



## **Regenerative Action:** **the Journey toward Good, Clean and Fair Food for Everyone**

### **CONTEXT**

A pivotal moment in the organisation's life, the Slow Food Congress is held every 4-5 years to assemble our global food community, forge a vision, and map out a plan to see it through.

After navigating long periods of uncertainty and social isolation, we crave the warm embrace of the world's most important food gathering — Terra Madre Salone del Gusto. With it, the season also brings us to the next Slow Food Congress. Recognizing that many will be unable to attend in person, we will reach deep into our organisation's deep well of creativity in order to bring the world closer together (even when we are pulled apart by geography, structural inequities, and wars).

We approach both events with mixed emotions, and with an even greater sense of urgency to formalize the shared vision from the 2017 Congress to regenerate Slow Food. This is a critical moment for Slow Food, the wider food movement, and the planet. For us, we will hand the reins of the organisation to a new generation of leadership — ushering in a political project that was envisaged and formalized in Chengdu, China.

## **Commitments we, together, assumed in Chengdu**

We committed to renovate the structure of the organisation together:

- Make Slow Food more open and inclusive, since many who “do” Slow Food find it difficult to “be” in Slow Food;
- Make Slow Food more adaptive and diffused, resembling the organisational circuitry of a plant more than an animal;
- Give voice to the nodes in our network that the original “individual membership model” cannot hear.

**Change is all around.** In the wake of the pandemic, these commitments set in motion changes that are now familiar, if not obvious and logical. For instance, how often are we sharing ideas with others via the cloud? If so, why in Slow Food do we limit ourselves to geography when our lives and our work are not? Or, what about our communications? In the past, we might have broadcast our views to the world. Today, we are learning to listen too. To paraphrase Carlo Petrini’s common refrain that we were never meant to be static but always liquid, reforms help us to meet people where they are. After all, it is unrealistic to expect that they will come find us.

Change takes time, but it also takes effort and intent. The intent behind the launch of Slow Food communities and thematic networks is to become more agile. They also help us to fulfill a purposeful playfulness that has always anchored our deeply serious work. At times, our compulsion to be everywhere has harmed our ability to communicate and collaborate with others effectively. Since Chengdu, we have made major changes to how we work. We

- Launched Slow Food Communities in order to remove the barriers to join our community;
- Organized thematic networks as another option to express Slow Food;
- Reengineered the engagement system at the headquarters, in order to better launch, manage and leverage campaigns. These internal investments are both human and technological;
- Trained network leaders around the world, in order to build the professional capacity in areas where they identified critical needs. From Latin America to Europe, youth to indigenous leaders, we made the most of the lockdown to open up and deliver training.

These new instruments and modes of operations do not make us perfect — not by a longshot. They are just the beginning. Moreover, they help us to learn how to embrace imperfections in us and with the communities we coalesce. Our goal is not perfection, but agency. We need your agency to continue regenerating how we work, where, and with whom.

**An urgent call to slow down.** At the start of the pandemic in 2020, we began to engage our network around the next steps in this political project, unfortunately, at the very moment most of us were unable to leave home. Despite (and to a certain extent because of) these restrictions, we developed new ways to talk about these new ideas with you. The *Call to Action* document asks you to find your individual interests within the collective struggle to change the food system that also changes the world. By now, you have likely read and interacted with the document. After all, your work and input helped to shape it. The document calls for the very thing our movement has struggled to embrace: discipline. It is not enough to do something, anything. The “giants” in the food system are disciplined. They are also very happy to observe us without it. Perhaps, our message that “we are the multitudes” became misconstrued to mean that it is enough to do a multitude of things. While there is power in actions that are diffused, this is not to suggest that they will simply succeed without strategy. Perched on high, giants observe the difference between adversaries who are disorganized versus decentralized.

Originally gleaned from our network successes, we categorized priorities into the *Call to Action*: Moving forward, we defend biological and cultural diversity; educate, inspire and mobilize people; influence policies in the public and private sector. Yes, of course we do many, many other valuable actions. However, it is within these pathways that we invest and measure our greatest efforts.

## **THE WORLD WE WANT**

Do you see yourself in this picture?

While it may be one thing to organize against hunger, against racism, against unbridled linear growth, it is quite another to draw a direct line between what we stand against and what we stand for — a future for all.

The future we want is already here. Each of us, daily, already experiences fragments of the world we want:

- Gardens are platforms for multi-generational learning, and more specifically to address the pressing issues of agroecology and hunger;
- Communities of producers transform endangered products into economic assets;
- Farmers markets bring the urban and rural into contact;
- Awareness campaigns use food to promote important social and environmental issues;
- Gatherings bring people of all ages and backgrounds together;
- Kitchens become social spaces of education, reflection and action to redesign our relationship with food.
- And many other pragmatic and solid actions affecting our local contexts.

We believe in uniting the joy of food with the pursuit of justice, for the right to pleasure and policies that defend the multitudes from that minority of people who want to turn happiness and life itself into commodities.

While scaling up may denigrate the attributes that make these isolated efforts so meaningful, we must infuse a greater sense of coordination for the critical mass to flourish, to transform lives and livelihoods; and to reform and replace systems that deliver violence and extract wealth.

## **WHO WE ARE (AND WHO WE WANT TO BE)**

We are a global network of local communities. In this critical regard, we differ from other organisations. Consider, for example, our approach to food biodiversity. It is not enough to simply catalog endangered foods. We spread biodiversity and entrust it to those who protect it as part of their everyday lives. We grow it, market it, and eat it. This is why we proclaim: "Eat it, to save it".

Other organisations may turn to communities primarily for support or validation. We ARE a community. Our diverse human relationships describe not only how we work, but also who we are. Importantly, we can do better. Look around: Who is with us? Who is missing? Who is leading the charge?

We joyfully manifest a collective respect and affection for life, self-determination, human rights and individual freedoms.

Our fundamental principles ask that we express empathy for all living beings, and solidarity with all the peoples of the planet, especially the most vulnerable and those who are most affected by the violence of the industrial food system in terms of production, distribution and consumption and resources exploitation.

As ambassadors of humankind's eternal longing for peace, love and freedom, we work to make Slow Food a compelling force for good, clean, and fair food for everyone. Amidst the turbulence of our current crises, it is far more likely that we — all of us — reach the good, clean and fair when these principles are present:

- Peace: More than the absence of violence, peace represents the presence of justice and reconciliation;
- Love: For the fragility of food and community, and for the planet;
- Freedom: From want and fear, and for individual and collective fulfillment.

We amplify the diversity of the voices of our world starting from the role of Indigenous Peoples' communities, especially women and youth:

- they are too often victims of transgressions and struggle to be heard; and
- their knowledge and experience with the world we want and the world we oppose informs how our future may flourish (if we are ready to listen and to acknowledge the wisdom shaped by struggle).

We develop skills by what we do daily. However, we also mature as a community when we learn from each other. Are we good at listening to the diverse voices who call for and manifest changes in the food system via words and actions? Listening takes skills. It also takes effort and intent to listen, not always speak. Together, we must develop an organisational discipline to make space for those whose voices are difficult to hear.

Only then, do we support each other as a community. Together, we learn how to become a learning organisation.

## OUR PATH, OUR STRATEGY

With Chengdu, we moved forward with a vision of a more inclusive organisation. The *Call to Action* organizes this vision into a plan. Your inputs not only validate this plan, but also help shape the new organisational structure. This is where we stand: at this fork in the road. Either, we recoil and relive past glories; or, we rejoice in the collective struggle to shape tomorrow with food that is good, clean, and fair for everyone.

In accordance with our commitment to pursue strategic and measurable goals, the 2022 edition of Terra Madre strives to relaunch the Slow Food image, generate resources for our collective work, and strengthen the relationships within the network. Devised with a similar degree of rigor, our goals for the 2022 Congress are to regenerate Slow Food:

- **Restructure Slow Food's legal framework (to make Slow Food clear and open):** We have long struggled to manage the complexities of operating as a legal entity in Italy with international expectations. Italian legal requirements can seem awkward, if not opaque. Recognizing transparency breeds trust, we seek your support for important legal changes. In order to adjust to recent changes in Italian law, we will transform our Association into a Foundation. Fortunately, you will notice little change in how you interact internationally. Many of these changes are experienced internally by the staff. Importantly, this affords us the opportunity to simplify the command structure, resulting in the formation of an international board, with clarified roles and responsibilities for each of the governance and advisory bodies. We hope you agree, this is long overdue.
- **Reimagine who we are (to make Slow Food more inclusive):** We are a multitude of farmers, fishers, cooks, educators, technicians, teachers, journalists, writers, advocates, and consumers.

We defend the diversity of the natural world that surrounds us, just as we find strength in the diversity of the participatory network that is Slow Food. However, now is the time to formally recognize those who DO Slow Food without NAMING it Slow Food. These include leaders and communities within and beyond our network. We largely interact with these nodes via programmatic funding and professional staff. Similarly, it is time to recognize that while *convivia* will continue to be our legacy — to accrue social capital — many newer nodes congregate around themes, like ingredients, markets and youth. We need your imagination to transform this mosaic of advocacy and action into one coherent picture.

• **Recalibrate how we work together (to make Slow Food more effective).** When we reform our legal structure, we formally recognize important stakeholders who have been missing from our collective picture. While they may have always been present, their presence was overshadowed by the brand identity of a place-based volunteer network. Unfortunately, this places greater value upon who we are over what we do. This misfire inadvertently restricts both growth and development. Fortunately, the consensus that has arisen from the *Call to Action* enables us to move forward by defining new strategic priorities: **biodiversity, education, and advocacy**. While this shift may sound simple enough, to succeed we must cultivate new professional skills, new forms of leadership, and a new comfort found with imperfection and working with others on their turf, not ours.

## WHAT WE DO ... OVER THE NEXT 4 YEARS

The question of what we do is up to us collectively. Forever the generalist organisation, it is challenging to narrow our scope. We operate on all steps of the value chain (from field to fork). Fortunately, we emerged from Chengdu in 2017 with a clear mandate to act more strategically, more openly, and to recognize the reality already apparent to many — that we cannot be everywhere. Instead, we must learn to trust our partners to lead, when we cannot; to invest in voices that are not our own; and to evaluate our own efficacy with levels of sobriety that, at times, can be uncomfortable. This is not to suggest that the next four-years should be devoted to inward reflection.

On the contrary, with internal systems restructured and external communications rebooted, now is the time to hit the ground.

Just as the *Call to Action* gives voice to a consensus around **biodiversity, education, and advocacy**, the 2022 Slow Food Congress must give clarity not only to what we do but how we organize our work together. The division of labour between those who proudly adorn the snail and those who work for the snail will change. No longer can we simply work harder. We must work smarter to better leverage our brand, our values, and our competitive advantage.

In order to guarantee that everybody has access to good, clean and fair food we need a profound transformation in the way food is produced, processed, traded and consumed, from farm to fork. This comprehensive transformation of the food system is necessary, and our network shows how it is possible.

Our commitment and concrete contributions for the next four years will therefore be to drive the development of the path we all have been setting from the challenges assumed of Chengdu to the groove of the *Call to Action*, building the actions of the global strategy emerged by the open and inclusive participatory dialogue and processes of our last International Congress to the next one.

By implementing this process we, as an organization, can play a key role in bringing about the change we need.

## **Biodiversity**

Our goals:

- Research and catalog the heritage of biological and cultural diversity linked to food (as an expression of territory), and identify the people who protect this heritage;
- Support and promote those who preserve biodiversity and act as caretakers of local territories; those who use agroecological techniques and sustainable farming practices that respect animal welfare; those who manage the resources of the oceans, rivers, and lakes without overexploiting them; those who promote an agricultural model that can stop the spread of monocultures and intensive farming, as well as the concentration of power in just a few hands;
- Create opportunities for dialog and exchange (commercial and otherwise) between those who work to bring food from “farm to table,” as well as with consumers.

Our strategic actions:

- Strengthen the governance of our work on biodiversity
- Enlarge the network of experts who can support biodiversity actions at local level
- Improve how we communicate on biodiversity: revise the narrative, highlight the community based/grassroot approach of our work
- Slow Food programmes (Ark of Taste, Presidia, Earth Markets, Cooks Alliance, SF Gardens and Slow Food Travel): strengthen governance, improve mechanisms, implement logo, develop global strategy
- Participatory guarantee system: define the model, disseminate it and support producers implementing it

## **Education**

Our goals:

- Develop communications materials and launch campaigns to increase awareness about the food system and to change behavior;
- Design and deliver educational and training activities as well as experiences to improve knowledge about food — from production to consumption to food loss — and to impact people’s practices and choices;
- Design and deliver educational and training activities for professionals in the food sector in order to reward those who make positive changes in food production, distribution, marketing, consumption, and waste management.

Our strategic actions:

- Strengthen the governance of our work on education
- Enlarge the network of experts
- Develop and disseminate formats that connect consumers with the producers
- Develop connections with training centers, institutions, schools
- Support SFYN to strengthen the global and national SFYN Academies
- Harmonise the methodology on food and taste education through further dissemination of Slow Food Manifesto for Education

## Advocacy

Our goals:

- Influence public institutions and the private sector at every level in order to create policies and models that support fair and regenerative systems of production, distribution, marketing, consumption, and management of food loss
- Inform, involve, and mobilize individuals and communities to become advocates for the necessary transition to fair and sustainable policies;
- Create alliances with others who are fighting for similar goals.

Our strategic actions:

- We work on food and agricultural policies with a focus on biodiversity, climate change and food justice
- Strengthen the governance of our work on advocacy
- Leverage the extensive (scientific) knowledge from the network for our advocacy work
- Strengthen the advocacy work of our global movement through capacity building - for effective advocacy work at grassroots level
- Make sure Slow Food's voice is strong in key international fora and political moments
- increase collaboration with partner organisations

The next four years may very well be the period we've been preparing for for ages. The *Call to Action* is not just on paper. It is in the hundreds of small decisions you and we all make together in order to regenerate our organisation, our individual and collective commitments to deliver food and community that is good, clean and fair for all.

Chances are, already, you contribute to the Slow Food strategic priorities: to positively affect **biodiversity**, **education**, and **advocacy**. Share with us in pictures and words how you are already committed to this work.

Committed to learning, we recognize that these actions are teachable moments. What are you learning? Which insights point to the future we want? We cannot get there alone. Only together can we hoist the flag on this new fertile ground. In the past, many of our ideas have been correct. They may not have always worked, but why? Were we too early? Were we too late? Did we not have the infrastructure in place to reach the goals we set? Or, more importantly, have our efforts inspired others to take the flag and run with it?

Regardless, we recognize that at this critical juncture, we need your input to determine what comes next. We need to measure your temperature to determine which passions burn brightest. And most importantly, we need to forge open communications and trust to recognize that we will make decisions about programmatic next steps that make sense for the organization, for the movement and the world. Your input shapes the future.