

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

Applying a food systems transformation lens in fragile contexts

14 May 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 14 May 2025, the Dialogue "Applying a food systems transformation lens in fragile contexts" 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 explored how to address the critical challenges that increasing global instability and the intersection of food systems and fragility pose to sustainable development and human security. It focused on emerging practices and innovative approaches for food systems transformation in these contexts, including integrated policy responses, inclusive governance mechanisms, and adaptive implementation strategies. Positive country-level examples were also highlighted, demonstrating how targeted transformation efforts can support recovery, strengthen resilience, and promote stability in crisis-affected environments. The Dialogue was a collaboration between the Hub and the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus Coalition.

Setting the Scene

Ms Mia Madsen, Policy Officer at the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, opened the morning and afternoon sessions, welcoming participants to the third 2025 Food Systems Solutions Dialogue. She noted that the discussions will focus on food systems transformation in fragile contexts and emphasized that systemic change is essential for countries facing food crises to thrive amid conflict, climate disruptions, and economic instability. She emphasized the urgent global need for bold solutions to address high levels of food insecurity and stressed the importance of connecting this Dialogue to key past and upcoming global events shaping food systems transformation. She also pointed to the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) and the second UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4), taking place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 27-29 July 2025 as key opportunities to promote debt reform and reframe food crises as long-term development priorities.

The morning and afternoon sessions welcomed a distinguished panel featuring global, regional, and local perspectives on applying a food systems transformation lens in fragile contexts. The panel included:

- Mr Habib Ur Rehman Mayar, Deputy General Secretary of the g7+ Secretariat
- Prof. Mohammed A. Sheikh Yusuf, National Food Systems Convenor for Somalia
- Ms Karima Ahmed Al-Hada'a, Assistant National Food Systems Convenor for Yemen
- Ms Armelle Siopathis, Director of Food Security and Nutrition, Central African Republic
- Ms Emilie Chazelle, Head of Secretariat HDP Nexus Coalition, WFP

Ms Louise Gentzel, Head of Partnership, Global Network Against Food Crises, WFP, moderated the sessions.

Key Insights from Panellists

Mr Habib Ur Rehman Mayar opened the morning session of the Dialogue by emphasizing the unique challenges conflict-affected countries face, noting that conflicts and wars have been persistent drivers of hunger and food insecurity across the g7+ Member Nations. He urged a shift in the global narrative from viewing food insecurity as a short-term humanitarian emergency to recognizing it as a structural issue tied to peace, development, and national security. In light of this, he outlined five main points: (1) food insecurity in fragile states should be recognized as a matter of peace and national security; (2) resources used for debt servicing should be redirected toward sustainable food self-reliance; (3) building resilience is essential to help food systems absorb shocks without triggering emergencies; (4) innovation and technology must be embraced to strengthen food systems in conflict-affected countries; and (5) coordinated action across humanitarian, development, and peace actors through the HDP nexus approach is needed.

Prof. Mohammed A. Sheikh Yusuf highlighted Somalia's efforts to transform its food systems amid ongoing fragility driven by conflict, political instability, climate change, and structural challenges. He detailed four foundational elements for effective food systems transformation: shifting mindsets from dependency to development among leaders and producers; identifying government-led game changers and pathways; embedding food systems in national planning; and strengthening governance to coordinate ministries and engage partners. He concluded by emphasizing the potential for private sector investment, noting Somalia's efforts to attract over USD 5.2 billion in agri-food investment, aiming to move beyond emergency responses toward long-term self-reliance.

Ms Karima Ahmed Al-Hada'a reflected on the challenges of disseminating and operationalizing national food systems pathways in fragile contexts. She explained that despite identifying game changers and pathways, progress in Yemen is hindered by a lack of political commitment, requiring high-level advocacy. As an interim approach, she emphasized integrating food systems into national plans as a unifying framework across sectors, sharing Yemen's experience with the Multisectoral Nutrition Action Plan while noting that the lack of proper tools and methods remained a key challenge. She concluded

by stressing the need for integrated approaches to ensure food systems are prioritized and implemented effectively, especially amid limited external funding.

In the afternoon session, Ms Armelle Siopathis shared efforts to revise the Central African Republic's national food systems roadmap to reflect emerging challenges and priorities. Despite early challenges, a revised decree ensures inclusive coordination and supports an updated roadmap with priorities such as transitioning from aid to development, promoting nutrition-sensitive value chains, and empowering youth and women in agriculture. She also underscored the need to mobilize untapped domestic resources, particularly from the private sector, and to utilize better forest-based and neglected foods to diversify and improve nutrition in the national food supply.

Ms. Emilie Chazelle addressed the urgency of transforming food systems in fragile contexts and emphasized the need to close the policy-investment gap through coordinated action. She highlighted five key priorities for the Ecosystem of Support: addressing unsustainable debt through tools like debt swaps and restructuring; aligning national policies with financing to turn food systems pathways into actionable investments; de-risking private sector engagement through blended finance and stronger governance; linking food systems transformation to peacebuilding and social cohesion; and fostering a cohesive, country-led Ecosystem of Support that moves beyond fragmented, project-based approaches. She called on national conveners to use the UNFSS+4 process to call for a system that truly responds to national priorities.

Dialogue with National Conveners

Following the expert panel, National Conveners engaged in an interactive discussion on applying a food systems transformation lens in fragile contexts. The Conveners were provided with three guiding questions:

1. What lessons have you learned in bridging policy commitments with implementation?
2. How do you foster transparency and inclusivity in complex contexts?
3. What innovative approaches have you explored to mobilize resources in challenging settings?

National Conveners reflected on the unique challenges and opportunities of advancing food systems transformation in fragile and conflict-affected settings, drawing from their national experiences to highlight context-specific lessons and approaches. They emphasized that the gap between policy commitments and practical implementation remains a core challenge in fragile settings. While food systems pathways and national strategies have been developed, turning these commitments into coordinated, cross-sectoral action is often hindered by institutional fragmentation, limited political will, and capacity constraints. Conveners noted the need for stronger interministerial coordination, integration of food systems into national development plans, and mechanisms that align policies with operational resources. They stressed that food systems transformation in these contexts requires long-term planning, adaptive structures, and resilience-oriented governance.

Creating inclusive and transparent food systems was highlighted as essential for building trust and sustaining progress in complex settings. Convenors shared efforts to engage diverse stakeholders, ranging from producers and communities to civil society and development partners, through multi-stakeholder platforms and coordinated governance structures. Despite persistent challenges such as siloed operations, weak accountability, and overlapping mandates, many convenors agreed that inclusive dialogue, clear roles, and regular consultation could strengthen transparency and reinforce national ownership of food systems transformation efforts.

National Convenors also brought up resource mobilization as a persistent barrier in fragile contexts, highlighting several innovative approaches to address it. These included leveraging joint development funds, promoting financial inclusion for smallholder farmers and agri-enterprises, integrating climate-resilient technologies, and exploring alternative funding streams such as diaspora investment and blended finance. Convenors noted that unlocking these resources depends on building investor confidence through improved governance and de-risking mechanisms. Effective resource mobilization must ultimately be embedded in nationally led, inclusive strategies that reflect the interconnected nature of food systems, development, and stability.

The Way Forward

The Dialogue underscored that applying a food systems transformation lens in fragile contexts demands strong political commitment, inclusive governance, and long-term, coordinated strategies that bridge policy, financing, and implementation. Participants stressed that in these settings, food insecurity cannot be viewed merely as a humanitarian issue but must be addressed as a structural challenge linked to peace, stability, and national development. Strong coordination mechanisms, institutional reform, and integration of food systems into broader national planning frameworks were identified as essential enablers.

Participants also emphasized that addressing debt burdens is essential to creating the fiscal space needed for long-term food systems transformation. Debt relief, restructuring, and debt-for-food-security swaps should be actively explored, particularly in countries where high external obligations constrain food system investments. These financial solutions must be accompanied by stronger governance, accountability, and transparency measures to build investor confidence and attract responsible private sector engagement.

Looking ahead to UNFSS+4 and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), the Dialogue called for food systems transformation to be prioritized in national, regional, and global financing agendas. Development partners, international financial institutions, and donors were encouraged to work more closely with fragile and conflict-affected countries to support demand-driven financing solutions, scale blended finance models, and foster cross-sectoral collaboration. A cohesive, well-resourced Ecosystem of Support rooted in national priorities and territorial needs will be key to enabling sustainable, resilient, and inclusive food systems for all.
