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| Call for Input: Human Rights Council resolution 54/6 on the centrality of care and support from a human right perspective| April 2024 |

**Contribution from FIAN International and FIAN Colombia**

***Background***

The resolution under discussion holds significant importance as it underscores the critical role of care and support within the framework of human rights. By recognizing the centrality of care and support, the resolution emphasizes the fundamental link between care and the realization of broader human rights principles, including the right to food. Ultimately, this resolution serves as a vital step towards ensuring that care and support are not only recognized as basic human rights but also actively promoted and protected within international legal frameworks.

While the care work carried out by women, as the result of the sexual division of labor, is often discussed in relation to rightsholder such as children, older persons, and individuals with disabilities, its intersection with food and food systems remains notably underrepresented in public discourse. Despite the critical role that care plays in ensuring access to healthy, sustainable, and nutritious food, providing adequate nourishment, and fostering healthy eating habits, discussions surrounding food systems often overlook the caregiving dimension, overshadowed by broader discussions on food security, agricultural production, and nutritional policies. By neglecting the caregiving dimension of food issues, we risk perpetuating systemic inequalities and overlooking the human rights implications inherent in the provision of food and care.

Care work within the food systems has become an essential focus on the international right to food agenda, particularly for the organizations of small-scale food producers. Care perspectives and practices highlight the intersectionality of care work, considering how factors such as race, class, ethnicity, age, disability, and other social identities intersect with gender to shape caregiving experiences. Understanding and addressing power dynamics within caregiving relationships in food systems is crucial for tackling and overcome the current challenges posed by numerous violations, particularly in situations of war, conflict, and occupation, of the right to food and nutrition and the right to care.

***Care and Food: widening the scope of care and support.***

If we understand care as a practice to build and nurture relationships that prioritize life reproduction, rescuing it from any potential commodification processes, we can infer that care is practiced by intertwining various levels of coexistent and interdependent relationships. An ethics of care is understood here as a logic and practice of reciprocity not only with the land and the territory but also among its members, and between its members and the community as another entity. It is an ethics that permeates the defense of women’s body–territory–land from the historical and oppressive violence of patriarchy, capitalism and colonization[[1]](#footnote-2).

As with care, food systems also rely on interdependent relations. Through a feminist lens, approach, and practice, care becomes central to a paradigm shift capable of transforming unsustainable, violent, and corporate-driven food systems into healthy, sustainable, and just ones. The multiple scenarios of crisis that we currently face (e.g. climate, ecological, food, care crisis, war, conflict, and occupation) exercise a further pression on caregivers, particularly women and nature.

Food care encompasses the diverse work undertaken by women, in all their diversity, to sustain and reproduce life, ensuring the right to food and food sovereignty. This includes safeguarding native seeds, tending to orchards, cultivating medicinal plants, caring for animals, and over common resources such as water, land, and forests. Moreover, food care involves activities spanning transformation, exchange, provision, and consumption, empowering women with agency and self-determination derived from these practices.

Food and care are also inextricably linked as two of the main acts of love that welcome mammals into the world through breastfeeding and caring embraces, generating the first intimacy of the relation between the parent and the child.

The work of food care, along with the broader spectrum of caregiving activities essential for any food system, is frequently carried out under conditions of precarity, inequality, discrimination, undervaluation, and exploitation. The gendered oppression inherent in caregiving roles often perpetuates gender and sexual violence. Women bear the primary burden of supporting the food system, yet capitalism and patriarchy capitalize on this unequal social distribution of care work.

Recognizing care as a fundamental right necessitates policy and normative efforts to reframe the fundamental questions to be addressed. Who is taking care of our food? Where and under which conditions does this caregiving occur? And when? How does it contribute to promoting healthier and more sustainable and just food systems for all? How does it foster vibrant, dynamic, and human rights-based rural environments? Moreover, how does it bolster the collective leadership, decision-making, and participation of rural women, non-binary, trans and queer persons in public policy spheres?

*Food care and Agroecological practices: the case of the Ausolanes in the Basque Country (Spain)*

The agroecological food system promote biodiversity, soil health, prioritizing local, traditional and ancestral knowledge and puts at its core redistribution of natural resources such as land, forests, water and care work, ensuring a constructive and generative shift in power relations. Overall, agroecological food systems represent a holistic and sustainable practice and approach to food systems towards equality, equity and self-determination.

The feminist practice of "ausolanes" in the Basque Country refers to a unique tradition of collective labor performed by women in rural communities. The term "ausolanes" originates from the Basque word "ausolan," which translates to "working together."

In the Basque rural context, particularly in the past, women played a crucial role in agricultural and household tasks. Ausolanes typically involve women coming together to assist each other in various agricultural activities, such as planting, harvesting, and processing crops, as well as other communal tasks like childcare and food preparation.

The practice of ausolanes embodies feminist principles of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual support among women. It challenges traditional gender roles, hierarchies and power dynamics by demonstrating the collective power of women in rural communities. Ausolanes provide a space for women to share knowledge, skills, and experiences, fostering a sense of community. The gatherings serve the purpose of exchange and collective care of the relations, politicizing the individual experiences, struggles, desires and life[[2]](#footnote-3).

*Food care, ancestral knowledge, and historical debt*

Care work associated with traditional food practices, such as native seed saving, food preservation and processing, and culinary traditions, plays a crucial role in maintaining, recognizing, and valuing cultural diversity and resilience. Supporting and protecting indigenous, afro descendant, kilombo and ancestral knowledge is essential for promoting cultural rights, fostering community cohesion, and strengthening communities’ right to food and nutrition and food sovereignty. Part of the food sovereignty demands highlight the importance of food culture and food relation with the ecosystem where is produced and eaten. The care work carried out by rural, indigenous, kilombo and afro-descendent women also include the storytelling function of care: songs that are sang during the harvest, the celebration of the communities’ own narration, history, ancestors and identities and the enormous historical care debt accumulated for centuries.

***Contribution of Martha Rentería, Community Director of Kilombo Niara Saray (Colombia) on the hearing organized by the Interamerican Court of Human Rights, on the Right to Care ( March 2024, Costa Rica).***

*My name is Martha Rentería, community director of Kilombo Niara Saray. The recognition of care as a right is an exercise of justice in the face of our historical struggles against different forms of oppression; that is to say, we caregivers are asking that the historical debt of care be repaid. Women are always there, from the care of the mangrove buried with their boots up to their knees pulling out the piangua while singing the harmonizing cooing and praises of the earth, to producing much more food than we and you need to live. We women are there without being recognized for the work of caring for nature, nor for the value of the work that we do as gatherers, fisherwomen, peasants. It is others, such as intermediaries and large corporations, who profit from this without our work being recognized.*

*The crises suffered by women leaders who care for and carry out the work of food care are various: emotional crises, sadness, loneliness, invisibilization because of the non-recognition of what we do, we become ill. When this happens, it is other women who take care of us, reproducing the circle of care and, when it is not so, we die alone and abandoned and asking, as I have had to do, for a drawer to bury these beautiful women. We are tired of not seeing solutions and the unpunished disengagement of our governments in the face of care, knowing that they have the political and economic power to provide a fundamental solution to this so deeply felt need of women.*

*Food care and healthy well-being*

The centrality of care work within food systems is intricately tied to health and well-being outcomes. Access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food, along with the provision of comprehensive care in its preparation and consumption, is vital for nurturing both physical and mental health. Care work extends beyond the mere provision of food; it encompasses the broader aspects of ensuring its safety, nutritional adequacy, and compatibility with diverse dietary requirements. Recognizing and valuing the labor-intensive care work involved in fostering healthy food environments and healthy dietary practices is crucial for addressing pervasive public health challenges, mitigating disparities in health outcomes, and advancing the right to health for all individuals, especially among women disproportionately burdened by care responsibilities.

*Care and LGBTQIA+ rights*

The naturalization of gender roles in agriculture, and the non-mention in the public and policy discourse, of persons who do not fit into heteronormative patterns is an important element to be highlighted when addressing the centrality of care in food systems. Food production is interlinked with ‘nature’ and what are perceived to be ‘natural conditions’. In this sense, a dichotomous division of society based on a binary gender model (woman and man) is regularly reproduced, thereby pre-defining – according to one’s biological body constitution – the tasks and roles that each individual is supposed to carry out and fulfil. The risk to essentialise gender roles in agriculture, often reproducing an understanding of gender along binary lines is high and should be strongly avoid[[3]](#footnote-4).

Heteronormative and patriarchal families have historically not recognized and exploited care work. Queer farmers’ communities and perspectives have overturned this paradigm by putting care practices at the center of another type of family, beyond the binarism of roles. The Land Dyke Feminist Family Farm is a community farm in Taiwan, which stands for a new understanding of the concept of family. While promoting biodiversity through agroecology, they bring gender awareness into farming practices. They produce rice and vegetables, and at the same time pursue “equal cooperation between people and the earth, workers and farmers, migrants and locals, cities and villages”. In doing so, they “create a family that is based in the collective strength that propels society toward change, not established through private inheritance, blood ties, and gender stereotypes.” The Land Dyke is not the only example; similar initiatives can be found worldwide (e.g. Rocksteady Farm in the US). These experiences can inspire us to rethink the way agriculture and farms are structured around caring relationships, and to redefine the concept of family, since the ‘family farm’ does not necessarily need to be associated to a monolithic heteronormative and paternalistic model[[4]](#footnote-5).

**Conclusions**

Expanding the concept of care to encompass care within food systems is imperative in confronting the current food, climate and social crisis. By recognizing the interconnectedness between care practices and food production, we acknowledge the pivotal role that sustainable agricultural practices play in tackling climate change and inequalities. By widening the scope of care to include food systems, we not only ensure the well-being of present and future generations but also contribute to the broader efforts to combat the food and climate crisis, overcoming patriarchal power relations and violence.

In order to craft genuinely caring politics, we must therefore acknowledge the complexities of [care](https://www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press/features/what-is-care/). Care work includes many aspects of life from the individual perspective of self-care to the care of households, territories, ecosystems, and communities. This includes acknowledging how privilege and oppression intersect in caregiving contexts and relations. By putting at the center of the current food production system care as described in this contribution, care ceases to be a burden or a catalyst for inequalities, discrimination, and violence. Instead, it emerges as the cornerstone of new public policies anchored in human rights approaches, care economies, and ecosystems. Acknowledging caring interdependent relations allows care redistribution, care as a communing practice, granting individuals autonomy and sovereignty over their bodies, relationships, resources, and lives, thereby establishing a new paradigm of life reproduction. In such understanding food is redefined as an expression of love, mirroring the ethos of care that permeates this new paradigm. In essence, care itself becomes an act of love, shaping and guiding our interactions with one another and with the world around us.

**ANNEX**

We attach to this contribution the Consultative opinion that several organizations, under the coordination of FIAN Colombia, submitted to the Interamerican Court of Human Rights on the Right to Care on 4 November 2023. Please find here the [HERE](https://fianinternational-my.sharepoint.com/%3Ab%3A/g/personal/maisano_fian_org/EXtVFKTV0khAlHzGd9X_Gu0BrMnSxgUJDajuwL3o0qMkQg?e=UVs2D1).

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1. [Care is the new radical: food and climate approaches from a peasant feminist perspective](file:///Care%20is%20the%20new%20radical/%20food%20and%20climate%20approaches%20from%20a%20peasant%20feminist%20perspective) – Ana Victoria Portocarrero Lacayo | February 2024 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. [Mujeres baserritarras cuidando. Personas, tierra, territorios y el planeta](https://www.ehnebizkaia.eus/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Zaintzen-Duten-Emakume-Baserritarrak-Mujeres-Baserritarras-Cuidando.pdf). EHNE Bizkaia | 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [Coming Out! Gender Diversity in the food system](https://fianinternational-my.sharepoint.com/personal/maisano_fian_org/Documents/CARE/Submission%20OHCHR/AMPAIGN%20TO%20END%20VIOLENCE%20AGAINST%20WOMEN%2C%20DIGNITY%20FOR%20MIGRANTS%20AND%20WAGED%20WORKERS%2C%20PATRIACHY%2C%20PEASANTS%27%20RIGHTS%2C%20WOMEN%2C%20YOUTH). La Via Campesina (LVC) | October 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ibidem [↑](#footnote-ref-5)