

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

Governance for Food Systems Transformation

29 May 2024

Summary Report

Introduction

The Food Systems Solutions Dialogues (FSSD) are purposeful and organized events that bring together National Convenors and other food systems actors to share their experiences and insights on food systems hosted by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub (the Hub). A new series is launched each year, and morning and afternoon sessions are held for each Dialogue to accommodate different time zones. On 29 May 2024, the first Dialogue of the 2024 series was held on “Governance for Food Systems Transformation” - this Summary Report reflects the combined discussions from the two sessions (morning and afternoon).

This dialogue explored how governance is critical in ensuring that institutions, legal frameworks, and collective action at all levels lead to the desired transformation of our food systems.

Setting the Scene

The Dialogue on “Governance for Food Systems Transformation” was opened by Dr Stefanos Fotiou, Director of the Hub. He reaffirmed the Hub’s commitment to transforming food systems through effective governance and highlighted that the themes for the 2024 FSSD series, supported by regional and global initiatives, have been selected based on the six action points from the Secretary-General’s Call to Action, focusing on governance, policies, finance, science, technology, and innovation.

Mr Fotiou welcomed a panel of distinguished experts who shared their extensive experience and insights on governance for food systems transformation. The panel featured;

- Dr Shenggen Fan, Co-Chair, Scientific Advisory Committee to the Hub
- Dr Corinna Hawkes, Director, Food Systems and Food Safety, FAO
- Mr Riccardo Rapallo, Senior Governance Officer, FAO
- Dr Rami Zurayk, Advisor on Food Systems Transformation, American University of Beirut
- Mr JuanJose Echanove, Senior Project Coordinator, Right to Food, FAO

The morning session was moderated by Mr Khaled Eltaweel, Senior Programme Coordinator at the Hub and Ms Mia Madsen, Policy Officer from the Hub, in the afternoon.

Key Insights from Panellists

Dr Fan opened the panel by emphasizing the critical role of governance in transforming food systems. He underscored the importance of establishing country-level coordination mechanisms involving diverse stakeholders beyond agriculture, such as finance, environment, and health. Dr Fan highlighted the necessity of using indicators to measure progress and address gaps, stressing the importance of initiatives at both national and city levels to ensure a comprehensive approach to food systems transformation.

Dr Hawkes discussed the importance of institutional arrangements and multi-stakeholder collaboration. She shared examples from country level, such as city-level governance structures in Bangladesh and Brazil, to illustrate effective food systems governance. Dr Hawkes stressed the need for meaningful engagement from less powerful stakeholders and the importance of financial and political resources to support implementation. She emphasized that governance structures must be action-oriented and not merely "talking shops" advocating for adequate resourcing and capacity building to support governance structures.

Mr Rapallo focused on the roles of various actors, from producers to consumers, in food systems transformation. He emphasized the UN System's contribution to making this transformation resilient, sustainable, and inclusive. He highlighted the importance of disseminating best practices, giving voice to vulnerable groups, and supporting National Convenors in implementing National Pathways. Mr Rapallo reiterated the need to build synergies and share knowledge at local, national, regional, and global levels.

Dr Zurayk highlighted a unique approach incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs) for actions in the National Pathways document and developing a right-to-food law in Lebanon in the morning session. He emphasized the need for resilient and sustainable food systems embedded in legal frameworks and the importance of collaboration with neighboring countries and partnerships with UN agencies.

During the afternoon session, Dr Inaya Ezzeddine, the National Convenor for Lebanon, discussed Lebanon's efforts to transform food systems amid multidimensional ongoing crises. She highlighted the country's challenges, including hosting over two million refugees and having a significant portion of its population living below the poverty line. Dr Ezzeddine stressed the importance of a multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach to food systems governance, involving robust mechanisms for collaboration and action at both legislative and executive levels. She advocated for the integration of gender perspectives and the development of KPIs aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to track progress and ensure effective implementation.

The panel discussions closed with Mr Echanove emphasizing the Right to Food as a fundamental human right. He outlined principles that should guide governance models for food systems transformation, including participation, non-discrimination, accountability, and empowerment. Mr Echanove stressed the need for transparent actions and active participation of all stakeholders to ensure that diverse voices shape policies. He highlighted the importance of clear communication, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that food systems transformation allows people to live their lives with dignity.

Dialogue with National Convenors

Following the panel, National Convenors were invited to share insights on governance for food systems. The Convenors were provided with three guiding questions:

1. What mechanism has your country adopted to drive its food system's governance? How does this framework promote the inclusive participation of all relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes related to food systems transformation?
2. What lessons have been learned from international collaborations or best practices in food governance that could be applied at national and sub-national levels?
3. What support is needed from the UN system to support your efforts to build inclusive governance structures?

In their interventions, National Convenors highlighted economic challenges in rural areas and the necessity for external support and initiatives to enhance local land use management and biodiversity preservation. Discussions included highlights from new national food security strategies involving policy implementation, international partnerships, and the establishment of dedicated secretariats for national food security governance mechanisms. Coordination efforts to support farmers, efficient use of water resources, and electronic governance to improve accuracy in identifying vulnerable populations were also emphasized. The importance of stakeholder and citizen involvement in food systems governance, inter-ministerial collaboration, and updating National Pathways to reflect recent policy developments was underscored.

National Convenors underlined the importance of developing National Pathway action plans involving multiple ministries and sectors and the importance of a holistic approach to school meals involving all stakeholders for better food systems. The economic importance of agrifood systems and the challenges posed by climate change were discussed, with participants advocating for strong and resilient agricultural markets and systems.

Integrating the food systems approach into overall government policy planning and focusing on nutrition and food supply were critical priorities. Country representatives shared updates on recent approvals of general laws on adequate and sustainable food and emphasized the need for international collaboration in food systems regulation. They also shared the severe impact of violence and instability on food systems, the call for international assistance to restore security and support food systems transformation, and progress in food systems governance emphasizing national coordination and multi-stakeholder involvement.

The Way Forward

The Dialogue highlighted the critical role of governance in fostering ownership and supporting food systems transformation. Integrated approaches, adequate resourcing, and robust data collection are critical for success. Key messages from the sessions include the importance of shared learning, collaboration among National Convenors, and embedding governance in food systems transformation agendas. In his final remarks, Dr Fotiou reiterated the need for practical approaches to food systems governance, operationalizing tools and platforms for data and policy uptake, and maintaining a whole-of-society approach to achieve sustainable development goals.