



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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High-level parliamentary meeting

Transforming food systems for health, equity, and sustainability

23 June 2021
15:00 – 17:00 CEST (Geneva)

Concept note

Background

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General will convene a Food Systems Summit in September 2021. It aims to identify solutions and launch new actions at all levels of the food system to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food.

As part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Summit will raise awareness and develop principles on how to leverage food systems to drive progress on the SDGs, all of which rely to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems.

Parliaments and parliamentarians are challenged to contribute more effectively to the governance of food systems, including the protection of the right to food, the regulation of the different stakeholders, institutions and processes involved along the food supply chain, and the promotion of equitable access to healthy and sustainable diets. Policies and laws on equity, including gender equity, poverty, education and health must also be reviewed from the perspective of food systems and their impact on the ability of food systems to deliver nutritious and sustainable food for all.

Why food systems?

Food systems encompass all the people, institutions and processes that play a part in the production, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food. Food systems therefore touch every aspect of human existence and are intricately connected to human and animal health, land, water, climate, biodiversity, and the economy. Achieving the SDG ambition of ending hunger and malnutrition by 2030 will require a holistic approach incorporating the entire food system.

However, too many of the world's food systems are failing at multiple levels. Current food systems drive greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation, contributing between 21 and 37 per cent of all global greenhouse gas emissions, using 70 per cent of all fresh water, and contributing to the degradation and destruction of ecosystems.¹ As the world population is projected to increase to 10 billion by 2050, the impact of food production must be reduced in line with the SDG targets on sustainable food production systems, biodiversity and the protection, management and restoration of ecosystems.

¹ FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development, UNICEF, World Food Programme and WHO, *The state of food security and nutrition in the world* (Rome, 2020): www.fao.org/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/.

Unhealthy diets linked to highly processed, industrialized food are now the leading global health risk and every year account for 11 million premature deaths.² Healthy diets remain inaccessible to the most vulnerable populations. While 690 million people worldwide are chronically hungry,³ adult obesity is rising in nearly every country bringing with it a parallel rise of diet-related non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. The proportion of food waste is also significant, as one third of what is produced is never eaten.

By conjugating health and sustainability considerations, transitioning to healthy diets can have significant impacts on human, environmental and economic health. A wide range of fiscal, regulatory and trade measures are required to reorient corporations and markets towards healthy and sustainable diets.

The majority of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers. Yet, there are growing inequalities with the largest one per cent of farms operating on 70 per cent of the world's farmland.⁴ Current food systems are over-reliant on food production chains that have grown more distant, are more vulnerable to shocks, and lead to higher environmental externalities.

Together with fishers, pastoralists, people dependent on forests and other ecosystems, indigenous people, and agricultural wage workers, smallholder farmers continue to face barriers to equitable access to livelihoods. Objective barriers such as lack of infrastructure, skills and knowledge, are reinforced by social and economic inequalities including gender discrimination and the denial of rights and entitlements leading to inequitable access to assets, services and information.

Addressing food systems inequalities and power imbalances can have wide-ranging positive impacts across the SDGs by tackling poverty from a multi-dimensional perspective with a focus on women, youth, indigenous people, seasonal labourers and other groups whose livelihoods are limited by current food production, distribution and consumption patterns.

Food systems are affected by conflict, economic crises and environmental shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of strengthening food systems to maintain the economic, social and environmental foundations to produce sufficient nutritious food. All individuals and institutions involved in food systems must be empowered to prepare, respond and recover from crises.

Objectives and modalities

As a contribution to the UN Food Systems Summit, the meeting will build understanding of food systems and discuss how parliaments can engage on food systems so as to take forward the recommendations that will be provided by the Summit. The meeting will identify entry points for parliamentary action to ensure the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food responds to health, equity and sustainability imperatives. It will focus specifically on health and climate change as linchpin issues cutting across food systems, while paying particular attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups and mainstreaming an equity perspective throughout the discussions. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting will highlight how addressing food systems failures can support post-COVID-19 recovery and strengthen resilience of societies and economies.

The outcomes of the meeting will inform the preparatory process of the UN Food Systems Summit.

The meeting will be held virtually and will be open to all parliaments. The working languages will be English, French and Spanish (simultaneous interpretation will be provided).

² EAT-Lancet Commission, "Food, Planet, Health: Healthy Diets from Sustainable Food Systems" (Summary report of the EAT-Lancet Commission, 2019): https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf.

³ *The state of food security and nutrition in the world*, www.fao.org/publications/sofi/2020/en/.

⁴ International Land Coalition, United for Land Rights, OXFAM, *Uneven ground: Land inequality at the heart of unequal societies*, available at: www.landcoalition.org/en/uneven-ground/report-and-papers/.

Programme

Opening

- 15:00 – 15:05 CEST [Welcome remarks](#)
- 15:05 – 15:35 [Keynote presentations on food systems](#)
Followed by Q&A

Session 1: Build sustainability – Food systems and climate change

- 15:35 – 16:10 [Expert presentation](#)
Followed by interactive discussion
- Guiding questions:
- What are the long-term environmental, economic and social consequences of current unsustainable food systems?
 - What transformations are needed to address the impact of climate change on food systems and the impact of food systems on climate change?
 - What are the legislative and policy entry points for more sustainable food systems that are climate-smart, inclusive and gender-responsive?

Session 2: Improve health – Food systems and malnutrition

- 16:10 – 16:45 [Expert presentation](#)
Followed by interactive discussion
- Guiding questions:
- What are the main transformations of food production, distribution and consumption that are required to tackle all forms of malnutrition?
 - How are current food systems driving inequalities, including gender inequality, in nutrition and health?
 - How can laws and policies support a food-systems approach to address malnutrition and what are the key policy trade-offs?

Closing

- 16:45 – 16:55 [Presentation on future perspectives](#)
- 16:55 – 17:00 [Closing remarks](#)