



## Statement of the CSOs – Nyéléni Europe and Central Asia Food Sovereignty Network

### **ERC/24/4 Rev.1 FAO's response to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia**

We appreciate the paper on FAO's responses to the multiple crises in Europe and Central Asia, and the important work done by FAO in our communities. Our region has indeed suffered severe multiple crises and economic shocks, from Covid to war, earthquakes, severe floods and droughts. Smallholders and civil society organisations have cooperated with FAO teams and country offices in various countries affected and we commit to further cooperate in actions on the ground, building up on the experience accumulated in the past years.

One of the root causes of the shocks that affected food, energy and finance systems and increased cost of living for the most vulnerable is the fact that the **local economy** is not a priority for the governments from our region. Local economy is the most resistant to crises and it distributes the wealth in rural areas in a way that international trade is not equipped to do. The key actors who build the local economy are smallholders. They are the ones who know the territory and their communities, they have the capacity to respond to crises fast and efficiently, providing access to healthy and nutritious food, agroecologically produced. Short food chains use cost and energy effective means, are reliable and resilient. We would like to offer a series of examples of good practices developed by smallholders and civil society organisations:

- Local and territorial markets, which - on one hand - are the main source of fresh, nutritious and culturally appropriate food for vulnerable consumers in less developed countries and - on the other hand - represent the main form of access to market for smallholders, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia;
- Public procurement schemes based on short food chains, involving smallholders and agroecological products, for schools, social canteens, hospitals and other public catering services;
- Food social security schemes - which are local food initiatives destined to economically disadvantaged groups; pilot projects are currently taking place in Belgium and France;
- Community supported agriculture schemes, are becoming more and more popular in our region;
- Local solidarity economy initiatives;

Local economy needs to be prioritised by member states and FAO and taken into consideration in any plan of action for response to the multiple crises at regional and national levels. Not in a way that brings back isolationist policies, but in a way that builds solidary and resilient societies and distributes wealth in rural areas, recognising the immense contribution of smallholders to food security. States should implement diverse instruments for market regulation, including using subsidies to manage supply. Subsidies must be oriented to prioritise the agroecological and sustainable transition of farms. *In that sense, civil society is respectfully asking FAO and the member states to include in the action box and in the final report, a point dedicated to: strengthen local and territorial markets, as well as other local economy initiatives, with the participation of smallholders.*

The second missing element from the document is the **climate crisis**. Although it is mentioned in some paragraphs, it is largely overlooked. When we speak about multiple crises, the climate crisis needs to be a priority. Rising temperatures, natural disasters, extreme weather events, like floods and droughts, soil erosion, heavy pollution and contamination of water, soil and air, mining and extractive industries have intensified and aggravated. Military aggressions destroying nature are a catalyst for climate change. The climate cost of the war can no longer be ignored. The destruction of the



Kakhovka dam in Ukraine by the Russian army, is a tragic example in that sense. The effects of climate change have accelerated the competition for resources such as land, water and food, fueling socioeconomic tensions and inequalities. The climate crisis is a risk multiplier that makes the other crisis worse. On top of everything, the unsustainable use of water and water pollution is extremely concerning. 60% of rivers, lakes, wetlands in Europe are in bad ecological status. The recent decision of EU countries to drop the ambitious goal of pesticide reduction will cause more contamination of water with toxic substances. In Central Asia, we are dealing with an acute lack of water and more frequent and severe floods and draughts. Agriculture consumes a very large part of available water resources, which is justifiable because of the need to produce food. However, a significant part of current agricultural water use should be questioned and this is linked to industrial farming. The distribution of water use in Europe and Central Asia remains unfair, with large companies taking too much of this resource while small scale farmers, fisherfolks, Indigenous People and local communities are deprived of it. Small-scale fisheries are particularly affected by water scarcity and pollution, with detrimental effects on the fisherfolk communities which rely on them for their livelihoods. The governments from our region made a priority from large infrastructure projects for irrigation, sometimes proposing risky and unsustainable use of water projects. Environmentally friendly and sustainable use of natural resources solutions are being developed by smallholders on the ground. We call FAO and member states to support the shift to diversified agricultural production models, because diversified models require less water, and create more resilient agroecosystems and livelihoods.

We call member states to develop water policies limiting the modifications of rivers as much as possible and restoring and preserving wetlands, and native forests as these play a crucial role in microclimate regulation. Agroecological approach to land planning can help preserve water and humidity in ecosystems on one hand, and reduce farms' vulnerability to severe weather events, and climate change in general.

*In conclusion, civil society is asking FAO and the member states to include in the action box of the background document and in the final report a point dedicated to: promoting and up-scaling agroecology as a solution for the climate crisis, with the participation of smallholders.*