to address climate change. They possess the operational capacity and proximity to effectively respond to the needs of the hungry and malnourished.

COLLABORATION PLAN 1/2

EARLY WARNING SIGNALS	RESPONSIVE MEASURES	KEY STAKEHOLDERS

STAKEHOLDER ROLES	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP PLAN	RESOURCES REQUIRED

COLLABORATION PLAN 2/2

STAKEHOLDER ROLES	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP PLAN	RESOURCES REQUIRED

COLLABORATION PLAN

EARLY WARNING SIGNALS	RESPONSIVE MEASURES	KEY STAKEHOLDERS

STAKEHOLDER ROLES	STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP PLAN	RESOURCES REQUIRED

SOCIAL ECOLOGY MAP

STAKEHOLDERS
AT LOCAL LEVEL

STAKEHOLDERS
AT NATIONAL LEVEL

STAKEHOLDERS
IN OTHER SECTORS

ALLIED RIGHTS-HOLDER &
MOVEMENTS



