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PREPARATORY PROCESS

Session: Ending hunger and achieving food security for all

Guiding questions

1. *Which areas and socio-economic groups are especially vulnerable to poor nutrition and food insecurity and what are ways to ensure that food systems transformations leave no one behind?*

As showed in the SOFI 2019, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased, with not enough progress in terms of children undernourishment and worrying trend also in terms of overweight and obesity. Nowadays the situation is getting worst in many Countries due to the Covid19 pandemic which is causing severe disruptions in food supply chains at all levels as well as other shocks related to food production and consumption, but also decreasing incomes in many sectors. This situation is surely affecting particular categories like older people, ill people, poor households, children and women among others. However, one of the most affected group is that of the farmers. Countries' lockdown measures and the consequent frontier closure is strongly impacting on farmers' access to markets, which is making the farmers' income close to zero. This situation is also causing the lateral effect of a huge amount of food waste at farm level and farmers are already implementing solutions to bring their products to those community who does not have any access to food in current conditions. Therefore, basically farmers are contributing to food security more than any other public entities, at their own costs. In 2019, 63 % of people in low-income countries were employed in agriculture¹. In order to leave no one behind, food systems transformation needs to be inclusive and involve all segment of society, all actors of the value chains from producers to consumers, in order to improve socio-economic opportunities, mitigate climate change effects and boost sustainable production and consumption of nutritious and healthy foods. Farmers play a key role in the process of shaping sustainable food systems. They are at the heart of all the processes related to such systems; also, despite the fact that what is always taken into consideration is the negative impact of unsustainable farming practices that causes GHG emissions, deforestation or other forms of land degradation, it should be mentioned that many farmers around the globe are already implementing sustainable and climate-smart farming practices, with positive impact on soils and resource management, biodiversity preservation, carbon sequestration. Also, it needs to be taken into consideration that farming is a business and that each farmer, even the smallest one on the smallest piece of land, wants to sell his products and earn from his job. Therefore, investments in sustainable agricultural practices, in programs that empower women and young farmers, as well as in an enabling regulatory environment that supports agriculture as a key sector for the society, as it is being recognized during the pandemic, are fundamental to ensure the transformation towards sustainable food systems and a substantive decrease in food insecurity without leaving no one behind.

On a final points, the lockdown measures that are leaving the most vulnerable people going to bed hungry are on the other side promoting food distribution by the NGOs and voluntary charities, however there is no

¹ <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15738coll2/id/133646>



control on the quality of that food and how healthy of nutritious it really is. This is causing the consequence that poorest people are getting less quality of food with an impact on their health conditions. It is necessary that strong control measures are taken to ensure the quality of food that is distributed and that acceptable nutrition levels are granted by public investments.

2. *What fundamental changes are needed to make our food systems an engine for inclusive growth and contribute to accelerating progress towards ending hunger and achieving food security for all in the Decade of Action?*

Food is so much more than what we eat: it connects people, economies, environment, it is about culture and history. Sustainable food systems are a complex network of connections that starts on the field with irrigated soils and come to our plates, through all the processing part. To achieve SDG2 within the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda, such systems need to ensure social protection and inclusivity as well as environmental and economic sustainability for the entire society. Policies need to be more interlinked and coherent both at national but also international level, with Governments and stakeholders united in looking at the different frameworks in place and at their connections (2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework, UNDRR, UN Urban Agenda, Addis Ababa Action Agenda among others). To ensure that everyone has access to sufficient, nutritious and healthy food, increased responsible investments are required to promote sustainable agricultural practices, to produce more with less while preserving biodiversity and natural resources and reducing emissions, as well as improving livelihoods of farmers in the broader sense (including fishers, pastoralists, foresters), strengthening their access to markets, services, insurances, infrastructures. All this requires a change in the overall approach as food systems cannot longer be tackled in silos but as a whole, with cross-sectoral policies that considers at the same time the impacts and synergies among food production and consumption, health, education and environment.

a) *How could they be designed and implemented to generate synergies and strengthen existing ones with other Goals and Targets?*

The traditional approach to food systems tended to take action on different sectors separately, whereas it is key for Governments and stakeholders to adopt a *food systems approach* which considers the food systems in its multiple aspects, looking at the interactions among its actors and the interlinkages among the different sectors and activities within the system (agriculture, environment, health, trade, policy, education, transport, infrastructure). Governments should work to guarantee a transparent and predictable regulatory and policy environment that promotes responsible investments so to increase not only farm productivity but also its sustainability and quality. Also, food waste should be reduced, and sustainable management of natural resources be increased (SDG12) starting from post-harvest loss at the farm level, to retailers and consumers level. To do so, education is key at all level, as well as making sure infrastructures for food storage, transportation, processing, cooling among others, are adequate (SDG11). Private investments are needed throughout the value chain, also to make sure that all the actors in the value chain are engaged, trust each other and join ends to make value chains stronger and fairer for everyone everywhere.

b) *What are some of the possible trade-offs from these changes and how can they be mitigated?*

Sustainable food systems need to deliver from the three pillars' perspective, providing at the same time enough nutritious and healthy food at an affordable price, guaranteeing fair incomes for those involved



in the production and post-production activities and preserve the environment and its resources. In a complex network of actors and activities, synergies are several as well as trade-offs that need to be considered and balanced.

3. How might COVID-19 facilitate or complicate the implementation of needed food systems changes?

The outbreak of COVID 19 has highlighted how interconnected we all are at local, national, regional and even international level from different points of view and how our food systems are interconnected too. We are living an unprecedented situation where the lockdown measures applied to respond to the health emergency, brought to an economic crisis which is impacting all Countries, showing the evident connections among different sectors and actors. Indeed, starting from the first actors of the food chains, farmers are no longer able to produce and sell their products even though they had already faced production costs, with consequent heavy economic losses. Also, in those case where such costs were payed through loans, farmers now have a debt that cannot be paid due to the lack of incomes as a consequence of the pandemic. All this implies tremendous consequences in terms of food waste, lack of inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, fuels for the machine. Also, seasonal workers who cannot travel due to lockdown measures thus contributing to increase the number of people who lost job and incomes, with consequences also in terms of agricultural production as the products cannot be harvested. Furthermore, farmers are also incurring in high costs linked to the health measures they need to adopt and respect for themselves and their workers in order to carry on their activities while at the same time preserving their health. Consequently, malnutrition increases with lack of availability of fresh and healthy products which lead to the consumption of unhealthy and cheaper food, with increasing exposure to diseases in general due to effects on the immune systems. Also, in many areas of the world especially the most remote rural ones, the pandemic has brought to a complete isolation of the rural communities from the urban areas, where usually all the activities and services, including health services and infrastructures, are concentrated. These consequences happen at different speed in different Countries depending also on how the economic and social situation was before the Covid19, but still it is affecting each one of them. Therefore, this is the right moment for the Governments to understand that, considering the Covid19 as a disaster, not only they need to manage its consequences, but also prevent those from happening again in the future in case the world will be facing another emergency like this one.

a) Will it aggravate and/or reduce vulnerabilities?

Covid19 is surely aggravating vulnerabilities. The pandemic surprised all Countries at the same time, finding of course different realities in the various areas of the world, meaning that it will exacerbating the problems that the Countries were already experiencing before its outbreak. In terms of SDG2 specifically, as predicted by WFP, 265 million people in low- and middle-income Countries will be under severe threat of acute hunger by the end of 2020, with the current number being 135 million at the moment². Taking into consideration that in the majority of developing Countries the main source of incomes for the largest part of the population is agriculture, it is predictable that farmers, especially small-scale ones, will be again the most impacted by such worrying trend. This is why national policies and programmes, as well as international agreements and frameworks, should recognize the centrality of agriculture as a multifaceted sector that, despite of being one of the most affected during such crisis, is also a key one to rebuild, avoid food insecurity, create jobs, contribute to sustainable development and food systems.

² <https://insight.wfp.org/covid-19-will-almost-double-people-in-acute-hunger-by-end-of-2020-59df0c4a8072>



b) What are the changes in design and implementation of policies affecting food systems which are necessary to prevent and better deal with food security and nutrition impacts of infectious disease outbreaks and pandemics in the future?

The need to guarantee that the food produced by farmers do not go wasted by creating better linkages with supermarkets, hospitals, public structures, charities, where the fresh products can be delivered with a positive impact both on farmers and communities. Investments to support agricultural sectors should be included as a priority in the national agricultural policies, ready to be used in case of an emergency like this one. Also, stronger support to the cooperative sector should be provided, as cooperatives for their nature, can make a difference as members are economically and socially empowered and more resilient to external shocks. Furthermore governments, together with other relevant stakeholders including private sector and financial institutions at all level, should foresee insurance schemes for farmers in case they lost products, or they cannot pay back loans due to a crisis like this one. Also, investments should be encouraged to strengthen the linkages among urban and rural areas, to make sure that water resources are always available even in the most remote areas of the world, as well as to increase access to technology considering that at the moment the only possible activities related to shipping and consuming are conducted online (and for example in the case of farmers, they need to face the shipping costs on their own). Moreover, governments and other relevant stakeholders should work on effective and alternative mechanisms of food distribution, especially in rural areas in developing Countries. This imply involving farmers and farmers’ organisations that can redistribute fresh and healthy agricultural products that otherwise risk to go wasted in the field, thus contributing to avoid food insecurity at community level while at the same time ensuring the quality of the food which is distributed.

c) What of the current immediate actions we are seeing will contribute to the long-term resilience of food systems?

Various initiatives that have been launched at the beginning of the pandemic by farmers’ organisations in collaboration with national Governments or other actors in the value chain. For example, the recruitment of national workers to be employed on the farms in the absence of seasonal workers from other Countries who cannot travel due to the lockdown. Also, guaranteeing fresh farm products delivery to those most in need but also in general, which is a way of showing solidarity and avoid food waste. Also, often such initiatives feature the support of cooperatives to be implemented, which is something that should be kept and strengthened also in the future, for the sake of resilient food systems. This terrible situation could also be the occasion to highlight the multidimensional nature of the agricultural sector, which is at the backbone of society, with its huge potential from an economic, environmental and social perspective in the shift towards more sustainable and resilient food systems.

4. What knowledge and data gaps need to be filled for better analysing current successes and failures in food systems and the trade-offs and synergies, across SDGs, in implementing food systems changes to fix these failures?

The farmers’ experience during this pandemic need to be taken into consideration. It is important to see how a sector which is fundamental to even talk about food systems, has reacted, will build back after this crisis, also to understand the support it needs but also the solution it can offer. From WFO side, at the beginning of the pandemic we decided to support farmers and give them a voice by showcasing their experiences vis-à-vis



the crisis by creating a Covid19 Agri-Information Hub. It is available on our website at the following link <https://www.wfo-oma.org/covid-19-agri-information-hub/> to keep the global community updated on the various issues affecting the farming community worldwide under the Covid19.

5. *What partnerships and initiatives are needed to harness synergies and/or reduce trade-offs in food systems?*

a) *What are the most critical interventions and partnerships needed over next 2 years, 5 years, 10 years?*

All the actors in the food value chains need to join hands to build the path towards sustainable and resilient food systems. Multi-stakeholder, holistic and cross-sectoral approaches are the only possible solutions to face a crisis like this one considering all the interconnections among sectors, the impacts on the different actors. In the short term, recovery plans are needed considering the terrible social and economic crisis that the Countries are already facing after the health crisis. In the longer term, prevention plans are needed as well as stronger and more sustainable supply chains that can resist better to such shocks. Also, fair and transparent international trade agreements that can make exchange among Countries smoother and fairer, in order for the economic sector of each Country to recover faster in case of crisis like the one caused by Covid19. Also, governments, financial institutions and private sector need to collaborate and support the farming sector through sustainable and responsible investments to make it more resilient, to improve storage services, to reduce food waste, to facilitate farmers' access to markets and services (insurances, fast funds programs among others).

b) *Can these be scaled up or adjusted to fit other contexts?*

Yes, in the sense that these are challenges that all the Countries face even though in different proportions and with different effects considering their specificities.

c) *How can private sector support investments for sustainable agriculture production and supply reduce food insecurity?*

Private sector is an essential partner to collaborate with governments, international institutions but also farmers' organisation in increasing investments in agriculture to boost farmers entrepreneurship and access to extension services at local level, but also investing in sustainable farming practices, in insurance schemes, in collaborating with scientist and farmers to improve the collection and management of science knowledge and data, making sure that farmers are always involved and approached as partners and not just as beneficiaries of projects and initiatives.

Key messages

1. Food is so much more than just what we eat, as well as farmers are so much more than just land keepers. Food is more linked to health than what has been recognized by Governments so far. A more holistic and cross-sectoral approach is needed not only to achieve SDGs but also to boost their interlinkages and shift to more sustainable food systems.
2. Covid19, with its dramatic nature, has the potential to advance a world with decreasing level of hunger and malnutrition, in which the central role of agriculture is recognised and reflected at the policy level, both nationally and globally.



3. Farmers play a major role in the process to shape Sustainable Food Systems, as they stand at the heart of any process related to the system: farmers are the ones who feed the world with healthy and nutritious food, and deliver at the same time multiple economic, social and environmental benefits to the society as a whole. At the same time farming is a business and farming families all over the world have to live from what they do, what they believe and grow, either directly or indirectly. For a sustainable shape of the global Food Systems an economical benefit for the farming families is indispensable.
4. Agriculture (from crop farming to forestry, fisheries and livestock) is crucial to achieve healthy diets: food systems transition towards sustainability in all its aspects, requires (1) a shift towards healthier diets, (2) the end of malnutrition in all its forms, by achieving in this way, not only food but also nutrition security. This is something which is affecting the existence of the food systems as a whole. Farmers have a key role to play as both producers of healthy and nutritious food, and stewards of local food habits, traditions as well as biodiversity.
5. Farmers' Organizations must play have a key role to play in dialogues and liaising with decision- makers to look for farmers-driven solutions to food systems transformation and to reach out to the farmers at grass roots level to promote sustainable innovation and foster the transition. On the same way, cooperatives plays a key role in the whole strategy: agricultural cooperatives play a crucial role in improving food security, generating incomes and building local communities thus strengthening farmers' position in the markets, increasing their income and improving their ability of producing more in a more sustainable and resilient way. This agenda should be developed under the specific angle of generating positive impact on the value chain and the food system.