

2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4)

Concept Note for Session Co-leads

July 27-29, 2025 – Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

1. Title of the session:

Anticipating the Future of Food: Science, Knowledge and Innovation for Just Transformations

2. Type of the session:

High-Level Panel

3. Date and time of the session:

29 July, 15:00-16:20

4. Session background:

This session directly supports UNFSS+4's objectives of assessing progress, strengthening partnerships, and unlocking investments by addressing the critical Science-Policy-Society interface gap identified across regional preparatory reports. This gap represents a significant barrier to realizing the tremendous potential of evidence-based food systems transformation, which could advance multiple SDGs.

To bridge this gap, the session centers on mobilizing knowledge co-creation across sectors, scales and actors to accelerate evidence-based food systems transformation. This approach demonstrates how inclusive science-policy-society collaboration can pool collective intelligence, navigate complexity, and deliver solutions that align nutrition, climate, biodiversity, health and economic development goals simultaneously.

The session brings together diverse voices spanning multiple levels of engagement: country ministers share national experiences; civil society leaders provide rights-based perspectives on transformation pathways including through sustainable traditional food systems; country representatives engaged in successful initiatives, for instance, on school meals, agroecology and healthy diets, demonstrate evidence-based impact; and chairs of key institutional platforms including CFS High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), FAO, CGIAR and the UNFSS Scientific Advisory Committee offer insights on the barriers and scaling effective arrangements.

By showcasing both grassroots successes and institutional innovations, this collaborative approach transforms fragmented expertise into collective intelligence, enabling the design of integrated action and food system governance that serve multiple goals. The session provides practical tools for strategic investment, demonstrates how diverse knowledge systems can drive multi-sector partnerships, and establishes pathways for sustained engagement towards the achievements of the SDGs.

The design incorporates a rights-based opening, evidence-based success stories, institutional innovation examples, barriers to overcome, and concrete options for scaling evidence-based approaches that ensure locally tailored, just solutions.

5. Context:

There is growing recognition that food systems must simultaneously address nutrition, climate, biodiversity, environmental and social challenges. The 2024 IPBES assessment shows that addressing these challenges separately is putting all systems at risk, requiring integrated approaches that create synergies and opportunities while helping navigate trade-offs.

Research demonstrates the potential of evidence-based food systems transformation. Supported by enabling policies and annual investments of less than 0.5% of global GDP through 2030, this could unlock USD \$4.5 trillion in new business opportunities, over 120 million rural jobs, and protection of ecosystem services worth USD \$44 trillion, while eliminating USD \$12 trillion in wasteful hidden costs.

By 2023, 119 countries submitted National Pathways for Food Systems Transformation, with countries like Ethiopia, Brazil, and Vietnam leading evidence-based interventions that achieve multiple goals: school feeding programs improving nutrition and education while supporting local employment, particularly for smallholder farmers ; agroecological practices delivering diverse foods while enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity conservation; and healthy diet initiatives aligning nutrition, livelihoods, and environmental outcomes.

However, UNFSS+4 Regional Preparatory Reports consistently identified the Science-Policy-Society interface gap as a critical bottleneck—where expertise silos prevent diverse knowledge systems from informing decisions and limit knowledge co-creation across sectors and scales. While successful examples of participatory, inclusive knowledge production show what's possible, this gap remains a barrier preventing societies from capturing transformation benefits.

While successful coalition approaches and knowledge platforms demonstrate what's possible for effective science-policy-society collaboration, critical gaps remain in institutional arrangements. There is an urgent need for enhanced mechanisms that enable convergence of nutrition, climate, health, and biodiversity policies across sectors and scales as countries approach the 2030 deadline for SDG achievement. This session addresses these urgent needs by mobilizing diverse actors to demonstrate how inclusive knowledge co-creation can bridge these gaps and accelerate evidence-based transformation.

6. Session objectives:

- **Mobilize diverse knowledge actors for collaborative action:** Bring together researchers, policymakers, and communities from multiple scales and sectors to demonstrate how inclusive knowledge co-creation accelerates evidence-based, rights-based food systems transformation.
- **Present compelling evidence and options:** Showcase transformation successes and outline specific, actionable opportunities that strengthen science-policy-society collaboration across scales, sectors, and knowledge types.

- **Build momentum for sustained engagement:** Generate dialogue and interest among countries and institutions for enhanced science-policy-society coordination towards UNFSS+6 and SDG achievement through strategic investment.

7. Link UNFSS+4 objectives

- Reflecting on Progress:** The session showcases evidence-based transformation successes through global-to-local-to-global initiatives achieving multiple goals through science—from school feeding to agroecology and healthy diets initiatives—alongside science-policy-society dialogue through formal and informal structures. It then identifies what has worked in participatory knowledge production that delivers multiple SDG outcomes simultaneously, examines persistent gaps in interdisciplinary knowledge creation identified in UNFSS+4 Regional Preparatory Reports, and builds momentum for enhanced collaboration through lessons learned across scales, sectors and actors.
- Partnerships and Tracking Commitments:** The session recognizes that realizing the full potential of science-policy-society collaboration requires coordinated, multi-level approaches that bring together diverse actors with varying power, interests, and objectives. Examples from grassroots coalition successes and institutional innovations illustrate how inclusive knowledge co-creation can navigate power imbalances and align divergent interests across social, economic, and environmental goals. This approach enables the transformation of fragmented expertise into collective intelligence, supporting the design of integrated action and food systems governance that address multiple food system transformation challenges for people and the planet, while creating coherence across scales, sectors, and stakeholder priorities while ensuring more equitable participation.
- Unlocking Finance and Increasing Investments**

8. Key message(s) of the session:

- Science plays a pivotal, cross-cutting role actively supporting convergence across scales from local to global and global to local, creating synergies and opportunities while navigating trade-offs through collective intelligence, actionable knowledge, and dialogue.
- Evidence-based frameworks and inclusive science-policy-society interfaces enable convergence of policies and interventions across sectors and scales through local-to-global-to-local co-creation of knowledge and collaborative decision-making processes.
- Invest strategically in demand-driven, rights-based food systems transformation to deliver tailored solutions through evidence-based approaches.
- Evidence-based decision-making has the potential to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of outcomes, while enhancing transparency and accountability.

9. Session format:

The session features a framing presentation followed by two sequential panels reflecting diverse science-policy-society arrangements. Panel 1 showcases transformation progress from coalition and initiative experiences at country level, examining how science enabled impact, persistent barriers, and scaling breakthroughs needed. Panel 2 addresses institutional responses to transformation demands, focusing on evidence needs, effective

cross-scale arrangements, critical gaps, and innovations toward UNFSS+6. The session includes audience interventions followed by closing remarks with key takeaways and call to actions. This enables cross-scale learning from grassroots successes and failures, and institutional innovations to strengthen science-policy-society collaboration for just, sustainable food systems transformation.

10. Guiding questions for speakers:

- From your experiences through coalitions such as the School Meals Coalition, Agroecology Coalition, and Healthy Diets Coalition: How has evidence enabled progress toward multiple goals? What is needed to scale multi-sectoral initiatives effectively? What will strengthen collective intelligence for evidence-based transformation?
- From your experience with country-led processes such as the G20 and national and grassroots food systems transformation initiatives: how has evidence-based science-policy-society collaboration informed your approach to multilateral and national engagement, what opportunities have these platforms created for strengthening science-policy interfaces, and what sustained mechanisms are needed to maintain momentum for evidence-based transformation?
- From your institutional perspective on strengthening science-policy-society interfaces: what arrangements and practices have proven most effective for enabling evidence-based transformation, where do critical gaps remain, and what institutional innovations and investments are needed to accelerate progress towards UNFSS+6 and achievement of the SDGs?

11. Desirable outcome:

Clearly outlined options and compelling case for strengthening science-policy-society collaboration and coordination across scales, sectors, and knowledge types and actors towards UNFSS+6 and SDG achievement.

12. Additional links/documents:

- CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program: <https://www.cgiar.org/cgiar-research-portfolio-2025-2030/policy-innovations/>
- Guidance on strengthening national science–policy interfaces for agrifood systems: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5238569e-1869-449a-b3fd-1d094b54e255/content/cd3125en.html>
- Montpellier Process: Pooling Collective Intelligence for Action: <https://sites.google.com/view/montpellierprocess>
- Committee on World Food Security: <https://www.fao.org/cfs/policy-products>
- HLPE website: <https://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/en>
- HLPE. 2020. Food security and nutrition: Building a global narrative towards 2030. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome. <https://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/publications/hlpe-15/en>