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Food and Agriculture
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Продовольственная и
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منظمة
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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

Thirty-first Session¹

New dates to be confirmed

United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021

Executive Summary

The 2030 Agenda has heightened awareness of the key role that future food systems will play in meeting the global challenges of malnutrition, poverty, use of biodiversity and ecosystems services and climate change. Food systems stakeholders are beginning to take actions and to change behaviour, but their many independent initiatives lack a common framing of the complex interactions, dependencies and trade-offs intrinsic to food systems. This is constraining the ability of societies to identify and implement appropriate pathways towards more sustainable food systems.

The overarching goal of the Food Systems Summit, to be convened by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2021, is to help stakeholders to better understand and manage the complex choices that affect the future of food systems and to accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Structured around engagement at the national, regional and global levels, the preparatory process towards the summit will enable stakeholders to develop, test and adapt frameworks and decision-making tools and will provide platforms for the innovative partnerships and initiatives needed to catalyse significant commitments for action and investment towards more sustainable food systems.

This item will allow Members to engage with the process towards the UN Food Systems Summit and to identify opportunities for contributing to the summit objectives and outcomes.

Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- a. Affirm the critical importance of action and investment towards more sustainable food systems to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda;
- b. Acknowledge the need for improved frameworks and decision-making tools to guide interventions in support of more sustainable food systems;
- c. Share experiences of initiatives that have been taken to ensure that food system developments contribute to an acceleration in the delivery of the SDGs;
- d. Provide guidance on opportunities for multistakeholder engagement during the preparatory process towards the summit.

Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:

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¹ Rescheduled from 23-27 March 2020, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

I. Introduction

1. In 2021, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General will convene a Food Systems Summit as part of the UN Decade of Action. The summit reflects the increased recognition that in delivering greater quantities of more affordable food, food system developments have worked against a number of societal objectives including improved health and nutrition, reduced poverty, improved ecosystem services and social inclusion.
2. Today, over 821 million people are hungry and more than two billion people are overweight or obese. Despite a 300 percent increase in global food production since the mid-1960s, malnutrition in all its forms is now the number one factor contributing to the global burden of disease and reduced life expectancy. Levels of extreme poverty persist in rural areas, with the majority of more marginalized populations relying on food production and the food economy for their livelihoods. Addressing poverty and malnutrition requires that future food systems are more inclusive of vulnerable groups of producers and consumers.
3. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Land has highlighted the trade-offs between the need to meet projected food demands with current practices and the prospects of achieving global sustainability goals. Food systems today contribute up to 29 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions, significantly contributing to climate change. Climate change will in turn alter food production patterns, increasing risks and threatening food security everywhere, particularly for the most vulnerable. The report by Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services shows that one million species are now threatened with extinction, posing serious threats for human beings. Agriculture is responsible for up to 80 percent of biodiversity loss and continues to overuse increasingly scarce natural resources including water, forests and land. It is the largest consumer of the world's freshwater resources and more than one-quarter of the energy used globally is expended on food production and supply.
4. The 2030 Agenda and its associated SDGs have shone further light on the importance of these objectives and on the key role that future food systems can play in their achievement. Indeed, the Global Sustainable Development Report identifies food systems as one of the few key entry points to bring about a worldwide transition to a more sustainable trajectory.
5. Food systems stakeholders are beginning to take actions and to change behaviour. Producers are experimenting with alternative practices to reduce impacts on biodiversity, natural resources and climate; the food industry is engaging in more sustainable sourcing, product reformulation and reduction of losses; consumers, where they can, are seeking out better information about foods for healthier diets and advocating for more environmentally friendly food products and reduction and better handling of waste.
6. However, the many independent initiatives of governments, private sector and civil society that have emerged in support of more sustainable food systems lack a common framing of the complex interactions, dependencies and trade-offs intrinsic to food systems. This is constraining the ability of societies with different priorities, observing different trends and having different agro-ecological and institutional potentials to identify and implement appropriate pathways towards more sustainable food systems. It is also limiting their ability to communicate and share learning.

II. How Will the Summit Address These Constraints?

7. The overarching goal of the Food Systems Summit is to help stakeholders and leaders of transformation initiatives better understand and manage the complex choices that affect the future of food systems and accelerate progress toward the SDGs. Grounded in the context of the 2030 Agenda, the summit will help UN Member States and their many partners meet the challenges of malnutrition, poverty, use of biodiversity and ecosystems services and climate change.

8. This will be achieved by working towards five objectives helping to transform global food systems to deliver on all 17 interconnected SDGs:

1. Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food for all (enabling all people to be well nourished and healthy; progressive realization of the right to food).
2. Shifting to sustainable consumption patterns (promoting and creating demand for healthy and sustainable diets, reducing waste).
3. Boosting nature-positive production at sufficient scales (acting on climate change, reducing emissions and increasing carbon capture, regenerating and protecting critical ecosystems and reducing food loss and energy usage, without undermining health or nutritious diets).
4. Advancing equitable livelihoods and value distribution (raising incomes, distributing risk, expanding inclusion, promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all).
5. Building resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses (ensuring the continued functionality of healthy and sustainable food systems).

III. What Will the Process Look Like?

9. The Summit will be informed by an inclusive, far-reaching preparatory process. Supported by robust and independent evidence, five Action Tracks, aligned to the Summit's five objectives, will offer all constituencies a space to share and learn, to foster new actions and partnerships, and to amplify existing initiatives.
10. Through dialogues in all countries and through a franchised toolkit that can be taken up by any constituency, the Summit will offer an inclusive and unique approach to ensuring this is both "a People's Summit" and "a Solutions Summit", by giving an opportunity for all countries and many communities to discuss their food system, what's working and not working, what is a priority to improve, and identifying priority actions moving forward.
11. Engagement with existing global platforms and contemporaneous events will ensure improved alignment of understanding and coherence of action and a powerful digital platform will provide a universally accessible, dynamic, and inclusive platform where the Summit process will be accessible to all up to and beyond the Summit.
12. This process will provide substantive inputs to the Summit, which is expected to yield the following outcomes:

- **Dramatically elevated public discourse** about the importance of food systems leading to the achievement of the SDGs and what to do to get the public working for people and planet.
- **Significant action**, with measurable outcomes that enable achievement of the 2030 goals. This will include highlighting existing solutions and celebrating leaders in food systems transformation, as well as calling for new actions worldwide by different actors, including countries, cities, companies, civil society, citizens and food producers.
- **A high-level set of principles** established through the process that will guide Members and other stakeholders to leverage their food systems capacity to support the SDGs. Distilled through all elements of the preparatory process, these principles will set an optimistic and encouraging vision in which food systems play a central role in delivering on the vision of the 2030 Agenda.
- **A system of follow-up and review** that will drive new actions and results, allow for sharing of experiences, lessons, and knowledge, and incorporate new metrics for impact analysis.

IV. How will the process be governed?

13. A Summit Advisory Committee chaired by the Deputy Secretary General and with multi stakeholder membership, including the Principals of FAO, IFAD, WFP, country representatives and representatives of the private sector and civil society will be responsible for oversight of the preparatory process. The Advisory Committee will provide guidance to the Special Envoy for the Food Systems Summit, Ms Agnes Kalibata. The Special Envoy will provide leadership, guidance and strategic direction towards the summit. A Scientific Group has been established to ensure independence in the generation and use of evidence. A UN taskforce will ensure broad UN engagement in the process towards the Summit and to supporting its follow-up. A Champions' Network will build, mobilize, and maintain strategic coalitions with partners to drive a global campaign toward and beyond the Summit.