POSITION PAPER ON
G20 AND AGRICULTURE UNDER INDIAN
PRESIDENCY: STOCK-TAKING OF
INITIATIVES


This position paper is a part of working group papers written for We20- A Peoples' Summit, organised in Delhi in the run-up to the G20 Leaders' Summit. The topics for the position papers are agriculture, climate crisis, just energy transition, global economic governance, international trade and development, banking and finance, labour and employment, shrinking democratic spaces (institutions, press freedom, dissent), digitalisation and surveillance: privacy, data rights and accessibility, rising inequality, social protection and welfare, privatisation of public services, gender, health, youth, education, disability rights, debt, inclusive growth, public transport.
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Introduction

The biggest threat that a large section of the world population is facing today is food insecurity. The cumulative impact of increasing demand and stagnant or declining investment in agriculture has dramatically increased the world food prices during the last couple of years. Scientists are raising alarms about the risk of simultaneous crop failures occurring in multiple regions across the globe, a catastrophe that poses an underestimated threat to the global food supply. Concurrent crop failures in major crop producing regions constitute a systemic risk as associated spikes in food prices can lead to conflict and under nutrition in countries that rely on imports. Volker Turk, UN human rights chief, warned of a truly terrifying future of hunger and suffering as climate change-driven extremes hit crops, livestock and crucial ecosystems.

The farce of stock-taking

While the G20 group has got all the major surplus food producing countries, the stock-taking exercise did not choose to address this challenge in a systematic way. At the 15-17 June Agriculture Working Group (AWG) meeting the presentation of Shri Tomar, India’s Minister for Agriculture was more about painting a rosy picture. He talked of how India is very prosperous and powerful in the agriculture sector and shares its knowledge and experience in the global interest of the agriculture sector, for which we will be ready in the future as well. Effective policies have been implemented in the agriculture sector, pioneering programs have been implemented, practical and sustainable solutions have been implemented for our food systems.

As per the data presented to the Indian parliament, seven million agricultural households permanently left agriculture between 2012 and 2019. Rural youth and agricultural labourers are reported to have committed suicides under the current dispensation. The lack of employment opportunities and income has resulted in an unprecedented reduction in per capita availability of food grains for the rural poor. The agricultural policy reform of this government is favourable to big business, which the farmers’ movement is completely opposed to. Since as large as three quarters of the population are below the poverty line they require their minimum food entitlement and need food ration for mere survival.

Call for Action on Food Security and Nutrition adopted at the G20 Agriculture related initiatives exercise of stock-taking in the meeting of 15-17 June has little to offer to the vulnerable experiencing hunger, starvation and malnutrition. It only focused with concern on excessive price volatility, high prices. While in the context of disruptions being experienced due to war in Ukraine it was vocal, but it chose to ignore the systemic sources of the crisis of the global agro-food system. Acuteness and severity of the global agro-food system crisis precedes the Ukraine war. No concrete proposal was placed by the Government of India to the AWG meeting.
The missed opportunity

Neither did the Minister talk at the AWG meeting of renegotiating the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) that has a systemic bias towards agribusiness driven agriculture and can prevent the Government of India from offering minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce to the farmers, nor did he ask the US and EU to review their obstructive stance on the issue of the permanent peace clause required for the security of public food stocks needed to maintain public distribution system (PDS).

Call for Action focused on the promotion of nature based solutions proposed by agribusiness to the UN Food Summit, which the movements have already rejected due to their agribusiness friendliness. Call for Action focused on the contributions of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) initiative and the Group on Earth Observations Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM). Call for action affirmed again the commitment of G20 to provide support and strengthen the data collection process through the AMIS and GEOGLAM for greater transparency to avoid the negative impact of food price volatility.

G20's corporate bias will persist

There was not even an attempt to transform the character of the activities being undertaken as part of the AMIS and GEOGLAM initiatives. The AMIS and GEOGLAM reports have a corporate bias written into the forecasts. The initiatives are restricted to providing data only on major crops. These G20 initiatives do not monitor the quantity and quality of diversity of food crops and livestock available for meeting food security needs. Call for action emphasized the need of incentivising farmers in line with WTO obligations to enhance environmental and economic outcomes.

The WTO AoA has been a key barrier to realizing the right to food. The existing rules need to change, but it is unlikely that WTO members can overhaul the AoA to meet long standing demands of equity. The AoA needs to be wound down. Governments should be free to negotiate new international food agreements based on principles of dignity, right to food, self-sufficiency, solidarity, recognition of limits of growth, transformation of the economy and decent work. The WTO AoA based policy paradigm is ill suited for India and the developing world; it was crafted in favour of temperate zones, capital intensive, corporate agribusiness driven, export oriented, peasant insensitive and mass livelihood threatening agriculture pathways. India should have made the case for a renewed Global System of Trade Preferences (GSTP) treaty among developing countries that is consistent with the vision of south-south cooperation and collective self-reliance in the case of agriculture.

Although the G-20 group within the WTO has a historic responsibility for restoring this vision and making it operative, but the call for Action merely talked of how the WTO at its core is needed in order to enhance market predictability, increase business confidence, and allow agri-food trade to flow to contribute to food security and nutrition. Call for Action prioritized reduction in food loss and waste through finance and market linkages. The syndrome of corporate agriculture continues to govern policymaking. The policymaking community knows that food loss and waste is an outcome
of the long agri-value chains associated with the pathway of corporate agriculture being protected by the advanced capitalist countries through the WTO’s AoA. Call for Action chose to appreciate the work done by the Technical Platform on Measurement and Reduction of Food Loss and Waste.

Reject the call for action adopted on agriculture at G20

Call for Action supported multistakeholder dialogue on agriculture wherein the big business is able to exercise undue influence shall be rejected. The power of big business is the key obstacle in the path formation for sustainable agriculture because the smallholder farmers and small and medium enterprises are held back only by the big business from shifting to sustainable, diversified and resilient agriculture and food systems. In this regard, some G20 countries, like India, have a lot to share with many poor nations.

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