



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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Parliamentary meeting on the occasion of the UN Food Systems Summit: Transforming food systems for health, equity, and sustainability

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

REPORT

Speakers (in order of appearance)

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Ms. Agnes Kalibata, United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy to the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit
Mr. Máximo Torero Cullen, Chief Economist, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
Mr. John Ingram, Food Systems Transformation Programme Leader, Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford
Ms. Sania Nishtar, Senator; Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection

Moderators

Ms. Patricia Torsney, Permanent Observer and Head of the New York Office, IPU
Ms. Gerda Verburg, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and SUN Movement Coordinator

Introduction

Food systems touch every aspect of human existence and are intricately connected to human and animal health, land, water, climate, biodiversity, and the economy. However, too many of the world's food systems are failing at multiple levels. 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.

The aim of the high-level parliamentary meeting organized on 23 June 2021 was to inform the preparatory process of the Food Systems Summit convened by the UN Secretary-General for September 2021. The meeting helped identify entry points for parliamentary action to ensure the production, processing, distribution and consumption of food responds to health, equity and sustainability imperatives.

The event was attended by close to 80 parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from 23 countries.

The welcoming remarks by the IPU Secretary General Mr. M. Chungong were followed by keynote addresses by Ms. A. Kalibata (UN Special Envoy) and Mr. M. Torero Cullen (FAO) who highlighted the main challenges related to food systems and the solutions the UN Food Systems Summit process would be focusing on. The two sessions which focused on climate change and malnutrition featured expert presentations by Mr. J. Ingram (University of Oxford) and Ms. S. Nishtar (Pakistan)

respectively. Interventions from parliamentarians on their countries' experiences were also heard.

Food systems and climate change

Participants were reminded of the impact of food systems on climate change. While food systems contributed one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, agriculture was responsible for up to 80 per cent of biodiversity loss. At the same time, climate change and shocks such as extreme weather impacted food systems which increased food insecurity.

Projections showed that population growth and increase in wealth would lead to overconsumption by a significant proportion of the global population. Overconsumption was a form of food waste with negative economic, health and environmental consequences. Therefore, the main challenge would be not to increase food production or agricultural productivity but rather to manage demand and so ensure a more efficient use of natural resources and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

A food-systems approach to malnutrition

The meeting reiterated that the right to food was a basic human right – the key to human security. However, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, 690 million people globally went hungry, while two billion people were overweight or obese. Different forms of malnutrition could sometimes be seen in the same family due to inequitable access to healthy diets which are five times more expensive than a calorie-sufficient diet. Tackling malnutrition therefore required a deep understanding of food systems and coordinated action on food supply, food demand and the food environment. Given the lasting consequences of malnutrition for individuals and societies, participants further agreed that investing in nutrition was an economic investment as well as an investment in human capital.

Food systems as an entry point to address inequalities

Food systems present many challenges but also provide a strong opportunity to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and build back better. The following entry points to tackle inequalities and poverty were highlighted:

- The role of women across food systems must be recognized and targeted in policies and programmes to achieve co-benefits in terms of improved livelihoods and better nutrition.
- Another important sector of intervention is constituted by informal economies, which were greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with individuals and families pushed into poverty and food insecurity.
- Given the economic importance of food systems, it is also crucial to take them into account in COVID-19 response and recovery plans, including combining actions to serve communities such as connecting COVID-19 immunization with nutrition services.
- At the global level, a more equitable distribution of food was required, which would also contribute to reducing food waste.

UN Food Systems Summit and parliamentary engagement on food systems

The process leading to the UN Food Systems Summit spans several months and involves all stakeholders at the global and national level. Parliamentarians were encouraged to contribute to country dialogues to define strategies and pathways to

transform local food systems. Panellists stated clearly that the Summit's success would depend on the kinds of policies and partnerships that would be put in place to move forward the Summit's outcomes. Parliamentarians were called to think in the long term and address food systems as a societal challenge. The complexity of food systems required a whole-of-parliament approach but also public engagement to ensure that policies and legislation were owned by the people. A number of instruments were at disposal, including incentives and sanctions, but data and digitalization were key pre-requisites for decision making.

The event called on parliaments to take bold action. The IPU would continue working with partners to support parliamentary engagement in that important area. A new handbook had been published to provide guidance to parliamentarians on how to leverage their powers to prioritize nutrition within a food-systems approach.

The meeting documents are available on the IPU website at:

<https://www.ipu.org/event/parliamentary-meeting-occasion-un-food-systems-summit>.