

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES

The promising role of food systems transformation for bold climate action: evidence and practice

Wednesday, 31 August 2022

Led by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, this Dialogue focused on discussing the place of food systems transformation in the climate agenda in the run-up to the 2022 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 27). Guiding questions encouraged a reflection on how food systems transformation can be incorporated into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) to support climate mitigation and adaptation, as well as main expectations regarding the role of food systems at COP 27. An Impact Panel with three guest speakers provided inputs to start the Dialogue. In the morning, Patty Fong, Program Director, Climate and Health and Well-being at the Global Alliance for the Future of Food, presented the results of a report assessing gaps and opportunities for incorporating food systems into NDCs in over 10 countries. Simi Peseta Noumea, Chief Executive Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Samoa, highlighted Samoa's experience in implementing its National Pathway for Food Systems Transformation in line with its NDC. In the afternoon, Martin Frick, Director, WFP Global Office Berlin, also addressed the rise in acute food insecurity in the world, noting how this scenario could deteriorate further if no action is taken to overcome the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. This note summarizes the main highlights of this Dialogue.

Impacts of climate change on food systems

In an interactive session, Convenors noted that food systems are particularly affected by climate change. This is because countries are increasingly facing water scarcity and flooding, soil erosion, changing pest and disease patterns, as well as changes in crop productivity and heat stress in crops and livestock. In Latin America, for example, droughts have been recurrent and of increasingly longer duration in the last 10 years. The impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly visible through the loss of lives from weather events such as floods, dry spells, landslides, and storms, as well as damage to infrastructure. These events also lead to severe crop loss, affecting livelihoods, and increasing food and nutritional insecurity. These extreme events sometimes result in conflict between affected communities and internally displaced people. From this perspective, climate change also increases poverty and migration. Furthermore, increases in temperature also affect the distribution and availability of safe food. Convenors emphasised these impacts are being experienced in addition to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in the cost of fuel and imported foodstuffs, and the decrease in the availability of agricultural inputs due to the conflict in Ukraine.

Climate action through food systems transformation

When discussing actions undertaken to mitigate and adapt to climate change, Convenors emphasized there is **no one-size-fits-all approach**. National governments are assessing and monitoring climate change drivers and impacts at the national level and identifying solutions accordingly. Food systems, in particular the agriculture sector, were repeatedly identified as major emitters of greenhouse gas emissions, which is why Convenors urged agrifood systems to become part of the solution. National governments are identifying ways to increase both the productivity and the sustainability of food systems to simultaneously address the climate and food crises. National governments are working towards **diversifying farming systems and boosting local agricultural production** to

increase resilience to shocks, reduce import dependency, avoid market price fluctuations, as well as provide support to other nations in need. Examples include, among others, agroecological principles and practices such as intensive agriculture, improved use of fertilizers, developing flood/climate tolerant crop varieties to significantly boost production.

In some countries, existing local **Indigenous food systems are being protected** and revitalised through agroecology and organic farming. In others, **climate-smart intensive agriculture** is also promoted to boost production while reducing water and resource waste. National governments are also working with the private sector to adopt **technologies** and improve production processes and **infrastructure** and prepare agricultural production for increasingly difficult weather conditions in the future. Innovations include flood tolerant crop varieties, climate resilient and climate-smart agricultural practices, agricultural methods to improve the use of fertilisers and more efficient water and land use. Identifying and managing **water resources** were repeatedly highlighted as essential to responding to climate shocks, particularly in Africa. National governments are also working towards a **decrease in deforestation and increased restoration of degraded forests and landscapes** to protect biodiversity, restore watersheds, fight desertification, and increase carbon sequestration. Participants in the session underlined the importance of **supporting farmers**. Convenors are working to further involve farmers in decision-making processes, increase farmers' access to land and financing. They are also working to increase the resilience of farmers' livelihoods by encouraging the sharing of best practices and improve farmers' access to education, especially for rural women.

National governments are also working towards setting targets for the **reduction of food loss and waste** and the **reduction of greenhouse gas emissions**. Key performance indicators are being created to track emissions from the sectors of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, and ambitious goals are set. In Ireland, a national climate law has been passed to reach net zero emissions by 2050. Actions to reduce emissions include **transitions towards plant-based diets** and an emphasis on the development and increase in the use of **renewable energy**.

Policy coherence and coordination for climate action and food systems transformation

Throughout the session, national Convenors repeatedly stressed the transversal nature of the issue of climate change and the need for a broad multi-sector approach, including policy coherence between climate, food systems, and biodiversity agendas and coordination of all implementation bodies across governments. Furthermore, it was emphasised that **responses to acute crises should not shift the focus away from long-term structural reforms**. This proves significantly challenging, especially in countries that need humanitarian assistance and are already experiencing financial shortages. Convenors also repeated the need for more emphasis on **regional cooperation** and **sharing best practices** between countries experiencing similar impacts. Participants to the Dialogue reported the urgent need for technical and financial support for adaptation and mitigation through research and development of climate insurance, agroecology, and green growth. Some countries are receiving support from entities such as the Green Climate Fund, the World Bank, USAID, and FAO, but highlighted the **need for coordination between these initiatives**. Convenors were especially interested in learning how to access climate finance mechanisms.

Pathways and Nationally Determined Contributions in advance of COP 27

In countries highly affected by climate change through droughts and flooding, climate change adaptation, mitigation, and resilience were key elements addressed in the Pathway. Several convenors also reported that their country's NDC addressed food systems issues, looking at agriculture's potential role in reducing emissions. However, several convenors also reported **challenges in ensuring policy coherence**, sometimes due to missing institutional coordination mechanisms between food and climate public policies. During the Dialogue, convenors also took the opportunity to report misalignment between the Pathway, its action plan and the objectives set out in the NDC, due to a lack of capacity: they called for dedicated technical and financial support.

Convenors welcome the opportunity to **share and promote best practices during the planned agriculture day at COP 27** and look forward to exchanging views between countries on transforming agrifood systems to be more sustainable and resilient. Several participants mentioned they would like to see a stronger focus on food systems at COP 27, which goes beyond agriculture. Convenors highlighted that the success of COP 27 is conditional on the availability of financial, technological, and technical support for developing countries.

Closing remarks

Offering support, the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub Director, Stefanos Fotiou, encouraged Convenors to ensure the next update of NDCs includes a strong focus on food systems. He welcomed suggestions on enabling entry points for national Convenors in these processes, noting that the Hub is working with the UNSDG trust fund to establish a financial window dedicated to food systems transformation and with the Green Climate Fund to support more proposals and projects.