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# COMMITTEE ON FORESTRY

## TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION

5 - 9 October 2020

## FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION AND THE UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT

### Executive Summary

This document provides a summary description of FAO's support to food systems transformation in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the COVID-19 pandemic, outlining FAO's strategic directions and linkages to forests and trees. It further informs about the process towards the United Nations Secretary-General's Food Systems Summit in 2021 and FAO's related contributions.

### Suggested actions by the Committee on Forestry

The Committee is invited to:

- Affirm the critical importance of FAO's support to Members in taking actions and investments towards the systematic integration of forests and agroforestry into more sustainable food systems, and the added urgency for transformative change in light of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Acknowledge the importance of FAO adopting a more systemic and coordinated approach to supporting Members in the transformation of their food systems to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda;
- Acknowledge the role that the Organization is playing in supporting the preparatory process towards the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, inter alia, leading the Knowledge and Policy workstream, facilitating dialogue and developing the capacities of food systems stakeholders to identify, design and scale-up coordinated initiatives to catalyse meaningful food systems transformation, appropriate to local contexts;
- Provide guidance on opportunities for amplifying the impact of the Summit and how FAO might support Members in their post-Summit development efforts.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has heightened awareness of the key role that food systems transformation can play as an entry point for accelerating progress to achieving the SDGs. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda requires that Members work to eliminate hunger and all other forms of malnutrition, while creating the growth and employment opportunities needed to eradicate poverty, sustain biodiversity and natural resources and their services, and address the growing pressures of climate change.
2. Forests and trees play an important role in agriculture and food systems in two ways: they are critical for both storing carbon and regulating climate and water at local and regional levels, which are becoming increasingly fundamental preconditions for future sustainable food systems. Further services support agricultural, livestock and fishery production, including soil erosion protection, nutrient circulation, pest control and pollination. Forests and trees are also important for diets of millions of people in rural, as well as urban areas, as an integral part of food systems. This includes providing: i) calories, protein, vitamins and minerals; ii) income derived from forest products and services; and iii) wood-fuel for cooking, which allows billions of people to eat and drink water safely.
3. Food systems stakeholders have been making changes to improve the sustainability of food systems: i) producers, by experimenting with alternative production technologies to reduce externalities such as deforestation or land degradation, emissions driving climate change and water pollution, thereby limiting their impacts on biodiversity and natural resources, including forests and climate; ii) the food industry, by engaging in more sustainable sourcing, product reformulation and reduction of losses; and iii) consumers, in seeking out better information about safe foods for healthier diets and advocating for more environmentally friendly food products and reduction and better handling of waste.
4. 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 these systems. This has constrained the ability of societies with different priorities, observing different trends and having different agro-ecological and institutional potentials to identify and implement pathways towards more sustainable food systems.
5. The COVID-19 pandemic has further alerted societies to the significant weaknesses in many contemporary food systems. These include the logistical challenges in globally interconnected food value chains when borders close and movement is restricted; the challenges of accessing safe, quality food at affordable prices, the reliance on temporary labour and the vulnerability of those employees engaged throughout the food system, and the increasing risks to global health posed by certain food production systems, particularly those resulting in land use change in biodiversity rich environments that diminish the buffer capacity of nature. Disruptions in global food supply chains and restrictions on informal and open-air markets has put further pressure on communities around the world. It has also prompted people to source food and feed locally, potentially creating opportunities for sustainable local or traditional food systems and related income opportunities. It has also shone light on the resilience of different food systems to shocks, bringing into stark contrast what is working, what needs improvement and what needs radical reform. The pandemic has also demonstrated that significant transformative change to the way in which societies' core systems operate is possible.

## II. FAO'S SUPPORT TO FOOD SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

6. Food systems development has long been recognized in FAO's work as a key driver for food and agriculture development, featuring in both technical and policy work. The emergence of a

distinctive food systems approach linking different aspects of FAO's work, for example agriculture, forestry, fisheries and land use sustainability, poverty reduction, improved access to investment and finance, and the importance of addressing food systems transformation in a more holistic frame are more recent phenomena.

7. In the development of its Strategic Framework, FAO seeks to ensure greater alignment and coherence in its support to Members, to reflect the increased recognition of food systems transformation as a principal driver of sustainable development and the need for a better understanding of the complex choices that affect their food systems.

8. To facilitate this improved coherence, FAO is supporting the development of a common understanding of Sustainable Food Systems and the pathways required to transition towards more sustainable systems. FAO has been working to clarify the concept of food systems, for example through the issuance of briefs, such as the *FAO (2018) Sustainable Food Systems: Concept and Framework*, and supporting the deliberations of its Technical Committees and Regional Conferences, such as through the inclusion of the item on Sustainable Food Systems on the agenda of the 26th Session of COAG in October 2018. FAO is also building the capacity of its staff in adopting a food systems approach through a capacity development programme soon to be launched as an e-learning course.

9. FAO has also played a lead role in defining approaches to food systems transformation through its technical support to the One Planet Network's Sustainable Food Systems Programme, in the formulation of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Food Systems Impact Programme, through the CFS Voluntary Guidelines on Food Systems and Nutrition, and in co-leading a taskforce on Food Systems in preparation for the Nutrition for Growth Summit. Furthermore, FAO has been at the forefront of recent high level events advocating for greater attention to the way in which interventions in food systems are designed and implemented, including the HLPF (2018 and 2019), UNGA 2019 and COP25.

10. The urgent need for improved data, analysis and decision making tools to help countries to prioritize food system outcomes, work their way through the complex trade-offs, and to identify critical bottlenecks and investment gaps is being addressed through the establishment of a technical platform for data sharing and analysis as part of the Hand-in-Hand (HIH) initiative. The HIH technical platform supports scenario-based analysis of alternative food systems transformation pathways and helps stakeholders evaluate means of reducing trade-offs among alternative policy and investment mixes.

11. The food systems approach has also informed the development of several recent initiatives which provide an entry point to support countries in the transformation of their food systems. Examples of these that are particularly relevant for forestry include:

- Efforts at UN Secretary-General level, co-led by FAO, to turning the tide on deforestation by addressing deforestation as an integral part of transforming food systems.
- Programmes and projects of both the GEF and the Green Climate Fund (GCF) addressing food systems, land use and restoration or emissions from agriculture, forests and land use through integrated, cross-sectoral approaches.
- Initiatives such as the Great Green Wall of the Sahara and the Sahel, which promote sustainable food systems, healthy diets and sustainable agro-silvo-pastoral systems.
- The FAO Sustainable Wildlife Programme, which promotes sustainable use of wildlife in food systems, while protecting biodiversity and reducing threats from zoonotic diseases.

### **III. BUILDING ON THE PROCESS TOWARDS THE 2021 UN FOOD SYSTEMS SUMMIT**

12. The process towards the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit provides significant opportunities for FAO to further leverage its support to Members.

13. 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. This will be achieved by working through five action tracks towards the objectives of the Food Systems Summit:

- i) Ensure Access to Safe and Nutritious Food for All
- ii) Shift to Sustainable Consumption Patterns
- iii) Boost Nature Positive Production at sufficient scale
- iv) Advance Equitable Livelihoods
- v) Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stress

14. In doing so, the process towards the Summit will result in the following outcomes: elevated public discourse about the importance of food systems in the achievement of the SDGs; significant action with measurable outcomes that enable the achievement of the SDGs; a high level set of principles that will guide Members and other stakeholders to leverage their food systems capacity to achieve the SDGs; and a system of follow-up and review to drive actions and results.

15. In supporting this process, FAO will play a key role in ensuring that the improved evidence, which is critical for informing complex decisions and for fostering effective multi-stakeholder engagement and action, is made more readily available and useable. This will include both (i) evidence generated at the global level which helps stakeholders to understand the impacts of, and interactions between, different multilaterally agreed actions, and (ii) evidence from the local and subnational level which captures the complexity of these systems and assists in determining their responsiveness to different policy interventions. This could include, for example, the extensive lessons that can be drawn from Indigenous Food Systems as recognized during the First High Level Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems organized by FAO in 2018, which proposed the creation of a global hub on Indigenous Food Systems to improve knowledge generation and sharing.

16. FAO will contribute to developing improved frameworks and tools, to add value to its existing initiatives through strengthened collaboration and partnership and to support evidence based dialogues in assisting countries to determine the most appropriate pathway for the development of their food systems, taking into account the possible contributions of forests and agroforestry to develop such systems.