

FOOD SYSTEMS SOLUTIONS DIALOGUES - Summary

Strengthening governance for more just, inclusive, and effective food systems transformations

Wednesday, 27 July 2022

This Dialogue, led by the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, discussed how law, regulations and institutions could support food systems transformation. The session highlighted how food systems transformation can be governed in effective, inclusive, and transparent ways – empowering existing institutions to become more supportive of food systems transformation. The Dialogue was introduced by Hub Director Stefanos Fotiou, and framed by a panel where colleagues from the International Development Law Organisation (IDLO) reflected on “the rule of law approaches to enhance good governance for food systems transformation”; a country example on “multistakeholder-based accountability reporting framework in Sweden” was also presented.¹

National Convenors and their teams presented their latest updates. They continue to advance on the development and implementation of the national pathways, with many being launched and presented at the highest level of government to receive validation and encourage the implementation process. In several countries, the pathways are being used as a reference document for the development of action plans for food systems transformation, or national strategies and policies on food security and nutrition, for example. Resources are being mobilised, and projects and programmes involving food systems are being aligned to the pathways. This note summarizes the key actions taken by Convenors to strengthen governance for more just, inclusive, and effective food systems transformation.

Importance of progressive legislative frameworks for food systems transformation

Due to current and ongoing global challenges, including climate change and the war in Ukraine, food systems are at the top of government agendas. During this Dialogue, Convenors reflected on the **need for progressive legislative frameworks to transform national food systems**. They are using the pathways to build and consolidate food system acts, strategies, and policies, and in many developing countries national governments are setting up **targets for food systems transformation**, including local production, nutrition, and other actions to deliver on the promise of moving from food security to food sovereignty. Frameworks are being established to support producers, smallholders, and family farmers, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises to sustainably boost local agriculture and food production.

Laws are being passed to recognize the rights of smallholder farmers and agricultural businesses, and programmes are being implemented to ensure their access to economic support. National governments are also undertaking **local value chain analyses** to ensure the development of context-specific regulations. **Laws on land tenure** are being prioritized to protect areas for food production and address issues around land ownership, including customary land issues and the management of land and water resources.

¹ The PowerPoints of these presentations are shared with this summary.

Inclusion of the Right to Food and food safety and regulations for food systems transformation

Throughout the Dialogue, Convenors highlighted the **right to food** as a fundamental element to be incorporated within legislative frameworks. They described their efforts to recognize it in both new and existing institutional architectures, including working on **social protection frameworks** that review food access and consumption issues. Governments are also working on promoting local consumption to shorten food supply chains and promote the consumption of fresh products. When imports are necessary, **food safety laws** are being endorsed to ensure the import of safe and healthy food. Particularly in Latin America, governments are aiming to promote healthy behaviours through **nutritional regulations and laws on the nutritional composition of food**. Children's nutrition is being addressed through the development of **school feeding laws and programmes** ensuring the delivery and quality of food for students. Convenors emphasised the need for food systems transformation to leave no one behind. Initiatives are being put in place to ensure that equity and inclusion guide food systems transformation, allowing women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and other vulnerable groups to fully play a role.

Finance is key to strengthened governance

In the discussion groups, **finance** was identified as a crucial component to ensuring the proper functioning of governance mechanisms, with governance identified as key to providing the legal frameworks for investments and the right incentives and taxes to promote the transformation needed in food systems. In many countries, lack of financing is a major barrier in implementing national pathways. Various means of funding are being sought out, including **foreign direct and private sector investment**. Convenors are also advocating for the **inclusion of food systems in annual budget planning**. Food security laws and policies for the agri-food sector are being reviewed to include issues of financing. Convenors highlighted the need to define an **investment framework for the implementation of the pathways**, specifying the sources and mechanisms of funding for each action at both national and territorial levels and defining monitoring frameworks. Governments are also seeking to provide financial support to individuals through **zero-rate loans to smallholders**, the **creation and promotion of food banks**, and **reductions of import tariffs** on basic food products to increase their accessibility.

The rule of law must be enforced

Convenors further discussed legislation for food systems transformation by addressing the importance of the **rule of law** and its role in **building trust between food systems actors and governance institutions**. Promoting the rule of law in the implementation of the pathways was shown to be particularly important. Several African countries are working to strengthen the **independence of the judiciary and all populations' access to justice**, and to provide a **mechanism of complaint in the case of a violation of the right to food**. The rule of law is also important when addressing foreign investors operating on commercial farms. Civil society and human rights organisations are working with governments on **monitoring mechanisms** to ensure a favourable environment for the implementation of the pathways.

Several Convenors also underscored the limitations of the rule of law, in the case where the review of existing legislation is not possible due to internal conflict, or when security aspects do not provide the space for the development and guarantee of human rights. Enforcement, they concluded, is crucial.

Trust as a key component to strengthened governance

The role of **trust** for effective governance and food systems transformation was repeated throughout all sessions. At the national level, Convenors reported that steps are being taken to build trust between institutions and create a safe space for multi-sectoral negotiations and coordination. Convenors highlighted the need for open discussion and increased connection between actors to build trust and address governance issues.

Multi-sector, multi-stakeholder, multi-level inclusion

More **dialogues** are being planned and held with different sectors and stakeholders, including farmers, producer organisations, youth, universities, Indigenous Peoples, consumer groups, civil society, UN agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and donors. National governments are also developing **inter-ministerial councils for food systems interventions** and are working towards establishing strategies involving the whole of government. **Multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder platforms** such as national and inter-ministerial councils involving non-government actors are also being increasingly developed. Platforms that existed before the Summit process have been opened to include a broader range of stakeholders.

In certain countries, dialogues and multi-stakeholder engagement are promoted within **decentralised structures** to ensure grassroots engagement and a more participatory and territorial approach to decision-making and actions in the different sub-national contexts. In other countries, policy and legal drafting will call upon multi-stakeholder consultations to ensure grassroots involvement. The aim of holding these dialogues is to ensure all actors are heard and have the ability to participate in decision-making, ensuring a transparent, inclusive, participatory and increasingly trustworthy legislative and decision-making process for improved food systems governance.

Concluding remarks

Convenors requested additional information on the support the Hub can provide to countries, and guidelines for reliable resources that can be mobilized by the Hub. Convenors would also like to hear more about global initiatives that can protect countries' access to healthy and nutritious food as food prices continue to rise.

Stefanos Fotiou, Director of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, concluded the session by commending the incremental institutional changes occurring within governments and called for these changes to be presented during the 2023 Stocktaking Moment.