

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

Strengthening accountability by engaging parliamentarians in food systems transformation

11 June 2025

Summary Report

Introduction

The Food Systems Solutions Dialogues (FSSD) are purposeful, organized events that unite 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 launches annually. Morning and afternoon sessions are held for each Dialogue to accommodate different time zones. On 11 June 2025, the Dialogue "Strengthening accountability by engaging parliamentarians in food systems transformation" was held as part of the 2025 FSSD series. This Summary Report reflects the combined discussions from the two sessions (morning and afternoon).

The Dialogue showcased the crucial role of parliamentarians in driving the transformation of sustainable food systems and strengthening accountability at the national level. It focused on how legislative action, budget oversight, and cross-sectoral engagement can advance inclusive, coherent, and rights-based food systems policies. Speakers and participants reflected on effective strategies for building the capacity of parliamentarians to champion food systems transformation, foster citizen participation, and align national development agendas with global commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Dialogue narrowed in on regional experiences and practical approaches to embedding food systems within legislative frameworks and strengthening coordination between parliaments and local food system actors.

Setting the Scene

Ms Lena Savelli, Deputy Director of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, opened both the morning and afternoon sessions of the Dialogue by emphasizing the urgency of food systems transformation in the lead-up to the second UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4), taking place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 27-29 July 2025. Noting that SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) is significantly off track, with 582 million people projected to remain chronically undernourished by 2030, she called for renewed collective efforts to address global food insecurity. In her opening remarks, Ms Savelli underlined that parliamentarians are critical changemakers, uniquely positioned to enact laws, ensure effective budget oversight, and represent diverse constituencies. Drawing on examples such as the African Food Systems Parliamentary Network (AFSPaN) and the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger, she stressed the importance of leveraging parliamentary leadership to foster

accountability, build institutional capacity, and embed food systems into broader national development strategies.

The morning and afternoon sessions welcomed a distinguished panel featuring global, regional, and local perspectives on strengthening accountability by engaging parliamentarians in the transformation of food systems. The panel included:

- Hon Lissouba Jeremy, Secretary General, African Food Systems Parliamentary Network (AFSPaN)
- Dr Rami Zurayk, Professor at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences at the American University of Beirut
- Ms Aleksandra Blagojevic, Programme Manager for International Development, Inter-Parliamentary Union
- Mr Juan José Echanove, Right to Food Lead, FAO
- Ms Kritza Pérez, Parliamentarian, Vice President of the National Congress of Honduras, and Regional Coordinator for Mesoamerica of the Parliamentary Front Against Hunger for Latin America and the Caribbean
- Dr Inaya Ezzeddine, National Convenor, Lebanon and member of parliament

Dr. Dora Siliya, former Minister of Agriculture of Zambia and member of AFSPaN, moderated the morning session, while Ms Mia Madsen, Policy Officer at the Hub, moderated the afternoon session.

Key Insights from Panellists

Hon Jeremy Lissouba provided a regional perspective on the role of parliamentarians in food systems transformation in Africa. He highlighted the gap between global food availability and ongoing hunger, noting that over 40 percent of the population cannot afford a healthy diet and that farmers are often among the most food insecure. He pointed to barriers such as siloed approaches, limited investment, weak implementation, and low awareness of national food systems pathways. Emphasizing the role of parliaments in legislation, budgeting, and oversight, he underscored their potential to foster coherence and political will. He introduced AFSPaN, a network of parliamentarians from 28 African countries and regional bodies, which works in collaboration with the African Union, UN agencies, and civil society. He cited its successful advocacy in the 2021 CAADP Kampala Declaration and concluded by calling for greater support and tools to strengthen parliamentary engagement in food systems governance.

Dr. Rami Zurayk shared experiences from Lebanon, highlighting the challenges of promoting food systems transformation in a fragile context. He noted that entrenched private sector interests and fragmented governance hinder reform; however, sustained advocacy and parliamentary engagement have led to significant wins, such as banning harmful practices in poultry farming. He stressed the need for capacity-building to enable parliamentarians to work across sectors and proposed tools such as joint committee hearings to support integrated policymaking. Emphasizing gender inclusion, he

underscored the role of women parliamentarians in addressing food access and equity. Dr. Zurayk concluded that food systems transformation must be linked to broader efforts to address Lebanon's intersecting social and economic crises.

Ms Aleksandra Blagojevic emphasized the importance of food systems in achieving the SDGs and the role of parliaments in leading change through legislation, oversight, and budgeting. She highlighted the link between food systems and climate change, particularly methane emissions from agriculture and waste, and introduced a new Inter-Parliamentary Union initiative to support parliamentary action on methane reduction. Stressing the need for cross-sectoral coordination, she called for stronger collaboration among parliamentary committees. She also shared resources developed by IPU, including a Parliamentary Handbook on Nutrition and Food Systems and a toolkit for SDG-informed legislative scrutiny. She concluded by highlighting the importance of peer learning and solidarity in driving political commitment to transforming food systems.

Mr Juan Echanove emphasized that the Right to Food is not just a guiding principle, but a universal human right rooted in dignity and entitlement, carrying legally binding obligations under international law. He stressed that integrating the Right to Food into food systems transformation is essential, not optional, as it ensures accountability, equity, transparency, and coherence across sectors. Highlighting the critical role of parliamentarians, he outlined key actions, including enshrining the Right to Food in constitutions and legal frameworks, forming dedicated parliamentary committees, adopting rights-based policies, ensuring inclusive participation, and providing oversight of government actions and budgets. He concluded that by embedding the Right to Food in legal and policy systems, parliamentarians can drive meaningful, systemic change toward just and resilient food systems.

In the afternoon session, Ms Kritza Pérez emphasized the importance of recognizing food security as a cross-cutting issue linked to health, the environment, and social justice. She highlighted that in Latin America, despite food availability, inequality leaves millions uncertain about their next meal. Citing FAO-supported programs in Honduras, she noted progress in reducing hunger through support for small producers and poor municipalities. She called for stronger parliamentary engagement, urging legislatures to prioritize food security as a state responsibility beyond electoral cycles and to adopt territorial, rights-based approaches. Ms. Pérez also underscored the central role of rural women in food systems and advocated for their inclusion through gender-sensitive policies. To strengthen accountability, she recommended institutional reporting with measurable indicators and digital tools. She concluded by framing food security as both a personal and political commitment, noting Honduras's experience as an example of progress supported through collaboration with FAO and other partners.

Dr Inaya Ezzeddine reflected on the profound impacts of conflict, displacement, and economic crisis on Lebanon's food systems, underscoring the need for integrated and cross-sectoral parliamentary responses. She noted that governance remains fragmented, limiting the ability to develop coherent strategies. Drawing on Lebanon's recent legislative mapping and the Right to Food Law, she stressed the importance of systems thinking and

evidence-informed decision-making. She shared how sustained advocacy, supported by research, led to banning colistin use in poultry, linking public health concerns with policy reform. Additional priorities include revisiting public-private partnership frameworks, addressing gaps in donor coordination, and promoting fiscal tools to shift consumer behaviour. She also highlighted the critical yet often overlooked role of women in food systems and emphasized the Committee on Women and Children's work to ensure gender inclusion in parliamentary processes.

Dialogue with National Convenors

Following the expert panel, National Convenors participated in an interactive discussion exploring how parliamentary engagement can help elevate food systems within national development agendas. The discussion also focused on ways to enhance cross-sectoral coordination and foster greater citizen participation. To guide the conversation, Convenors were provided with a few guiding questions:

1. In your national context, what roles do parliamentarians play in strengthening accountability to advance food systems transformation?
2. What key challenges have you encountered in engaging parliamentarians or parliamentary committees in food systems-related efforts?
3. What are some effective approaches or strategies for building the capacity of parliamentarians to engage meaningfully in food systems transformation?

National Convenors emphasized that parliaments are central to ensuring accountability, providing political legitimacy, and driving forward laws and budgets that support sustainable food systems. Many have noted that strong political leadership is a vital enabler for transformative food systems policies; however, frequent changes in government priorities and leadership transitions can disrupt continuity and hinder long-term progress. To address this, some countries have established dedicated high-level committees or advisory councils that bring together parliamentarians, relevant ministries, and technical partners to coordinate national food system governance. Such mechanisms help align decision-making across sectors and ensure that policies are formally endorsed and supported at the highest levels of government, creating greater stability and coherence.

Convenors also highlighted the importance of parliamentary oversight in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where food security challenges are particularly acute. They stressed that parliaments must play an active role in monitoring the implementation of laws and programmes, holding the executive accountable, and advocating for the needs of the most vulnerable communities. Additionally, raising public awareness about good nutrition and the importance of food security at the local level was recognized as an essential parliamentary responsibility.

A recurring challenge highlighted was the structural organization of parliamentary systems, which are often divided into sectoral silos, with committees focused on specific areas such as agriculture, health, or the environment. This fragmentation hinders the adoption of holistic, systems-based approaches necessary for effective food governance. Convenors noted that while parliamentarians are generally open to engaging on food systems issues, they frequently face capacity gaps in addressing complex, cross-sectoral topics. Additionally, limited inter-committee collaboration and short-term political pressures further constrain the ability to plan and implement long-term, transformative solutions.

In addition, several Convenors pointed out that while parliamentarians are generally committed and interested in contributing to food systems transformation, they often face capacity gaps. Understanding complex systems approaches, translating them into practical legislation, and balancing short-term political demands with long-term sustainability goals can be challenging without targeted training and access to expert knowledge.

To overcome these barriers, Convenors recommended investing in ongoing capacity-building programmes for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, strengthening partnerships with technical experts and relevant UN agencies, and creating more opportunities for peer learning and experience-sharing among countries. They also emphasized the value of platforms that facilitate sustained discourse between the executive and legislative branches, and other stakeholders, ensuring that food systems transformation remains a shared, coordinated priority across all levels of governance.

The Way Forward

The Dialogue underscored the importance of further empowering parliaments to drive and sustain national food systems transformation. Moving forward, there is a need to strengthen institutional frameworks to ensure consistent parliamentary engagement and oversight, enhance capacity-building through targeted training and access to technical resources, and foster better cross-sectoral collaboration within and among parliamentary committees to support integrated, systems-based policymaking.

Participants also underscored the value of continued peer learning and knowledge exchange among parliamentarians across countries and regions to share good practices and innovative solutions. Sustained discourse between the executive and legislative branches, alongside local stakeholders, remains critical to align national food systems priorities with global commitments and to uphold accountability.

The UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, together with partners, will continue to facilitate these efforts and provide platforms that enable parliamentarians to champion resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems for all.
