

Oral Presentation

South African Human Rights Commission: A National Inquiry into the Food Systems of South Africa

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Who is SAFCEI?

SAFCEI is a multi-faith organisation committed to increase awareness, understanding, and action on eco-justice, sustainable living and climate change. We work with African Traditional Healers, Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Quaker, and a wide range of Christian denominations.

We emphasise the spiritual and moral imperative to care for Earth and the community of life. We call for ethical leadership and speak out on issues of eco-justice, encouraging citizen action.

SAFCEI has a long history of mobilising faith-based and civil society networks to demand public accountability and food sovereignty. Established in 2005, SAFCEI has transitioned from general environmental advocacy to a focused rights-based approach that centers the "right to food" as an issue of both social and climate justice.

No Faith in False Solutions

"Commoditisation is the process of converting products or services into standardised, marketable objects. This process tends to strip away unique or identifying qualities of the commodity in favour of identical, lower cost items that can be interchanged with one another."

Gabriel Manyangadze, SAFCEI's Food & Climate Justice Manager

Our Approach

SAFCEI's aim is to create an enabling environment for all players, including emerging and small-scale farmers, by focusing on systemic solutions. We would like to partner with progressive industry role-players who are serious about corporate social responsibility (CSR) and can help generate momentum in creating a system that is kinder, fairer, and better for animals, people, and our planet.

Written Submission

Food customs and practices are deeply embedded in communities as cultural and ritual practices and are linked to faith traditions and cultural identity. Faith communities uphold the wholeness, divinity and sanctity of food and life, remembering that the physical intake of food has a spiritual dimension. SAFCEI's programmes seeks to empower faith communities and those most affected to better understand and to actively advocate for agroecological systems that promote sustainable consumption, guarantees access to nourishing food to uphold human dignity, help address health pandemics and help to build climate resilience while upholding human dignity. We oppose destructive food-intensive systems like factory farming, industrial agriculture and GMOs and advocate for sustainable, equitable alternatives that are in harmony with nature.

Oral Submission

- Our oral submission crosses over themes 2, 5 and 7; reflecting on research and advocacy on poultry, corporatisation of funding of food, and indigenous knowledge and food sovereignty.

Faith, Food and the Future: Indigenous food systems for climate and community resilience. The agroindustrial expansion and philanthro-capitalist investment that threatens traditional agriculture systems, indigenous livestock genetics and seeds.

Traditional poultry systems and indigenous breeds genetics are threatened

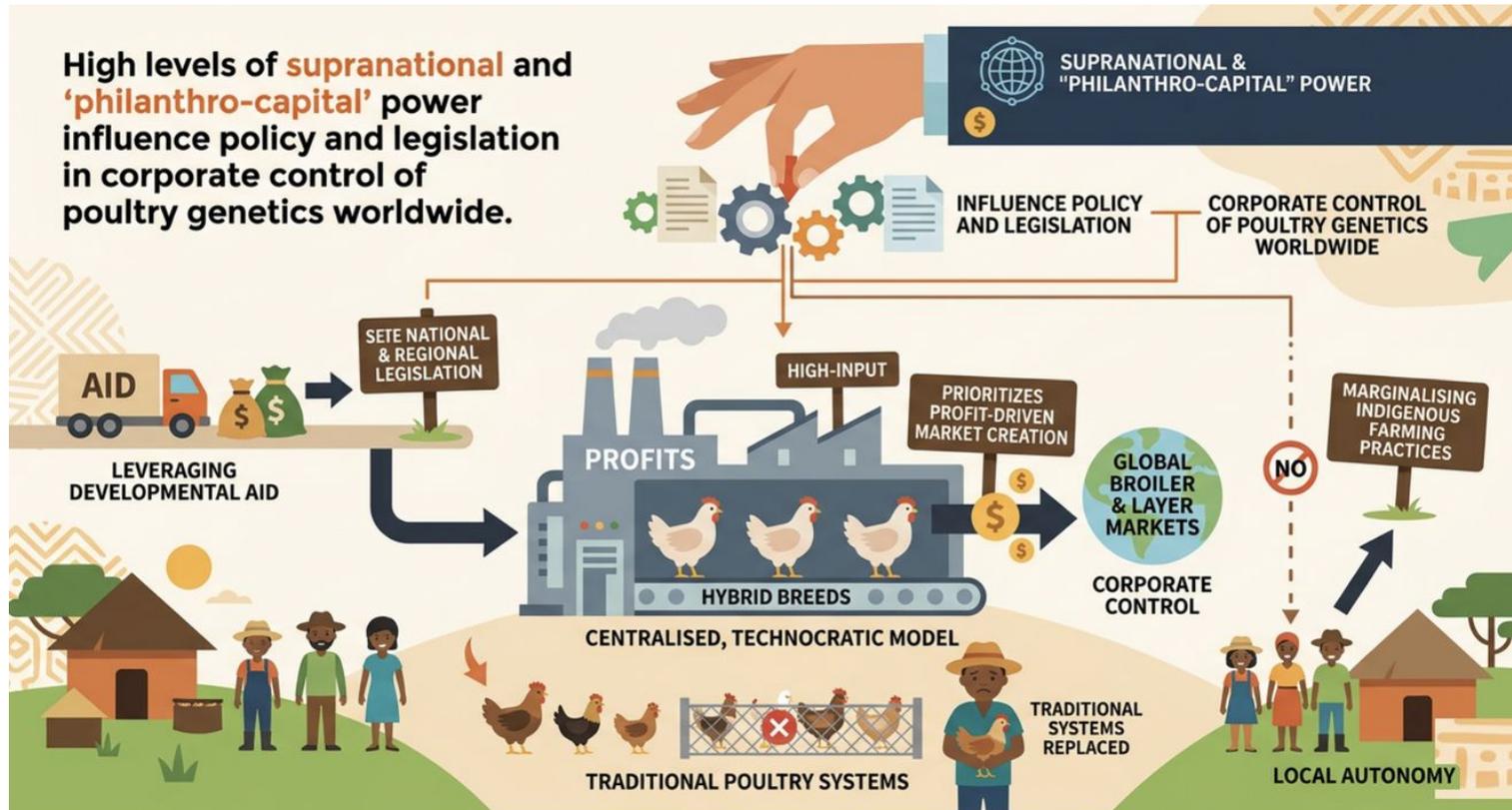
Indigenous chicken breeds, central to food sovereignty, are being defended for their resilience, suitability for local needs, and as a resistance to corporate control.

Demand for chicken meat & eggs is rising (#1 source of animal protein), so there is a huge market for corporates to capture in Africa.

African communities have a wealth of local chicken biodiversity: 85% of all chickens in Africa are indigenous. But corporates are coming in and replacing these breeds with exotic hybrids.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched an indigenous poultry conservation programme. In addition, the Agricultural Research Council in South Africa has established a programme to “protect” four local chicken breeds. Local chickens play a significant role in improving livelihoods, and strategies to preserve and sustain them must be intensified but the ARC research should come with a caution of its focus on commercial "improvement" over traditional autonomy.

High levels of supranational and “philanthro-capital” power influence policy and legislation in corporate control of poultry genetics worldwide.



Increased corporate concentration in food systems diminishes individual and community agency—the ability to make choices and have a voice—through three primary mechanisms:

Market Power:

Large firms can exploit their dominance to generate excessive profits by raising prices for consumers while lowering wages and opportunities for workers.

Material Influence:

These companies dictate the physical realities of the food system, including production technologies, working conditions, and the level of processing in foods, which restricts the options available to the public.

Political Power:

Corporations use lobbying and indirect influence to shape food policies, effectively sidelining democratic participation and public interest in governance.

Recommendations

- Policy Recommendation: Legislators should pivot toward supporting agroecological systems and nature-based farming that build climate resilience and ensure local food sovereignty.
- Institutional Alignment: Governance must move away from "false solutions" and their negative impact on indigenous food and ecosystems that are promoted by large industrial corporations and instead focus on systems that empower small-scale farmers.
- Respect Animal Dignity: Improve animal welfare by moving away from caged and intensive systems that rely on pharmaceutical intervention to survive.
- Amplification of small-holder farmers voices & narratives.

Recommendations continued

- Safeguarding Genetic Sovereignty and Indigenous Breeds: Improving animal welfare must include protecting locally adapted breeds from being displaced by proprietary, high-input industrial genetics. Indigenous breeds are naturally resilient to local climates and pests; preserving them ensures long-term food security and biological diversity while reducing the suffering inherent in intensive, "fast-growth" industrial systems.
- An acknowledgement of the contribution towards ecological stewardship made by indigenous knowledge systems in the region and the vital relationships between indigenous landscapes, foods, culture and spirituality.
- Establish demonstration farms to showcase successful indigenous farming systems.

"Indigenous foods have more resilience to climate change, meaning that a shift towards indigenous food and systems means sustainable and resilient ways of solving the food crisis."

Mu-Aalima Amyna, Muslim Faith Leader

Thank you.